

The End of Innocence:
Women of Color Literature, Utopia, and the Cultural Politics of
U.S. Cold War Racial Liberalism

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Abstract

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This project studies the centrality of the utopian and dystopian narrative form in U.S. political culture after the protracted racial crisis of the 1960s. This dissertation explores two main lines of inquiry. The first addresses the way women of color literature provides a genealogy of liberal subject formation; and the second studies how the genre of utopia mediates the racial organization of the U.S. state during the Cold War period and its aftermath. While utopia and dystopia seem like contradictory forms, I study both genres because utopian visions of the future are grounded in dystopian visions of the present. I argue that the genres of dystopia and utopia become a crucial locus of critical intervention for the U.S. racial liberal state, minority nationalism, and women of color literature. The race riots of this period present a watershed moment that needed a genre for the interpretation, and mediation, of race and the U.S. state. Dystopia was the genre that served this purpose. The 1968 *Kerner Commission Report* is an exemplary text of the dystopian representational regime of the racial liberal state of the Cold War period. Developed under the aegis of the federal government to diagnose the Watts, Chicago, and Newark riots, which have been understood as the most disruptive period of rioting in U.S. history, the report identifies not only the causes of the riots but also the appropriate strategies for the prevention of urban uprisings. Undergirding the report's dystopian narrative was a logic of

pluralism that worked to identify and represent “authentic” racialized groups for racial harmony. This report also influenced the narrative forms and practices of minority nationalism of this period, which took up the rhetoric of authenticity in the production of racialized male subjects as necessary figures for social movements and the achievement of a new racial political order.

Women of color literature of the post-Cold War moment returns us to the centrality of utopia in the production of meaning around race and the nation, and makes new interventions into racial liberalism and minority nationalism. Specifically, my project explores how a cohort of critical utopian and dystopian writers, including Cynthia Kadohata, Julie Dash, Karen Tei Yamashita, Rosaura Sánchez, and Beatrice Pita, emerges in a moment in which the U.S. Cold War liberal state begins to narrate itself as the leading nation in defining notions of freedom, capitalism, and globality. Contradicting the image of the U.S. as an egalitarian entity, women of color writers produce critical utopian and dystopian narratives that complicate our understanding of the relationship between racialized and gendered populations and the U.S. racial liberal state. I argue that the racial liberal state and minority nationalism have used utopian and dystopian rhetorics to produce closed notions of the nation, race, and subjects. In contrast, women of color critical utopia and dystopia re-deploy these genres in ways that challenge us to imagine oppositional practices that counter the closed narratives of the racial liberal state and minority nationalism.

For my Parents,
Jitlada and Sirivat Sudhinaraset,
and their critical utopian visions.

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Introduction

Utopian Form and the Making of Subjects

Utopias seem very much more realizable than we had formerly supposed. Now we find ourselves facing a question which is painful in a new kind of way: how to avoid their actual realization.

Nikolai Berdyaev, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*

I don't like most utopia stories because I don't believe them for a moment. It seems inevitable that my utopia would be someone else's hell.

Octavia Butler, *Blood Child*

There is no guarantee, in reaching for an essentialized racial identity of which we think we can be certain, that it will always turn out to be mutually liberating and progressive on all the other dimensions. It *can* be won. There *is* a politics there to be struggled for. But the invocation of a guaranteed black experience behind it will not produce that politics. Indeed, the plurality of antagonisms and differences that now seek to destroy the unity of black politics, given the complexities of the structures of subordination that have been formed by the way in which we were inserted into the black diaspora, is not at all surprising. These are the thoughts that drove me to speak, in an unguarded moment, of the end of the innocence of the black subject or the end of the innocent notion of an essential black subject.

Stuart Hall, "What is this 'black' in black popular culture?"

This dissertation began as an investigation into the possibilities of defining women of color literary aesthetics and literary production in the United States in the Post-Cold War era. In the earlier iteration of this project, I sought to explore the utopian and dystopian visions of emancipation that women of color writers in the 1990s imagined. What I discovered, however, was that the conditions that organized women of color writing in the Post-Cold War moment have certain characteristics that are dialectically linked to the development of the racial and cultural politics of the U.S. Cold War state under the period of 1968-1991. I moved to an understanding of utopia and dystopia as strategies of the state as well as strategies of opposition. As such, the political coding of these genres was much more complex than I initially assumed. I found that this set of post-Cold War women of color writers must be read in a dialectical

relationship to the ruling discursive regimes of the late cold war moment. This project, then, studies the centrality of utopian and dystopian narrative form in U.S. political culture after the protracted racial crisis of the 1960s. While utopia and dystopia seem contradictory, I study both genres because utopian visions of the future are grounded in dystopian visions of the present. As such, this project has developed into an investigation into the ways the genres of dystopia and utopia become a crucial locus of critical intervention for the U.S racial liberal state, minority nationalism, and women of color literature. In studying the utopian and dystopian narratives of these loci, and the essentialist and anti-essentialist narratives and subjects that emerge from these narratives, this dissertation asks: if these “innocent” or seemingly harmless essentialist notions were to end, what might our political projects look like? *The End of Innocence* explores the possibilities that arise from this question.

Reading the scene that organizes women of color cultural production, we can begin to understand Post-Cold War women of color writing as a dialectical outcome of U.S. Cold War cultural politics. In other words, what we call fiction, aesthetics, or literature needs to be put under challenge because what I have discovered is not a cohesive body of literature but a set of counter-writings by women of color that are dialectically linked to the cultural practices of the state and minority nationalism. Dialectical here refers to the theoretical concept and Marxist method that has been further developed by theorists such as György Lukács and Fredric Jameson. In *Valences of the Dialectic* Jameson argues that the dialectics is the most fitting method for capturing the relationship between the sociocultural and historical world of our times because it helps to narrate and counter liberal political philosophy’s notions of the social “whole” or “totality” underwritten by a progressive linear temporality.¹ For dialecticians like Jameson, thinking dialectically sees the interpretation of the past or the text as a *continuous process of*

mediation between the past and present that does not fix hierarchies between subject and object, but pulls the past closer. Dialectics shuttle between, in the tradition of Cartesian epistemology, mind and body, and provides a narrative of the “Geist,” or the self-unfolding of spirit. In understanding women of color literature dialectically with the U.S. state and minority nationalisms, I seek to understand the ways in which we can approach women of color literature as having the capacity to mediate the past, the historical, and the political in ways that does not confine their writing to an abstract realm, to the interiority of liberalism’s individual subject. Rather, women of color narratives track the relationship between cultural, political, and social materialities and the historical moments from which they emerged. Approaching this set of writings as part of a dialectical process with U.S. Cold War political forms helps to name the ways in which liberalism has so strongly shaped our contemporary imaginations. This naming is important because it is crucial to understanding how the power of liberalism operates through cultural forms so that we may counter liberalism’s totalizing projects and begin to imagine alternative political forms and aesthetics. It is my contention that we must take seriously the alternative aesthetics and forms with which women of color literature presents modernity.

In this project, texts produced by Cynthia Kadohata, Karen Tei Yamashita, Julie Dash, Rosaura Sánchez, and Beatrice Pita do not merely represent a unified cohort of women engaging with the literary forms of utopia and dystopia; rather, these women of color cultural producers are engaging with the aesthetic practices that the cultural and political practices of the racial liberal state and minority nationalism of the late Cold War period dialectically initiated. For me, dialectically linking women of color writing and U.S. Cold War political forms is also an objection to essentialist approaches to women of color writing that would seek to definitively define and fix women of color subjects. My use of the term “women of color” aligns with Asian

American feminist scholars such as Lisa Lowe, Laura Kang, Kandice Chuh, Sonali Perera, and Grace Hong who understand women of color feminist practices as an analytic that helps to “name the contradictions of the racialized nation-state by deploying tactics that exceeded nationalism’s scope: intersectional analysis, an attention to difference, and a critique of identification with the normative race, gender, and sexual institutions of the state.”²

Extending my inquiry into women of color feminism, more specifically, “attests to contradictions of liberal institutions of nationalism—in other words, that the very rhetoric of inclusion and universality ensures racialized and gendered dispossession.” This dissertation follows this line of inquiry around “women of color” as a term that opens up “forms of coalition that are not necessarily based on conscious identification or sentimental sympathy between members of racialized groups, and are thus not contradicted by the existence of racisms or chauvinisms.”³ Similarly Sonali Perera demonstrates the ways in which women of color feminist projects are about unfinished, collaborative forms, or “unity-in-dispersal,” where heterogeneity and contradictions gather under a “collective signature.” This is an important notion—the notion that heterogeneity, contradictions, unity, and collectivity must exist simultaneously. While some might critique the mobilization of “women of color” as a mode of uncritical identity politics, I propose that we instead understand women of color as a “collective signature,” as a call to historical consciousness about who and what produces a text. In this dissertation, I approach women of color utopian literature as heterogeneous, contradictory, unfinished, coalitional, and fragmented. In this way, women of color utopian literature may serve as an analytic for studying liberalism’s cultural practices of subjectification that reproduce the conditions for racialized and gendered inequality.⁴

This dissertation argues that during the 1960s, the literary genres of utopia and dystopia were used by the racial liberal state and minority nationalisms—in state policy writing, newspapers, documentary and visual practices— under the Cold War moment to engender new visions of justice, and racial emancipation that would deeply resonate with our contemporary moment. Some of my objects of study, such as Cynthia Kadohata’s *In the Heart of the Valley of Love*, and Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita *Lunar Braceros*, are more obviously a type of dystopian narrative. Yet in other objects of study, such as the U.S. state’s *The Kerner Commission Report*, I Wor Kuen’s *Getting Together*, Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X*, and NAFTA, the connection to dystopia and utopia are less obvious at first. I deliberately chose to study texts that are not apparently utopian and dystopian in order to disrupt the notion that there is a cohesive utopian and dystopian genre, that there is a cohesive women of color literary tradition. Instead these categories—utopia, dystopia, women of color— are dispersed, varied, and link up to disparate cultural practices. Juxtaposing these seemingly unrelated texts allows me to make unexpected connections between different cultural productions, locations, and institutions to explore the following questions: What happens when we read these sets of texts as utopia and dystopia? How does this reading practice change how we conceive of literature, and U.S. state and minority nationalist discourse in the Cold War and Post-Cold War moment? And, what kinds of subjects are produced through U.S. state, minority nationalist, and women of color utopian and dystopian narratives?

This dissertation argues that women of color literature of the post-Cold War moment returns us to the centrality of utopia and dystopia in the production of meaning around race, subjects, and the U.S. state, and makes new interventions into racial liberalism and minority nationalism. This argument, therefore, does not comprehend state policy as a government

rationality or logic, and instead undertakes the project of studying state practices as a cultural field. As Timothy Mitchell contends, “we should abandon the idea of the state as a freestanding entity” because this view is too narrow and reproduces the state as a “machinery of intentions—usually termed *rule making*, *decision making*, or *policymaking*—state becomes essentially a subjective realm of plans, programs, or ideas.”⁵ In other words, the power of the state as an abstraction that holds the authority and ability to make rules, decisions, and policies lies in its appearance as an entity that exists apart from society and the economy, which produces the state as the most rational entity. Instead, Mitchell insightfully argues, we should address the state “as an effect of mundane processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, supervision and surveillance, and representation that create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society or state and economy.”⁶ This project takes up Mitchell’s call for reading the state as an “effect” of different practices, structures, and institutions, and I extend this line of inquiry through a discussion of the utopian genre. I argue that in the Cold War period, the racial liberal state takes up the genre of utopia to produce narratives of “mundane processes” of spatiality, temporality, supervision, and surveillance that in effect produced the racial liberal state. Later I will further extend this line of inquiry to demonstrate how minority nationalisms also take up the utopian genre in ways that simultaneously critique and reproduce the logics of the racial liberal state.

With this approach to the state, I hope to contribute to projects that seek to study Cold War cultural politics, such as Caroline Chung Simpson, George Lipsitz, and Leerom Medovoi,⁷ that understand U.S. Cold War racial liberal state practices as being imbedded in cultural politics. In reading state practices as a cultural practice, I am interested in the kinds of cultural forms and conflict that cohere the racial liberal state in the Cold War period. My project begins

in the mid-1960s, a moment when people of color en masse took to the streets. The 1960s race riots in the U.S. presented a watershed moment that demanded a cultural form for the interpretation, and mediation, of race and the U.S. state. Dystopia was the genre that served this purpose. The 1968 *Kerner Commission Report* is an exemplary text of the dystopian representational regime of the racial liberal state during the Cold War period. Developed under the aegis of the federal government to diagnose the Watts, Chicago, and Newark riots, which have been understood as the most disruptive period of rioting in U.S. history, the report identifies not only the causes of the riots but also the appropriate strategies for the prevention of urban uprisings. Undergirding the report's dystopian narrative was a logic of pluralism that worked to identify and represent "authentic" racialized groups for racial harmony. For my project, I read the 1968 *Kerner Commission Report* as a literary text that was made up of a set of cultural bodies that brought together different cultural forms of dystopia, documentary, and realism to produce the Cold War racial liberal state. Rather than reading *The Kerner Report* as an effect of the Cold War racial liberal state, I approach *The Kerner Report* as literature, which enables me to mark the ways in which the state is being produced by cultural forms.

Reading the state policy of *The Kerner Report* as a cultural text allows me to make two arguments about the relationship between culture and the state. The first is that at the limit of the state there is a battle over who or what is deemed "rational" and who or what is figured as a cultural object that can be studied and represented. Scholars such as Jacqueline Goldsby and Wai-Chee Dimock have argued that genre is an expression of cognition and has the potential to inform us about the ways people make meaning of the world. Genre aesthetics produce a set of "styles," principles, methods, and techniques that are historically contingent and tell us something about why the author is committed to creating the vision s/he is writing. The fictive

world produced in the discursive structures of utopia, then, tells us something about the social and cultural history that informs the author's fictional utopian or dystopian world. In addressing history without having to produce "the real" of history telling, genre mediates "the world of the text and the world of real history."⁸ Understanding *The Kerner Report* as a cultural text that employs literary genres such as utopia and dystopia, then, reveals the ways in which cultural texts are employed by the state to make sense and meaning out of the crisis from which the *Report* emerges. Approaching *The Kerner Report* as a cultural text instead of reading it strictly as a state policy report, I seek to track a genealogy of the state to read for the ways the state engages with the genre of dystopia to gain the status of rationality. At the same time, *The Report* figures African Americans as the cultural object that the Commissioners must fully represent and narrate as the problem of U.S. inequality that the Commissioners must resolve. In order to name who is rational and who is cultural, *The Kerner Report* employs the dystopian genre to produce a narrative of the racial liberal state as having the authority to represent the reality of inequality, and therefore, as the authority on resolving racism. What is revealed is that for the state to be rational there is an arbitrary distinction between the rationality of the state and others who are figured as "cultural," resulting in a narrative of the racial liberal state as the rational leader of the free world and urban black culture as an object for study, representation, and containment.

My second argument about culture and the state focuses on the centrality of genre to state form and argues that the state is reliant upon utopian forms to narrate itself. More specifically, this project tracks the emergence of the state in relationship to the genre of utopia during the Cold War and Post-Cold War moment. For utopian scholars such as Phillip E. Wegner "narrative utopia plays a crucial role in the constitution of the nation-state as an original spatial, social, and cultural form." Wegner argues that the formal spatial precepts of utopia help produce the nation-

state as the agent and locus of capitalism. In other words, the formal features of utopia “serves as an in-between form that mediates and binds together” different representational acts in the conceptualization of cognitive space, lived experiences, theoretical perceptions, and the world in which we live.⁹ While I agree with Wegner that utopia and dystopia have been nationalist genres that reproduce the assumptions of modernity, this dissertation does not merely approach these genres as being tied to nationalist narratives. Utopia and dystopia also become crucial genres for women of color writers that seek to counter the U.S. racial liberal state and cultural nationalism. Women of color writers come to recognize the ways in which utopian precepts of time and space become central to cohering the nation and narrating teleological development, revolutionary subjects, and social change. This is why altering utopian and dystopian formal precepts of space and time become so central in women of color utopian literature in the imagination of an alternative, non-nationalist, political project.

Following Wegner’s line of argument, *The Kerner Report* produces the sense of a shared world through the dystopian formal precepts of space and time. These shared generic expectations of dystopia provides the conditions for imagining a shared world that also produces the conditions for the state effect of the U.S. Cold War racial liberal state. As Mitchell argues, following Poulantzas (1978) and Foucault (1977), the same processes of individualization, modern production of knowledge, and the reorganization of space and time are the aspects of capitalism that organizes production and also accounts for the form taken by the state.¹⁰ Just as utopian precepts of time and space mediate capitalism, the genre of dystopia becomes fundamental to the state’s existence because it allows the state to reproduce itself as the rational entity that will provide a plan for national resolution. Thus, the U.S. Cold War racial liberal state required a dystopian narrative of urban race riots and social inequality to produce itself as a

sympathetic entity that had the capacity to repair political and social disenfranchisement, a narrative that was woven through texts like *The Kerner Report*.

I use “U.S. Cold War racial liberal state” to periodize my project because racial liberalism became the dominant paradigm for race in the early Cold War period and “was a framework for racial meanings and politics that sought to manage the exposure of domestic racial inequality as a major threat to U.S. global decolonization and the Cold War.”¹¹ In the shadow of the fall of the Axis powers, the United States and the Soviet Union waged war under proxy forces. U.S. claims about liberal capitalism confronted the Soviet Union’s claims to state socialism under “the main historical event of the era: the rapid decolonization of much of the earth.”¹² The old European world empires were collapsing, and between 1945 and 1960 “forty countries with a total of eight hundred million people—more than a quarter of the world’s population at that time—revolted against colonialism and won their independence.”¹³ Collectively known as the “third world,” the emerging nation-states of the Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean and South and East Asia appeared as the universe over which the two ideological forces of the U.S. and the Soviet Union competed. As Leerom Medovoi points out, the two super powers sought to gain new territories, however, “it was no longer permissible to do so in the old modality of empire.”¹⁴ Seeking to align itself with the narrative of the “third world,” as historically colonized spaces and peoples, the U.S. depended on racial liberalism as a paradigm that appeared to resolve U.S. racial inequality and “validated itself as the proper model for developing third world nations...by mobilizing its claim to a history of colonial revolt.”¹⁵ Rather than an “imperial parent” of the “third world” the U.S. sought to cast itself as an “elder sibling” to the new nation-states.¹⁶

Rather than casting the race riots of the 1960s as a series of events that undermined the U.S. as “leader of the ‘free world’” *The Kerner Report* mediated the contradictions of the racial inequality that existed within the boundaries of a supposedly liberatory nation. Through a dystopian narrative of urban unrest *The Kerner Report* produced a linear narrative of temporality and spatial logics of the black ghetto that narrated the U.S. state as a racial liberal entity that could provide the answers to its domestic problems. The race riots, while in need of containment because they represented a menace to the Cold War racial liberal state, was at the same time a national allegory in which the U.S. citizenry and the U.S. state took part in a global movement of protest and struggle against histories of colonialism and imperialism. In other words, *The Kerner Report* uses allegory—a powerful literary device that produces a double meaning: “what appears on the surface and another meaning to which the apparent sense points”¹⁷— to produce two representations of the riots. First, the race riots symbolize a national crisis that undermines the U.S. state. Second, the race riots symbolize the notion that the U.S., *like* the “third world,” also had suffering peoples that were fighting for equality. Consequently, the dystopia of *The Kerner Report* produces an allegory that provides an antidotal narrative for the U.S. racial liberal state to define the U.S. as a nation undergoing revolution and change, aligning the U.S. with the histories of the emerging nations of the “third world.”

In studying Cold War cultural politics, this project also delves into an investigation into the ways U.S. Cold War racial liberal state utopian and dystopian practices are imbedded within other cultural practices, such as minority nationalist cultural politics. Racial liberal state logics greatly influenced the narrative forms and practices of minority nationalism during the Cold War era. My dissertation seeks to contribute to ethnic studies and literary studies through an intervention into utopian and dystopian genres. The genre’s form is central to the ways in which

utopia and dystopia have produced racialized and gendered subjects. These narrative forms are privileged sites for me because they reveal how the state and dominant social movements are entrenched in conservative and revolutionary precepts of the genres for the imagination of social transformation. Colonialist utopian narratives have been widely critiqued as concomitant narratives to histories of western expansion that reproduce colonial epistemologies of space and progress. For instance, John Winthrop declared that the Puritans came to the new world to build “a city upon a hill,” a society where they could practice their beliefs without persecution. However, colonialist utopian narratives that were about better places to live also served to rationalize the exploitation and displacement of indigenous people. Marxists like Georg Lukács and the Frankfurt School represent one of the most important political movements that have reinterpreted the importance of the utopian form since its interpretation as a discourse on imaginary space. Marxist utopia changed the precepts of utopia from an emphasis on idyllic spaces to an emphasis on revolutionary temporality and realism. Through an emphasis on teleological time and vanguardism, Marxist utopias produce an “ideal” and proper proletarian subject. Marxist utopias, then, are narratives about “ideal” subjects who can effect revolutionary transformation.

While Marxist cultural critics of the early twentieth century used utopia to narrate European social revolution and scientific progress, the centrality of Marxist utopian practices in the U.S. has been about its capacity to mediate racial crisis. Like Marxist understandings of the revolutionary structure inherent in utopian realism, teleology, and subjectivity, so too did the racial liberal state and minority nationalism believe that representations of racial authenticity in due time would resolve our racial crisis and lead us to a racially harmonious society. Taking up the rhetoric of authenticity in the production of racialized male subjects as necessary figures for

social movements and the achievement of a new racial political order, minority nationalisms reproduced the very logics of liberalism that they sought to combat. More recently, Marxist utopian scholars like Wegner argue that the dawn of the twentieth century witnessed how

the narrative utopia became one of the places where a crisis in [the] conception of the subject and object of modernity was first registered... [and] modernity enter[ed] into a new phase, marked by a growing consciousness of the place of the nation-state in a global cultural and social space.¹⁸

Unlike colonialist understandings of utopias as static descriptions of either real or ideal places, for Wegner, narrative utopia is a privileged genre of modernity because it integrates space and time in a way that socializes people to the notion of the nation-state as the locus of history. As I discussed earlier, narrative utopia has been central to the formation of the modern nation-state.

Historically, then, utopian narratives have been central to modern notions of the nation, capitalism, and revolutionary imagination through the inculcation of temporal and spatial precepts. With this in mind, my project focuses on utopian precepts of time and space to study the ways in which these forms produce subjects of liberalism. For me, the utopian genre's notions of space and time are central features that mediate U.S. Cold War cultural politics to produce figures of liberalism. In other words, the "authentic" subject, or racial liberal subject, of the state and minority nationalisms is created through the temporal and spatial precepts of utopia. At the core of racial liberalism and minority nationalisms' mediation of U.S. capitalist culture and social formation is the attachment to the nation state's linear temporalities as a notion of time that creates "truthful" meanings and narratives.

My understanding of the work of utopia and dystopia as mediating the contradictions of U.S. Cold War cultural politics resonates with Lisa Lowe's discussion of the novelistic

developmental narrative. For Lowe the narrative of “a single unified subject,” of the individual subject, mediates nationalist unification and the triumph of “liberal tolerance and the magnanimous state that protects and incorporates immigrants.”¹⁹ In other words, the cultural form of the developmental novel, its “adherence to a realist aesthetic,” and its “fetishized concept of development” allows the nation to resolve its contradictions and conflicts through the formation of a unified, individual subject.²⁰ Similarly, the use of utopian forms by the racial liberal state and minority nationalism mediates the contradictions of U.S. Cold War cultural politics, albeit in very different ways. For the state, the dystopian form seeks to mediate the contradictory position of the U.S. as the global arbiter of freedom and equality and as a new modern imperial and oppressive force. As a result, the state uses dystopian forms to produce particular stereotypical racialized subjects for revolution, and the U.S. racial liberal state is narrated as the apparatus that would facilitate that transition. For minority nationalisms, the utopian form seeks to mediate the heterogeneity of racialized subjects to produce a whole and unified revolutionary subject against state power. Critical utopian women of color writers seek to disrupt these subject-making projects by shifting their formal features. Some utopia and dystopia are realist, while some are not. I interrogate the realist aesthetics of state and minority nationalist utopia because these utopian narratives are modernization projects that seek utopia through an adherence to realism. That is to say, the racial liberal state and minority nationalisms of the Cold War period seek the achievement of utopia through the rational and the scientific, which is precisely why women of color literature engages in speculative fiction writing.

This dissertation specifically studies the ways in which the racial liberal state’s dystopian policy report *The Kerner Commission Report*, the truth claims of Asian American revolutionary nationalism’s utopian newspaper practices, the utopian documentary practices of Black

Nationalism, and the utopian narrative of transnational capitalism all rely on logics of realism and empiricism. I argue that these logics produce the very contradictions that would give rise to a set of critical speculative utopian writers. My project further explores U.S. Cold War cultural politics through a cohort of critical utopian and dystopian writers, including Cynthia Kadohata, Karen Tei Yamashita, Julie Dash, Rosaura Sánchez, and Beatrice Pita. These writers, I argue, emerged after a moment in which the U.S. Cold War liberal state narrates itself as the leading nation in defining notions of freedom, capitalism, and globality; these writers emerge in the context of and after minority nationalisms that narrate particular types of racialized subjects for social movement. Contradicting the image of the U.S. racial liberal state as an egalitarian entity, women of color writers produce critical and speculative utopian and dystopian narratives that complicate our understanding of Cold War cultural politics. While the racial liberal state and minority nationalisms have used utopian and dystopian forms to produce closed notions of the nation, race, and subjects, women of color critical utopia and dystopia re-deploy these genres in ways that challenge us to imagine oppositional practices that counter the closed narratives of the racial liberal state and minority nationalism.

Women of color utopian and dystopian literature engage with issues of subject-making through speculative writing practices and return us to Cold War utopian and dystopian narratives to diagnose how their formal features uphold the commitment to realism and authenticity. Women of color feminists in the post-Cold War moment recognize how the struggle over representation and the mediation of race and gender in the late twentieth century is a struggle over utopian forms, primarily over formal precepts of time and space. As I have suggested, utopian and dystopian forms, as deployed by the racial liberal state and minority nationalisms, are influenced by Marxist realist temporalities and modern capitalist notions of spatiality in

producing closed notions of authentic subjects for revolution. While not all utopias uphold a commitment to authenticity, studying the utopian narratives of the racial liberal state and minority nationalism as realist texts demonstrates the continuity between these formations. Both formations are committed to liberal notions of authenticity that are at work within minority nationalism and state realist utopia. Liberalism must be understood as the promise of authenticity.

And, because narratives of authenticity deeply limit our capacity to imagine social change beyond the prism of realism, women of color critical utopia and dystopia challenge the formal limits of the genre by employing speculative writing to interrupt realist time in their refusal to deliver narratives of “authentic” racialized subjects. This is an important intervention by women of color utopian fiction. Closed notions of authenticity harbor the belief that the true answer to our racial crisis is already here and all we have to do is reveal the truth of inequality by representing and giving voice to the authentic subject. This can be noted in the ways Marxist utopias of progress have produced a liberal white male subject and the ways minority nationalisms have produced racialized men as the motor for revolution and as the subjects others must live up to and against which others are measured. Women of color critical utopia, on the other hand, resist closure and do not believe that the answers to all our problems are already present and need only be revealed. Rather, counter-hegemonic practices are dependent upon new thoughts, actions, different formations, and subjectivities. There is, in other words, always a desire for new oppositional tactics.

My project follows Roderick Ferguson’s claim that “revolutionary nationalism and cultural nationalism have historically relied on and produced an idealism of the essence and an empiricism of the subject. With few exceptions, they have idealized heteropatriarchy as the

essence of social relations and have presumed that heterosexual subjects and relations exist as absolute givens.”²¹ This logic of an essential and empirical subject has produced utopian notions of revolution, nationalism, and the subject that have worked to justify, reproduce, and erase forms of racialized and gendered violence. Octavia Butler has written, “it seems inevitable that my utopia would be someone else’s hell.”²² Again, women of color writings do not treat utopia and dystopia as opposites, but identifies a complicated relationship where utopian visions are almost always dependent upon “someone else’s” dystopia. Kadohata, Yamashita, Dash, Sánchez, and Pita are very much part of a women of color feminist project that seeks to combat the realization of utopias that result in the disenfranchisement of non-normative subjectivities.

Recalling Stuart Hall’s words, these are the thoughts that drive me to speak, in an unguarded moment, of the end of the innocence of the utopian subject, the end of the innocence of utopia, and the end of the innocence of authenticity. Again, I want to ask: if these “innocent” or seemingly harmless essentialist notions, which are all deeply tied to racial liberalism, were to end, what might our political projects look like? The following chapters explore the possibilities that arise from this question. I argue that Post-Cold War women of color literature is calling for an acknowledgement of the cultural force of utopia and the demise of notions that utopian narratives are “innocent” and without consequence. Women of color feminist projects have primarily been about the interrogation of “innocent” essentialist projects and their subjects. Although women of color feminists have different names for critical utopian subjectivities that reveal the dangers of naming essentialist utopian subjects— for example, Sonali Perera and Lisa Lowe use the language of a “collective subject”; the Combahee River Collective, Angela Davis, Elizabeth Martínez, and Grace Hong employ the term “coalitional subject”; Chela Sandoval coined the term “tactical subjectivity”; and Norma Alarcón uses the notion of a “multi-voiced

differential subject” — all of these women of color feminists are articulating a way of thinking about contradictory subjectivities that interrupt the logic of the individual, empirical, and authentic subject that has normalized the ways we imagine social movements and political emancipation.²³

Sonali Perera proposes that the collective subject is an unfinished and collaborative form, or a “unity-in-dispersal,” where heterogeneity and contradictions are gathered under a “collective signature.”²⁴ Perera’s collective subject names a heteronomous, not autonomous, subject that begins with the notion that actions are willed by factors that are external to oneself. Unlike the concept of the autonomous bourgeois or proletarian subject that believes that we are self-willed persons whose agencies are determined by our own actions and not exterior systems or circumstances, women of color feminists are theorizing cultural production in a different way, where actions, and contestation, are conceived of in relationship to preceding actions or social movements. This is why, as I have argued earlier, women of color literature must be understood dialectically to the rise of the U.S racial liberal state and minority nationalisms. Women of color feminism is a critique of liberal projects that approach subject formation as an interior individual project. Instead, women of color feminism forces a reckoning with the ways in which subjects are effects of powerful external factors—such as the U.S. state. It turns out that the proletarian subject of Marxist utopia and the liberal subject of the U.S. racial liberal state are not so “innocent” because they are produced through the elision of heterogeneous accounts of race, gender, and sex. This is what women of color literature reveals. In the place of these “innocent” subjects women of color writers offer their readers overlapping and contradictory racialized, gendered, and sexual subjects against the racial liberal state and nationalist discourse.

Because the genres of utopia and dystopia mediate the production of the subject and give us a formal means to imagine the subject, I am interested in how women of color dystopian and utopian writers can potentially name systems of power and the historical processes from which subjects materialize. As Paul Gilroy has stated, “more important than their content is the fact that during the process of performance the dramatic power of narrative as a form is celebrated. The simple *content* of the stories is dominated by the ritual of storytelling itself.”²⁵ Women of color feminist critical utopian writers in the post-cold war moment come to recognize that the project of subject-making is a contestation over utopian and dystopian formal precepts of time and space because these formal features have been central to “the ritual of storytelling itself.” Minority nationalism and the U.S. racial liberal state cannot think about time and spatial form in this way. That is, the state and minority nationalism are projects that reproduce systems of hierarchy because they cannot understand the ways in which power and inequality is re-instantiated through narrative forms, even as they employ narrative form toward these ends. Women of color writers come to recognize the “ritual[s] of storytelling” as a powerful mode through which racialized and gendered norms are formally produced and reproduced; therefore, changing the rituals of storytelling can also change the circulation and cultural production of racialized and gendered inequalities. My chapters investigate how critical utopian women of color writers are redefining utopian spatial and temporal logics in order to re-imagine the project of subject-making. Their critical utopian projects are flexible, open, critique essentialism, and reflect upon the cultural and political institutions that produce the subjects of liberalism. Reading women of color writers in this way allows us to break down the barriers between the political, literary, cultural and social in order to show the significance of literary form in the making of the U.S. racial liberal state, political actors, and subjectification.

Chapter one, “Witnessing Crisis, Imagining Hope: Dystopia and the Cold War Racial Liberal State” studies the ways the racial liberal state produced a national dystopia around the urban race riots of the mid-1960s. This chapter sets up the racial liberal state logic, and discourse of equality that pervades the historical moment of my dissertation. I argue that the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, a state report released in 1968 that attempted to account for urban riots that broke out in the mid-1960s, is a representative text of the dystopian form of the racial liberal state. In chapter one I argue that the 1968 U.S. Cold War racial liberal state employs the genre of dystopia in the *Kerner Commission Report* for the development of state policy to attend to urban race riots. Central to the commission’s dystopian narrative was the hypervisibility of black urban criminality, as well as unequal living conditions, through the use of documentary photography, which, the state argued, could transparently and adequately represent black life for the U.S. public. The *Kerner Commission Report* approached documentary practices as the medium that could convey to a white audience, in particular, “a sense of the degradation, misery, and hopelessness of living in the ghetto,” that would cultivate an “understanding or appreciation of... a sense of Negro culture, thought, or history.”²⁶ In other words, the commissioners believed that if the “transparent” representations of black dystopian realities of “degradation, misery, and hopelessness” could be shown to the white public we could move toward a better future. In the moment of 1967, then, the documentary form was seen as a mechanism for the solicitation of white sympathy for black inequality. The report uses images of urban crisis, of poor black women and children and looting black men, to produce a dystopian narrative in which the U.S. state, as the most global egalitarian entity, could help the country move beyond racial conflict. Documentary photography that displayed racial inequality and urban crisis came to serve as the state’s answer and the mode through which we could address

the “true” problem of racial inequality in the U.S. As a result, documentary photography was tasked with the capacity to reveal the lives of urban blacks and was established as a valued practice for fixing the urban crisis. In contrast, Cynthia Kadohata’s novel presents a linguistic heterotopia to critique state visual practices and its undergirding logics to upend fixed notions of race as solely being attached to bodily forms. I argue that *In the Heart* exposes the state’s racial logic of surveillance, displacement, and incarceration in the name of “private property.” Hope in Kadohata’s novel is not found in the “transparent truth” of race as depicted through visual culture, as the U.S. racial liberal state suggests; instead, Kadohata finds hope for social change in the space of linguistic heterotopia. Linguistic heterotopia, for Kadohata, is a space in which contradictions and differences, the dominant and dominated, and multiple identities exist in order to reveal the exploitative relations, and the “slipperiness of signifiers.”²⁷

Chapter two, “‘Living and Breathing in the Place Blinded from View’: Utopias of Fact, Utopias of Fiction in Imagining Asian American Social Movements,” explores the ways in which the racial liberal state logic of representation and authenticity comes to affect minority nationalist utopian forms. More specifically, I focus on I Wor Kuen, an Asian American revolutionary nationalist group that takes up the utopian form to articulate fixed notions of space in imagining the “third world” as a galvanizing force for social movement. I Wor Kuen’s newspaper *Getting Together* takes up Marxist utopian discourses and normative notions of translation of the proletariat to imagine a community of “Third World” people. Tied to this imagination are fixed notions of geographical space. Understanding Asian American revolutionary nationalism’s utopian longings for a better world allows us to understand important critiques revolutionary nationalism made about U.S. state power. However, Asian American feminists such as Lisa Lowe and Kandice Chuh have also argued that minority nationalisms replicate hegemonic state

logics of identifying subjects. For I Wor Kuen, “authentic” third world subjects are bounded to strict notions of geographical space and the “third world.” I argue that Karen Tei Yamashita’s 1997 magical realist utopian novel *Tropic of Orange* offers a different model of Asian American social movement writing that unsettles Asian American revolutionary nationalist logics of space. As a magical realist utopia *Tropic of Orange* is a utopian novel that critiques traditional modes of translation and purposefully plays with the slipperiness of language in the process of border making and border-crossing. By providing an alternative narrative of geo-political boundaries Yamashita complicates Asian American social movement discourses of the “third world.” This chapter argues that Yamashita’s magical realist utopia marks the limitations of Asian American revolutionary nationalism. At the same time, since *Tropic of Orange* is a literary text without an explicit tie to social movement ideology, it might be easy to dismiss Yamashita’s novel as “mere” and “impossibly idealistic” utopia. While most critics would align Yamashita’s work only within a tradition of Latin American magical realist writers, I argue that in order to recognize the political significance of Yamashita’s text *Tropic of Orange* must also be understood within the utopian legacies of Asian American nationalism and Third World liberation struggles.

In the first two chapters I read Cynthia Kadohata and Karen Tei Yamashita’s 1990s novels as being dialectically linked to the moment of the Cold War racial liberal state and suggest that Kadohata’s heterotopia provides an alternative utopian accounts to the realist and teleological dystopia of the racial liberal state and Yamashita’s linguistic utopia is a counter narrative to the realist utopia of minority nationalism that followed similar logics of the Cold War state. My third chapter, “In Search of the Most Authentic Black Subject: Black Documentary, Black Nationalism, Julie Dash, and the Post-Cold War Racial Liberal Moment,” is

an engagement with the moment of the 1990s—a period that was immersed in multiple debates about authenticity and a period that produced women of color feminist narratives like *In the Heart of the Valley of Love*, *Tropic of Orange*, and one of the textual objects of this chapter, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. I argue that while the U.S. Cold War racial liberal state rationalized documentary practices and forms as having the ability to transparently represent inequality and the authentic lives and histories of African Americans, the 1990s marks a different moment in which visual technologies are no longer merely treated as transparent accounts of reality. In the discourse surrounding the Rodney King beating, in particular, the moment of the post-Cold War racial liberal state in 1992 asserted the need for the interpretation of documentary visual practices. In other words, in 1992, documentary and visual texts no longer represented a transparent account of the real as it did with *The Kerner Report*; instead, visual technologies needed institutions to interpret and tell its viewers how to understand the truth, or the authentic, and to interpret the events and meanings of what the viewers were seeing. The police officers were acquitted precisely because viewers were told not to believe what they were seeing—white police officers brutally beating a black man. Instead, viewers were told that Rodney King controlled the situation, presented a threat to the police officers, and that the officers acted in “self-defense.”²⁸

Black filmmakers in the 1990s were very much at the forefront of interpreting and re-framing black representational politics in a post-Cold War moment that no longer strictly upheld traditional logics of documentary and truth. Just as they did in the 1960s, black filmmakers in the 1990s continued to actively engage with the questions of documentary, representation, and authentic subjects, albeit in disparate ways. This is the focus of my third chapter. This chapter studies the ways in which black filmmakers in the 1990s take up the question of authenticity and

documentary. First, I track the emergence and peak of black documentary in the 1960s through to the 1980s to investigate the question of representing black authenticity in the Cold War racial liberal moment. Second, I study the 1990s as a moment that saw a burgeoning cohort of black filmmakers for whom the questions of authenticity, representational practices, and form varied greatly. For some, like Spike Lee and John Singleton, documentary and realist practices of Black Nationalism remained a stronghold for interpreting black politics. In the epic film *Malcolm X*, for example, Spike Lee borrows from minority nationalist utopian production of the black male subject. For black feminists filmmakers like Julie Dash, documentary is not so cut and dry. I end the chapter by exploring how Dash's significant 1991 film *Daughters of the Dust* is a refusal of the documentary form as a rejection of what Stuart Hall calls, "the innocence of the essential black subject." Reading Dash's marginalized text as a refusal of documentary form and the essential black subject reveals the ways in which the cultural forms of the state, black documentary, and Black Nationalism gain the status of rationality. Like the King verdict Dash believes that documentary footage does not transparently reveal the "truth" or "reality"; however, unlike the King verdict she does not assert a better truth claim. Rather, Dash produces a black feminist critical utopia that emphasizes speculative temporalities to critique Black Nationalist utopian linear temporalities that produces the black male revolutionary subject as the telos for black cultural politics.

Chapter 4, "Antechambers for Struggle: Zapatistas, Chicana Feminism, and Utopian Spaces in a Post-NAFTA Era," argues that borderlands Science Fiction like Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros: 2125-2148* is in a dialectical relationship with transnational narratives as exemplified through NAFTA, as well as the Zapatista Movement. In this chapter I explore the impoverishment of NAFTA's utopian logic. I then explore the ways in which the

Zapatistas responded to NAFTA through the employment of performative language to create political fictions through the form of communiqués. By creating critical fictions, I argue that the Zapatistas are accepting their status as doing figural work, which is their innovation to politics and social movement. I then explore how Beatrice Pita and Rosaura Sánchez' *Lunar Braceros* is a response to a response, or rather, *Lunar Braceros* is a fictionalization of Zapatista tactics, and also a response to the false utopianism of NAFTA. While the EZLN can certainly be understood as borderlands writers, Pita and Sánchez, unlike the Zapatistas, are part of a cohort of borderlands Science Fiction writers that intervene in the universalist narrative of transnational capitalism and its borderless world. In this chapter, I seek to explore the importance of borderlands Science Fiction in imagining alternative “utopian cartographies.”²⁹ As a novel of communiqués, *Lunar Braceros* takes the cultural work of the EZLN into the space of the novel form in order to disrupt the developmental narrative and re-theorize borders and boundaries that are in line with artist and writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña. Against the teleological and universal narrative of transnational capitalism, *Lunar Braceros* is a critical dystopia that is not about fixed and unchanging spaces, but provides an account of literary antechambers that treat space and time as speculative practices to imagine alternative utopian cartographies.

¹ In *Marxism and Form* Jameson draws on Adorno's “negative dialectics” to argue against the effects of liberal reification and commodification. In liberal reification and commodification everything becomes commensurable with everything else and there is no possibility for

² Grace Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor*, xix.

³ Grace Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, xix.

⁴ Sonali Perera's “Re-thinking Working Class Literature: Feminism, Globalization, and Socialist Ethics,” 9; Hyun Yi Kang's *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women*; Kandice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise*; Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*.

⁵ Timothy Mitchell, “Society, Economy, and the State Effect,” 184.

⁶ Mitchell, 180, 185

⁷ In *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* George Lipsitz specifically focuses on the years following World War II—an era that marks the largest strike wave by workers in U.S. history; In *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960* Caroline Chung Simpson recasts events and controversies in postwar culture to investigate the ways in which national identity and postwar history were shaped by the social and political disenfranchisement of Japanese Americans in the late 1940s and early 1950s; and in *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*, Leerom Medovoi argues that the figure of the rebel emerged at the dawn of the Cold War era in order to produce the U.S. as the “leader of the ‘free world.’”

⁸ Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 34-35.

⁹ Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, xvi, xvii, xviii, xx.

¹⁰ Mitchell, 181.

¹¹ Jodi Melamed, “The Killing Joke of Sympathy,” 2. Throughout the dissertation I will also shorthand the Cold War racial liberal state as the racial liberal state.

¹² Leerom Medovoi, 227.

¹³ Penny Von Eschen, 125.

¹⁴ Medovoi, 11.

¹⁵ Medovoi, 12.

¹⁶ Medovoi, 12.

¹⁷ Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, 2.

¹⁸ Wegner, xvii.

¹⁹ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 107.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black, Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, 141.

²² Octavia Butler, *Blood Child*, 214.

²³ In Chela Sandoval’s “U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World” “tactical subjectivity” is flexible and dynamically opposes essentialism. Tactical subjectivity refers to a self-conscious process of identification as opposed to a fixed and static identity. For more on women of color theorizations of the subject see Sonali Perera’s “Re-thinking Working Class Literature: Feminism, Globalization, and Socialist Ethics” (2008); Norma Alarcón’s “The Theoretical Subjects of This Bridge Called My Back” in *Making Faces, Making Souls—Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990); Grace Hong’s *The Ruptures of American Capital* (2006); Angela Davis and Elizabeth Martínez’s “Coalition Building Among People of Color: A discussion with Angela Y. Davis and Elizabeth Martínez.”

²⁴ Sonali Perera’s “Re-thinking Working Class Literature: Feminism, Globalization, and Socialist Ethics,” p.9.

²⁵ Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 200.

²⁶ “Documenting Social Issues: Black Journal, 1968-1970” Tommy Lee Scott, 73.

²⁷ Mary Louise Pratt, “Linguistic Utopias,” 62.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ In “The Free Trade Art Agreement/El Tratado de Libre Cultura” Gómez-Peña proposes a “utopian cartography” of “the New World Border” against the “sinister cartography of the New World Order” of NAFTA, 6-8.

Chapter One

Witnessing Crisis, Imagining Hope: Dystopia and the Cold War Racial Liberal State

The effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

If you're not careful the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.

Malcolm X

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Published in the same year as the 1992 Los Angeles uprisings Cynthia Kadohata's novel *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* has been positioned both as a dystopia and anti-dystopia that portrays the tensions in our contemporary urban times. While Kadohata's reader might expect an Asian American writer to write a novel about Japanese incarceration and its aftermath, or the Black-Korean conflict around the Rodney King Riots, I read *In the Heart* as an engagement with the conflict between narrative and visual practices of race. The spectacular visualization of the Rodney King beating of 1991 and the subsequent trial in 1992 led to an urban crisis and revolt that rivaled the riots of the 1960s. In this period, the country was submerged under dystopian images of the beating, the trial, and the riots on the television. Even as these riots were an expression of frustration and disappointment in the law, the images served to narrate a specter of

danger. My reading of *In the Heart* does not situate Kadohata's novel as an intervention into the historical and cultural moment of the Rodney King Riots, but rather, as an intervention into the racial projects of the Cold War— the period before she is writing. We have to read Kadohata's novel in relationship to the U.S. Cold War state because Kadohata's 1992 novel marks the limits of visual surveillance as the effect of the Cold War racial liberal state. Approaching Kadohata's text this way allows the reader and viewers of the Rodney King beating a way to understand the visual practices that were established by the U.S. state prior to the moment of the King beating. In other words, I read the visual practices surrounding the King beating and the subsequent urban riots as an after effect of U.S. Cold War state formation.

This chapter argues that Kadohata rewrites the literary, social, cultural, and political conventions that were established during the Cold War racial liberal moment because their effects are still being felt after the so-called end of the Cold War. The *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* of 1968, or as it is more commonly known, the *Kerner Commission Report*, is an exemplary text of Cold War racial liberalism and it was central to the establishment of dominant dystopian narratives of urban crisis that Kadohata re-writes. I situate these texts together because they offer us two modes of witnessing urban crisis, racial inequality, and U.S. state formation. In particular, this chapter explores the ways in which the formation of the racial liberal state necessitated and produced a visual discourse, exemplified by the *Kerner Commission Report*, that assumed the ability of the state to properly represent, and therefore reconcile and contain, urban crisis and racial inequality. I read *In the Heart* as a linguistic heterotopia that provides a counterpoint to *The Kerner Report's* representational practices of race and the state form derived from these practices. I read *In the Heart* and *The Kerner Commission Report* together to mark the conflict between visual and literary form as a conflict over

representation and reconciliation between an Asian American feminist narrative and *The Kerner Report's* statist photographic strategies. At stake in tracking the formal strategies of these respective texts is an ability to understand the ways in which the spectacularization of urban race relations of Kadohata's 1992 was born out of the regime of visibility of the racial liberal state.

On July 28, 1967 President Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the series of urban uprisings erupting across the U.S. between 1965 and 1967. Cities like Watts (1965), Newark (1967), and Detroit (1967) experienced some of the most intense race riots and significantly shifted the pattern of U.S. racial violence. These uprisings signaled the first non-white on white violence and provided a uniting force for people of color. It is not a coincidence that these riots erupted at the same moment Third World Liberation Movements brought histories of fascism and colonialism to the local level and directly challenged state authority, state legitimacy, and U.S. democracy. Johnson charged his status quo committee, headed by Governor Otto Kerner, Jr. of Illinois and Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York City, with answering three questions: "What happened? Why did it happen? And what can be done to prevent it from happening again?" Released in 1968, two weeks before the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which instigated another wave of riots, the lengthy 581 page *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, or the *Kerner Commission Report*, became a national bestseller with over two million copies in print. Considered one of the most comprehensive investigations of racial strife delivered to the President and the American public, the national public culture accepted the *Kerner Commission Report* in 1968 as the new civil rights text and the most significant examination on the American race problem in the twentieth century, replacing Gunnar Myrdal's influential *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy* (1944).

I read this particular state discourse as a dystopia to understand the ways in which the Cold War state produced new visions and norms of an urban crisis overrun by images of dangerous black figures and racial strife. However, it is important to note that *The Kerner Report* was progressive for its time in that it was trying to manage inequality by showing inequality through photography. The commissioners were sympathetic to a certain modality of racial violence and believed that if we could see the conflict through adequate representation, we could also find answers to the crisis. However, along with these new representational practices arose a new set of liberal racist norms of temporality, subjects, representation, and witnessing crisis. Photography becomes central to the way the racial liberal state makes meaning around race. Through photography, *The Kerner Report* sympathized with the plight of urban blacks and simultaneously empowered the state as the source and authority to rectify inequality and criminalize black bodies as the cause of poverty, violence, and disorder. This dystopic rendering produced and upheld the state's claims to save the nation and reject insurgent demands for racial equality. This is why Kadohata's novel engages with temporality, surveillance, and bodily forms. What I find is a conflict between the visuality of the racial liberal state and the literary form of Asian American feminist writing.

Cynthia Kadohata's novel presents a linguistic heterotopia to critique state power and its undergirding visual logics to upend fixed notions of race as solely understood via visual means. Such a reading opens up new visions of hope and imaginations of liberation that need not be achieved through the nation-state. Instead, *In the Heart* exposes the state's racial logic of surveillance, displacement, and incarceration in the name of "private property." This chapter seeks to study how the Cold War period was a key moment during which the U.S. state produced and constituted itself through the twin narratives of totalitarianism and liberalism. Dystopia,

then, is a literary form that has been historically generated and altered by the political reasoning of the Cold War moment. I will explore how *The Kerner Report* employs dystopia as a state form because dystopia afforded the state¹ a narrative structure to adapt and alter the nation against totalitarianism and conservative racism. The historical confluence of totalitarianism and its haunting—the Cold War, civil rights, the rise of liberal democracy, the post-industrial moment, urban uprisings, and the development of the dystopian genre—composes the social and cultural milieu of the *Kerner Commission Report*. To develop my argument about the *Kerner Commission Report* and Cynthia Kadohata's novel, I will first historicize the *Kerner Commission Report* and *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* within the context of the Cold War and long Civil Rights moment to investigate the ways in which the encounter with totalitarianism, race, and urban space informed the formation of the U.S. racial liberal state. Then, I will historicize the emergence of the dystopian genre in order to track the kind of narrative we get when we read the *Kerner Commission Report* as a literary dystopia. I will argue that *The Kerner Report* alters the precepts of dystopia through the use of documentary photography, which allows *The Kerner Report* to establish and fix stereotypes and norms of urban crisis in an effort to invoke sympathy and authority for the state.

Reading *The Kerner Commission Report* and *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* together provides much insight into the ways in which the Cold War U.S. liberal state seized the genre of dystopia to legitimate realist documentary practices to address and reproduce normative notions of state subjects, the state, justice, race, and urban unrest in the Cold War civil rights era. The Kerner Commission Report indexes a historical moment when state discourse attempted to legitimize its counter-insurgent and counter-revolutionary tactics even as it sought to narrate itself as the defender of racial equality. The state's counter-revolutionary discourse in this

moment marks a discursive transformation of the U.S. state's management of racialized subjects. Moreover, the state in the *Kerner Commission Report* deploys dystopia as a state form in order to contain radical discourses of racial justice while also narrating itself as the defender of liberal democracy through the vilification of black protest. In other words, the state must contain the very thing that racial liberalism claims to support, the fight for racial emancipation and political agency. This is a moment in which the U.S. state is seizing a genre historically associated with critiquing the totalitarian state in order to disavow the totalitarian character of the U.S. white supremacist state. Rather than reproduce the nightmare of the state, *The Kerner Report* resignifies the specter of danger from the totalitarian state to the danger of black radicalism and black social agency as the threat to liberal democracy, and the state itself. The state, in the *Kerner Commission Report*, is no longer a menacing presence but, counter to the totalitarian state, is instead our only recourse.

I argue that understanding *The Kerner Report* as a dystopian narrative that hypervisibilized African Americans effectively invisibilized Asian Americans who were at that moment being simultaneously narrated as model minorities by the popular media. Both moves to invisibilize and hypervisibilize Asian Americans in the mid-1960s marks a key moment in which Asian Americans were erased from narratives of urban life. I see Kadohata as dealing with this historical moment that simultaneously overproduced the criminality of poor urban blacks through the erasure of Asian Americans from urban narratives. The visions of *The Kerner Report* are formative of the legacies with which we are left in the post-Cold War moment. I read *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* as a novel that produces heterotopic forms of race that provides an alternative narrative of urban crisis and hope that runs counter to the visions of *The Kerner Report*. Kadohata re-writes and re-signifies racialized, gendered, and urban histories that have

otherwise been overwritten by or written out of *The Kerner Report*. This last section focuses on Asian American feminist writers like Kadohata as part of a critical feminist tradition in dystopian writing that alter the precepts of dystopia to forward a different vision of change and hope. Like the *Kerner Commission Report*, Kadohata engages in questions of criminality, race, and urban crisis, yet Kadohata writes a story that disrupts all of the contradictory racial histories that the *Kerner Commission Report* erases. Reading Kadohata alongside the *Kerner Commission Report*, then, provides a way to track the limits of the state's discourse on "solving" the problem of inequality through state policy. Kadohata unfixes the state's normative narrative of urban crisis and names it as a fiction. *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* delineates the limitations of the state narrative of the *Kerner Commission Report*, which cannot account for the complex heterogeneity of racialized histories and relationships in the novel, and moreover, has dematerialized these connections from U.S. urban life. More specifically, I argue that Kadohata is intervening in the visual discourse and narrative that the racial liberal state produced about racial equality and black subjectivity. I read *In the Heart* as a critique of the visual logic of the U.S. Cold War racial liberal state and its assertion that it could fully represent and therefore fix the problem of U.S. inequality. My reading of *In the Heart* demonstrates the ways in which Kadohata levies this critique by de-visualizing race in her novel.

Cold War racial liberal state formation and Dystopia

It is important to note the ways in which the dystopian form of the *Kerner Commission Report* is haunted by and responds to the twin narratives of totalitarianism and liberalism, two political modes of reasoning that constituted the U.S. state during the Cold War period (1945-1991). As I mention in the introduction to my dissertation, dystopia develops out of the utopian

genre, which finds its darker iteration, dystopia, in the early part of the twentieth century. This section will argue that the U.S. racial liberal state of the Cold War Civil Rights period was constituted through the concomitant rise of totalitarianism and U.S. liberalism and that these forms of political reason altered and generated precepts of utopia and dystopia in the early-mid twentieth century. Dystopia is, then, a genre that the state uses to produce the Cold War racial liberal state. The Cold War racial liberal state was not only influenced by totalitarianism and U.S. liberalism, but also the genre of dystopia, which allowed the state to constitute itself as a “true” liberal democracy, and therefore, the polar opposite of totalitarianism. This section demonstrates why the genre of dystopia emerges as a literary form employed by the U.S. racial liberal state during the Cold War period and fleshes out how the *Kerner Commission Report* achieves this narrative.

The period of the Cold War² (1945-1991) was a defining moment in the development of U.S. liberalism and the U.S. racial state that produced the *Kerner Commission Report*. Historically situating the *Kerner Commission Report* in the Cold War moment allows us to note the formation of two contradictory pictures of the U.S. state in this period. The state produced itself as an anti-totalitarian liberal democratic state in order to argue for the necessity of increased U.S. state control and management. In light of the violent totalitarian regimes emerging in the early twentieth century the U.S. state had to portray itself as the “political antithesis” and “photographic negative” of fascist rule.³ Yet, this image of a U.S. state as the *opposite* of totalitarian dictatorship was produced alongside technologies of U.S. state control that exhibited and extended totalitarian tendencies.

Fears of totalitarian regimes haunted literary imaginations in the early twentieth century in the form of dystopia; however, these literary visions were not merely influenced by the rise of

fascism as literary dystopia in turn concretized fears of totalitarian state control. The development of literary utopia took a turn from felicitous imaginations of space and time toward more frightening visions as the dawn of the twentieth century was met by two brutal World Wars. The rise of fascism in Italy in 1925 (which many mark as the implementation of the first truly totalitarian system), followed by Stalin's Russia, and Hitler's regime in 1933 produced images of utopic socialist revolutions gone awry. Alongside the rise of fascism was the development and use of technology; nuclear weapons were created and used to decimate entire cities and populations. Utopian Enlightenment belief in human reason was displaced by dystopian visions of humanity's inability to restrain its destructive powers.⁴ The United States was deeply impacted by European totalitarianism as the Cold War liberal state was formed in relationship to the rise of totalitarianism. David Ciepley argues, "from the late 1930s through the 1960s... the contrast between democracy and totalitarianism (or freedom and totalitarianism) structured reflection on most every domain of social life, including politics, economics, law, psychology, education, and foreign affairs."⁵ Prior to U.S. involvement in World War II, U.S. and émigré intellectuals had already

formulated their opposition to fascism, Nazism, and communism in terms of *a political antithesis*. First, they cobbled together a new category of political regime—totalitarianism—designed to capture an essence common to them all. [U.S. and émigré intellectuals] then reinterpreted democracy as its polar opposite. Totalitarianism became the *photographic negative* that fixed, and in many respects continues to fix, the self-image of the United States. It is our defining Other.⁶

The presence of totalitarian regimes and technological progress were central to the rise of

dystopian literature in the earlier half of the twentieth century.⁷ The emergence of dystopia in the wake of totalitarian regimes, and the proliferation of nuclear armory as a technology of global genocide and concentration camps, provided fodder for dystopian writers and intellectuals. In archetypal dystopian narratives, exemplified by Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel, *Brave New World*, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, written in 1949, the world is at perpetual war, under constant government surveillance, and the public is totally controlled by the state.⁸ Orwell and Huxley's literary visions of dystopia strove to rouse their readers to become active, not passive, to the dangers of state control. Their visions of the future defined the main conventions of dystopia in the early to mid-twentieth century, in which a totalitarian regime has eliminated any subjectivity and we live in a world that is hierarchical and divided along racial and gendered lines. It is a world without hope, or escape, and the state ultimately triumphs and the will of the people is repressed through the state's effective indoctrination of its citizens.⁹ The very force of literature lies in its world-making capacity wherein readers are offered and are influenced by alternative visions of the society in which we live. Written in light of totalitarian regimes of Europe and Asia, authors like George Orwell and Alex Huxley, through the dystopian form, effectively (re)produced and solidified a fear of state violence and control in their readers. European representations and theorization of totalitarianism were mirrored in the U.S. as totalitarianism came to signify everything that would threaten the free individual. Totalitarianism, in the American imagination, came to represent two things. First is state control over the individual's activity around economics, travel, association, and even procreation. Second, totalitarianism signifies state control of individual thinking, through propaganda, media and education, ideological indoctrination, brainwashing, and reeducation. The nightmare of state control over individuals' bodies and minds seized the U.S. imagination throughout the 1930s,

World War II, and the Cold War as the very thing that would threaten the freedom of the free individual subject that all Americans supposedly possess and cherish.¹⁰

The pressure on the U.S. state to distance itself from images of totalitarian regimes rallied American intellectuals and politicians to defend an American democratic way of life and promoted a racial liberal U.S. state as the opposite to European and Asian totalitarian state control. American democracy in this period, then, became articulated as the antithesis of fascism, communism, and socialism, all of which were understood as promulgating a totalitarian state. If totalitarianism was understood as ideological, extremist, absolutist, and as a regime where the state controlled individuals through mass communication, religious persecution, and arbitrary government, American democracy had to be totalitarianism's opposite. The U.S. liberal state had to be non-ideological, moderate, morally skeptical, multi-valued, moved by interests springing from society, creating a place where power and politics is dispersed, and everyone has access to freedom of speech. Eighteenth-century liberal ideals and discourses of liberal individualism and equal rights, with an emphasis on private property, freedom of contract, civil liberties, constitutionalism, limited government, and legislative democracy were invoked. In the 1930s social scientists played a central role in building of the U.S. state and they looked to state autonomy as the answer to the crisis of American democracy. However, by the end of World War II, the encounter with totalitarianism pushed American liberalism in an antistatist direction, bringing an end to the Progressive era, a period that looked to the government for guidance and social control. The idea of "social control" became anathema to the American way of life as it became attached to images of totalitarianism.¹¹

In order to project an image of American liberal democracy, the U.S. state had to conjure images of racial harmony and cooperation, due process and rule of law, values that would all

come to define the U.S., and U.S. racial politics became central to the development of Cold War Civil Rights liberalism.¹² Nikhil P. Singh has argued that the legitimacy of U.S. liberal democracy during the long Civil Rights era, bracketed by Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, was dependent on the myth of racial progress.¹³ With the onset of the Cold War, U.S. State department officials argued, "white supremacy was the 'Achilles heel' of U.S. foreign relations."¹⁴ Resolving the "Negro problem" became fundamental to demonstrating the force of the "United States [as] the world's greatest democracy, whose ability to harmonize the needs of a heterogeneous population fitted it to be the broker of the world's security concerns and aspirations for social progress."¹⁵ Race in the Cold War civil rights moment held a precarious position in that racial justice became a defining feature of liberal democracy and the "American Creed," and at the same time threatened the status quo of the state. The "Negro Problem" has been famously studied by Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal who argued, in 1948, that the "dilemma" facing America at the time was

the ever-raging conflict between, on the one hand, the valuations preserved on the general plane which we shall call the 'American Creed,' where the American thinks, talks, and acts under the influence of high national and Christian precepts, and, on the other hand, the valuations on specific planes of individual and group living, where personal and local interests; economic, social, and sexual jealousies; considerations of community prestige and conformity; group prejudice against particular persons or types of people; and all sorts of miscellaneous wants, impulses, and habits dominate his outlook.¹⁶

The "Negro problem" for Myrdal places the "American Creed" of the United States in a dilemma precisely because the subjugated position of the black population contradicted the liberal

American ideal that all individuals had access to liberty, equality, and justice. The dilemma, then, was how to uphold liberal notions of freedom and liberty when African Americans were a constant reminder that freedom and liberty were not accessible by blacks. U.S. global ascendancy to the position of leader of the free world was not only defined against totalitarian regimes but was also bound to, and legitimated through, the image of U.S. racial harmony and the integration of people of color.¹⁷ I read the *Kerner Commission Report* as a literary dystopia to expose how dystopia is employed as a U.S. state form during the Cold War civil rights period at the moment the state is experiencing a crisis of its own legitimacy and a disruption of the state's linear narrative of progress.

State power operates on its ability to disappear the narrative construction of itself and to present state authority as necessary, rightful, and rationale. To understand the *Kerner Commission Report* purely as a social scientific account of U.S. urban crisis would give far too much credence to its logics and findings. We cannot understand the *Report* as a wholly objective account, but must understand it as a state policy form that is producing different narratives in the service of the state, and therefore the status quo of racial hierarchy and racial liberalism. In other words, while the *Report* masquerades as an objective and factual account of urban crisis, it is in fact a narrative that has a material effect on social life by reproducing stereotypes of racialized people and representations of the state. Comprehending the *Report* as a literary dystopia, a lens that is not typically applied to a reading of state reports, allows us to reckon with the fiction of violence in dystopia as a sociological reality with the material effects of the fictions of the state. If we cannot acknowledge the social force of the literary genre of dystopia, we miss the material effects of literature and therefore the relevance of the *Kerner Commission Report* in transforming U.S. state power.

“Eyewitness to Crisis”: Documentary Photography and State Dystopia in the *Kerner Commission Report*

The *Kerner Commission Report* has been popularly recognized as a social scientific state policy report and a civil rights text. Expanding on these framings I would add that *The Kerner Report* is also a narrative of urban crisis that appropriates dystopian form in order to legitimize the Cold War racial liberal state and state subjects. Told from the standpoint of the U.S. Cold War state *The Kerner Report* coheres a narrative of urban crisis in the mid-twentieth century that picks up on and transforms the precepts of dystopia that the racial liberal commissioners in 1967 inherited. I argue that *The Kerner Commission Report* produces a dystopia through the use of documentary photography and narrative form that ultimately shifts Marxist utopian and dystopian notions of temporality. I track these changes in order to explore how the logics of utopia and dystopia transform and constitute the social and political logics of the late modern period. Moreover, recognizing the changes in literary formal precepts exposes how new narratives are produced that in turn affect our material histories. It is my contention that the moment of *The Kerner Report* cohered a narrative of urban crisis that concretized the specter of black danger in an effort to legitimize the U.S. racial state as the entity that would preserve the free individual subject of U.S. democracy, and permit the narration of the U.S. state’s linear progress toward “true democracy.”

Although the notion of utopia began as a literary form that was attached to notions of space, or Sir Thomas More’s paradisaical “nowhere” or “else-where,” the rise of industrialism in the nineteenth century shifted the precepts of utopian thought and literature toward futurity and historical process and progress. Marxist notions of temporality intervened in utopian and dystopian thinking and form from the mid-nineteenth century and well into the mid-twentieth

century. I bring up Marxist interventions into utopian and dystopian literary form and thought in order to demonstrate how *The Kerner Report* is invested in the temporal precepts of utopia and dystopia, and is attempting to manage a crisis in capitalism; however, the report does not follow the logics of a Marxist dystopia. Marx's *The German Ideology* (1845) suggested that history itself, with the help of men, would destroy capitalism. While Marx argued that, after a period of revolution, the state would own all means of production and class division would be eliminated, and then soon enough, the state would be rendered dispensable, *The Kerner Report* mobilizes a different narrative of progress, crisis, and the role of the state.¹⁸ A linear narrative of progress for *The Kerner Report* resists a Marxist conclusion of state dispensability and instead argues for a liberal narrative of assimilation. For Marxism progress is dialectical in that we must work through crisis toward progress. Crisis is, then, productive for a more just society, or for Marx, a proletarian utopia. *The Kerner Report*, instead, is a narrative that pinpoints a moment of crisis that identifies the state as the corrective, rather than the problem or the entity that must fall. *The Kerner Report*, in other words, is a narrative of counter-insurgency that attempts to evoke sympathy for the state, not the urban poor, in order to contain the racial contradictions of the U.S. liberal state. In order to disrupt the teleology of Marxist utopian and dystopian logics that calls for the eventual abolishment of the capitalist state, *The Kerner Report* changes the precepts of utopian and dystopian form. While Marxism privileges narrative, narrative form is inadequate for *The Kerner Report* in forwarding its narrative of the collapse of urban cities and the strengthening of the U.S. racial liberal state. For Marx, and later Theodor Adorno, narrative form is the vehicle through which the underclass will gain political consciousness and an understanding of their status in society. Marxism continued to influence utopian and dystopian writing and theorization into the twentieth century, as Marxist intellectuals were coming to terms

with the nightmares of their contemporary moment.

In 1949 Theodor Adorno returned to Germany in the aftermath of WWII and the Nazi regime, and the year in which the Cold War split Germany into two different territories and visions. Theodor Adorno's theory of negative dialectics is particularly helpful for me to unpack the statist and cultural logics of the visuality of *The Kerner Report*.¹⁹ Rather than seeing culture as reconciling society's contradictions, Adorno's theory of negative dialectics claims that art must actively participate in a dialectical relationship with society and culture, mobilizing itself as a counter-culture to dominant ideologies and cultural forms. In other words, culture is useful for promoting dissonance between subject and representation, because in this dissonance what is revealed is the inadequacy of representation and not the belief that there is a fully adequate mode of representation that will lead to a solution (which is how *The Report* operates). *The Kerner Report's* cultural practice of visual representation does not interrogate the ways in which it is producing dominant ideology; rather, *The Kerner Report* poses itself as being able to fully represent, record, and address urban crisis, which is precisely the cultural logic that Adorno critiques. John Tagg usefully demonstrates the degree to which photography has historically served "as a means of record and a source of evidence" for institutional and governmental strategies that demanded "a new 'regime of truth' and a new 'regime of sense'." Tagg argues that photography grew alongside state formation and the state's desire for new ways of establishing new modes of surveillance and control through the appearance of objectivity and was vested "with a particular authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life; a power to see and record; a power of surveillance."²⁰ While Tagg's study focuses on the working class and state formation in the 19th century, I would argue that *The Kerner Report* confers documentary photography with the same authority and power to record racial struggle and tension in the mid 20th century.

Following Adorno's line of critique, and keeping Tagg in mind, the commissioners' belief in the power and authority of documentary photography to properly record race relations and social inequality upholds the state as having the capacity to provide the solution to U.S. urban crisis and racial inequality. The series of pictures ends with an image of reconciliation between the U.S. state and the black community, which is represented by the image of African American children talking to a white police officer. The sub-caption reads "Negro children in New Haven talk with police officer at the Neighborhood Center for Police Community Relations. The first such organization to be established in the riot-affected city, it demonstrated hope for new cooperation." Hope at the end of *The Kerner Report's* visual narrative is symbolized by a white police officer talking peacefully to black children, and the absence of black radicalism. In contrast to the busy, messy, and disorderly images this penultimate image is a calm, "promising" picture in which the state, as represented by the police officer, is the solution to urban crisis and allows the state to narrate its own teleology as a liberal democracy. This vision of hope does not view the government as the site that must be changed and critiqued; rather, the federal government is seen as indispensable in the fight for equality. The federal government, local police, state officials, the legislature and law enforcement have a special place in ending the urban "disorders." Hope for the *Kerner Commission Report* is envisioned through the necessity and strengthening of state institutions, and the quelling, integration, and assimilation of what the commissioners visually narrate as dystopia figures of black radical "agitators." *The Kerner Report's* visual narrative upholds the Cold War liberal democratic state as *the* social actor and liberator that can rectify our urban crisis. *The Kerner Report* is reflective of the ways in which the Cold War period marks the height of American racial liberalism, and the emergence of a new faith in restoring the federal government as an egalitarian entity that will enact change in U.S.

society through liberal reform.²¹ The Kerner Commission Report indexes a historical moment when state discourse attempts to legitimize its counter-insurgent and counter-revolutionary tactics of containing black radical protest even as it sought to narrate itself as the defender of racial equality. In other words, the liberal state worked to contain the very thing that racial liberalism claimed to support, the struggle for racial emancipation and political agency.

As a social scientific dystopia, *The Kerner Report* alters utopian and dystopian precepts through the use of documentary photography. Central to understanding the dystopian visions of the *Kerner Commission Report* is how the genre enables the authors to “warn” its audience of bad things to come, of a society that will be worse than the one we live in, by pinpointing a danger and fear. As I discussed earlier in my history of dystopia, this literary genre has for the most part been about the fear of a totalitarian regime. Dystopia is a genre that allows writers to pinpoint a fear, and that fear throughout the early twentieth century was a fear of fascism.

Although dystopia is a genre that is haunted by the presence of totalitarian regimes, its structure allows writers to name a threat, and is, therefore, a particularly useful genre for the state to employ in the state’s effort to promote itself as the very thing that will save us from that threat.

And, the threat in *The Kerner Report* is displaced onto black communities and uprising. Up until this moment of the Cold War civil rights period, it seems that the state has been invested in the production of utopian narratives belonging and liberal democracy. The state has played a pivotal role in these utopian imaginings precisely because the state is that which provides the country with the means, structures, and laws to live out these imaginings. Utopian imaginations of the U.S. and the American dream have always been about an exceptional place where people from all over the world could integrate and belong, where people no longer have to worry about religious, racial, class, gendered, or sexual difference. In this utopia all of these differences

would no longer matter, or better yet, they would magically go away and “becoming one nation” would be our inevitable telos. Throughout the *Kerner Commission Report* the authors iterate that “the major goal is the creation of a true union—a single society and a single American identity” (23). And, the way to this “true union” is by fixing “white racism.”

The idea of democracy and the American Creed found its articulation through the idea of racial harmony. Sociology provided rational social scientific methodologies toward that end. While Myrdal seems to be devoted to enacting change, and “solving the Negro Problem,” he does so through maintaining U.S. liberalism and producing the “Negro” as a “problem” that threatens our “American Creed” which states that liberal democracy does indeed promote and allows for equality between different races. Myrdal’s answer to this problem is to recognize that the “Negro Problem” is actually a “white man’s problem,” which is why *An American Dilemma* gives

primary attention to what goes on in the minds of white Americans... it is... the white majority group that naturally determines the Negro’s ‘place.’ All our attempts to reach scientific explanations of why the Negroes are what they are and why they live as they do have regularly led to determinants on the white side of the race line... The Negro’s entire life, and consequently, also his opinions on the Negro problem, is, in the main, to be considered as secondary reactions to more primary pressures from the side of the dominant white majority.²²

This understanding of race does two things. First, this conclusion relegates the problem of race and racialization to that of the problem of individuals. This does not allow for an account of historical, institutional forces that have produced racialized subjects and racism. Second, it does not allow us to see people of color as active social agents. Instead, an African American’s “entire

life” and “his opinions on the Negro problem” are “secondary” to whites. There is a lack, here, of seeing blacks playing significant roles in enacting change outside of whites. Social scientific inquiry, up until this point, only allowed sociologists to understand change through changing white minds.

The *Kerner Commission Report* would employ and build on Myrdal’s solution as the Kerner Commissioners argue that a fundamental problem is “the racial attitude and behavior of white Americans toward black Americans... white racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II.”²³ The *Report* was the first public statement by a group charged by a U.S. president that named “white racism” as a systemic problem. Indeed, this was a significant declaration on the part of the state and it upset the very foundational social roots of white American public culture.²⁴ The commission allayed Johnson’s fears of a conspiracy group that was organizing against the U.S. government by stating that they “found no evidence that all or any of the disorders or the incidents that led to [the riots] were planned or directed by any organization or group, international, national, or local.”²⁵ Rather, the report found that “racial disorders,” as the impending threat, stemmed from conditions that were created by white Americans. As such, the Commissioners proposed that “white racism” was the cause of black discontent. White Americans are “deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.”²⁶ Racism and racialization here is relegated to consciousness, as if it can be changed if white people only become informed and change their mind. Race is not understood as permeating society in a way that has institutionally and systematically oppressed African American life. Addressing urban crisis merely as a problem of “white attitudes,” through this individualist discourse, does not implicate the white supremacist

or racial liberal state. Understanding race solely through the level of the individual disables recognition of how the very foundation of U.S. state and institutionality is built on white supremacy.

For the Commissioners their current moment is not moving toward of a “true union.” Instead, they argue, “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal... [because] discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American” (1). *The Report* specifically narrates a dystopian world as being marked by a deepening division between blacks and whites in order to call for action and change. We cannot, the writers warn us, continue on the course we are on because to do so would lead to two “separate and unequal” societies. Like other dystopian narratives, *The Kerner Commission Report* is calling attention to our dangerous socio-political climate, and calling for action in changing our current conditions. The dystopia is, then, the failure of achieving the utopian, and fictional, vision of a “single society” and “single American identity” because injustice and inequality exists; and if injustice and inequality exists, liberal democracy cannot, “threatening” the “future of every American.”

I read *The Kerner Report* as a text that indexes a key moment in late modernity in which dystopia was visualized through documentary photography, which produced notions of the state, urban life, and state subjects. The documentary photography in *The Kerner Report* provides “proof” of the threat to a unified society, and that our nightmares of the collapse of the country is already here, not in our distant or near future, but is already being acted out in our streets. The peculiarity of *The Kerner Commission Report*, as a state policy form attempting to portray a “truthful” and “objective” account of the urban crisis, is that it actually produces its “truthful” and “objective” account through a dystopian narrative. So, it utilizes both sociological

methodologies and claims to objectivity and also the dystopian genre form. The Commissioners legitimize their authority, and *The Report's* authority, through implementing social scientific methodologies; yet *The Report* makes a more secretive argument about the state, state subjects, and race that can be named if we read the report as a literary dystopia. The report, then, is reliant upon a long history of sociology thinking. Here is a brief discussion of *The Kerner Report* and its sociological leanings, precursors and legacies with which the commissioners are working. A normative reading of the *Kerner Commission Report* is not by way of literary genre, but through an understanding of *The Report* as a state policy that provides a “truthful” account. Upon issuing his executive order on July 29, 1967, President Johnson charged Otto Kerner and the rest of the Committee to “As best you can, find the truth, the whole truth, and express it in your report” (537). In search of the truth, *The Report* constructed profiles of disorder, conducted and analyzed field interviews in each city, used law enforcement agencies’ after-action reports, logs, of U.S. Army and National Guard units, FBI reports, fire department logs and reports, and Prosecutors’ offices and other investigating agencies. They accumulated 1500 pages of depositions and interviewed approximately 1200 people (108). *The Report* measured levels of violence, law enforcement mobilization, and developed profiles of riots and rioters. Rather than Marx’s “a time to come,” then, we are already living out a dystopia and things will only get worse, not better, without state intervention.

The series of documentary photographs in the section “Eyewitness to Crisis” is the state’s attempt to make meaning and construct a narrative out of different pictures taken in urban areas across the U.S., over the course of four years.²⁷ The photographs position the report as providing an impartial “witness” to urban crisis, promising its white racial liberal readers full access to the experience of black urban life.²⁸ As an archive, the seemingly cohesive narrative begins with an

image of, in the report's terms, "disorder." At the forefront of the picture is a white policeman, arms raised, baton in hand, ready to strike a black man. Black bodies are struggling and fighting white men, who are either policemen or photographers documenting the scene. As we follow the visual narrative of the report, we enter into the world of black life. Dirty urban streets are crowded with faceless African American children playing, followed by an image of children sleeping in a cramped apartment in Detroit, and then images of sleeping black children in a classroom. Seemingly peaceful pictures of sleepy children stand in stark contrast to chaotic photographs of African American men rioting. Overturned trashcans, streets full of riot debris, and black men roam and loot their own neighborhoods as national guards with bayonets and batons move into the ghetto. A young black man stands next to a paratrooper, with a horrified expression on his face. A black woman is sprawled out on the pavement, facedown, in the middle of the night. Black men are arrested and jailed as armored tanks move into the city, while in the next image black women hover in the ruins of their home, after having been burned down. This narrative ends with young African Americans talking to a white police officer, with the caption reading, "Negro children in New Haven talk with police officer at the Neighborhood Center for Police Community Relations. The first such organization to be established in the riot-affected city, it demonstrated hope for new cooperation." The visual image in this edition of the report ends with a racially ambiguous man walking on the street with the words "Black Soul Brother" scrawled on a wall of a building.

I argue that the photographic narrative, along with the text, of the report replaces the danger of the totalitarian state in early twentieth century dystopia with the danger of black agency. The visual narrative demonstrates how black agency is a threat not only to black communities, "their" own neighborhoods and women and children, but also the U.S. at large.

The images present a new mode of perception for understanding how *The Kerner Report* organizes the logics of race and social relations in this period. *The Kerner Report* presents these images as truthful and accurate depictions of the urban crisis marked by urban riots in the mid twentieth century. John Tagg demonstrates the degree to which photography has historically served “as a means of record and a source of evidence” for institutional and governmental strategies that demanded “a new ‘regime of truth’ and a new ‘regime of sense.’” Photography grew alongside state formation and the state’s desire for new ways of establishing new modes of surveillance and control through the appearance of objectivity.²⁹ Photography is vested “with a particular authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life; a power to see and record; a power of surveillance... This is not the power of the camera but the power of the apparatuses of the local state which deploy it and guarantee the authority of the images it constructs to stand as evidence or register a truth.”³⁰ The camera itself does not have the power to be seen as a truth, but the photographs are imbued with truth because the state constructs it as such. While Tagg is focusing on the working class struggle of the 19th century, this paradigm is helpful to think about representational practices of race in *The Kerner Report*. The state has a vested interest in granting this power to photography because the state wants to use the images to create the kind of narrative of the state and its subjects that they want, and present it as “the truth” of how race and racism works. In other words, the state dictates how documentary photography is being used and its ability to access the “truth” of racial inequality for racial emancipation. As an effect, photography is co-opted by the state for counter-insurgent means and as a discourse of containment.

The commissioners write that the images are part of

special measures to ensure effectiveness of arrests for serious violations. On-the-spot photos have been found useful in some jurisdictions. They fix the accused's identity and help to refresh the police officer's recollection after he has made scores of arrests for different offenses within a matter of hours.³¹

Here, the Commissioners state that the photographs provided a tool for the police to more efficiently identify and arrest rioters. The pictures are presented as "evidence" against rioters and as "evidence" the images are supposedly able to capture the truth of what happened. The camera is the "eyewitness" that is presented as providing its audience a new way of seeing. Such a way of seeing documentary photography is to see it as unquestionable and objective truth.

The introduction of race and visual documentation to the dystopian form gave rise to new narratives of racialized minority subjects and the role of the state in the period of the Cold War. With this understanding of the role of photography in regimes of truth and knowledge, we must understand the ways in which the documentary photography in the *Kerner Commission Report* is presented as empirical evidence of the danger of black uprisings in urban ghettos, and the necessity of the police and state. I argue, then, that the report marks a historical moment in which U.S. perceptions of race shifted. Although photography is used in the report as a way to establish documentary photography's supposedly "objective" and "truthful" narrative, these images mark a moment in which black agency is visually spectacularized as dangerous and criminal, and the state presents itself as having control over the disorder of blackness. The report attempts to portray this formula as a truth and does so through the selected images. The photos in this archive were selected for a particular reason in order to construct a particular narrative of the state and state subjects. The framing of the images shapes the way the audience, reader, or viewer is being managed and asked to understand our perilous urban cities.

Over and over again, the viewer is bombarded with images of black bodies, hypervisibilizing black criminality and black destitution. The commissioners treat the signified, in this case black bodies and the urban ghetto, as being fully capable of being represented and captured. In doing so, the report produces black male subjects as criminals. Even though the text positions itself as trying to “fix” the urban crisis that is leading us toward a “separate and unequal” society, it does so through the narrative of blackness as the specter of danger. The “crisis” is represented in the very first picture of the visual narrative. Black men are pushing policemen, and a white police officer has his baton raised about to strike a black man wearing a hat. The image is intense with racial tension and physical violence. In a later image, “A suspected looter” is behind bars with his hands up, as if conceding to his crime. Another image shows a line of black men, holding onto each other’s shirts as they are being corralled to the police station. All these images point black men in one direction, toward jail. Black male teenagers and adults roam the streets, trashcans are overturned, and debris surrounds them. This is the “crisis” that threatens society, according to the visual narrative.

Included in the report is President Johnson’s “Address to the Nation on Civil Disorders” (July 27, 1967) where he declares, even before the investigation begins:

... let there be no mistake about it—the looting, arson, plunder and pillage which have occurred are not part of a civil rights protest. There is no American right to loot stores, or to burn buildings, or to fire rifles from the rooftops. That is crime—and crime must be dealt with forcefully, and swiftly, and certainly—under law... The criminals who committed these acts of violence against the people deserve to be punished—and they must be punished. Explanations may be offered, but nothing can excuse what they have done. The apostles of violence, with their ugly

drumbeat of hatred, must know that they are now heading for disaster. And every man who really wants progress or justice or equality must stand against them and their miserable virus of hate. (539)

This declaration, alongside the images and the picture captions, “Three looters reach through the grating of a liquor store,” “Looters carry as much as they can during the Detroit riot,” “Teenagers are booked at police station for alleged looting,” “prove” that blacks were rioting because they wanted to steal, even from their own communities. The images, in other words, confirmed President Johnson’s suspicions that African Americans were “looters,” “arsonists,” “plunderers,” “pillagers,” and “apostles of violence” committing acts of violence against American citizens, society, and private property. Johnson’s words are reminiscent of the American jeremiad, a didactic political dystopian tradition that dates back to the New England Puritans in 1630. Best exemplified through figures such as John Cotton and John Winthrop, the jeremiad is a cautionary tale that justified westward expansion and American colonialism. The jeremiad prophesized apocalypse and doom if Puritans did not fulfill their “errand” of making America a “true Utopia.”³² President Johnson’s address is producing a kind of jeremiad, in which the “apostles of violence,” black subjects, are casted as that which will bring about an apocalypse, threatening the progress of the dream of America. Black bodies, not white, Asian, or Latino bodies, are causing a disturbance in the social and political fabric of American life.

In order to conjure the image of black criminality, *The Kerner Report’s* narrative and photographs delinked urban uprisings from the movement toward justice and equality by declaring that these actions are not “part of civil rights protest.” So, just as important as what is included in this visual narrative, is what’s left out. Nowhere in this archive of pictures is there a connection to the political and social movements going on at that time. We do not get any images

of “meaningful” political protests, and the pictures that we do get, that which could be read as the political uprisings of the local urban poor, are framed as random acts of violence. Depicted as an angry mob, black protesters are cast as degraders of society who promote repression, not justice, and are even keeping down, not only their own community, but also every citizen’s access to freedom. In other words, black men are the divisive specter of danger that are leading us toward a divided and unequal society.

Black male criminality is solidified through the depiction of black children and women as victims of black male violence. Interspersed among the pictures of black male criminality are images of innocent African American women and children. Images of innocent black children playing in the messy streets or asleep in the classroom suggest the abandonment of the children in the urban ghetto. They are alone, with no parental guidance, while their teenage brothers and fathers are roaming the streets. Another image shows three African American women, one woman is holding a young boy, huddled together. The caption reads “Negroes among the charred ruins of their home in Detroit.” The charred home, and the destitution of the black women and the sequence of the images, suggests that their home has been burnt down because of the rioters in their own neighborhood. Black women and children are depicted differently from the African American teenagers and adult male who are not only disturbing the “unity” of the U.S., but also the very well being of their very own community and families. Black women and children are cast as total victims of the riots in an effort to typecast black men.

The images erase black women and children from scenes of riots and hypervisibilize them as victims, working with the text of the report to depict the specter of danger as everyday black male youth and activists. Such a reading asks the viewer to imagine what the “activist” looks like. The report states that:

typical rioter was not a hoodlum, habitual criminal, or riffraff; nor was he a recent migrant, a member of an uneducated underclass, or a person lacking broad social and political concerns. Instead, he was a teenager or young adult, a lifelong resident of the city in which he rioted, a high-school drop-out—but somewhat better educated than his Negro neighbor—and almost invariably under-employed or employed in a menial job. He was proud of his race, extremely hostile to both whites and middle-class Negroes and, though informed about politics, highly distrustful of the political system and of political leaders. (26)

The activist is “better educated” than his “under-employed” or “menial” laboring “Negro neighbor.” “He” has pride in being black, and as such is “hostile” to whites and middle-class blacks, and distrustful of the political system and its leaders. The threat in the dystopia of the Cold War liberal state is no longer achieved through the “danger” of an authoritarian state but through danger of black radicalism and activism.

Placed outside the purview of law and justice black urban protest during these years (and now still) came to signify the very thing that needed to be contained and punished because it threatened the status quo of American society. Indeed, black protest and actions were a threat, not to grassroots movements toward emancipation, but threats to white supremacist institutions and the state. *The Kerner Report* portrays young black male radicals as militants who would not negotiate with the government because they distrust the government, and because they do not want to compromise their militancy (334). Black activists were depicted as non-negotiating, unbending, “angry” mobs that refuse integration, and not as working with the state toward civil rights. By de-linking black urban riots from black political movement, young black radicals and black social agency are narrated simply as threats to the nation, erasing the significant political

organizing by people of color in the 1960s. The 1960s marked a key turning point where for the first time in U.S. history people of color instigated, not merely responded to or were victims of, non-white on white violence as they physically attacked the state and private property.³³ Prior to the 1960s, en masse non-white on white instigated violence was unheard of. Historically, white mobs whipped, murdered, and lynched communities of color, yet these were not immediately condemned as a national crisis because they kept in place the order of things, or in other words, white supremacy.³⁴ 1960s black radicals calling for social agency and the right to protest had to be recognized as the specter of danger precisely because they were, at this particular moment, calling for a revolution, not merely on city streets, but on campuses and organizations across the country, and political institutions and leaders at the state level. Black urban neighborhoods³⁵ became spaces for the confluence of the great migration, ghettoization, racial segregation, industrialization, as well as black resistance. The Commissioners state that there was “a new mood” called “Black Power” that had “sprung up among Negroes, particularly among the young, in which self-esteem and enhanced racial pride are replacing apathy and submission to ‘the system’” (11).

Black radicals in the Cold War Civil Rights period were linking fascism, colonialism, U.S. imperialism, and U.S. racial inequality and were articulating these links in and through the “urban ghetto.” The urban uprisings of the mid-1960s were an effect of centuries of inequality, migration, poor urban life, an awareness of state racism, and the desire for a fight in the hopes of a more just world. Urban resisters, as Singh points out, had the least to gain from the Civil Rights movement, and “had the most in common with the subjects of colonial rule.”³⁶ The U.S. state cannot acknowledge this “new mood” as a movement about justice for people of color and racialized groups living in the third world because this would implicate the role of the U.S. in

colonialism. This “new mood” was not seen as hopeful for the *Kerner Commission Report*, and instead they were condemned in order to justify the U.S. state’s counter-revolutionary tactics. *The Kerner Report* commissioners argued, “militant organizations, local and national, and individual agitators, who repeatedly forecast and called for violence, were active in the spring and summer of 1967. [The Commissioners] believe[d] that they sought to encourage violence, and that they helped to create an atmosphere that contributed to the outbreak of disorder” (9). Key “agitators” that incited riots like SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), Black Nationalists, Black Power advocates and militants, Black Muslims, Orthodox Muslims, and members of the United Afro-American Association are depicted as “violent,” divisive, and the reason for the “outbreak of disorder,” which would only lead to the “alienation and hostility toward the institution of law and government and the white society which controls them” (206).

The spectacularization of black male bodies in the images is contrasted to not only black women and children suffering, but also male white police officers, as a symbol of the state, “controlling” disorders. African American men are narrated as a threat to the nation precisely because black radicals and their protests disrupt the teleology of the U.S. racial liberal state’s narrative of progress.³⁷ However, if black radicals were acknowledged as recognizable political social actors, then the state would have to acknowledge its own lack. The visuality of the text is integral to U.S. racial liberal state teleology as the visual narrative of the documentary photographs in “Eyewitness of Crisis” ends with an image of reconciliation between the U.S. state and the black community, represented by the image of African American children talking to a police officer. The sub-caption reads “Negro children in New Haven talk with police officer at the Neighborhood Center for Police Community Relations. The first such organization to be established in the riot-affected city, it demonstrated hope for new cooperation.” Hope for a

solution and resolution at the end of the visual narrative is signified by young black children talking to a police officer. There is a temporalization to this representation of hope by the state that works to subdue radical activism. The hope is that these children will not turn out to be like the violent male teenagers and adults in their community; the hope is that they will grow up to “cooperate” with the police, rather than being untrusting and divisive; the hope here is that the police will provide a resolution to the urban crisis. Hope lies in the U.S. state’s ability to control the rioting bodies, with batons and bayonets. Hope is symbolized by a white police officer talking peacefully to black children, and the absence of black radical leaders. Rather than a busy, messy, disorderly scene this penultimate image is a calm, “promising” picture in which the state, as represented by the police officer, provides the solution to urban crisis. This conclusion for *The Kerner Report* allows the state to narrate its own teleology of liberal democracy.

The Kerner Commission Report produced a dystopian vision that placed our fears onto black bodies, leaving little room for people of color to be seen as agents that could enact significant social or political change. This upholds the Cold War liberal democratic state as *the* social actor and liberator who can rectify the urban crisis. This period marks the height of American liberalism, because there was a new faith in restoring the federal government to enact change in U.S. society through liberal reform. Rather than viewing the government as the site that must be changed and critiqued, the *Kerner Commission Report* argues for the indispensability of the federal government in moving toward equality in the U.S. The federal government, local police, state officials, the legislature and law enforcement have a special place in ending the urban “disorders.” President Johnson declared that these institutions must stop the violence, “quickly, finally and permanently” and these institutions “should, and must, be respected by our people.”³⁸ Rather than view the police as symbols of white power, white racism

and white repression, and an expression of white attitudes, *The Kerner Commission Report* states that this is an unfair view of the police as we must “respect” and “support” law enforcement.

There is a desire for new modes of state containment through the expansion of judicial and police apparatus. The Commissioners called for “laws sufficient to deter and punish riot conduct, ... additional judges, bail and probation officers, and clerical staff, ... volunteer lawyers to help prosecutors and to represent riot defendants, ... policies to ensure proper and individual bail, arraignment, pre-trial, trial and sentencing proceedings, ... and adequate emergency processing and detention facilities” (19). Reforming the judicial and law enforcement system seemed to be aimed at strengthening the system to deal with rioters, rather than figuring out how to provide justice *for* rioters. They are calling for an increase in state power to punish and control the population, even as the state tried to set itself up against the image of a totalitarian state. The state cannot appear to have totalitarian tendencies, but through claims of safeguarding the good life for Americans, the report is supporting the increase in state power to protect and control society against the urban violence of African Americans. Visualizing the dystopic figure of African Americans through photography conjures black activism and protest as the source of danger, not hope. Representing the specter of dangerous black bodies is treated as a transparent truth, or authenticity, of what they are, rather than seeing the pictures as a representational practice that is part of a narrative that finds hope in the strengthening of state institutions, not through protest and riots.

Through the use of photography, the *Kerner Commission Report* changes the precepts of Marxist utopia and dystopia narratives and resists a Marxist conclusion of the poor uprising and the fall of the capitalist state. Instead the commissioners argue for state legitimacy, the containment of black radical thinking and organizing, and liberal assimilation as the resolution to

U.S. racial crisis. The Commissioners argue that

integration is the only course which explicitly seeks to achieve a single nation rather than accepting the present movement toward a dual society. This choice would enable us at least to begin reversing the profoundly divisive trend already so evident in our metropolitan areas—before it becomes irreversible. (407)

Hope does not include black male bodies, because to get to this peaceful vision of “a single nation,” the black male protesting body has to be assimilated into the dominant culture. And if he won’t assimilate, then he must be wholly excised. Hope for the state is based on imaginations of integration and assimilation that adheres to a desire for a universal and coherent society. The image promises that if these young African American children go along with the police and state there will no longer be an urban crisis. Here, the Commissioners are declaring the divisive tactics of protesting blacks. Integration, the Commissioners argue, will allow us to “reverse” divisions and will allow us to move toward “a single nation.” This is why *The Kerner Report* produced black subjects in the report as “agitators” who were preventing the efforts of the government to control disorder and improve social life. The state, therefore, increases its power and authority by condemning black radicals who are against integration. Integration will cure the disorder, and so long that people of color can integrate into dominant society. This report is an insight into the vision of liberation that we will get when we count on the state to imagine change for us. It is done so within in the confines of governmental policy and discourse and in the interest of maintaining the status quo. The hope that is outlined by the *Kerner Commission Report* is not about a hope for liberation for racialized and gendered subjects, but instead forwards a nationalized condition of forgetting in which histories of racialization and gendered subjects are erased in the name of integration and assimilation.

Invisible and Hypervisible Asian Americans

Through the hypervisibilization and dystopic figure of urban African Americans, *The Kerner Commission Report* achieves the narrative of black male criminality and the state by elevating local conflagrations of urban uprisings to the national level. Black masculinity is figured as an ideal for radical liberation politics in the U.S., but at the same time it is figured as a target for containment by the state. It is important to understand how black emancipation, as the specter of danger, relies on a conception of race that reduces U.S. histories of racialization to a black-white relationship. In reducing racial difference to the black-white binary, the liberal state of the Cold War period spectacularized black masculinity as a threat to the liberal democratic state but is realized through the elision of Asian, Native American, and Latino presence. What we get, then, is a universalizing narrative that excises the particularities of U.S. race and gender relations.

The use of documentary photography allowed the Commissioners to cohere its own liberal and linear narrative through the black-white binary. It is relevant that the visual narrative of *The Kerner Report's* "Eyewitness to Crisis" is composed of images of different cities, and taken from different sources, but were placed together in order to create a cohesive picture of U.S. national crisis. This coherency relies on the disappearance of multi-racial protest and presence in the Cold War civil rights moment and ends up hypervisibilizing African Americans and erasing Asian Americans from narratives of urban crisis. I am not arguing that Asian Americans must be reinserted into the urban crisis narrative, but that the absence of Asian Americans is a marker for the condition of possibility for *The Kerner Report's* liberal narrative of racial inequality. In other words, black criminality becomes meaningful through the utopian

figure of the model minority, which becomes visualized through the figure of the Asian American in 1966. The model minority stereotype would then come to find its fullest articulation in multicultural discourses of the Reagan years. The invisibilization of Asian Americans by *The Kerner Report* coincides with the hypervisibilization of Asian Americans as model minority by popular media.

As African American images abound, Asian Americans were written out of the historical and political images of urban late modernity. Asian Americans, according to statist racial liberal logic, need not be included in the image of urban unrest, because they have successfully assimilated into the dominant culture. For *The Kerner Report*, Asian Americans do not at all factor into the disorder, they do not even exist in the urban ghetto. And for popular media beginning in 1966, Asian Americans are over-represented as the ideal upon which all racialized minorities, especially African Americans, should model themselves. Both moves to invisibilize and hypervisibilize Asian Americans are modes of writing out Asian Americans. To be clear, while *The Kerner Report* and popular media's modes of representation of Asian Americans are distinctly different, with *The Kerner Report* working to invisibilize and popular media hypervisibilizing Asian Americans through a mode of visual spectacularization, both modes write out Asian Americans through an argument for liberal assimilation. *The Kerner Report* is an argument for integration of black and Asian difference. As such, its visual narrative works toward integration.

The stereotype of the "model minority" would come to find its fullest articulation in multicultural discourses of the Reagan years; however, 1966 marks a key point in the popular development of the stereotype of Asian Americans as model minority. In 1966, one year before President Johnson assembles his National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, the first two

pieces of popular media writing describing Asians as model minorities were written. The first was published on January 9, 1966 called “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” and it was written by William Petersen, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. The second article was published in the *U.S. News and World Report* on December 26, 1966, entitled “Success story of One Minority Group in U.S.” Both articles argue that Asian Americans have suffered just as much, if not more, than African Americans, yet they have “made it.” The *U.S. News Report* article states, “the Chinese and other Orientals in California were faced with even more prejudice than faces the Negro today. We haven’t stuck Negroes in concentration camps, for instance, as we did the Japanese in World War II. The orientals came back, and today they have established themselves as strong contributors to the health of the whole community.”³⁹ Rather than implicating how white institutional structures have worked to subjugate both Asian Americans and African Americans, this statement demonstrates the degree to which Asians have not only suffered more than African Americans, but have overcome oppression and are now “strong contributors” to society. African Americans, this article suggests, have not applied themselves and worked as hard as Asian Americans, because if they did, like Asian Americans, they too could navigate the system and “succeed,” and they would no longer suffer from racism and discrimination. As such, Asian American racial oppression is posited as a historical matter divorced from the present.

In contrast to *The Kerner Report’s* non-representations of Asian Americans in its account of urban crisis, Asian Americans are represented in popular media as a racialized minority group that is not part of the “problem” of urban crisis, but can overcome urban crisis by following the law. Asian Americans are invisibilized in *The Kerner Report’s* state dystopia because Asian Americans are not the problem, but an answer. William Petersen writes that “[l]ike most

immigrant groups, Nisei generally have lived in neighborhoods characterized by overcrowding, poverty, dilapidated housing, and other ‘causes’ of crime. In such a slum environment, even though surrounded by ethnic groups with high crime rates, they have been exceptionally lawabiding.”⁴⁰ Even though Asian Americans live in poor neighborhoods, they are still “lawabiding.” Unlike African Americans, this article argues, Asian Americans are exceptional in that they can live in slums, and can still aspire for success and abide by the laws. These narratives by popular media celebrate Asian assimilation into American life and serve to reinforce white supremacy by erasing the racism that exists against Asian Americans. Asian Americans were more successful at assimilating into American life because they were “more like” white Americans. They had the same morals and strong family units and communities, and shared a strong work ethic. Furthermore, in pointing out that Asians have successfully integrated into the framework of the U.S. proves that the system works. It isn’t the system that has to change, but minorities have to work harder, and then the system will work for them.

This liberal narrative is particularly strong in this period, and it is significant that the utopian discourse of the model minority is established alongside the criminalization of dystopic African Americans. Up until this point, different Asian American groups, first the Chinese, and then the Japanese, were treated as a “yellow peril,” a threat to the safety of the nation, which is evident in the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII. However, this moment marks a period when Asians are no longer the peril, but the exception. The model minority utopia is not visualized in the same way that the dystopic urban black community is visualized. Instead, the model minority utopia is produced through the writings of the *U.S. News Report* and Petersen. While the hypervisibilization of black uprising and disobedience is central to *The Kerner Report*, textuality works to produce the model minority utopia. This highlights a re-articulation of ocular-

centrism of anti-black racism within U.S. culture as both spectacle and subject to erasure.

Even though urban Asian American racialization has historically been compared in the popular media with African American urbanization, this utopian discourse of the model minority that emerged in 1966 and *The Kerner Report* (1968) drops Asian American racialization out of the urban crisis narrative. Asian Americans are never mentioned in the *Kerner Commission Report*. While *The Report* erases Asian racialization from the national crisis narrative altogether, Latinos are only briefly mentioned, in no significant way, a handful of times. In omitting the presence of Latinos and Asians in its urban dystopia, the *Kerner Commission Report* marks a point in which Asians and Latinos are delinked from urban histories of racialization. Furthermore, complex cross-racial histories and alliances among Asian, Latinos, and Blacks are elided, and the race question, and race “problem,” is relegated to a black-white relationship. This reliance on the black-white binary, however, comes to a head in multi-racial urban areas like Los Angeles where the black-white binary cannot account for the presence, history, and agency of Asians and Latinos. Local conflagrations like the Watts Riots of 1965 are elevated to the level of a national crisis by the state in order to produce the specter of danger of black agency, because if urban unrest were to be understood locally in spaces like Los Angeles, the state would have to account for protesting yellow and brown bodies, along with protesting African Americans. And the state would not be able to easily substitute the specter of state violence with black protest in the dystopic world of *The Kerner Commission Report*.

By leaving Asian Americans out of the narrative of urban crisis the *Kerner Commission Report* erases the significant roles that Asian Americans took on during this period. Asian Americans, especially youths and activists, were actively rejecting assimilation into white supremacy and must be seen as significant protagonists in the revolutionary drama unfolding in

the U.S. and across the world. Grassroots movements involved ordinary people that demanded the ability to learn about their own history, access to higher education for people of color, and self-determination. These movements sought to establish community-based organizations that focused on communities of color, help “ghetto” communities that were not being recognized as ghetto and poverty in Asian American communities. The *Kerner Commission Report* was a significant moment in which new multiracial ethnic identities and solidarity that were being forged to fight racism in U.S. and abroad were written out of national memory.

The unity of people of color in student strikes was a threat to white supremacy, and the political unifying signifier “Asian American” that coalesced in the 1960s mobilized groups of people protesting histories of racial inequality, and were making connections to the Vietnam War and the Black Power movement. At the same time that *The Kerner Report* was published, Martin Luther King Jr. condemned the U.S. government as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today” as the U.S. fought the “Cold War” in Asia. Kadohata’s novel reveals the connections between state violence, empire, and visual practices in order to link Asian Americans, and those killed by U.S. militaristic campaigns overseas, and African Americans as subjects of mass incarceration and criminalization. This connection—a connection that *The Kerner Report* elides, makes it possible to critique a narrative of state intervention on behalf of black civil and civic rights. *In the Heart* counters the state’s reliance upon visualization of race by producing a linguistic heterotopia. Such a reading allows the Asian American subject to be theorized apart from the domesticated “model minority,” in order to expose and trace a genealogy of race and state violence. I have argued how the Cold War State seized upon the dystopian genre to reproduce stereotypes and erase racialized subjects to produce a coherent “picture” of the collapse of urban cities. This next section is an inquiry into the ways in which

Cynthia Kadohata's post-Cold War novel *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* re-writes the narrative of urban crisis that arose in the 1960s. I position this novel as a response to the universalizing narratives of the Cold War period that invisibilized and hypervisibilized Asian Americans in the production of a universal narrative.

Heterotopia, Hope, and “Universal Abandon” in Cynthia Kadohata’s *In the Heart of the Valley of Love*

Set in 2052 Los Angeles, *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* is a story that follows the life of eighteen-year-old protagonist, Francie. Although Francie is the narrator and central character of the novel, there is a simultaneity of overlapping narratives and experiences arising from the community around her that provides the reader with a dark and hopeful narrative of the relationship between geo-political boundaries, race, gender and class tensions within Los Angeles. While *The Kerner Report* relies on the assumed transparency of documentary photography to properly represent the signified, Kadohata does not treat the signified as something that can be transparently represented. Cynthia Kadohata is able to employ certain precepts of dystopia to re-write the conventions and formal qualities of the dystopian vision of *The Kerner Report* because it is already a tradition of novel writing. Kadohata draws on common precepts of urban dystopia, as established by *The Kerner Report*, as a segregated and apocalyptic urban setting; however, Kadohata's narrative of urban crisis critically revises the tradition of dystopia through the production of heterotopic forms of race. I argue that Kadohata specifically writes a linguistic heterotopia precisely because the Cold War and Post-Cold War state is such a visual state. Kadohata's linguistic heterotopia mobilizes racial antagonism in way that does not resolve into turning to the state. Kadohata constitutes heterotopic forms of race through her treatment of the body, temporality, and riots. Re-narrating the body, temporality, and riots allows

for a vision of hope that is vastly different from the one offered by the teleology of liberal democratic hope in *The Kerner Report*.

Japanese American writer Cynthia Kadohata is an Asian American feminist writing at the beginning of the post-Cold War period and writing in light of the legacy of state produced narratives that have erased multi-racial and gendered histories out of Cold War urban crisis. She is also living in the shadow of radical nationalist, social, and cultural movements that transformed the way writers and intellectuals mobilized cultural forms. In reading *In the Heart* as a revision of dystopia, I align Kadohata with late twentieth critical utopian and dystopian feminist scholars. Feminist scholars emerging in the 1980s such as Raffaella Baccolini, Jane Donawerth, Marleen Bar, Sarah LeFanu, and Frances Bartowski take up the “critical dystopia” to argue for the connection between feminism, postmodernism, utopia, dystopia, and science fiction. Baccolini argues that women writers emerging from the protests of the 1960s and 1970s were able to redeploy the conservative genre of dystopia for feminist subversive politics and new radical and oppositional strategies. Critical dystopia is, according to Baccolini, the most fitting genre for the late twentieth century and the “intersection of gender and genre... opened up the creation of new, subversive, and oppositional literary forms.”⁴¹ Feminist critics and writers focus specifically on the ways in which gender and sexual preference have been constructed in dystopia in order to dismantle traditional patriarchal discourse of dystopia. Feminists were able to take up the genre to articulate a feminist politics; however, they did so by altering the traditionally conservative genre for their own purposes by borrowing from other genres such as the epistolary novel, the diary, and the historical novel. Through genre blurring, feminist critical dystopias, Baccolini argues, opened up the dystopian genre to utopian elements, to create new texts that would question the very notion of genre. These new texts opposed the essentialist

principles of masculine hegemonic ideology that have been folded into the conventions of utopia and dystopia literary form itself.⁴² Feminist utopists and dystopists were able to recognize the ways in which male utopian and dystopian writers and theorists criticized class hierarchies and imagined utopias as the equality of all men and dystopias of the inequality of men, but women's role in our futurity remained relegated to traditional roles and to the margins. Utopia and dystopia have been, for most of their existence, dominated by white masculinist visions of felicitous futures and places that have elided people of color. Although 1980s feminist dystopia and utopian scholars that I name above did not spend much time linking issues of gender to race, I would argue that Asian American feminist writers like Kadohata create new texts that build on, challenge, and change the precepts of dystopia. I position this novel as an Asian American feminist text precisely because traditional genres cannot narrate the story Kadohata wants to tell, and she's radically renovating set narrative forms. Unlike *The Kerner Report's* dependency on photographically "documenting" the "reality" of our dystopic urban crisis, Kadohata re-writes that common narrative of crisis by writing a linguistic heterotopia.

Heterotopia is a concept that has been most famously linked to Michel Foucault's lecture "Of Other Spaces," yet the concept can be noted in postmodern geographer Edward Soja's term "thirdspace," Tom Moylan's "critical utopia," Lyman Tower Sargeant and Baccolini's "critical dystopia," and Mary Louise Pratt's "linguistics of contact." For Soja, thirdspace is a complex overlay of places and histories and representational strategies of real and imagined places that force the center and periphery into relations as to disrupt the meanings of these terms. For Moylan, Sargeant and Baccolini, critical dystopias do not merely present completely dismal visions the future, but present a warning of a danger or threat while still maintaining a utopian impulse that resists closure.⁴³ In other words, while traditional dystopias present completely

enclosed worlds, critical dystopias present a confrontation with a threat as well as the possibility for something better within the novel. Pratt's call for a "linguistics of contact" replaces utopian ideals of a "linguistics of community," which is "mirrored in linguistics' imagined object of study, the speech community... [in which Benedict] Anderson's limited, sovereign, horizontal brotherhood is the image in which the speech community often gets conceived in modern linguistics." In other words, the utopia of a nation's language is that it "posits a unified and homogeneous social world in which language exists as a shared patrimony-as a device, precisely, for imagining community."⁴⁴ A linguistics of community, then, promises a universal and unified community, but only does so through the suppression of difference. Because a linguistics of community works through the solidification of dominant groups through language, language can only be seen as cohering identity, not as a "site of social struggle or a producer of social relations" and not as a "concrete encounter between two subjects constituted within a hierarchical and conflictive web of social relations in which racism and race conflict are pervasive."⁴⁵ The linguistics of community is a utopian project that posits unified and idealized social worlds, a universalizing project that also finds its articulations in dystopia. In other words, the commitment to a unified and dominant social referent produces and are produced by a unified subjectivity and discourse. These universalizing projects only see felicitous worlds in which sub-communities that threaten the coherency of a unified community are dissolved. Instead of this universalized and patri-centric linguistics of community, Pratt advocates for a "linguistics of contact." A linguistics of contact is Pratt's naming of Foucault's heterotopia, which, following deconstruction recognizes the "need to decenter the centrifugal homogenizing tendencies of western thinking, not because they are false, but because they are limited in ways they themselves cannot acknowledge."⁴⁶ A linguistics of contact is a linguistics that "decenter[s]

community... [and] place[s] at its centre the operation of language *across* lines of social differentiation, a linguistics that focused on modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups, between persons of different and multiple identities, speakers of different languages, that focused on how such speakers constitute each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in language.” If we think about social relations in terms of a “linguistics of contact” rather than the universal and utopian notion of a linguistics of community, our understanding of social life can change to one that, as in a linguistics of community, is a system in which different racialized and gendered groups are not separate, but continually interacting and conflicting in multiple “zones of contact.” In these “zones of contact” we can pinpoint how exploitative relations are acted out and reproduced through language. Pratt further argues that while we can learn from Fredric Jameson that utopia has a place in critical projects, we need to also “avoid, in the case of a linguistics of contact, a utopian impulse to joyfully display all humanity in tolerant and harmonious contact across all lines of difference, or a dystopian impulse to bemoan a world homogenized by western media or run only by misunderstanding and bad intentions.”⁴⁷ For Pratt, then, a linguistics of contact is invested in “processes of appropriation, penetration or co-optation of one group’s language by another.”⁴⁸ Because a linguistics of community is “anchored in a normative vision of a unified and homogeneous social world it is hard to give up the enormous mental comfort of that vision. But it is worthwhile to give it up, in hopes of gaining a linguistics and a criticism whose engagement with the social world is not confined to the utopian.”⁴⁹ A linguistics of contact would instead “take the much-debated slipperiness of signifiers for granted, and will be much concerned... with the improvisational dimensions of meaning-making.”⁵⁰

I discuss Pratt’s concept of “linguistics of contact” at length because the role of language

in a “linguistics of contact” is especially helpful in understanding my reading of Kadohata’s narrative of racial heterotopia. Kadohata, I argue, bravely “gives up the enormous mental comfort” of a “normative vision of a universalized and homogeneous social world”—a vision that the Cold War racial state could not give up—and employs narrative to write against the universalizing tendencies of *The Kerner Report* and popular media by playing with the “slipperiness of signifiers.” While *The Kerner Report* spectacularized black bodies and invisibilized Asian American bodies through documentary photography, and popular media hypervisibilized Asian American bodies, Kadohata plays with the “slipperiness” of racial signification through heterotopic forms of race. Kadohata is not attached to producing a narrative of truth or universality, but instead re-appropriates the language and form of dystopia in order to point toward the tenuousness of narrative itself. And, through recognizing the fragility of language, there is also recognition of language as a site through which new relations can open up. What Kadohata gives us, then, is not an “eyewitness” account of urban crisis; nor does she give us an answer to the crisis. And even as Kadohata challenges the capacity of language to give “proper” representations of the signified, she challenges the reader, through narrative form, with improvisational ways of making meaning about race, body politics, time, riots, and hope.

Rather than producing a clear “picture” of race, as writ upon the body of minority subjects, *In the Valley of Love* is a narrative that forces a different understanding of body politics. We come to find out that our narrator, Francie, is part Asian American and part African American, yet this text appears to be, as Emily Apter writes, “the most Asian-less Asian-ness imaginable in what is marketed as an Asian-American novel.”⁵¹ Even though this story is told through Francie’s point of view, Francie does not offer much of a stereotypical Asian American viewpoint. We are able to conclude that Mark Trang, Francie’s boyfriend, is Asian American

because of his name, and their friend Lucas is African American because he used to be a black radical, we do not get more information about the character's race beyond these discreet descriptions. Kadohata's text undermines the language of race that is solely attached to the bodily form. Instead she asks us to re-think the ways in which we have been trained to think about race, as being solely attached to visual markers. She forces a confrontation with the reader to question how we think race when race isn't visibly marked on bodies, especially when race has, as seen in *The Kerner Report*, historically been about the visual encounter with race. Any mention of skin in the narrative is connected to a disturbing skin condition that affects everyone. This skin condition, or as Francie calls it, "derma-what-do-you-call-it" is not fatal or harmful, "but there was something profoundly disturbing about it" (12). It even afflicts Francie as she tells us, "I scrubbed my skin so hard the black pearls beneath it fell out and rolled across the tub and down the drain... I sang. I talked to myself. I imagined" (193). The disturbing images of black pearls growing beneath skin surface, popping out, and rolling around shifts the readers' understanding of skin color to a skin condition. Kadohata describes Francie's body as suffering from a skin affliction instead of describing the color of her skin, the color of her eyes, or the color of her hair. Even though the reader is highly invested in a visual economy s/he is not given a visual description of Francie's body. Indeed, Kadohata's words evoke a bodily response in the reader, but the body is treated in a different way. Whereas with the body in *The Kerner Report* is all about seeing race and criminalizing black bodies. The body for Kadohata is instead thinking about the different ways race is constituted. Race for Kadohata is not merely about seeing the body as she disrupts the visual field of seeing bodies as a way to access knowledge about race and inequality.

Rather than understanding the text as a meditation on class divisions due to the absence of visual racial markers, which is a common way this novel is taken up, what is striking about the novel are the ways in which race is severed from forms of bodiliness yet continues to permeate and mediate the social world of the characters. Race is rendered non-corporeally not because it no longer exists, nor is she invested in a discourse of color-blindness. Kadohata, in effect, has to argue against *The Kerner Report's* notion of race as the production of discriminatory meaning of pre-existing bodies of difference through the visual field. Kadohata offers a comprehension of race that demands an acknowledgment of the process of race that does not depend upon the specter of the racialized body through a consideration of multiple temporalities of race. Kadohata, then, gives the reader access to different temporalities of race that are bound to discrete historical moments demonstrating how race, racial formation, and how we write about race are historically contingent phenomenon and processes. The novel does not unfold linearly from disaster to resolution. Instead, the narrative moves from its present, 2052, back to Francie's recollections of her parents and their historical moment through a series of flashbacks. The section of the book entitled "Possibilities" begins with Francie recalling a childhood friend, Lily and Lily's mother who was beaten by Lily's father. Lily's mother went to school with Francie's mother. Francie recalls:

I owned a yearbook of my mother's. The white girls had tried to enlarge their mouths with lipstick, emulating the naturally full lips of the black girls. The black girls had straightened their hair to emulate the naturally straight hair of the Asians. And the Asian girls wore shadow that rounded out their eyes. All of them looked quite silly. That had been a strange period of transition in America. (76)

In this passage, Kadohata offers us a historical moment, perhaps our moment, when race was/is primarily understood through corporeal forms. For Francie living in 2052, her mother's high school years were a "strange period of transition in America," marked by the appropriation of corporeal forms, with white girls emulating black girl's lips, black girls copying Asian hair, and Asian girls making their eyes look bigger. Francie finds the superficiality of "emulating" other races "silly," which tells the reader that this physical mode of reading race is no longer dominating the world in which Francie lives. Francie's understanding of the way race operated in her mother's high school years is through a yearbook, a visual text that attempts to capture and remember a strange period of transition in all of our lives. A yearbook is composed of photos of faces, and from these images, Francie is able to make her meaning of the way race operated. Looking at these pictures she notices that all of the black, white, and Asian girls "emulated" each other's racialized features, and Francie finds this emulation "silly." It is silly to Francie that the girls would want to look like another race by physically altering their faces, which demonstrates the degree to which this logic of race is perhaps no longer operating in Francie's social world. 2052 in Kadohata's novel is not obsessed with full "black girl" lips, straight "Asian girl" hair or big round "white girl" eyes and Francie is able to think of these physical emulations of race as "silly" because race in this novel is re-signifiable in a way that does not merely understand racialization through corporeal forms.

The description of this "strange period of transition in America" is itself a strange description of that transitional period. High school and that historical moment signal strange transitional emphasis suggesting that Francie's world is beyond this strange period of transition even as we get the sense that Francie's world is also going through a period of transition and change. Kadohata's novel captures the ways in which the linguistic is a medium for a transitional

temporality that is different from the temporality of *The Kerner Report's* photographic representation. Under the logic of *The Kerner Report's* photographic narrative, the viewer is able to see everything: the past (white supremacy), the present (poor living conditions of the black urban poor), and the future (the state as the answer to social inequality). The temporality of photographic representation promises access to truth of what has happened, what is going on, and how we will change. Kadohata does not offer us such a promise. Instead, we are given a period of transition of uncertainty. In her novel, the reader is constantly caught in weird transitional periods. And as such, knowing “reality,” historically, presently, and for the future, is unstable. In this instability there is hope for change that stands outside of the nation form.

In the dystopian vision of *The Kerner Report* riots constitute an urban crisis instigated by black male criminals, and in need of control by the U.S. state. *In the Heart*, however, does not give the reader a fixed picture of riots and the rioters are not racially marked. While we do get a sense that the rioters are non-whites and underprivileged because the urban ghetto is everywhere outside of “richtown was what everybody who didn't live there called the Beverly Hills and Brentwood area. Every city had a richtown.”⁵² We gather that people who live in Richtown are white because Beverly Hills and Brentwood are historically wealthy white areas that were restricted to non-whites.⁵³ Kadohata never describes the rioter, whereas *The Kerner Report* was preoccupied with documenting and profiling African Americans as agitators and instigators of disorder. Francie does see the riots as dis-ordering society, but the riots will make richtown fall. This disorder is not counterproductive, as it is in *The Kerner Report*. However, Francie does not romanticize the always-present riots either, as they are still a great cause of anxiety. In a passage where Francie is driving home with Mark, Francie notices three ambulances passing her, and she thinks:

Maybe there'd been a mini-riot. I didn't know what I thought of the riots; you got used to them. They'd become so commonplace, I didn't think much about them at all. But a few days ago there'd been a big riot in richtown. That frightened me and thrilled me at the same time. When richtowns across the country started to fall, I knew there would be changes... If the riots got bad, many people had plans to leave the city. Auntie and Rohn had always said they would leave, but I hadn't decided what I would do. I don't think conflagration was coming; conflagration was destined to fail. Collapse was coming... the city had been deteriorating for a long time, and it was just that the rate of deterioration seemed to be increasing.

(117)

For Francie, riots are simultaneously “frightening” and “thrilling” and always about “changes.” We never get a clear picture of what that change will be, however, because “it became clear that the rioters had long ago stopped rioting for change. Now they rioted for destruction” (90). The riots here are no longer about small visions of social change, but a complete destruction of the order of things. The ubiquity of the riots in the novel is a racial motif, one that draws on the history of race riots in L.A. and one that calls upon a history of revolts against injustice and racism, such as the uprisings occurring in the 1960s. Riots in the U.S. in the late modern period have been primarily linked to race. Rather than making order out of this disorder, as the *Kerner Commission Report* argues that we must do, disorder here is what will bring “change.” In *The Kerner Report's* narrative of urban crisis, riots are placed at the forefront. Rather than an aberrant occurrence, riots in Kadohata's 2052 L.A. are a fundamental feature of the urban landscape as “you got used to them” because they were so “commonplace.” The riots are not fore-fronted as the “crisis” in Kadohata's text, and we see this through the ways in which riots

are always in the background of the storyline on the T.V., or off in the near distance. Francie can see smoke from the riots, but she's never in a riot, so the reader does not get pulled into the place of the riot. The reader is never placed in the riot, and Francie is not presented as an "eyewitness," unlike *The Kerner Report*, which tried to provide an "eyewitness" to the riots to place the reader in the urban scene. In *The Kerner Report*, the riots are the storyline, for Kadohata riots are part of the setting. In de-spectacularizing riots, Kadohata also de-spectacularizes the criminality of protesting people of color.

For Francie, "conflagration" wasn't coming, "collapse" was coming. These two terms are juxtaposed against each other in this passage. Conflagration is often associated with the notion of collapse, but for Francie they are distinct. Riots were not bringing conflagration, meaning fires, and the total burning down of society. Rather, the "collapse" of Richtown, or the social order was coming, and even if this increases the "rate of deterioration" of the city, Francie knows it's because "there would be changes." "Changes," then might seem "frightening" but they are necessary and exciting for Francie. The deterioration of the city here is not marked by the total burning down of the city by riots, but by collapse of institutions/systems that have created/protected Richtown. Kadohata's narrative of the deterioration of the city is not something that needs to be controlled and rectified by the state, but instead signals change. Riots and deterioration seem scary and while Francie's Auntie and her husband Rohn said they would leave, Francie is not sure throughout the novel what she would do; however, at the end of the novel, Francie decides that she would and could never leave Los Angeles (225). The city in collapse and deterioration should not be abandoned and Francie ultimately sees hope in this.

While "hope" in *The Kerner Report* is literally pictured as the integration and assimilation of urban black difference into the linear narrative of the racial liberal state,

Kadohata does not see the liberal democratic state as the horizon of “hope.” At the end of the novel, Francie and Mark are listening to the President’s speech. Francie notes:

That night, President Connors made a speech about the country’s problems. So many people were listening to or watching him that I could hear his voice not from any specific place but from all around me. The air itself seemed to be speaking. ‘Some people have no respect for property,’ he said, hitting one fist into another. ‘And the good people of this nation will not tolerate that.’ His words reminded me of one of those car alarms everyone had that said, ‘you’re touching private property. Please stand away’ or ‘I’m going to call the police’ or ‘Help!’.

(222)

This is an interesting scene where we can recognize how Kadohata co-opts the language of *The Kerner Report* to talk about disorder. As I mentioned earlier, the state is the loci of hope and change in *The Kerner Report*; however, Kadohata rehearses the same language of the state, through President Connor’s speech in order to critique its logic. Connor’s speech begins as an attempt to restore order, but he does so through creating panic and “alarm” that ends up targeting and criminalizing the urban poor in the name of protecting private property. In other words, Kadohata re-signifies on how we might understand the state’s argument by creating a new understanding of the omnipresence of the language of the state. She produces a linguistic heterotopia in which contradictory objects—the state as the answer and as the problem—exist in a shared space and moment. Again, Kadohata’s heterotopia does not find resolution in statist practices and forms.

President Connor’s message permeates Francie’s social world as she “could hear his voice not from any specific place but all around,” so much so that the “air itself seemed to be

speaking.” Kadohata recognizes the omnipresent logic and presence of the state, and how much people believe in the ability of the President to solve our social problems. However, this omnipresent voice is not hopeful for Francie, and while this scene demonstrates people’s faith in the government, it simultaneously exposes Francie’s lack of faith in the government. There is no appeal to the state as the entity through which Francie and her community must mobilize. Rather, Francie equates the President’s reminder that “the good people of this nation will not tolerate” disrespect of private property to a car alarm. Protecting private property seems to be the only thing being protected in this city, at the cost of the urban poor, who are the majority living in the U.S. in Kadohata’s 2052. It is not a coincidence that President Connor’s speech sounds much like President Lyndon B. Johnson’s address to the nation in *The Kerner Report* that I alluded to earlier in the chapter. Connor, like Johnson, condemns “people [who] have no respect for property.” These, in Johnson’s words, “looters,” and “agitators” are set in contrast to the “good people of this nation.” The image of President Connors (and Lyndon B. Johnson) hitting his fist into his hand, adamantly warns the rioters that they will be dealt with. Connors is not invested in change for justice but the state is, instead, invested in protecting the value of property. It seems, then, that rather than providing answers for those watching him on T.V., or giving hope to the urban poor rioting for the destruction of the status quo, President Connors is condemning the very people who most need his help. The narrative demonstrates the ways in which state logic continues to protect private property, and the criminality of the poor and disenfranchised as a threat to private property. Kadohata puts this argument in suspension to emphasize how this vision cannot be the way to change. Hope cannot be about the protection of private property and the containment of rioters. Kadohata reveals the limits of a state vision of surveillance, as surveillance is both more expanded and less successful in the post-Cold War dystopia. She is

also showing us how power and violence will work when surveillance is no longer easily available to the state because bodies are not part of a neat taxonomy of difference and inequality.

Hope, for Francie, is not about producing a coherent narrative that finds closure in a clear “solution”; rather, hope is generated in the fragmentation of coherent worldviews. Kadohata’s heterotopic narrative demonstrates how hope and love can be found in, and transformation can be enacted by, people living in the direst conditions. Toward the end of the novel, the residents of Los Angeles are on lockdown in their homes because the entire city is being bugbombed.

Francie reflects,

Pesticides and mysticism, police and religion—people were always looking to powerful forces to change the world, or to help conquer other forces... the whole city had just been bugbombed, but I couldn’t help feeling hopeful. To me, love and hate were not the opposites. Love and pain were. It was not hate, but pain, that love assuaged, opposed, canceled out... I thought of all the life out there that was now dying. I am not saying that I felt sympathetic of all those bugs, just that the thought of a million creatures dying at once amazed me as much as anything ever had. (215-216)

The horror of the whole city being bugbombed in an effort to save the crops and agricultural economy of Los Angeles contradictorily invokes feelings of hope, love, and pain in Francie, and allows Francie to meditate on hope. “Pesticides,” “mysticism,” “police,” and “religion” are named as the institutions and means through which people hope to “conquer other forces.” Yet, Francie turns to a different understanding of love with pain being love’s opposite, not hate, as a way to think about “conquer[ing] other forces.” Kadohata asks the reader to consider: what do we get by understanding pain as the opposite of love? Francie sees hope in reconfiguring the

logic of love in her novel, but even as the reader searches for a concrete vision of hope, we never get one. Love, as the opposite of pain, is the thing that can alleviate pain, even as love has no fixed meaning for her. Change, then, can be brought about by making different connections between words and ideas that have been fixed, such as love and pain, race and bodies, riots and criminality, hope and uncertainty.

While *The Kerner Report* gives its readers very fixed and clear notions of what hope is, hope in Kadohata's novel is difficult to pinpoint. Hope is, for Kadohata, found in the ability to shift the ways in which we think about our social norms, not merely in her novel, but between her text and her reader. Hope is found, then, in challenging the reader's established ways of imagining utopias, dystopia, social change, and revolution. Kadohata's heterotopic narrative forces a re-ordering of our logics around urban life, crisis, race, and emancipatory visions. She refuses to give us a clear vision of what resistance and change looks like and at the same time we are reminded that we have to move outside of traditional ways of understanding change and racialized resistance, as offered to us through state institutions. Nothing is fixed, not race, not richtown, not the ghetto, not the state, and the novel presents Los Angeles as the heterotopic space through which all of these spaces and representations are overlapping, contradictory, and juxtaposed. Riots are scary, but they are also about change. There is criminality and unlawful acts because everyone's a criminal because the characters are trying to survive. Conditions are urgent, but the story is not without hope, and these entities that are usually seen as "bad" and a "threat" to society, are the very conditions that reveal the social and racial ordering process. Although Kadohata does not give us a clear vision of what hope looks like, it is a hopeful narrative in that the reader is offered a narrative structure that helps us "free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently."⁵⁴ *In the Heart* allows us to acknowledge

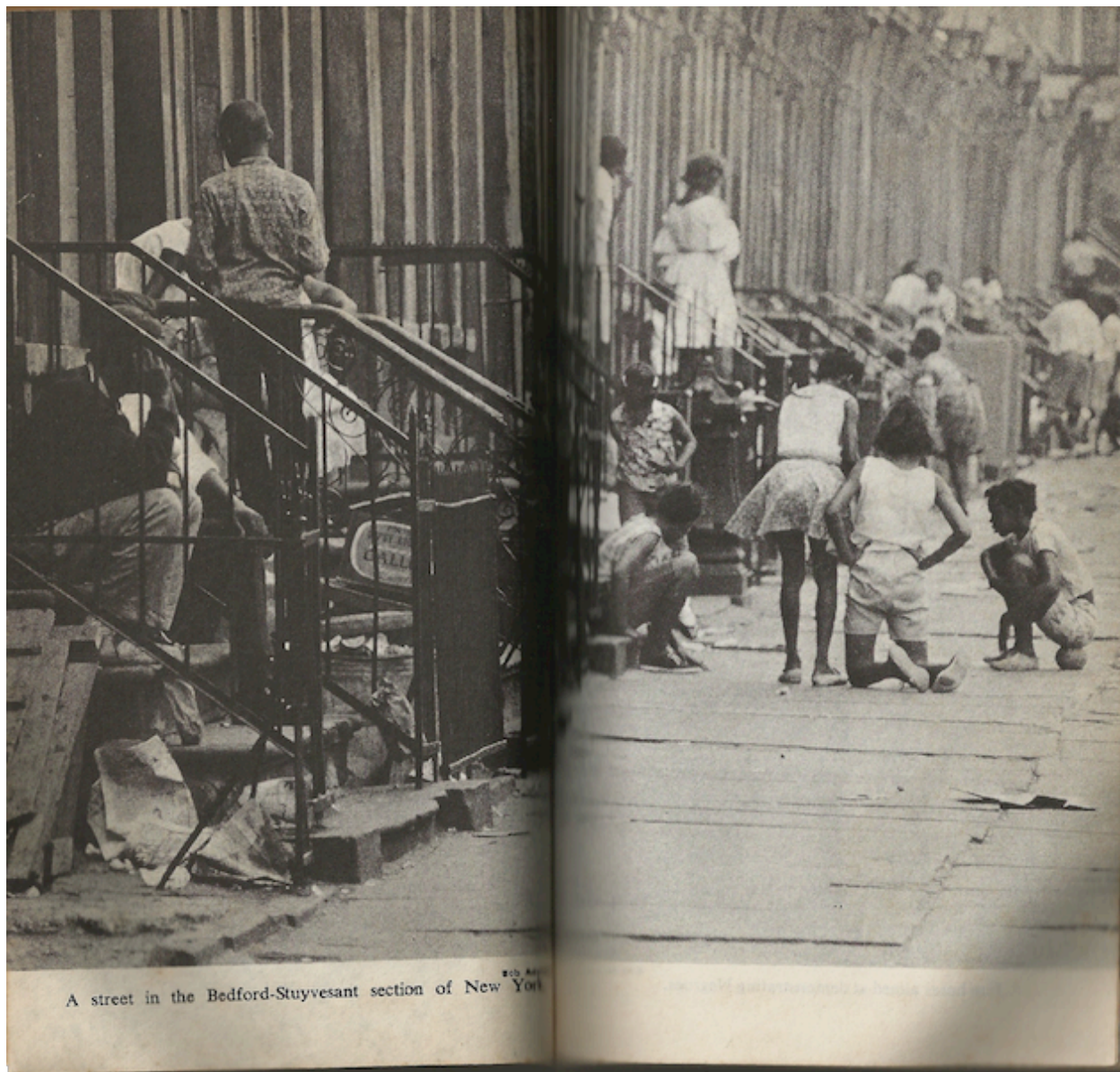
how racial meanings have been regulated and fixed in order to “free” us from these normalized logics in an effort to re-conceptualize how we can re-think race, temporality, bodies, and hope. Hope is itself found in the ability to recognize how dystopia has been mobilized for state power, for the subjugation of the urban poor, and for the regulation of criminality. Hope is found in understanding that these narratives must be named and remembered and that they can be changed through re-narration. For Kadohata, then, hope is about what might come out of the confrontation between her dis-ordering narrative and her reader’s ability to think otherwise and abandon the “comfort” of the “normative visions” we have inherited. In other words, hope is not found in the visual field of *The Kerner Report*, even as it promises the viewer transparency and access to the truth. Hope is instead found in a linguistics that signals “zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups,” between “different and multiple identities,” and “speakers of different languages.”⁵⁵ In Kadohata’s linguistic heterotopia the dominant and dominated groups exist, and the reader can note the tensions and contradictions that emerge through their contact. Differences and their collusions are central to linguistic heterotopia and the ability to imagine hope in new ways.

Appendix I

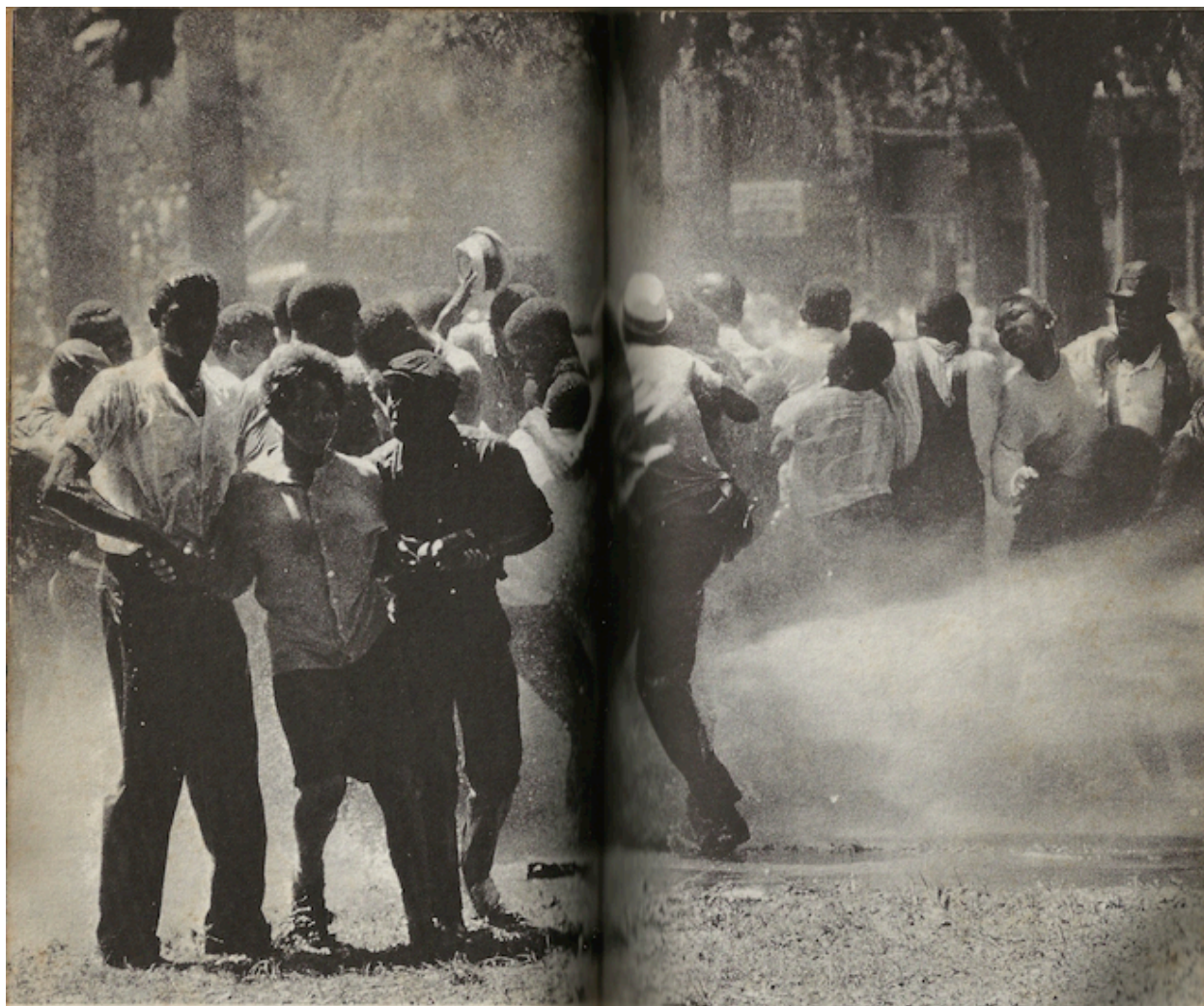
EYEWITNESS TO CRISIS



Wide World

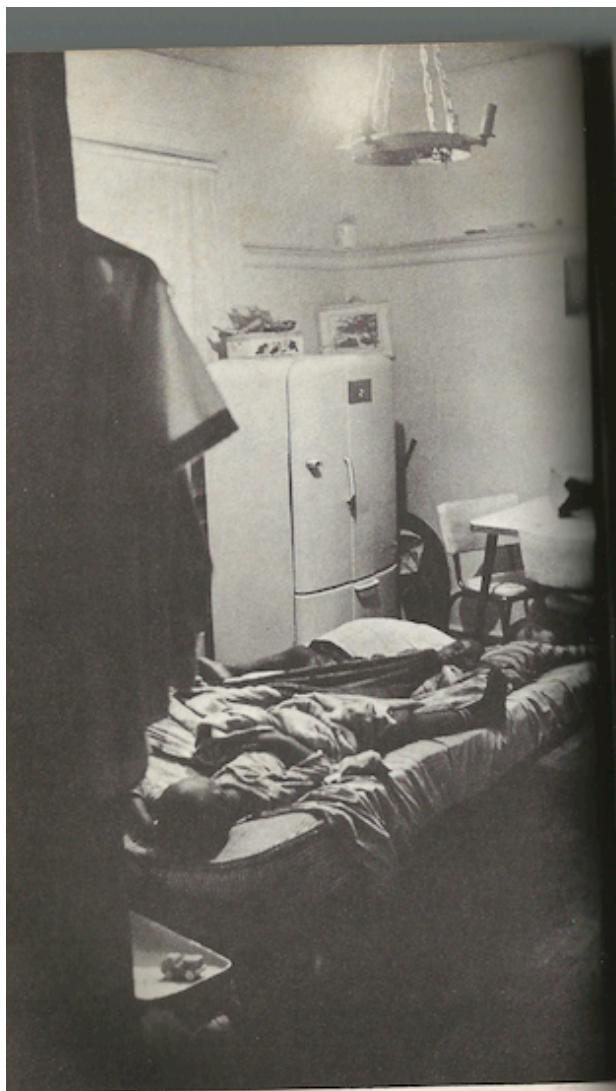


A street in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of New York

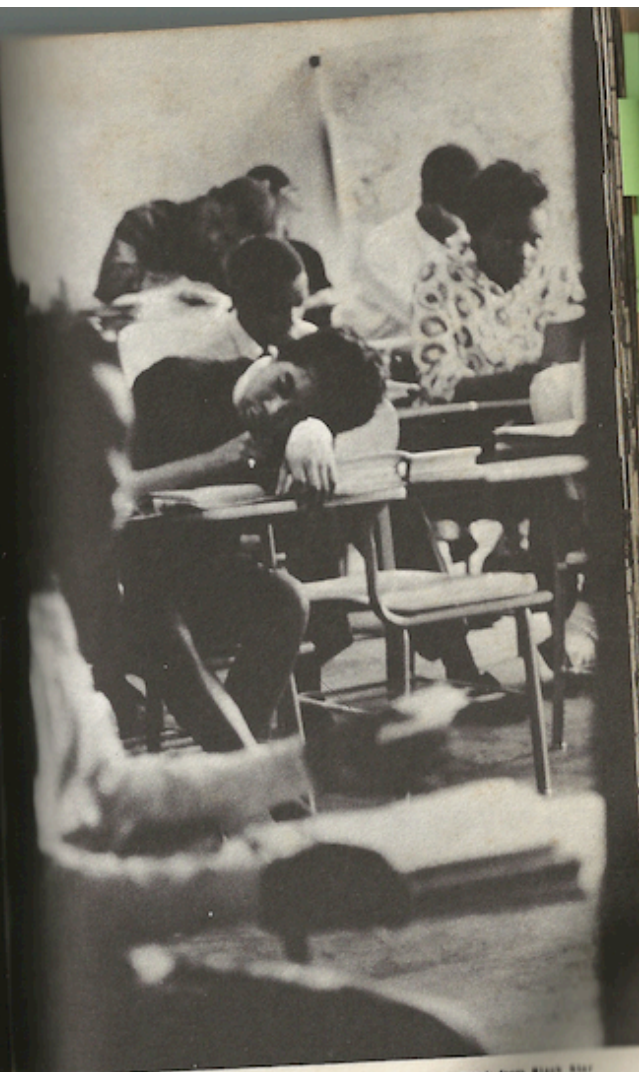


Fire hoses aimed at demonstrating Negroes.

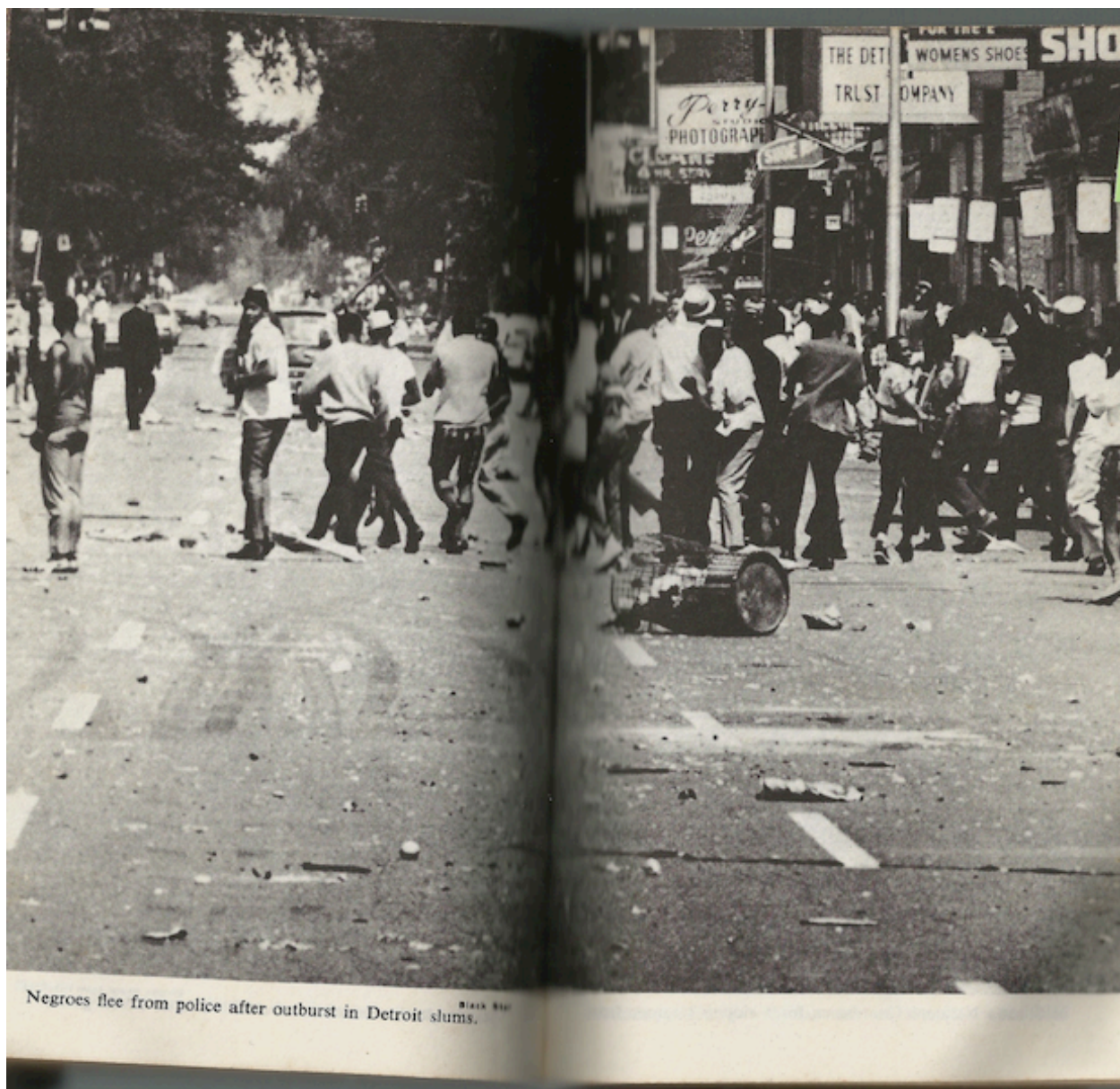
Bob Adelman



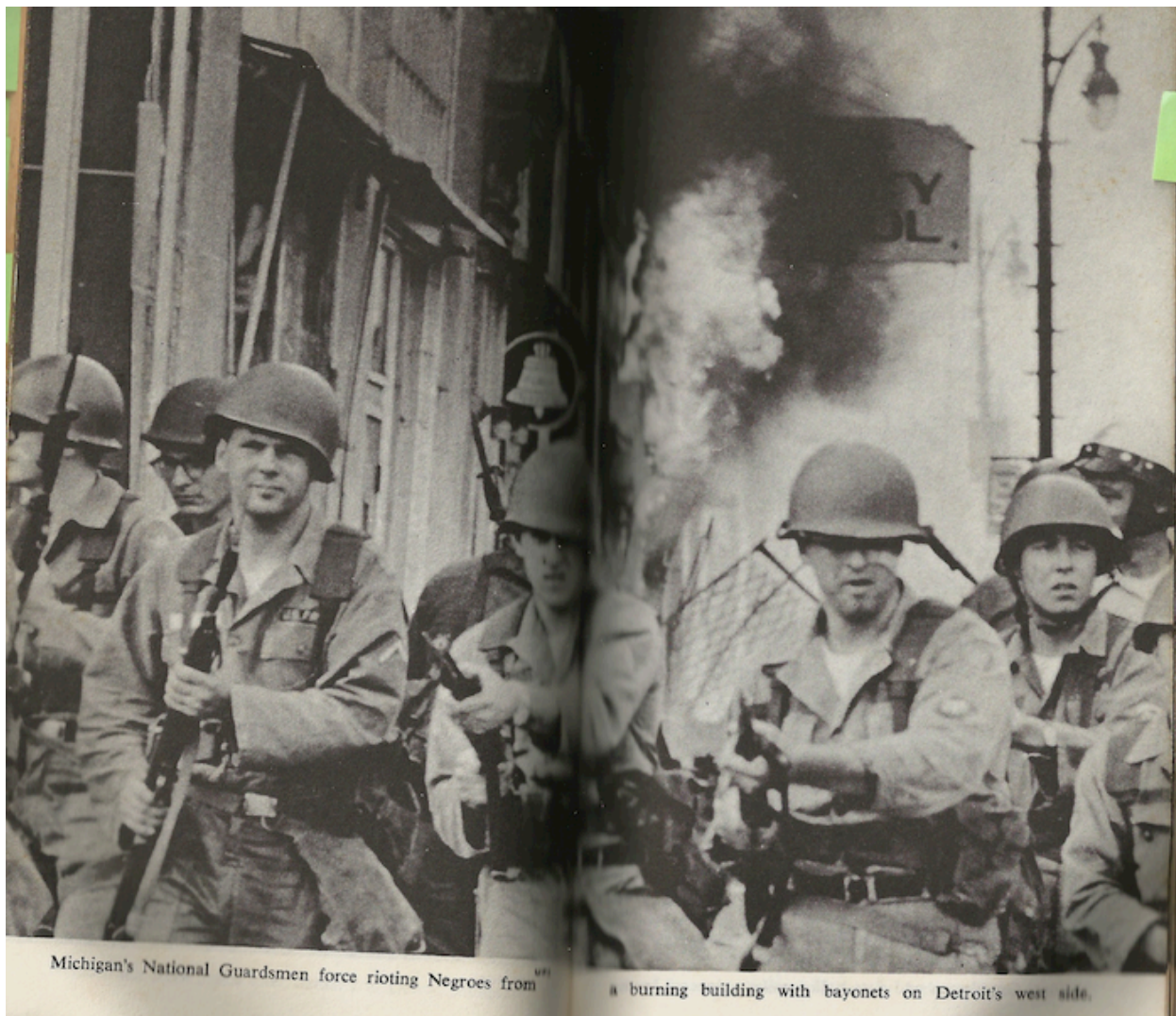
Black Star
One bed for three children in a Detroit ghetto apartment.



Dennis Brack from Black Star
View inside the classroom of a school in an urban ghetto.

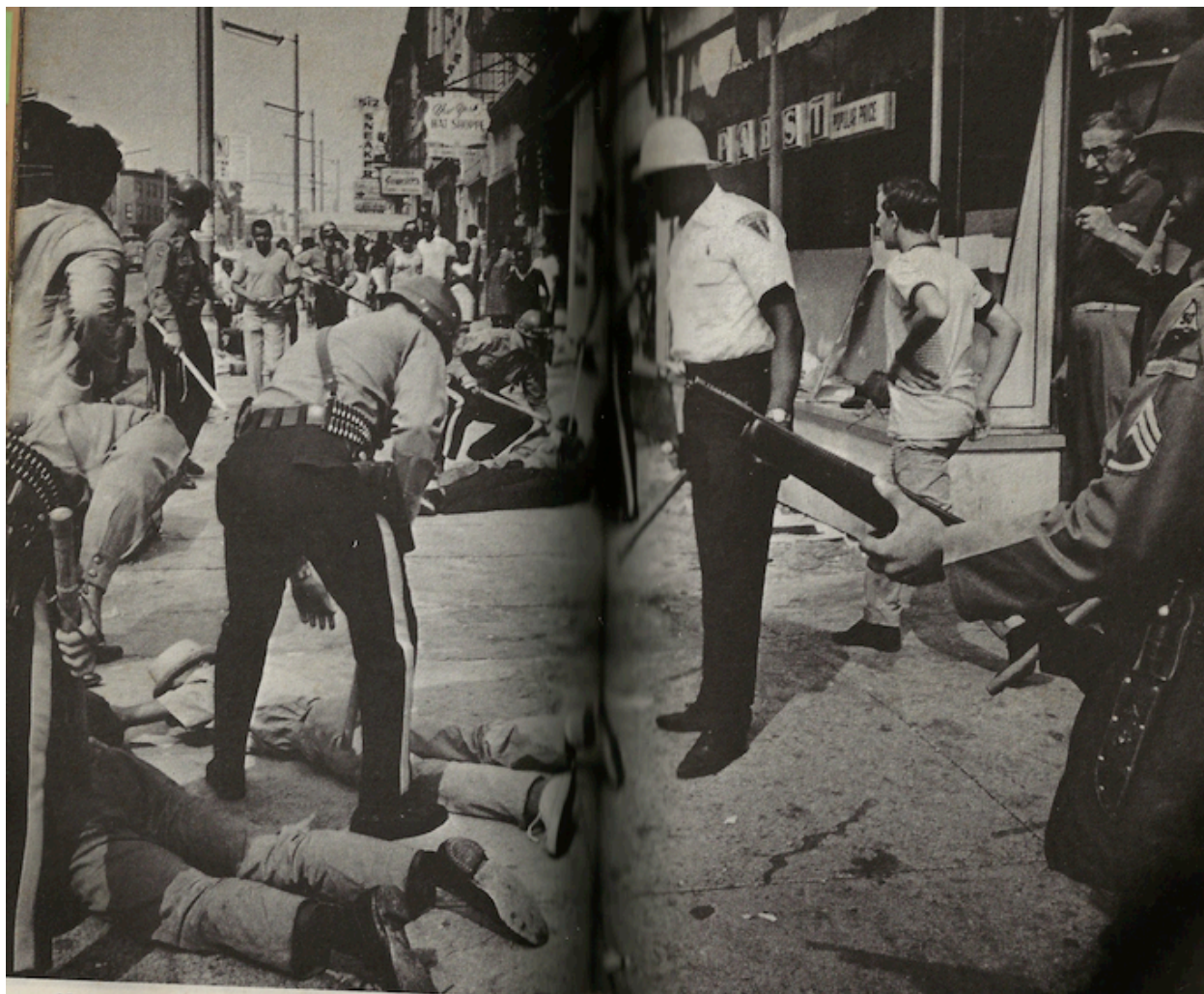


Negroes flee from police after outburst in Detroit slums. BLACK STAR



Michigan's National Guardsmen force rioting Negroes from

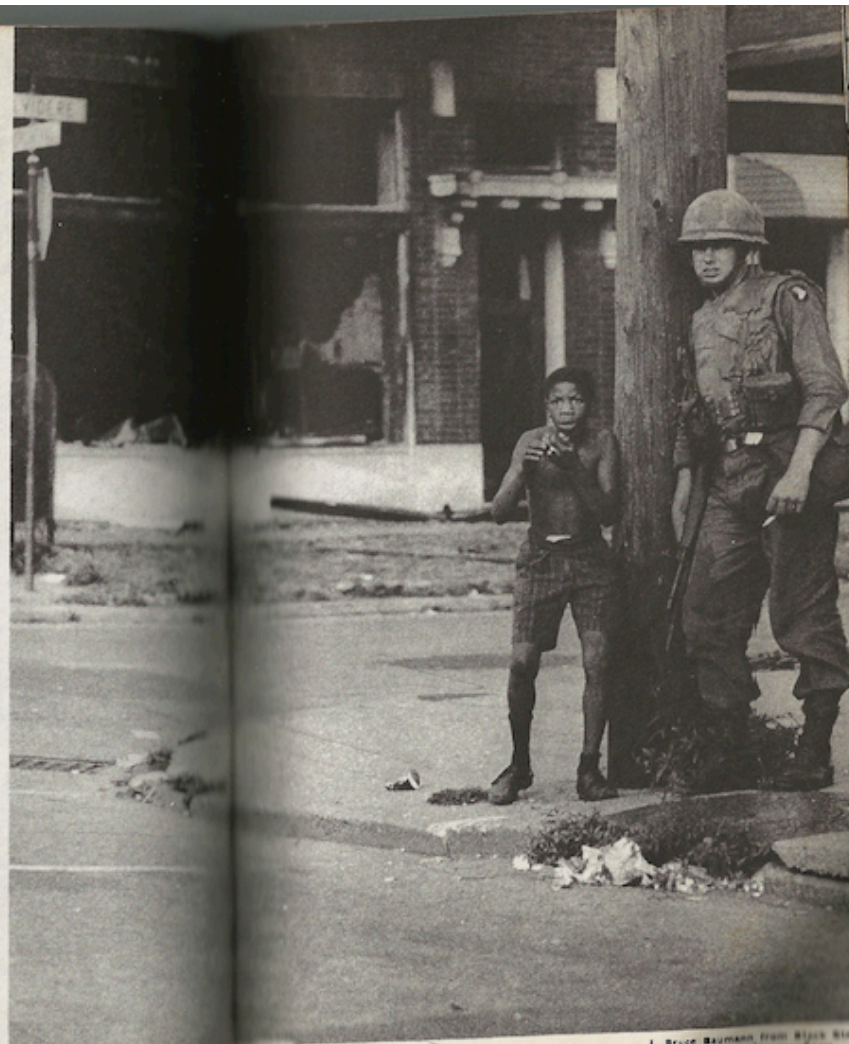
a burning building with bayonets on Detroit's west side.



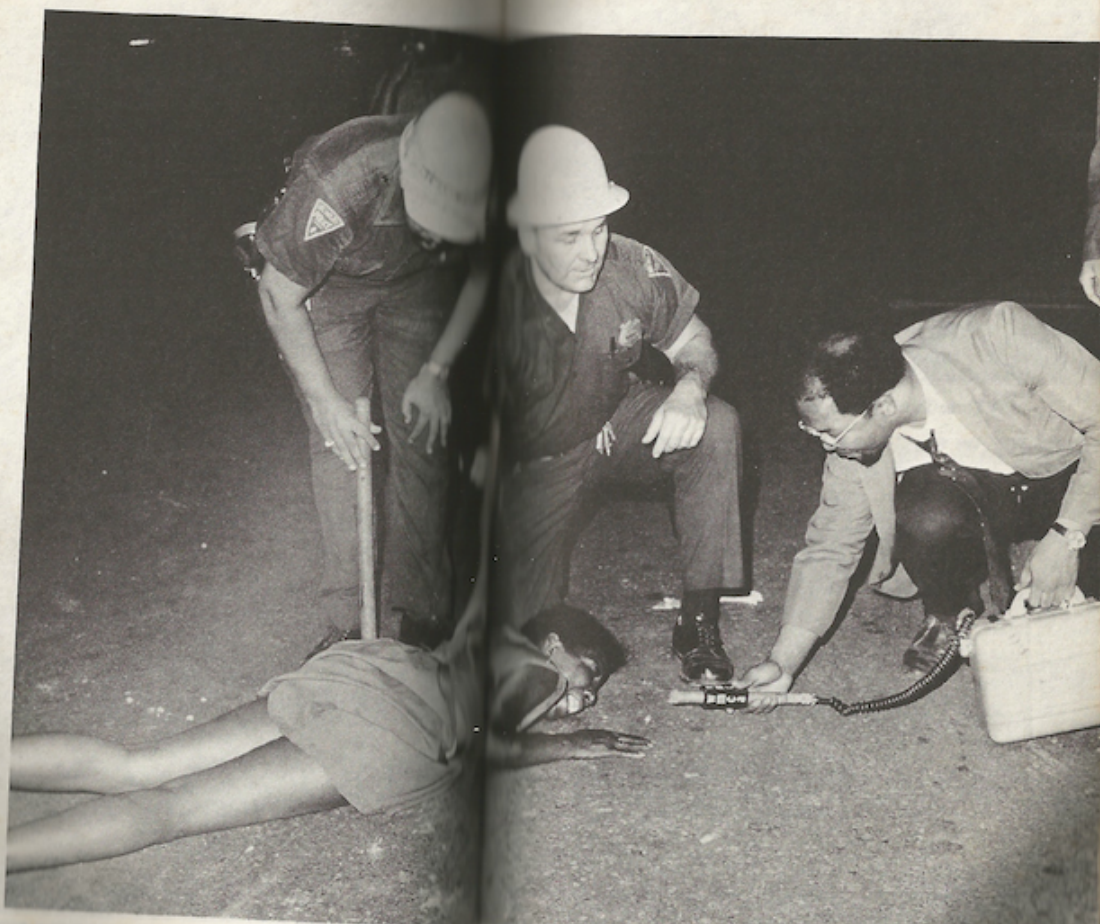
National Guardsmen and state police collar suspected looters along Newark's Springfield Avenue during summer riots.



J. Bruce Baumann from Black Star
National Guardsman and Detroit
resident share a doorway.



J. Bruce Baumann from Black Star
Paratrooper and youngster waiting for the Detroit curfew.



A reporter seeks a statement from a woman badly wounded during the second night of rioting in Newark, New Jersey. UPI



UPI Three looters reach through the grating of a liquor store.



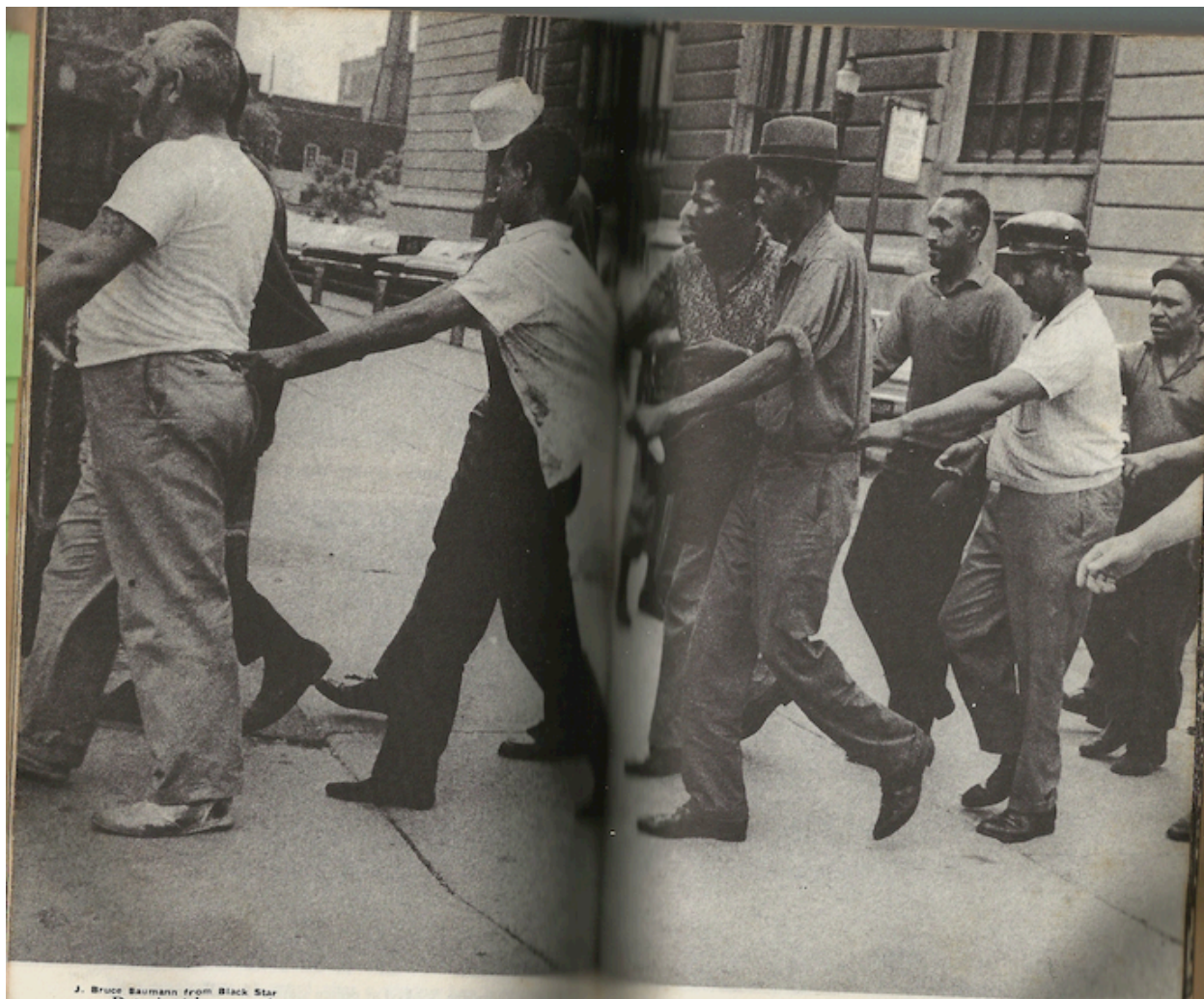
Black Star Looters carry as much as they can during the Detroit riot.



UPI Here employees sit guard after a window has been smashed.



UPI Teen-agers are booked at police station for alleged looting.



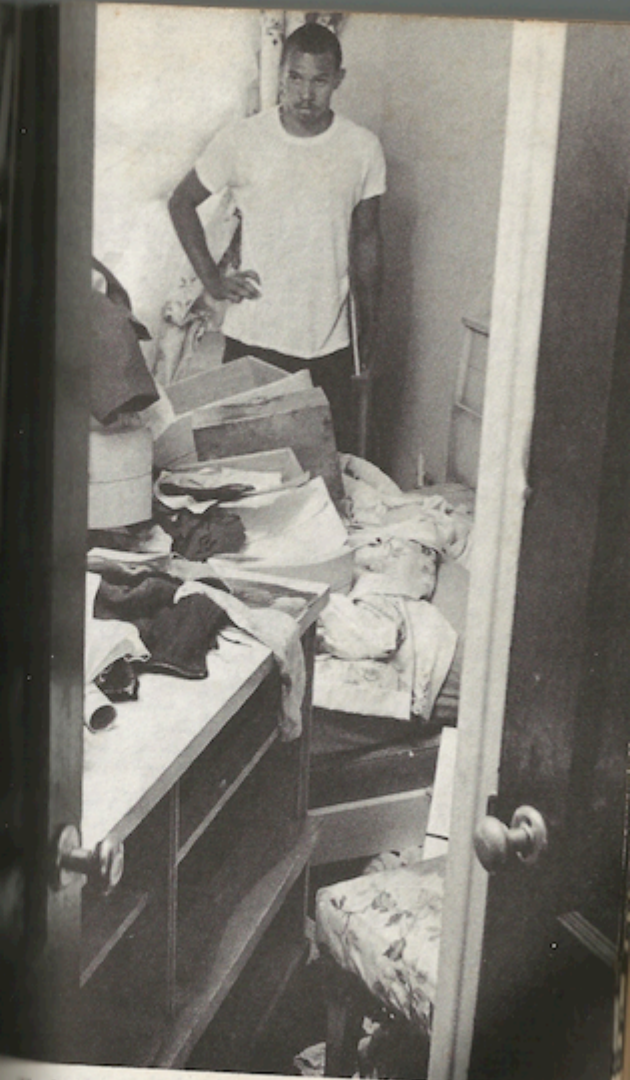
J. Bruce Baumann from Black Star
Detroit citizens as they are marched to the police station



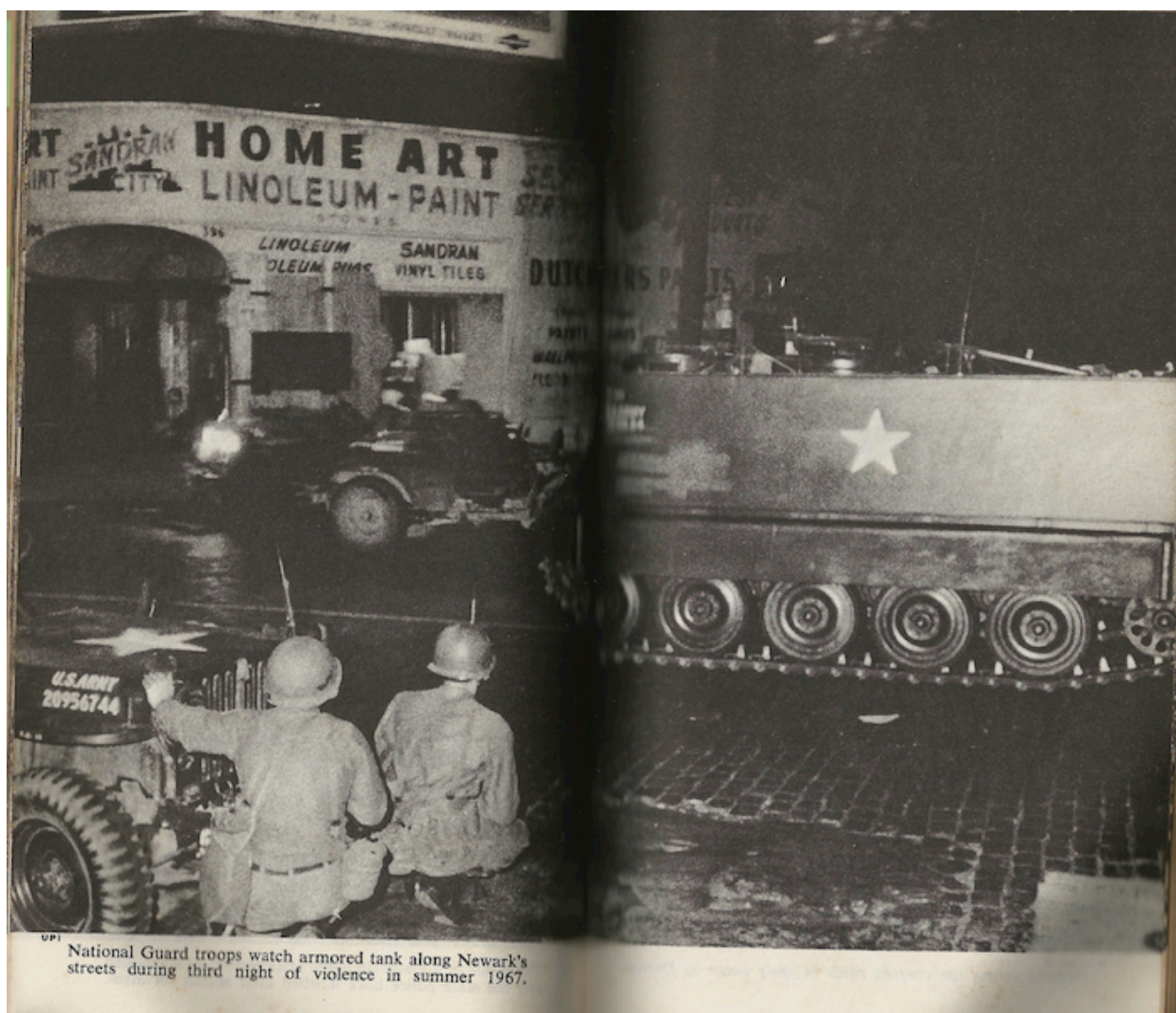
J. Bruce Baumann from Black Star
A suspected looter awaits legal action in Detroit jail.



National Guardsmen search homes in Plainfield, New Jersey, for carbines and ammunition stolen from an arms maker.



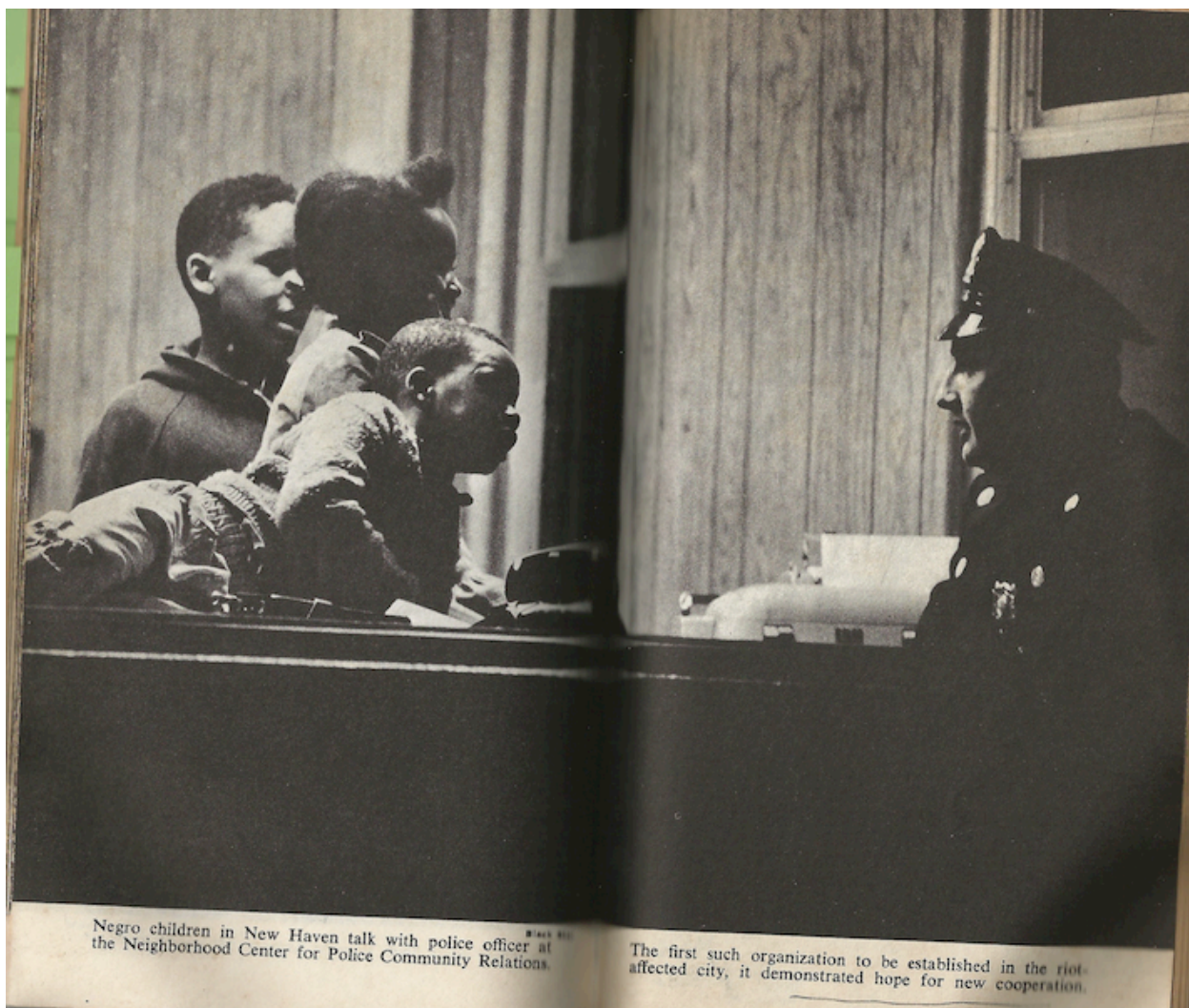
The inside of a Plainfield home after National Guardsmen and the state police have finished their search for arms.



UPI
National Guard troops watch armored tank along Newark's streets during third night of violence in summer 1967.

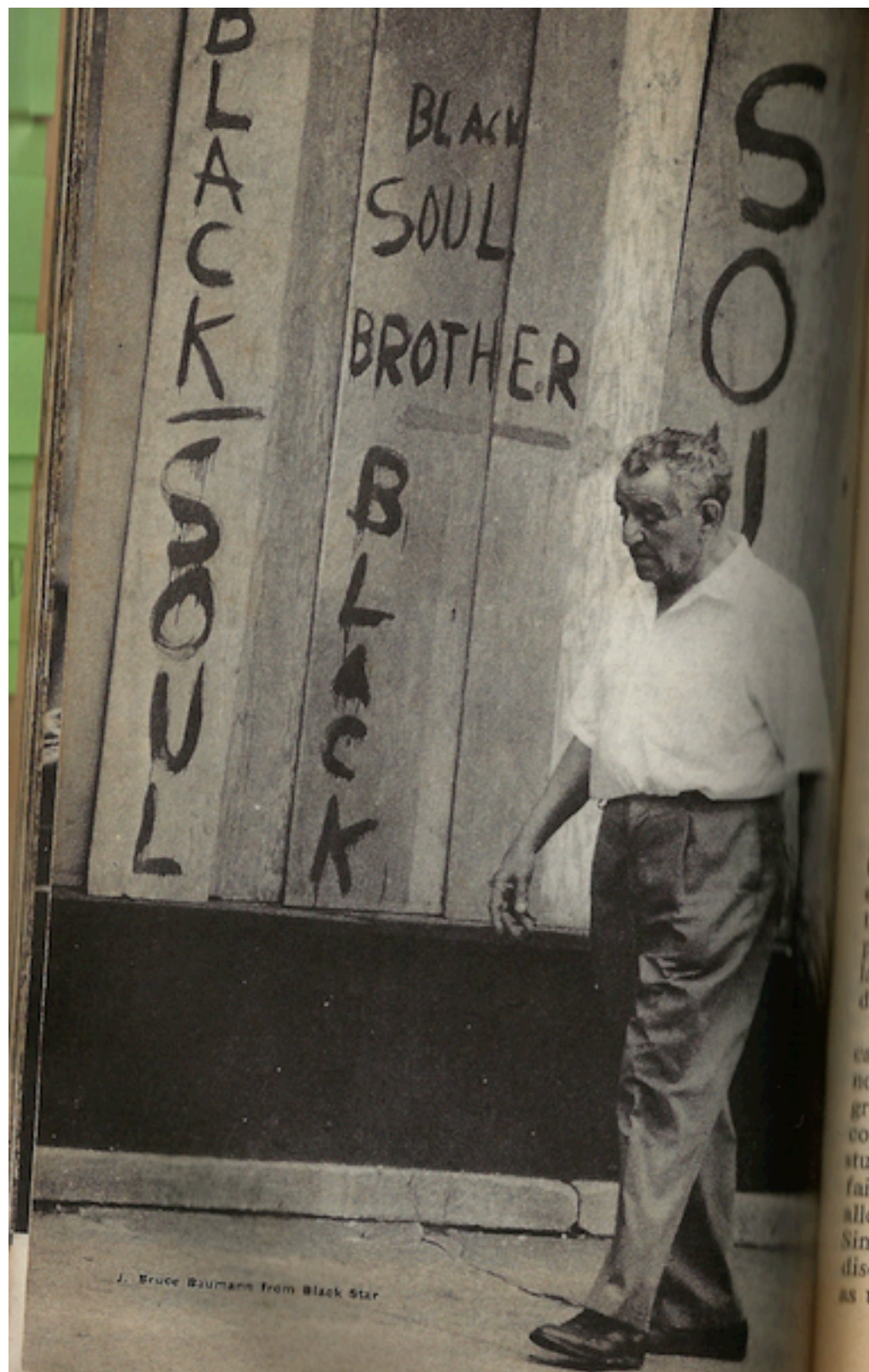


Wide World
Negroes among the charred ruins of their home in Detroit.



Negro children in New Haven talk with police officer at the Neighborhood Center for Police Community Relations.

The first such organization to be established in the riot-affected city, it demonstrated hope for new cooperation.



J. Bruce Baumann from Black Star

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¹ David Ciepley provides a useful way of understanding the use of “the state” for my account. He writes, “we must start distinguishing between ‘the state’ as a territorially bounded, rationally organized moral-political community (as in the ‘nation-state’ and ‘the state’) as a bureaucratic organizational form (the administrative structures of the national government).” To clarify, Ciepley uses “nation-building,” to speak of the first development, and “state-building” for the second and continues, “Yet it should be born in mind that nation-building is also part, and really the more indispensable part, of what I am calling the ‘state project,’ the aspiration to fashion a secure, prosperous, legally unified, territorially bounded moral-political community” (41).

² The term “Cold War” was first used in George Orwell’s essay “You and the Atomic Bomb,” published October 19, 1945, approximately one month after the end of World War II. In Orwell’s description of a world living under the threat of nuclear war he described life in the shadow of World War II as living in a “peace that is no peace,” living in a permanent “cold war.” Michael Kort, *The Columbia Guide to the Cold War*. Columbia University Press, pg. 3, 2001. “Cold War” was first used to describe the ideological confrontation between the Soviet Union and Western powers post World War II. Although the USSR and the U.S. were allies during World War II, they were in political disagreement as the U.S. and its allies sought to contain the spread of communism. The Cold War was not merely an ideological struggle but as a period that impacted material life in the U.S. and around the world. Identifying communism in Asia as a new threat, the U.S. found in Vietnam (1959-1975) and Korea (1950-1953) a significant battleground for the Cold War’s fight against communism. The Berlin Blockade (1948-1949), the Berlin Crisis (1961), and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) were also distinct violent eruptions during this period. With the Alien Registration Act, or the Smith Act, of 1940 all aliens fourteen and older be registered with the U.S. federal government and fingerprinted. This act also declared anyone who advocated the overthrow of the federal government. The Communist Part of the United States of America (CPUSA) went underground, because they were now declared “illegal.” McCarthyism ruled the 1950s as programs by President Truman were implemented to fight communism, and to weed out communist infiltration in the federal government. All federal employees now had to take a loyalty oath to the U.S. government and people could be questioned. Thousands of employees resigned and two hundred were dismissed due to accusations of disloyalty. The McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950 strengthened the Smith Act and among many other things, allowed the federal government the power to detain subversives in concentration camps for national security.

³ *Ibid.*, 1, italics mine.

⁴ Gregory Claeys’s “The origins of dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell,” 107.

⁵ David Ciepley, *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism*, 184.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, italics mine.

⁷ From the utopias of sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, the notion of what some call an “anti-utopia,” or a “utopia gone wrong” was born. The idea of dystopia, then, preceded the neologism of dystopia, which was first articulated in John Stuart Mill’s parliamentary speech in 1868 in which Mill used the word “dystopia” to describe the opposite perspective of utopia.⁷ Although the term dystopia was first coined in 1868 it would not be until the earlier part of the twentieth century that dystopian literature would gain traction.

⁸ Raffaella Baccolini, “The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction,” 520; “Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler,” 13, 19.

⁹ Raffaella Baccolini, “Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler,” 13, 18. Jane Donawerth’s “The Feminist Dystopia of the 1990s: Record of Failure, Midwife of Hope.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹¹ This antistatist direction did not remove state authority from American life, but rather, state authority became concealed through the court system (the enforcer of “state neutrality”) and through corporations at the expense of families, schools, associations, government agencies, and legislatures. Ciepley notes that the implementation of the New Deal was carried out during the rise of Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler, dictators that engaged in the planning and control over production and economic concerns during the global financial crisis of 1929. The New Deal was reliant upon federal state authority to implement domestic changes, binding liberalism to the power of U.S. nationalist discourse over civic life. New Deal liberalism believed in the expansion of the political administration to resolve the strain between the market and social organization. Fears that the New Deal would instigate similar state-side controlling regimes and that Franklin D. Roosevelt would soon be a dictator shifted the direction of American liberalism so that in the following years what the U.S. was left with was a “weak welfare state and unplanned civilian economy... [and] a strong developmental warfare state and a cooperatively (military-industry) planned military economy. The result was a government with unprecedented capacity to intervene internationally, but limited capacity to intervene domestically.” David Ciepley, 33,77; Nikhil P. Singh, *Black is a Country*, 61, 177.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹³ Nikhil P. Singh, *Black is a Country*, 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁶ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, lxxi.

¹⁷ For instance, in an effort to project an inclusive and accepting nation the U.S. government passed the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which overturned the 1790 naturalization law. This act allowed anyone to become a naturalized citizen, and Asia was now included in the quotas. Moon-Ho Jung lecture Nov. 16, 2010.

¹⁸ A socialist-communist utopia narrates alternative economic relations and systems of labor wherein individuals are no longer merely seen as an extension of the process of production. There is no longer a division of labor, and work is voluntary and spontaneous. This transformation of man’s relationship to work would lead to a more harmonious interaction between individuals. Man would emerge from the fall of capitalism and the demise of the state as equal and ethical people.¹⁸ Marxism, the predominant form of socialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, contributed greatly to the transformation of utopian thought and literature, which, utopian scholars like Vieira have argued, “was crucial to [utopia’s] success” (13). This turn in utopian literature, the turn toward futurity, at the end of the nineteenth century was the climax of a change in the utopian genre that had begun to take place at the end of the eighteenth century. Karl Mannheim has noted the degree to which Marx and Engels transformed the way the future was imagined, not merely as a place for wishes and dreams, but as a place where revolution and change could be achieved, redefining and placing utopian visions in the realm of reality, and no longer Sir Thomas More’s paradisiacal “nowhere” or “elsewhere.” Utopia represented, instead, “*a time to come.*” Marxist visions of transformation understood revolution as something that would be achieved by the end of the historic process; the present, therefore, is

a place that should be seen in terms of its future. Marxism's intervention into utopian literature is in this change in concept of time. The completion of utopia is the telos of historical development. Marxist thought provided a discourse of historical evolution as the basis for literary utopia to narrate humanity's felicity as a goal to work toward.

¹⁹ Paolo A. Bolaños' "The Critical Role of Art: Adorno between Utopia and Dystopia." Peter G. Stillman, "Dystopian Critiques, Utopian Possibilities, and Human Purposes in Octavia Butler's Parables," Stephen D. Dowden, *Kafka's Castle and the Critical Imagination*. Paolo A. Bolaños, "The Critical Role of Art: Adorno between Utopia and Dystopia."

²⁰ John Tagg, *Burdens of Representation*, 60-61.

²¹ Liberal reform can be noted through Johnson's "War on Poverty," which increased social spending on social security, health, welfare, and education. New immigration laws, such as the Immigration Act of 1965 were passed to promote a positive image of the U.S. as a nation of immigrants. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 further demonstrated how anti-racist and equal the U.S. was.

²² *An American Dilemma*, Gunnar Myrdal, lxxv.

²³ *The Kerner Commission Report*, 10.

²⁴ *Encyclopedia of Race Riots*, 331-332.

²⁵ *The Kerner Commission Report*, 202.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁷ The images of "Eyewitness to Crisis" from *The Kerner Commission Report* are at the end of this chapter in Appendix I.

²⁸ While Marx wrote for the proletariat, the audience for the report is imagined as the white moderate. In the "Introduction" to *The Kerner Commission Report* Tom Wicker of *The New York Times* writes that the report was written by "representatives of the moderate and 'responsible' Establishment—not by black radicals, militant youth or even academic leftists. From it rises not merely a cry of outrage; it is also an expression of shocked intelligence and violated faith"(v). The legitimacy of the report is established through the declaration that the report was *not* written by "black radicals," "militants," or "academic leftists," who, Wicker suggests are all non-objective sources. Instead, we have (white) "moderate" and "responsible" representatives writing to "white, moderate, responsible America" (v). The reader of the *Kerner Commission Report* is imagined as white American citizens who need to "learn" about the poor conditions of black life, through their empirical findings and photographic images. The Commissioners are addressing this report "to the institutions of government and to the conscience of the nation, but even more urgently, to the minds and hearts of each citizen. The responsibility for decisive action, never more clearly demanded in the history of our country, rests on all of us" (34). This text is not written for the empowerment of people of color, but empowers the state and white people to take it into their own hands by "teaching" white institutions and white people about "white racism," the poor living conditions of African Americans, and why blacks are a threat to liberal democracy. This report is appealing to white moderates, and therefore justifies its findings by stating that the authors are themselves "rational" and "objective" white moderates. Objectivity and "truth" here, then, is being defined against black radicals who are not seen as impartial. Even though the *Report* claims to be serving the interests of "all of us" it remains invested in the upkeep of the status quo. *The Kerner Report* carries on this dystopian vision as it states, "[v]iolence cannot build a better society. Disruption and disorder nourish repression, not

justice. They strike at the freedom of every citizen. The community cannot—it will not—tolerate coercion and mob rule.”

²⁹ John Tagg, *Burdens of Representation*, 60-61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 347.

³² Sacvac Berkovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 68.

³³ Singh, 192. And *Encyclopedia of America Race Riots*.

³⁴ The end of Reconstruction restored the move to firmly establish white supremacy and the enforcement of racist laws and practices. Between 1892 through 1930 there were, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, 4,951 lynchings in the U.S. (from encyclopedia of race riots) Even as the lynchings of black bodies were spectacularized, through “Negro barbeques” and “Necktie parties,” local authorities turned a blind eye to these violent acts as they were seen as extralegal acts of justice being carried out by good (white) American, law-abiding citizens. The African American community, however, did not just sit by and accept their position. Anti-lynching black activists like Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the “New Negroes,” led by W.E.B. Du Bois organized and wrote in response to violence against blacks; one million African Americans migrated out of the south to avoid being killed; “Black Towns” were established; and everyday people of color rose up in everyday struggles in urban areas. Yellow and brown people agitated right alongside African Americans, however, their protests are cast aside.

³⁵ Between 1910 and 1940 over one million African Americans migrated out of the South and moved up North, out to the Midwest and west to seek industrial jobs and to escape Southern racism. The urban ghetto, as the othered space of white suburban life, would reveal the social and economic discrepancies between people of color and whites and the racial segregation that continued after legal bans on segregation. White suburbs aimed at building property equity between working-class and lower middle-class whites developed after World War II, denying blacks access to the suburbs. Urban renewal projects that were supposed to build more housing for housing shortages of the 1950s and 1960s in racial minority communities instead served the interests of commercial, commuter, and businesses, building freeways and tramlines through black neighborhoods, demolishing housing for minority communities rather than building them up (7-8 Singh).

³⁶ Singh 197.

³⁷ Casting radical blacks as a threat to the safety of the nation is pivotal to the state narrative of the *Kerner Commission Report*, as black uprisings demonstrated the degree to which the US state has always operated on the racist logics of white supremacy. In other words, if the U.S. was attempting to define liberal democracy against totalitarianism, it had to project an image of an anti-racist state; however, the uprisings in the “urban ghetto,” and the demands of people of color, would not allow the country to forget U.S. histories of racialization. The racial logic of urban life traffics between multiple colonial state formations (liberal and totalitarian).

Connections black radicals made between fascism, colonialism, and U.S. racial inequality during World War II deeply impacted the black power movement, and by the mid-1960s minority communities organized and protested through and against the “urban ghetto.” As forty new nation-states in the former colonial world emerged between 1945-1960 activists of color linked their racialized minority struggles in the US to liberation struggles in India, Ghana, Cuba, Congo, Vietnam, South Africa, and Palestine (Singh 54, 185). Black radicals proclaimed that they would bring the “anti-colonial revolt home to America” defining a “new mood” for their time and

“black liberation politics valorized the ghetto as a location from which to finally overturn centuries of racial stigma” (Singh 197). The “new mood” of African American urban life found its articulation through racial uprisings that erupted all over the country and black urban life was the place where the black freedom movement and urban crisis collided, producing racialized subjects who protested for their liberation. African American communities were able to name the U.S. as an empire and coercive state that needed to be opposed, not integrated into. (Singh, James Baldwin quote, 184, 193, 197).

These are precisely the connections that *The Kerner Report* cannot account for. The state cannot read non-white revolutionary tactics as an anti-colonial revolt, or as political acts of liberation. To recognize these acts as viable political means toward justice would mean that the state would have to question the very foundations of the U.S. state, a white supremacist entity that is supposedly safeguarding racial harmony and equality. The persistence of racial inequality and segregation, and the resulting urban uprisings, are the very things that would remind us of the fascist tendencies of the U.S. state. Although this period successfully challenged the legality of segregation, ended legalized Jim Crow, secured black political rights, enabled blacks to enter trade unions, the military, and the civil service, new forms and spaces of racial inequality emerged in the Cold War period. For example, even as the U.S. tried to distance itself from totalitarian countries by condemning the totalitarian state of Nazi Germany as a racist state, at home, the U.S. would find itself producing a “softer” version of Nazi concentration camps through the incarceration of over 110,000 Japanese Americans and Japanese when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. Japanese concentration camps would be called internment camps because they “weren’t as bad” as the German concentration camps. These camps demonstrate the degree to which European totalitarian methods of racial segregation were alive in the U.S.

³⁸ President Johnson’s “National Address to the Nation on Civil Disorders” on July 27, 1967, *Kerner Commission Report*, 539.

³⁹ *U.S. News Report*, 75.

⁴⁰ William Petersen, 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Raffaella Baccolini, “Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler,” 13, 140.

⁴³ Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, *Dark Horizons*, 7. In the latter half of the twentieth century, utopian and dystopian scholars understand these genres through a more critical lens. In the 1980s, scholars such as Tom Moylan began to argue that the exciting political movements of the 1960s and 1970s again turned the dystopian tide toward utopian visions in what Moylan names “critical utopia.” For Moylan, “critical utopia” “incorporates an Enlightenment sense of *critique*, a postmodern attitude of self-reflexivity, and the political implication of a ‘*critical mass*’ required to make the necessary explosive reaction” (Baccolini and Moylan, *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, 2). Critical utopia, Moylan argues, demonstrates an awareness of the “historical tendency of the utopian genre to limit the imagination to one particular ideal, authors of critical utopias reclaimed the emancipatory utopian imagination while they simultaneously challenged the political and formal limits of the traditional utopia. By forging visions of better but open futures, these utopian writings developed a critique of dominant ideology and traced new vectors of opposition” (*Feminist Utopian Novels of the*

1970s: Joanna Russ and Dorothy Bryan, Tatiana Teslenko, 1-2) This tendency, Moylan continues, ended in the 1980s, in the face of economic restructuring, right-wing politics, and a cultural milieu informed by an intensifying fundamentalism and commodification, science fiction writers revived and reformulated the dystopian genre. Lyman Tower Sargent asserts in “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited” (1994) that politically engaged texts “are clearly both eutopias and dystopias...[and therefore]...undermine all neat classification schemes.” (Lyman Tower Sargent, *Demand the Impossible*, 7).

⁴⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, “Linguistic Utopias,” 50.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 56, 57.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵¹ Emily Apter, 1999.

⁵² Kadohata, 5.

⁵³ In *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis gives a particularly insightful discussion of the historical connections between race and the divisions of Los Angeles’ urban space. He demonstrates how, in an effort to prevent Blacks from buying homes outside of the ghetto in the 1920s, white homeowners united together to form Homeowner’s associations, creating racially specified “block restrictions.” Consequently, Blacks and Asians could not live in 95 percent of the city’s housing stock in the 1920s. By WWI, these covenants, or deed restrictions, came to define the middle-class world of Los Angeles’ Westside, building a “‘white wall’ around the Black community on Central Avenue,” excluding Blacks, Chicanos, and Asians. The geographical racial and class segregation in Southern California, then, was not an accident, or unplanned development, but was deliberately shaped to exclude people of color, which also served to increase property value. In Davis’ terms, the “white walls” separating Kadohata’s richtown and downtown L.A. is the product of twentieth and twenty-first century historical processes of racial and socio-economic segregation.

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

⁵⁵ Pratt, 50-60.

Chapter Two

“Living and Breathing in the Place Blinded from View”:
Utopias of Fact, Utopias of Fiction in Imagining Asian American Social Movements

The utopian as we primarily know it has missed the opportunity to chart a richer and more adequate history and theory of our real and imagined strivings for a livable social existence. This missed opportunity is a blind spot. However, there is always something living and breathing in the place blinded from view.

Avery Gordon, “Something More Powerful Than Skepticism”

When truth cannot be realized within the established social order, it always appears to the latter as mere utopia. The utopian is not what is actually impossible or unrealizable; rather it represents the limit of permissible truth. That’s why it often appears as the ‘merely.’ To *adhere* to the truths contained in the utopian’s bad facticity *against all appearances* is what Marcuse means by obstinacy, which he strictly distinguishes from whimsy or opportunism. Obstinacy may be irritating, but it is necessary for preventing the merely utopian from being used to disqualify or discredit the elsewhere or otherwise that we know—sometimes as craziness, sometimes as elusive desire, sometimes as our most prized possession—but that we do know is realistic and possible. Or, lesson three: in order to even approach utopian thinking we have to stop associating the utopian with the impossibly idealistic (or with its evil materialist twin, the ‘never enough’) and using it as a weapon against others and ourselves. We’ll have to learn to be more comfortable with bad facticity.

Avery Gordon, “Something More Powerful Than Skepticism”

Recently, Avery Gordon has called for an intervention into the ways in which we understand the utopian. For Gordon, “the utopian as we primarily know it has missed the opportunity to chart a richer and more adequate history and theory of our real and imagined strivings for a livable social existence.”¹ This missed opportunity is a “blind spot,” according to Gordon, because we have primarily come to know the utopian as “impossibly idealistic” or “never enough.”² And, in approaching the utopian as the “impossible” and “never enough,” we have cast aside that which we cannot easily recognize as empirically valid, rendering it as “bad facticity.” Instead of dismissing “bad facticity,” or fiction, Gordon argues, “we’ll have to learn to be more comfortable with bad facticity.”³ In “bad facticity,” Gordon is recognizing the value of

fiction. We cannot merely see “bad facticity” from an empirical realist perspective, as poor epistemology. Rather we need to recognize the ways in which “bad facticity” is not merely concerned with the status of being quantifiable, but opens up ways of knowing that have been dismissed by realist and empirical epistemologies. In other words, there are utopian projects that cannot be wholly recognized and made sense of, yet we must still realize that they live and breathe in places blinded from our view. Our attachment to realist ways of knowing seeks to excise these projects, but just because we are blinded from seeing fictional utopia, or “bad facticity,” it does not mean that these narratives are irrelevant. Far from being irrelevant, these projects of “bad facticity” offer important ways of charting histories and theories of our strivings for the utopian, which are not merely oriented toward a future ideal, but calls attention to our present and past struggles for “a more livable social existence.”⁴

I begin this chapter with Avery Gordon’s challenge because I see Asian American radicalism and social movement writing as critical projects that engage in practices that richly read for “blind spots,” missed opportunities, and the “bad facticity” of the utopian in the latter half of the twentieth century. Asian American imaginings of social movement have been central to the project of our “strivings for a livable social existence.” I ground this inquiry around utopia and “bad facticity” in two texts. The first text is *Getting Together*, a newspaper produced in 1971 by one of the first Asian American revolutionary nationalist groups, I Wor Kuen.⁵ The second text is *Tropic of Orange*, a 1997 novel by Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita. I read these two disparate texts together to track how the realist writing practices of social movement literature orchestrated the utopian politics and representational practices of the Asian American movement, which would then come to affect and shape Asian American feminist writers such as Yamashita in the following decades.⁶ In other words, this chapter explores the relationship

between the literary form of utopia and social movements and asks: How can fictional utopia, or utopias of “bad facticity,” reveal the limitations of factual utopia, or “good facticity,” for the imagination of social movement work?

I consider what it means to situate I Wor Kuen as a group of writers that produced a set of discursive practices that powerfully shaped Asian American cultural politics. *Getting Together* demonstrates the desire to resist normative discourses of the nation, race, and gender that would seek to subjugate Third World people and to chart a different history and theory for a more equal and just social existence. The practices of translation, which I will discuss more fully in this chapter, were integral to the formation of the political category of the “Third World,” which would come to affect and shape Asian American cultural politics, writers, and activists in the following decades.⁷ Even as I Wor Kuen’s writing demonstrates a desire for dialoguing across geographical, racial, and gendered boundaries, they were also committed to providing accurate social representations that were attached to realist practices. This attachment to realism, I argue winds up producing normative and universalizing discourses of national belonging, unity, and universality.

Written over twenty years after the first issue of *Getting Together*, Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* is a critical engagement with Asian American cultural nationalism’s writing practices around realism, translation, and the “Third World.” I do not read Yamashita’s text as necessarily “better” than *Getting Together*, but literature holds a privileged position in that, unlike a newspaper, Yamashita’s novel is not obliged to hold onto the same strict realist protocols of journalistic writing. *Getting Together* is a periodical, and Yamashita’s text is a novel, so their representational practices are different because the novel, as Yamashita acknowledges, provided her with more freedom to “create a different system or a new way of

living.”⁸ Asian American writers in the 1990s, such as Yamashita, are building on the work of the Asian American cultural nationalist movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Yamashita is able to critique dominant representational practices that reproduced a different version of universality and coherency through genres such as magical realism because she witnessed the limitations of realist writing in the context of de-colonial social movement projects.

Reading *Tropic of Orange* alongside *Getting Together* allows me to study the relationship between the “bad facticity” of Yamashita’s novel and the utopian vanguardism of I Wor Kuen. While I Wor Kuen romanticized Lenin vanguardism and overemphasized the future in a closed way, Yamashita privileges fiction. Juxtaposing these two texts allows me to track the question of practice, or “good facticity,” of social movement groups such as I Wor Kuen and the work of fiction, or “bad facticity,” of Karen Tei Yamashita for social movement politics. I argue that I Wor Kuen relied on realist practices of translation that had a tendency to suture differences for a “linguistics of community.” While Yamashita is part of a conversation about Asian American politics she is deeply entrenched in literary practices as she draws from Chicana/o writers to imagine social movement work by imagining the practice of translation through the idea of border-crossing. She draws on Latin American writers by taking up magical realism for Asian American politics. I seek to demonstrate how *Tropic of Orange* unfixes the seemingly coherent worldview of I Wor Kuen’s writing practices and names their claims to reality and objectivity as a fiction. On the other hand, I have to also recognize the limitations of fiction, or “bad facticity,” and I Wor Kuen certainly was able to politically effect Asian American politics in ways that Yamashita’s novel could not. For instance, I Wor Kuen had very real material practices, such as feeding Asian American communities, helping them gain access to health services, and creating a forum for different readers and writers to interact. Yamashita’s vision for social movement is

not about social practice, but it is about the work of art, literature, and fictional practices for revolutionary imagination.

Even as the work of social practice and the retreat into fiction have their limitations they are integral to Asian American politics and social movement building. I open up with Gordon's call for valuing fictional practices at the beginning of the chapter because my reading of Yamashita's novel provides an "opportunity" to see history, our present, and social struggle in a new light. What would it look like for social movement to value "bad facticity"? What kinds of utopia do we get if we begin to take seriously the work of fiction? Do these utopia only exist in art or can we move fiction to social organizing? If this utopia can only exist in art, is that a problem? I suggest that Yamashita's novel offers its readers a way to imagine the work of fiction in social movement in order to ruminate on possible answers to these questions. I argue that *Tropic of Orange's* political value lies in its ability to be "comfortable" with bad facticity in imagining utopia. The utopia in Yamashita's novel is not trying to become "good" facticity, but produces narrative modes of self-critique. Yamashita is not arguing for what is possible, but arguing that the realm of the imagination, or what we deem as "impossible," is itself an important site of struggle—even if its work and struggle is different from the political practices of groups like I Wor Kuen.

I contend that Asian American nationalists in the 1970s relied on the newspaper form, journalism, and other social movement texts that were based on fact, like *Getting Together*, to write utopias for social movement as an instructional manual of sorts for the realization of freedom. In other words, they believe that writing a factual utopia is the only way of achieving utopia. Even as I Wor Kuen attempted to change dominant social structures for equality, *Getting Together* produced idealized communities, or as Mary Louise Pratt would call it, a "linguistics of

community,” through the discursive formation of Third World subjects bound together through proletarian struggle. This approach to Third Worldism continued to hold onto dominant modes of power that were maintained in realist practices of translation because it precludes notions of coalition that Yamashita imagines in her novel, which I will later discuss. Asian American writers, such as Karen Tei Yamashita, return to the idea of literary utopia in the 1990s but, unlike *I Wor Kuen*, treat the utopia as wholly unrealizable and impossible, not to deflect the hopes of social movement work, but to show how power is conserved through factual and realist mimetic discourses. While the utopia of Asian American revolutionary nationalism aimed to provide a manual of living for a freedom to come, Yamashita’s literary utopia is not about the realization of her utopia. Rather, Yamashita’s literary utopia is a privileged site precisely because, unlike the fact-based form of the newspaper, she opens up translation as a utopian practice that need not be tied to empiricism. Instead her novel re-thinks the politics of translation that embraces “bad facticity” for the emergence of imaginative practices and impossible conjunctions that not only reveal the limits of realism, but also links to the production of heterogeneous and materially unequal publics for the mobilization of de-colonial and radical utopian politics. This chapter argues that Yamashita’s literary utopia “represents the limit of permissible truth” in Asian American revolutionary nationalism.⁹ At the same time, since *Tropic of Orange* is a literary text without an explicit tie to social movement ideology, it might be easy to dismiss Yamashita’s novel as “mere” and “impossibly idealistic” utopia.¹⁰ While most critics would align Yamashita’s work only within a tradition of Latin American magical realist writers, I argue that in order to recognize the political significance of Yamashita’s text, *Tropic of Orange*, must also be framed within the utopian legacies of Asian American nationalism and Third World liberation struggles.

“They were writers, you know...”: I Wor Kuen and *Getting Together*

In the fall of 1969 I Wor Kuen, a Chinese and Asian American Marxist-Leninist-Maoist revolutionary collective composed of immigrant and American-born radical students, workers, and working class youth, surfaced from the new left among Asian nationalities living in New York City’s Chinatown. Literally translating into “Society of the Harmonious Righteous Fists,” I Wor Kuen drew its name from the Boxers in China, an organized secret society that combined mysticism and martial arts to oppose western imperialism and expel foreigners in 1900. As a group that figured themselves as revolutionaries, I Wor Kuen identified with the Boxers’ anti-imperialist militancy and their “revolutionary spirit.”¹¹

On the West coast, a few months before the formation of I Wor Kuen in New York, a small group of Asian American youth in San Francisco was inspired by the ultra-militaristic and radical stylings of the Black Panther Party. Complete with their own 10-point program, the Red Guard Party viewed themselves primarily as an army rather than a political and ideological vanguard. Alex Hing, a member of the Red Guard Party, shares, “If the Panthers would’ve recruited us we would’ve joined on the spot. But they didn’t. What they did instead was they invited us to go up to their headquarters on a weekly basis and start studying with them. So that’s when we started to get introduced formally to revolutionary theory.”¹² Scholars such as William Wei and Daryl Maeda, among many others, have noted the influence black radicalism and the civil rights movement had on Asian American social movements and cultural organizing. Often noted are the ways in which the militaristic thread of these early cultural nationalist articulations was the turn to a masculinist discourse that failed to articulate the need for gender equality, and thus relegated the role of women. William Wei has stated that “I Wor Kuen was struggling

internally” with this tension, and Daryl Maeda has pointed out the “performances in masculinity were key to the Red Guard Party’s initial phase, [and] some evidence points to an uneven evolution in the gender ideologies and practices of its members.”¹³ These contradictory and uneven gendered practices and ideologies fractured both I Wor Kuen and the Red Guard Party and eventually the Red Guard Party disbanded in 1971. On August 21, 1971 a faction of the Red Guard Party merged with members of New York’s I Wor Kuen to form a national I Wor Kuen based in San Francisco, CA. In that same year, the group produced and circulated a bi-monthly bi-lingual newspaper called *Getting Together*, which included poetry and short stories of Asian experiences in the U.S. and abroad, and articles contributed from their readers.

William Wei has stated that by the time a national I Wor Kuen was established, “these tendencies [of gender inequality] had been corrected, strengthening the organization and paving the way for more of its women to assume leadership roles.”¹⁴ While I agree with Wei’s statement that we should not read the breaking up of the Red Guard Party and the internal divisions within I Wor Kuen as failures but as productive for a movement, I am not convinced that “these tendencies” had somehow been “corrected” and fixed. I would, however, like to pick up on Wei’s suggestion that Asian American women assumed leadership roles in the national iteration of I Wor Kuen. Fred Ho and Alex Hing have indicated that more than half of the national I Wor Kuen’s Central Committee were women.¹⁵ Although it has been suggested that Carmen Chow was a leading member of I Wor Kuen, there is little mention of other women’s involvement as members or leaders. According to Fred Ho, “Quite a lot of them [women in I Wor Kuen] were very highly educated, from very educated families. They could do administrative work much better than the males, they could do the memos, they could do the correspondence, they could come out with position papers more easily, they were writers, you know.”¹⁶ “They were writers,

you know.” This simple statement about the work of women’s labor in *I Wor Kuen* reveals a great deal about the gendered logic of social movement labor. Although Ho rightly acknowledges that women were educated, and could do certain things “better than the males,” their roles as writers and administrators appear secondary to Ho. Rather than viewing their writing as integral to doing, shaping, moving and forming their social movement, Ho seems to suggest that what was happening in “reality,” on the streets, everyday, was what really mattered, and the “administrative work,” “memos,” “correspondence,” and “position papers,” were women’s work. Rather than viewing writing as a mimetic practice that merely supports or reflects the work on the streets, I take seriously the role of writing as a constitutive practice of social movement work. If *I Wor Kuen* women were the group’s key writers, we also then have to assume that they were central participants in the production of *Getting Together* which is, I argue, a significant text in Asian American social movement literature that critiqued the U.S. liberal state, situated histories particular to Asians and Asian Americans, articulated their desire for and visions of better lives and novel ways of getting there.

I understand utopia as a central form in social movement literature of the 1960s and 1970s, a time when Third World people were reinvigorated by the idea of achieving revolution through cultural transformation. *Getting Together* is part of a rich legacy of Asian American newspaper and magazine writings, such as *Gidra*, *Bridge Magazine*, *Unity*, and *East Wind* that share a particular moment of movement work and writing. The newspaper form of *Getting Together* may seem like a conventional form of writing, but I instead want to understand it as a form that mediated a series of complex relations that reveals how utopia was being imagined and articulated in the early 1970s by Asian American revolutionary nationalists, especially when these articulations had no place in mainstream and dominant media and writing and were also in

tension with revolutionary nationalism. To be clear, when I read *Getting Together's* practices as utopian I do not understand these tactics as a *romanticizing* practice. Utopia and romanticizing may cohabitate but they are not equivalent. That is to say, the utopian in *Getting Together* is not the romanticizing practice of utopia as escapism or an impossibility, but I see the utopian in Asian American social movement literature as a pre-figurative politics for social transformation.¹⁷ It is easy to conflate utopia with romanticizing; however, I make the distinction between the two. I see utopia, unlike romanticizing, as central to twentieth century movements for better political, cultural, and social life. Reading *Getting Together* as utopian literature is to acknowledge how utopian forms have been vital to social movement building, because utopian forms and articulations have not only revealed the limits of the established order—as an articulation of that which the dominant regime cannot think— utopia has also given a form and language to imagining alternative ways of organizing. Utopia is indispensable and necessary to Asian American activists writing in the 1970s not merely because of the content of their writing, but also their ability to mobilize the utopian precepts of time and space, through *Getting Together*, in order to produce new practices that orchestrated cultural and social movements in the 1970s and thereafter. *Getting Together* is as an expression and vehicle, in a particular historical moment, of an Asian American feminism that finds in the utopian form of print journalism an indispensable and necessary mode of orchestrating the politics of culture. More specifically, I Wor Kuen drew on and re-produced utopian practices and the utopian that were central to the discursive formation of Asian American identity and cultural politics. In the next two sections I will explore the complex ways in which *Getting Together* mobilized around a Third World community for political movement through the newspaper form, in ways that attempted to actualize a utopia.

As an emergent Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party with a Central Committee composed primarily of Asian American women, I Wor Kuen held multiple tensions and contradictions within the group's political ideologies and practices. I Wor Kuen had an investment in familiar utopian discourses and practices of Marxist-Leninist political models, such as vanguardism and Marxist linear notions of time, for example. In 1901, under the last Tsar of Russia Nicolas II, Vladimir Lenin wrote *What Is to Be Done?* which laid out a strong utopian argument for a Party to act as vanguard for the proletariat.¹⁸ In Lenin's utopian vision of revolution, the vanguard would be "*a party guided by the most advanced theory*" and serve as the most advanced consciousness of the proletariat.¹⁹ In other words, the party would have the most sophisticated utopian vision of a better future and an agenda for social change in order to help the proletariat get there. Lenin, who saw himself as part of the vanguard, argued, "it is not enough to call ourselves the 'vanguard,' the advanced contingent... it is our task, the task of the progressive representatives of bourgeois democracy to lend the workers' economic struggle *itself* a political character."²⁰ On its own, the proletariat could achieve "trade-union consciousness," but the proletariat needed a new kind of party to raise their revolutionary consciousness. Central to Lenin's theory of the vanguard is the role of print culture because "*there is no other way of training* strong political organizations except through the medium of an all-Russia newspaper."²¹ The newspaper would ideally function to establish contacts, "communication between towns on revolutionary business... [help facilitate] an exchange of experience, of material, of forces, and of resources" across all of Russia.²² The newspaper would serve as a Marxist utopian form through which the vanguard party could raise revolutionary consciousness among the masses by "spark[ing]... the class struggle and ... popular indignation into a general conflagration."²³ According to Lenin, "[i]n our time only a party that will *organize* really *nation-wide* exposures

can become the vanguard of the revolutionary forces.”²⁴ The Marxist-Leninist approach linked the form of the newspaper to the capacity to establish an exchange of disparate experiences that could then be unified into a “general conflagration.” Utopia here, then, is about the sublation of difference into revolutionary unity.

As one of the first Asian American revolutionary national organizations, I Wor Kuen indeed saw themselves as “the vanguard of the revolutionary forces” and were similarly mobilizing their newspaper to “spark” struggle, raise and develop a proletarian consciousness for a future class-less society. Even as I Wor Kuen was influenced by Marxist-Leninist critique of class struggle it is relevant to note the ways in which I Wor Kuen, in 1971, is a group of Asian American women and men mobilizing and transforming these traditional vanguardist revolutionary practices for Asian American, Third Worldist, and feminist politics. I Wor Kuen was not solely organizing around raising class consciousness, as Lenin and Marx were at the turn of the century, but were organizing decolonial projects around race and gender in a moment when feminist, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist struggles were finding a new global articulation. I Wor Kuen was invested in utopian Marxist-Leninist notions of linearity and time and the idea that through their writing they, as the vanguard, will raise the consciousness of the Asian American community who would then eventually rise up. However, the vanguard in this case looks different. I Wor Kuen’s audience is more heterogeneous, and I Wor Kuen’s newspaper—as the group’s utopian cultural articulation—creates a different kind of community of readers and writers from traditional Marxist-Leninist newspapers. While traditional Marxist-Leninist vanguardism viewed the newspaper as the form through which the Party’s knowledge and teachings could be disseminated, *Getting Together* served as an experimental and collaborative site that was primarily made up of submissions from readers. The literary form of *Getting*

Together's utopia has a role in anti-imperialist social movement practice; however, because this utopia was produced through the newspaper form, I Wor Kuen's utopia was imagined through a particular set of protocols that produces a factual utopian project.

***Getting Together's* factual utopia: The work of translation in the production of a "Linguistics of Community," and the discursive formation of the "Third World"**

This section reads *Getting Together* for the set of realist protocols Asian American revolutionary nationalist journalistic writing upheld. I argue that their factual utopian project becomes restricted to notions of community that need to be studied and critiqued. On the one hand, *Getting Together* importantly imagined a Third World subject, and on the other hand, the newspaper did so through the romanticization of Mao, Lenin, Marx, the proletariat, and an idealized community. *Getting Together* is an interesting piece of social movement literature because it demonstrates the complex ways I Wor Kuen was at the cusp of normalizing discourses of cultural nationalism as well as emergent critical feminist discourses in the 1970s.

Translation is key here as it opens up an internationalist dialogue between women and plays a key role in *Getting Together's* production of an idealized community.²⁵ In an article entitled "Reply to an Afro Am Sister" an Asian woman or man replies to an African American woman's previously published article in *Getting Together*, marking the third interaction with the two contributors. The article appears as follows:

Reply to an Afro Am Sister

(translated from the Chinese) by Fu

I read your article on *Swanlake* in Vol. 3 no. 12 of GETTING TOGETHER. Your point of argument will deepen my thinking and widen my scope in my later writings. I am very glad about this. I did not anticipate that my

insignificant article would receive the concern of an Afro-American sister... Not only am I excited because my article got a response. I also benefitted much from the study of your article. First of all, please allow me to pay you high internationalist respects!

You told me that you are 'a person who has political consciousness.' As for myself, I am a follower of Marxism. In the Marxist analysis, the modern society is a class society, there is a capitalist class, and a working class. The capitalist class is the rich monopoly-capitalists-exploiters; the working class is the laboring masses who are forced to sell their labor. Capitalism [sic] will be, defeated, the working class will break their chains and build a classless new world.

You said that you 'didn't understand too clearly where and how this ballet served the interests of the rich who oppress Third World and other poor people.' Before I go into the explanation, let me first tell you the situation concerning reformation of opera in China. In the past we played the kings and emperors, the scholar and the belle and such. After liberation, less and less people watched these plays; the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers especially are not interested in the old operas. Just think, in New China, the people already are the master of the country, how could they allow the kings and emperors, the scholar and the belle to be the protagonists on the stage, and to continue propagating feudalism, propagating the thinking and emotions of the reactionary declining class. Why not eulogize the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers who fight valiantly for the well-being of the people? Through an arduous struggle the

direction was set. Responding to Chairman Mao's call, advanced in the *Talk on Art and Literature*, the revolutionizing of operas was carried out. The kings and emperors, the scholar and the belle were swept off the stage, and a new cultural style as embodied in the *Red Detachment of Women* and the *White Hair Girl* was created, making the heroic image of the laboring people the true master of the stage!

What does the content of the ballet *Swanlake* point out? Is it a pure pursuit of the image of truth-beauty-goodness? Or a piece of supra-class art? It is neither one. Mainly what it points out is the corruption of its thinking. The prince, swan-woman, and the sorcerer are the products of the feudal era, non-existent in the present society. It is the same as other reactionary art forms, a kill-time for the rich people, a piece of decoration for them. It uses beautiful terms to lead people into the illusory; it uses a heart-breaking romance to drug the hearts of the youth; it uses unearthly scenery to drown the people's direction. In this militant era, when the roar of the Third World resisting oppression shakes the universe, do you think that moribund art like the *Swanlake* should continue appearing on the stage to be heard and seen by the people who will be unconsciously influenced by it psychologically through the days and months decaying the nature and fighting will of the laboring people?

I, as with you, am rejoicing over the rise of the strength of the Third World people. It is an irresistible force in the world's trend, it is the mainstream that generates the progress of the era! I as with you, being a member of the Third World at this time, feel most happy and proud! We must do our utmost to waken

our brothers and sisters, to shake off the restriction and oppression of the two super-powers, to jointly fight for the rights and respect due to the Third World people. (*Getting Together*, August 1972, 7)

As we can see from the small note under the title “translated from the Chinese by Fu,” the original article was written in Chinese from an Asian person to their “Afro Am sister.” The product here is a translation of the original, for an English reading audience. The piece is a correspondence between an African American woman from an Asian man or woman, and we aren’t completely sure of the gender of the writer of the original or the translation. *Getting Together* does not only function as a transmitter of information and disseminator of I Wor Kuen’s political agenda, but the newspaper does so through the work of translation. The Afro-American sister would not have been able to read the work of the Asian writer, nor would she have been able to respond if it were it not for the work of translating Chinese into English and English into Chinese. What gets translated in this letter is an analysis of Marxism, culture, and politics as they are being experienced in China during a historical transition from feudalism as a “pre-modern” form of hierarchy. Marxism, the writer shares, is a call for the rise of the working class to “build a classless new world” and the writer demonstrates how the politics of culture is integral to the fight against oppression. She explains that *Swanlake* had “served the interests of the rich who oppress Third World and other poor people.” As a white, western form of “supra-class art,” the writer argues that *Swanlake*, a seeming harmless ballet is wrapped up in the capitalist system of oppression, just as traditional Chinese opera, which were about kings and emperors, worked in the interest of the rich and elite. “The broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers” were not interested in these cultural forms and narratives in “New China” because “New China” was against the propagation of feudalism, kings, emperors, scholars and the belle.

Instead, “New China” was interested in responding to Chairman Mao’s call to “eulogize the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers who fight valiantly for the well-being of the people,” that created heroic images of the “laboring people” instead of the elite. The writer connects the experiences of China, its labors and struggles, to the life of the “Afro-Am sister.”

This article in *Getting Together* demonstrates the ways in which I Wor Kuen was part of a larger global project that generated a Third World public and politic, and imagining a Third World subject. The statements: “I, as with you, am rejoicing over the rise of the strength of the Third World people,” and “I as with you, being a member of the Third World at this time, feel most happy and proud!” joins the lives African Americans and the Chinese, even though they do not share the same race or nation, and makes the argument for a global “Third World” struggle between people who are seemingly disconnected and different from each other. The newspaper’s mode of translation is central to its utopian practices and the political identity of “Third World,” as an emergent term of translation between different life worlds of disparate women and men. This article connects the subjugation of people and their labor together, across space, to fight against capitalism and cultural forms that would reinforce hierarchy through the notion of Third Worldism.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty has argued that understanding the analytical and political category of Third World Women as “an ‘imagined community’ of third world oppositional struggles” is particularly useful because

it suggests potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, and ‘community’ because in spite of internal hierarchies within third world contexts, it nevertheless suggests a significant, deep commitment to what Benedict Anderson, in referring to the idea of the nation, calls ‘horizontal comradeship.’ The idea of

imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of third world feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. Thus, it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the *way* we think about race, class, and gender—the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, women of all colors (including white women) can align themselves with and participate in these imagined communities. However, clearly our relation to and centrality in particular struggles depend on our different, often conflictual, locations and histories.²⁶

I Wor Kuen fits Mohanty's approach to thinking about third world struggles, as the newspaper functions to build "potential alliances" and "collaborations" to produce "an imagined community" through a shared political commitment that is not bound by essentialist notions of feminism and racialized struggle. While the newspaper in Benedict Anderson's account is a classic bourgeois form that is universalizing and creates an "imagined community" of the bourgeoisie, *Getting Together*, I argue, articulates a different kind of community that stands outside the false universality of the bourgeois newspaper form. This is why Mohanty writes, "The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of third world feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. Thus, it is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the *way* we think about race, class, and gender—the political links we choose to make among and between struggles." Third world feminist struggles are not just about political alignment based on color and sex, but more about political links disparate imagined communities can make with each other. Third World politics, then, is a collaborative practice and struggle that "depends on

our different, often conflictual, locations and histories.” While Mohanty draws on Anderson’s terminology of an “imagined community,” as the political ties between “Third World” politics, she replaces the homogeneity of his “imagined community” with the heterogeneity of gender, locations, histories, and race. Rather than having a community that is bound by sameness, then, Third World politics is bound by difference.

However, what is less accounted for in Mohanty’s significant discussion of the politics and analytics of the “Third World” are the ways in which the “Third World” is a practice, identity, and political formation that has been discursively produced through the practice of translation. *Getting Together*, and the utopic form of the newspaper, acts as a vehicle through which the labor of translation is visibilized as integral to social movement work and the utopian practice of social movement writing. Approaching *Getting Together* through a reading of its utopian literary formal features of translation allows us to recognize the central role translation has played in the construction of Third World politics in the 1970s. *Getting Together* makes a discovery that the politics of third world struggle is a labor of translation. And so, what we know as “Third World” has emerged from the work of translation in utopian projects. The category of the “Third World” is an emergent formation that is discursively produced and articulated through the writing and reading practices of *Getting Together* as a feminist response to “racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and monopoly capital.”²⁷ In “Reply to an Afro Am Sister” two people are able to communicate, share political ideologies, and dialogue across racialized, and nationalized boundaries. In other words, *Getting Together* is a site through which multiple forms of linguistic, and regional knowledge is shared.

The emergence of the “Third World” through the work of translation is an intervention into Marxist notions of revolutionary consciousness and temporality, and also, the novelty of the

Third World enables the work of translation where different racialized communities across the globe are entering into conversations with each other.²⁸ The newspaper serves as an unmarked universal site through which translations are occurring and as a point of convergence for the different Third World experiences. Translation here works to continue the life of different articles, turning the articles into dialogue and transforming the letters into more than individual, disconnected letters. Women, who would otherwise not be able to talk to each other or read each other's work or share in a political dialogue are able to connect, build on, argue, and learn from each other, crossing boundaries, and producing new affinities and new practices that opens up onto emergent and unexpected discourses and coalitional politics. I Wor Kuen's newspaper is an emergent site through which new practices that would have otherwise been seen as impossible by the logic of the U.S. nation state are forged. Even though the women do not share a language they share the experience of being racialized women who are able to get together through an inquiry into cultural difference. The mode of translation in *Getting Together* allows the two women to communicate and connect while keeping intact their particular experiences and knowledge of their positions as African American woman and as a Chinese immigrant in the U.S. This article marks the third exchange between the two women in *Getting Together*, opening up a conversation that the Asian American woman did not "anticipate... [from] an Afro-American sister." A unique space is opened where the Chinese woman has an audience and is able to "tell" her Afro Am sister about opera's reformation in China. Although surprised, the Chinese person is "glad" that the Afro-American sister would share her concerns about Third World people and would read an Asian American newspaper. As a form that does not adhere to strict boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexuality, the newspaper is able to circulate into different spaces and may be accessed by Asian American, African American, Chicano men and

women. Through this public medium the women are able to discuss the intersection of multiple systemic oppressions and enact the linguistic subjectivities of Asian American, African American, immigrant, and “Third World” women.

Even as *Getting Together* significantly demonstrates the centrality of language in social movement work, providing a fecund form for the articulation of an emergent Third World subject and politic, it does so through the idealization of Mao, Lenin, Marx, the proletariat and community. In other words, just as translation served to conjure a Third World subject, *Getting Together's* realist mode of translation also served to suture differences for the production of a coherent community, and produces what Mary Louise Pratt calls a “linguistics of community.” Pratt illuminates how Mohanty’s model of an “imagined community” of third world opposition is more problematic than Mohanty suggests. For Pratt, unlike Mohanty, linguistics plays a central role in the formation of a community of difference. Pratt is highly critical of Benedict Anderson’s approach to language and community because it produces utopian ideals of a “linguistics of community,” which is mirrored in a speech community that is conceived as a “sovereign, horizontal brotherhood,” a “unified and homogeneous social world in which language exists as a shared patrimony-as a devise, precisely, for imagining community.”²⁹ In other words, “linguistics of community” is a utopian project that posits unified and idealized social worlds. The commitment to a unified and dominant social referent sees felicitous worlds in which sub-communities that threaten the coherency of a unified community are elided. I Wor Kuen was informed by feminist critique of cultural nationalism’s unifying discourses, and forwarded a Third Worldist politics, even as the group was drawn toward cohering a community.

In the first issue of *Getting Together*, the I Wor Kuen Central Committee states,

...this is written to announce that I Wor Kuen now exists in both New York City and San Francisco. We hope that by reading the rest of this issue of *Getting Together* and by keeping in touch with or participating with our programs and work, everyone will more fully understand the need to form a national I Wor Kuen organization.³⁰

Through the statement, “this is written to announce that I Wor Kuen now exists,” the group is writing itself, as a political and social force, into existence, but it can only exist if they have an audience of readers and participants. They exist because they are able to narrate themselves into existence. Reading and writing becomes integral practices to the formation of their community because these practices allow disparate people to connect, “keep in touch,” and “participate” in I Wor Kuen’s programs and work. *Getting Together* sets out to unite people living in “all over the U.S. in New York, Los Angeles, Hawaii, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and every other Chinese community across America... With all our communities united we will be strong. Together with other oppressed peoples in America we will be stronger still. Together with all the people of the world we will win.”³¹ *Getting Together* seeks to unite people living in different cities who would not otherwise have contact with each other and sets up, in Anderson’s words, an “imagined community.” For Benedict Anderson, the utopian practice of the newspaper seeks to unify fragmentation, and elide difference, through the sense of belonging to a national “imagined community.” This imagined community for I Wor Kuen, however, is imagined beyond the framework of the nation. As we can see in the statement above I Wor Kuen attempted to produce a collectivity, and join “everyone” through the newspaper. The notion of community itself takes on a complex role in I Wor Kuen as *Getting Together* simultaneously articulates a politics that critiques the universalism of nationalism and is at the same time demonstrating the

need to unite disparate groups of people.³² Community in *Getting Together* is established through identifying with another person, having the Afro Am sister understand that their struggles are linked through class struggle, and does not consider how their differently gendered and racialized experiences might complicate the writer's notion of proletarian revolutionary consciousness and struggle.

The realist modality of translation in *Getting Together* was central to the suturing of "a linguistics of community." Asian American activists in the 1970s very much shared the realist approaches of the socialist realism that came into prominence in the Soviet when Joseph Stalin decreed socialist realism to be state policy in "On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations" in 1932. As a response to the aristocratic art produced under Russian Tsarist rule soviet socialist realism asserted that real and concrete depictions of the worker would bring about ideological and social transformation.³³ Realism was, for Soviet writers and intellectuals, the way to properly represent and achieve a socialist reality. Furthermore, as I argue in my first chapter, realist representations were tied to the racial liberal state formation during the Cold War period. Proclaiming their representations as reality, and in their capture of reality, the state promised that they could right the wrong of the social inequality they were able to capture on film. I situate the realist practices of *Getting Together* within the same episteme as the Cold War racial liberal state, even as *I Wor Kuen* was struggling against the racialized practices of the Cold War racial liberal state. Indeed, literary cultural practices are persistent and forceful entities to our political practices and institutions.

Through the practice of translation, *I Wor Kuen* is able to join men and women that would otherwise not join in struggle; yet, certain normative assumptions are reproduced through the notion that the translations are not only accurate but are representative of a whole group of

people. *Getting Together* is operating under an elision of the mediating function of form and its narrative mode in their assertion of a “true” Asian American subject that subsumes heterogeneity for a Third World politics that is organized around proletarian struggle. For example, the “Letter to an Afro-Am Sister” is predominantly read in a newspaper as a true experience of a Chinese person, who gives a “true” image of China. The English translation is accepted as a “real” and accurate translation of the original document, and leaves little room to ruminate on other possibilities of meaning making. Socialist realist features can also be noted in *Getting Together*’s images, captions, and testimonial-like articles, which are evident in articles such as “Story of an Immigrant Worker....” The beginning description of this article says: “The following personal account was sent to Getting Together recently. It relates the direct experience of one so-called ‘illegal immigrant’ ”. There are three pictures included in this article. One of a man loading a white van with boxes, with the caption reading: “...at the start of a long day’s work.” Another image is of a restaurant with two waiters with the following caption: “Inside Chinese Restaurant, New York,” and the third picture is of a man in a hat with the caption, “Resting at the Hong Kong docks.”³⁴ The image of the working man loading a van, of the waiters, of the dock worker all claim to offer the viewer and reader a real and concrete snapshot of Asian immigrant workers’ everyday lives. Together, the “personal account,” the images, and captions promise access to an authentic experience of an immigrant laborer. Even though the pictures and the stories are of different immigrants, the caption collapses them into a singular experience of “an immigrant worker,” suggesting that these stories are wholly representative of all immigrant laborers, and erasing the particularities and differences of immigrant life. The realist utopia of *Getting Together* homogenizes differences, and reproduces the universalizing logics of nationalism. Because realism is still important to their project nations stay stagnant, and their work is not

about changing the boundaries, but instead take territorial boundaries as fact, just as the work of translation is taken as fact. Later I will examine the ways Yamashita literally moves national boundaries in order to change the ways we imagine coalitional groups for social movement.

Another realist tendency of *Getting Together's* can be noted in the role of anonymity in the newspaper.³⁵ Anonymity in *Getting Together* functions to erase the process of mediation, and produces the newspaper as a neutral space and observer. Both authors of "Reply to an Afro Am Sister" and "Story of an Immigrant Worker" are not stated, and individual writers of I Wor Kuen are never named in the newspaper, and when there is writing by I Wor Kuen it is authorized by statements such as: "This is a statement by the general membership and central committee of national I Wor Kuen," or "New York I Wor Kuen." In signing off as "I Wor Kuen" they are naming themselves as a vanguardist party. At the same time, however, *Getting Together* is primarily composed of submissions, as I have mentioned earlier, and some of these submissions do indeed include names of the author, translator, and or the names of subjects in the article. The anonymity of I Wor Kuen and multi-authorship of articles from non-I Wor Kuen members, then, produces *Getting Together* as an unmediated text in which "anyone" can presumably submit, share, and dialogue with one another. *Getting Together* begins to articulate a complex dialogue between its readers and writers, in a way that strives to go beyond the articulation of the unity of nationalism, and contributes to an emerging construction of Third World politics. Yet, this seemingly harmonious interaction between the writers and readers are not necessarily the "bad facticity" that I discuss at the beginning of this chapter. Bernice Johnson Reagon writes that coalitional work makes you feel as though you are "gonna keel over and die," not live in harmony with difference, or consume differences for the sake of harmony. *Getting Together* begins to understand the work of coalition but instead produces "a linguistics of

community,” an idealized sense of harmony between readers and writers in an effort to establish unity. Differences that cannot be accounted for, comprehended, or that fits into I Wor Kuen’s unified proletarian and sense of “Third World” struggle does not fit into *Getting Together’s* utopia of fact. This is to say, *Getting Together* cannot recognize the importance of “bad facticity” for social movement work because it gets in the way of I Wor Kuen’s factual utopia for an idealized community.

I Wor Kuen cannot acknowledge and disclose the mediating practices of *Getting Together*, and instead imagines a project for social justice through “proving” that they can accurately and truthfully narrate the struggles of the “Third World.” They remained attached to realist narratives because realism

becomes a strategy for defining the social position of the author. To call oneself a realist means to make a claim not only for the cognitive value of fiction but for one’s own cultural authority both to possess and to dispense access to the real. Indeed realists implicitly upheld the contradictory claim that they had the expertise to represent the commonplace and the ordinary, at a time when such knowledge no longer seemed available to common sense... realists are often seen to take the self-effacing stance of the neutral observer.³⁶

The attempt to empirically narrate the Asian immigrant experience, for example, assumes a stable and rational knower, or author, as a “cultural authority” who, as a “neutral observer,” “possess[es] and... dispense[es] access to the real” world who has to do away with “bad facticity.” The category of Third World Woman emerges in *Getting Together* through mediated interactions between readers and writers of I Wor Kuen’s newspaper. Epistemologically, this realist logic presumes the ability to achieve an unmediated perception and narrative of the lives

of Asian immigrants, Asian Americans, laborers, women, and the people of the “Third World.” Similarly, the practice of translation presents the translator as a neutral subject who is most accurately transferring knowledge and experience. It presumes that *Getting Together* has access to an ontological reality, which does not account for the ways in which the newspaper, the writers, and readers, are interacting in a highly mediated mode and too simplistically presumes a correlation between the object of representation and the status of that representation. In other words, the situated arrestment of reality is not taken into account and the newspaper representations and translation practices are taken for granted as unmediated empirical realities that are transparently dispensing the original. The newspaper sees itself as an objective site, and in approaching translation through a realist mode there is a disavowal of a mediated world.

There would be a continuation of utopian social movement writing in the 1990s through the novel form. Even as I Wor Kuen deployed writing to discursively create communities and emerged new identities through the act of translation, in the effort to maintain their objectivity and authority, they could not acknowledge the fiction of their utopian practices. The inability to recognize how their practices are indeed mediating and fictive is limiting because it reproduces an investment in the empirical western logics of the nation form that ultimately upholds the sovereignty of the state and reproduces gendered and racialized norms. In other words, their utopia was still imagined within the framework of the nation state, which is the very thing they were fighting against. This logic of realist utopias dominated much of social movement literature in the latter half of the twentieth century which very much shaped the ways in which we have come to understand the “Third World.” The Asian American cultural nationalism of the 1970s grew out of traditional utopian Marxist-Leninist practices, but changed and re-forged these practices for a distinctly Asian American political agenda, which then continued to dominate and

influence the following decades of social movement thinking. Even though texts like *Getting Together* maintained normative assumptions about the nation state, their utopian writing practices constructed new political identities and formations at a particular historical moment, and were able to grow from cultural nationalism, in ways that deeply impacted Asian American politics in the following decades.

In the following sections I track how the utopian practices of groups such as I Wor Kuen carry on into the 1990s as a social and cultural force that informed and evoked various responses from later Asian American writers and social movement thinkers that could imagine utopias that are not dominated by the sovereignty of the nation form. More specifically, I will explore the ways in which Asian American writer Karen Tei Yamashita engages with the realist utopian imaginings of the Asian American Movement with a magical realist utopia. In response to Asian American nationalism, Asian American feminist writers have shifted the conversation around utopia, translation, and social movements through the deployment of non-realist techniques in an effort to outline and identify various Asian American subjectivities that do not reproduce nationalist forms of power. Asian American writers like Karen Tei Yamashita successfully use non-realist techniques to offer non-nationalist accounts of Asian American subjectivity that are not based on a homogeneous Asian American identity, but are based on accounts of fragmented and overlapping subjectivities. I read Yamashita's 1997 novel *Tropic of Orange* as part of I Wor Kuen's tradition of Asian American social movement literature. In other words, *Tropic of Orange* grows out of, and is a response to, previous Asian American utopian writing practices that were tied to realism.

Yamashita's literary engagement with social movement writing isn't necessarily "better" than *Getting Together*. I am not asserting Yamashita as a vanguard, but I do want to explore how

fiction and Asian American feminist forms of writing in 1997 is a Post-Cold War response to the constraints of realist utopian practices during the Cold War period. And, while *Getting Together* was formally tied to the protocols of journalism and the writing of facts, literature is not. Again, this is not to say that literature is a wholly emancipatory entity, and that there was or is a better way of writing about Third World politics and emancipation. What Yamashita's novel is able to yield, in a way that factual utopias of the 1970s were not, is the thematization of the protocols of realism that produced particular subjects. In other words, *Getting Together* could not recognize the ways in which it was tied to realist techniques and producing facts about Asians, Asian Americans, and Third World people in an effort to make them and their struggles legible. Yamashita's literary novel is more about an investment in fiction, not "good facticity" or a set of "concrete" instructions about how to have a more realizable and just future. Her writing complicates the relationship between literature and social practice, and the values assigned to "good facticity" and "bad facticity." Yamashita dares to undo national boundaries, and her utopia actively strives to be empirically unrealizable through the use of magical realism. Through this irreverence to reality and "good facticity," we get a utopia that can only be realized in language, and impossible visions of utopia that disrupt our realities of what is possible, which makes her one of the most significant utopian writers in our contemporary moment.

"All lies!": Karen Tei Yamashita and the "Bad Facticity" of Fiction

Karen Tei Yamashita is a writer and educator who was born on January 8, 1951, in Oakland, California. She lived in Los Angeles for most of her childhood and went to Carleton College in Minnesota. In her junior year she was an exchange student at Waseda University in Tokyo, and would then graduate with degrees in English and Japanese literature. In 1974 Yamashita received a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship to study Japanese immigration to Brazil and

ended up marrying a Brazilian architect, Ronaldo Lopes de Oliveira, having two children, Jane and Jon, and lived in São Paulo for nine years. In 1984 the family moved back to Los Angeles, where she wrote plays, screenplays, poetry, and novels. Life in Brazil would come to deeply impact Yamashita's work.

Even though Yamashita first arrived in Brazil as an anthropologist, she would leave with a different understanding of her work. In the process of researching and interviewing Japanese Brazilians and Japanese immigrants living in Brazil Yamashita found anthropological approaches to be limiting in exploring Japanese immigration and Japanese Brazilian life. In an interview with Jean Vengua Gier and Carla Alicia Tejeda, Yamashita tells them about her experience interviewing and working in Japanese Brazilian communes. When meeting the head of the commune, she tells Gier and Tejeda, he asks her, "Well, what do you do?" Instead of telling him that she was studying the oral history of Japanese women, she answers with a lie, "I write," fearing that she would automatically be placed in the kitchen and would never see or learn anything else outside of the kitchen space. "Well, what do you write?" he asks her. She tells him she writes stories. "Come with me!" he tells her, "Write this down; this is my life." Yamashita explains how she found his stories to be fascinating but she didn't know what to do with them. And, when she left the commune and spoke to other Japanese Brazilians they asked her, "What have you been doing?" To which she answers, "Well, I met so and so and he told me this really interesting story." And they said: "All lies!" This, according to Yamashita, changed the course of her work. She tells Gier and Tejeda that she

began to look at [her] project in a very different way. [She] thought, 'OK, if I were an anthropologist or an historian, I would have to read Japanese, and my Japanese would have to be more than just conversational; *I would really need to*

know when people weren't telling the truth. And because people were using a language that I was deficient in, they could control whatever they were telling me. I was very aware of that. That's why I turned to the novel. The other thing is, unlike a project in which I would focus on one area of these communes, one history, one story, one anthropological theme or idea, *I began to see an entire world.* I began to see subjects that really interested me: ideas of social systems, use of land, environment, philosophical questions; all of those things came into play. I began to know how these people were in *a very different way.* If I were to do something more academic, or a sociological study, I would have to prove everything. And I could not do that. But I knew that what I was thinking about was important enough to get down. How could I do this? It had to be fiction. I could create complex characters out of the many people that I met, and their oral histories—and their story could be embellished as they wanted.³⁷

In this brief explanation of why she turns to fiction, Yamashita makes the distinction between the will to “truth” that drives anthropological, academic, and sociological work and the work of “lies,” fiction, or “bad facticity.” As an anthropologist she had to “know when people weren't telling the truth” so that she could produce “one history, one story, one anthropological theme or idea.” In other words, anthropology demanded that she produce a cogent singular narrative from disparate lives. The will towards a “truth,” for Yamashita, limited her ability to re-tell the complicated and heterogeneous life worlds she was witness to, a complexity that would be left out of the “good facticity” of anthropological methods. This is why she turns to fiction. In fiction, she is not hoping to produce a “truthful” story or dispense the real, but recognizes that fiction, that which is rendered “bad facticity,” allows her to see and narrate “these people... in a

very different way.” For Yamashita, then, it is about producing a “different way” of seeing and recounting that is not about something that is not totally a “truth” or a “lie,” and can be “embellished,” and changed, and still remains something that is “important to get down.” Here, she is recognizing the importance of narratives that are not just about total accuracy. The will to truth oftentimes results in a definitive singular story that ultimately limits the ability to see or understand “complex characters,” and overlapping histories that stand outside of that definitive story. This is how Yamashita approaches writing differently from *Getting Together*. Whereas I Wor Kuen saw writing in *Getting Together* as a vehicle through which they could transparently and coherently narrate the story of U.S. hegemony and Asian immigrant oppression, Yamashita recognized that something important is lost in the representational practices of realism and its desire for a unified story and explanation. The interrogation of fact and “lies,” multiplicity, and heterogeneity reverberates throughout much of Yamashita’s work.

While Yamashita identifies as an “Asian-American” writer, her oeuvre refuses the pull to write in the service of defining fixed notions of “Asian American” life and experience. Her first novel, written in 1990, is *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*, a magical realist story about the effects of globalization on Brazil, its tropical rainforest, Brazilians, the U.S. involvement, and Japanese migration, among other things. Her second novel, written in 1992, *Brazil-Maru*, follows the birth and decline of an imaginary Japanese colony, Esperanza, that spans the time from 1925 until the 1950s. In 1997 Yamashita wrote her third novel, *Tropic of Orange*, a story set in modern day Los Angeles that narrates the lives of seven different characters. This novel is the object of my inquiry in this chapter and I will talk more about this novel later. In 2001 Yamashita wrote *Circle K Cycles*, which is a collection of journal writings, personal essays, and short stories that explore the relationship between Japan and Brazil and what happens when

Japanese Brazilians move back to Japan. Visually, *Circle K Cycles* does not at all look like a novel as there are pictures and pop art dispersed throughout the novel. While her four novels clearly grew out of her experiences in Latin America it is important to also acknowledge how Yamashita's work grows out of the struggles, practices, and articulations of social justice movements of the previous decade and nowhere is this more evident than in her 2010 novel *I-Hotel*, a text that strings together a series of novellas about the Asian American movement set in the 1960s and 1970s. Although *I-Hotel* is the most obvious and explicit story about Asian American social movements, all of her novels reflect a utopian strain, as all of her writing is about the imagination of emancipation in everyday life.

All of Yamashita's novels exhibit a utopian strand. Her novels include heterotopias that get played out in the Brazilian rainforests and alternative and mythical community formations. Her novels are peopled with ordinary people made extraordinary as they take on global powers that are supposedly beyond their control. All of these are utopian stories that experiment with literary forms and genres grounded in the fantastic as Yamashita explores the notions of community formation, migration, revolutionary time, geographical boundaries, culture, and identity. These explorations do not merely bind her or her readers to realist representations; nor do they bind her and her readers to the nation form. And, all the while she shows us how literary form and representations tell us something about the ways in which we imagine our relationship to the nation. Yamashita's magical realist utopian writing practices are, then, an effect of her life in Brazil, the historical moment in which she grew up, went to school, and worked. Her novels work to unsettle concrete understandings of national identity, canonical cultural forms, and geographical boundaries of the nation form that had been established by hegemonic projects and re-formulated and mobilized for Asian American politics during the Cold War period. Unlike the

cultural form of *Getting Together* that was attached to a realist and empiricist mode of representing and translating Asians, the “Third World,” and Asian Americans, Yamashita recognizes the work of fiction in forging novel notions of coalition, identity, and struggle. With this recognition she is also able to present us with a different way of imagining an emancipatory utopian project, which she renders through the use of non-realist literary forms. Although Yamashita’s utopia is indebted and is a response to the utopia of Asian American cultural nationalism, she is also indebted to Latin American novel forms of writing, such as magical realism. The following explores what Yamashita’s utopian project looks like and how she achieves her utopian narrative through the deployment of magical realism in her 1997 novel, *Tropic of Orange*.

“The Suspension of Disbelief”: *Tropic of Orange* as Magical Realist Utopia

Tropic of Orange is a magical realist novel about the overlapping lives of seven characters living in the Western hemisphere: Rafaela Cortes, Bobby Ngu, Emi, Gabriel, Manzanar, Buzzworm, and Arcangel. Rafaela Cortes, the caretaker of a house in Mazatlan and the mother of a little boy named Sol, is married to Bobby Ngu, a “Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown” (15); Emi is a Japanese American television producer who is dating Gabriel, a Mexican American newspaper reporter who is also the owner of the house in Mazatlan; Manzanar Murakami is a Japanese American homeless man, ex-doctor, and Emi’s grandfather; Buzzworm is an African American Vietnam Vet, an informal social worker and Gabriel’s informant and expert of everything Los Angeles; last is Arcangel, an immortal superhuman performance artist who travels north to Los Angeles to wrestle SUPERNAFTA.

Yamashita's cast of characters spans the space of the Western hemisphere but would eventually collide in Los Angeles, California—a city that some consider to be the largest “Mexican” city outside of Mexico and has come to dominate dystopian and apocalyptic stories of the present and the future. Rather than reading Yamashita's novel as another dystopian tale about Los Angeles I want to read *Tropic of Orange* as a critical engagement with factual utopian projects of the Asian American movement of the 1970s. *Tropic of Orange* is a continuation of, and response to, the ways in which Asian American nationalist utopian projects narrated, imagined, and understood the status of writing the utopian for social movement. I Wor Kuen was invested in practices of translation to produce a universal a harmonious community through the production of utopia—of freedom, emancipation, and social movement—as facticity. And, within this vision of a harmonious community of Third World proletarian subjects, there was no space for conflict, because that conflict would undermine the utopia and “truth” that this supposedly whole and unified community was imagining and fighting for. Cohesion had to stay intact, for I Wor Kuen, so that their claims to emancipation can be read as valid, possible, and inevitable. This is the kind of empirical project that Yamashita views as limiting.

Instead, Yamashita takes full advantage of the imaginative capacity of literature to produce a dream space in order to help and re-imagine the everyday politics of subjects, not with the aim of producing factual accounts and instructions for how to live a better life, but to provide “a standpoint of comprehending and living in the here and now.” This utopian “standpoint,” for Avery Gordon, functions as an “*extraordinary* example of how to combine complex and acute social analysis with a vision of how some people have lived and do live today that is a model for how all of us could live.” This “*extraordinary*,” not ordinary or realistic, standpoint holds onto “a strong sense of the past and the future... [and insists] that history is only ever made in that

conjuncture... [and it] must be tied to, indeed generated from, an uncompromising diagnosis of the deathly apparatuses of power” through an understanding that requires “ ‘something more than skepticism.’”³⁸ And, according to Gordon, one way the utopian may exist as “ ‘something more than skepticism’” is through “a few magic tricks” and “good magic” to produce “the suspension of disbelief.”³⁹ I take Gordon’s suggestion about good magic, utopia, and the suspension of disbelief seriously in studying how Asian American writers such as Yamashita engage with the realist utopian practices of 1970s social movement writing through magical realist utopian practices in the 1990s. Yamashita’s magical realist utopia does not want to be realized empirically. The utopia of Yamashita’s imagination exists within language and discourse and is invested in remaining in its status as fiction because her utopia has never been about a world to come or that could be realized—that is the work of factual utopia; rather, her utopia has a stake in changing practices, disrupting our sensibilities of how we experience the present, the past, the future, questioning our modern notions of time and space, and complicating the ways in which literature, as an imaginative and social practice, can help organize social movement politics. Yamashita dares to say that life can be better in ways in which we cannot yet comprehend or make real by forcing us all to suspend our disbelief for revolutionary social practices.

I read Yamashita’s novel as a magical realist text that is a response to the realist utopian social movement literature of previous decades, not because it is a form that is completely separate, different, and more radical than realism, but because it is important to understand the continuities and discontinuities of Asian American utopian writing practices in the latter half of the twentieth century in forwarding an Asian American politics. To treat magical realism as a wholly liberating form is dangerous because it would fail to critique magical realism as another

kind of Western literary form that is, as Fredric Jameson has suggested, a “peculiar new form of realism” that does not totally subvert common western constructs, and continues to produce hierarchy.⁴⁰ And yet, while magical realism may be considered a “peculiar form of realism” it is not merely, as Jameson argues, a “mimesis of reality,” which is the work of realism.⁴¹ So, for instance, I have argued that Asian American nationalist groups like I Wor Kuen were invested in producing realist accounts of Asian American lives, struggle, contestation, and in pure opposition to the dominant U.S. state. This ends up reproducing the nation state as the primary force through which revolution can be addressed. In other words, utopia in *Getting Together* relies on a fantasy of full access to a purely oppositional politics. Yamashita, on the other hand, does not narrate the utopian as something wholly outside of oppressive regimes of power. Instead magical realism allows Yamashita to purposefully reproduce oppressive regimes of power in a satirical way. As such Yamashita’s utopia is not obviously a utopia for a better future in a realist sense because we cannot yet recognize it or think it.

The use and definition of magical realism is complicated and has been co-opted, reapplied, and changed drastically from its original use. Therefore, we have to understand how the literary form of magical realism in and of itself lacks fixity and is a form that needs constant evaluation of the way it is being used and its political implications. In 1925 German art critic Franz Roh first coined the term “magical realism” to describe *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Dispassion, or New Objectivity, which were marked by paintings that portrayed altered realities but not magical realities. Roh’s use of the term “magical” was not used in reference to the existence of the fantastical alongside the real; rather, he applied the term to describe paintings of quotidian life, and emphasized the magic *of* the real world. Later, Arturo Uslar-Pietri, born in Lausanne, Switzerland, and raised in Havana, Cuba, applied the term magical realism to describe

the work of Latin American writers. When Alejo Carpentier used the phrase “*lo real maravilloso*” in his work, he again altered the meaning of “magical realism.”⁴² The 1940s and 1950s proved to be fecund decades for the proliferation of magical realism in Latin America as the mid-1940s marked a moment of change in Latin American fiction in which writers began to reject conventional, realist, and regionalist modes of writing that dominated in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴³ Borges’ anthology of short stories entitled *Ficciones* (1941) challenged the realist-naturalist tradition of fiction writing and instead extended the invitation to invent, not merely imitate, reality. Novelists such as Asturias, Yanez, Ramos, Carpentier, García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Vargas Llosa and many others followed Borges’ lead as they also drew on the Latin American tradition of writer as “social critic, as voice of its indigenous traditions, its historical past and political present and its vast and heterogeneous cultures.”⁴⁴ As such, Latin American writers in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Fuentes, García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, and Vargas Llosa surveyed and wrote about the dismal political landscape, which included a military dictatorship that had been in power in Brazil since 1964, the military governments of Argentina, Uruguay, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay.⁴⁵

Yamashita is very much following in this popular Latin American political tradition of novel writing; however, as an Asian American writer, she is also deploying magical realism in a uniquely Asian American way that speaks to her experiences in Brazil, Japan, and the U.S. She wrote *Tropic of Orange* in 1997, a moment that had witnessed the Third World Liberation Movement, the Asian American Movement, the invention of the “Third World” during the Cold War, and the fall of the “Second World” at the end of the Cold War in 1991. *Tropic of Orange* is a complex novel about many things; however, I focus my discussion of the novel on ways in which Yamashita employs magical realism to narrate her character Arcangel. Like *Getting*

Together, a key mode in which Yamashita produces her utopia is through the practice of translation, which instigates the creation of communities and the transference of cultural forms and knowledge; yet, Yamashita's mode of translation is not merely about translating languages. More importantly her mode of translation is not reliant upon fixed national borders, as it was for *I Wor Kuen*. Translation for Yamashita is about border-crossing, reconfiguring our trenchant knowledge of space and time in order to imagine a hemispheric social movement, and articulating the centrality of cultural workers in this new configuration. Yamashita peoples her novel with amazing characters that are all part of a hemispheric revolution not for the purposes of providing a model or manual for a society to come, but to suspend disbelief for a moment to allow for an imagination of impossible geographies, times, conjunctures, and subjects.

Translation as Border-Crossing

Yamashita's utopian narrative is not about a place and time that will come. It's not about being transported to a perfect world or a fetishized future. Freedom is not about creating a whole and united community. Instead, Yamashita's utopia is filled with people living with the contradictions of sexism, racism, and capital exploitations of our modern times. In her novel the poor manage to rise up and take on NAFTA; the homeless take over and occupy the streets of the Western Hemisphere, from Mexico to Los Angeles. Her utopia and freedom are about "want[ing] to be free, [by living and acting] as if you are free to live, right now, right this minute, in the midst of all the life-threatening forces arrayed and ready at hand."⁴⁶ Yamashita's utopia is not about the myth of a perfect and "whole" community, but it is about the desire for freedom and the ability to recognize moments in which we can live and act as if we are free in the face of "life-threatening forces." Modes of translation are still an important part of Yamashita's magical realist utopia, but function differently from the mode of translation in *Getting Together*. For

Yamashita, translation is about crossing and literally moving and undoing national, linguistic, cultural, gendered, racialized, and sexualized boundaries and borders that have been put up to separate and enfeeble us, in order to take on those forces that would want to kill the disenfranchised and oppressed peoples of the Americas. She changes our map of the world and gives us what Pratt advocates for, a “linguistics of contact,” as opposed to a “linguistics of community,” with which we can imagine new coalitions, subjects, geographies, and temporalities for struggle.

Contra to the “linguistics of community,” a “linguistics of contact”

decenter[s] community... [and] place[s] at its centre the operation of language *across* lines of social differentiation, a linguistics that focused on modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups, between persons of different and multiple identities, speakers of different languages, that focus[es] on how such speakers constitute each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in langue.⁴⁷

If we think about social relations in terms of a “linguistics of contact” rather than the universal and utopian notion of a “linguistics of community,” our understanding of social life can change to one that is a system in which different racialized and gendered groups are not separate, but continually interacting and conflicting in multiple “zones of contact.” In these “zones of contact” language users, speakers, readers, and writers are multiple and disparate. For Pratt, then, a “linguistics of contact” works through “processes of appropriation, penetration or co-optation of one group’s language by another.”⁴⁸ This concept of conflict and interactions within zones of contact is similar to Chicana feminist theories of the Borderlands. Gloria Anzaldúa importantly notes in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*,

The switching of codes in this book from English to Castillian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language—the language of the Borderlands. There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born.⁴⁹

The languages of English, Castillian Spanish, North Mexican, Tex-Mex, Nahuatl, and the Borderlands are not merely words people speak, but are produced, cross-pollinate, are revitalized, born, and die at “the juncture of cultures.” Language is important because it marks a “switching of codes,” and the contact and conflict of cultures. For Anzaldúa, the Borderlands is the physical borderland of the “Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border,” and the “psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands not particular to the Southwest.”⁵⁰ The Borderlands are “physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrink with intimacy.” The Borderlands are, such is Pratt’s “linguistics of contact,” a “scab,”⁵¹ or an “infected wound,”⁵² a “place of contradictions” which are produced by, and also create, novel linguistic, cultural, and social practices.⁵³ The “scab” of the Borderlands acts as a provisional closure that does not have the texture of enclosed skin, but is something that is always on the verge of being torn off and made anew. A “linguistics of contact” is not merely about language, but the relationship between language and the materialities of racialized, gendered, and localized embodiment.

In the tradition of Chicana feminists, like Gloria Anzaldúa, and other Chicano scholars and artists such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Yamashita finds the concept of border-crossing relevant to the study of Asian American narratives, histories, communities, identity and struggle.

Yamashita applies the borderlands to Asian American politics to illuminate the differentiating power of language and space in constituting Asian American identities. Yamashita has stated,

I don't necessarily think of *Through the Arc* as an Asian-American book, although I'm an Asian-American writer, and I don't have a problem with that. I think, though, that Asian-American literature is changing. It has to be more inclusive because the geography is changing, the map is changing. People are moving very quickly and over a shorter period of time, because of the globalization of the Pacific Rim economies. So I'm sure that Asian-American studies is going to be more inclusive, and its going to require more facility with languages—to address the Asian diaspora in the Americas. In order to study this thing, whether or not we call it Asian-American—means that we're going to have to know a lot more about it than just talking about the United States.⁵⁴

Tropic of Orange is not an Asian American novel in the strict sense of the term, which is to say that it is not merely an accurate and “true” narrative about an Asian American experience, covering “typical” Asian American thematics and issues. This is why she borrows from the common themes and techniques of Chicana and Borderlands writing. According to Yamashita, Asian American studies has to shift from the desire to authenticate Asian American experiences because this line of inquiry has been limiting and cannot account for the complex identities, experiences, and relations spread out across the Americas. Yamashita finds in Chicana/o frameworks of the borderlands a more relevant methodology for understanding urban, immigrant, and transnational experiences of Asian Americans, and cross-racial solidarity in a non-national sense. For Yamashita translation is about border-crossing because it allows her to imagine novel ways of fashioning a different dreamscape of space, time, and coalitional subjects

that cannot be imagined under the rubric of realism, “good facticity,” and the nation form. Understanding translation as border-crossing not only allows us to re-conceptualize Asian American studies’ approach to translation but also the work of social movements, political alliances, the “Third World,” and the shifting borders with which we live.

Central to this border-crossing utopia is the role of the performance artist and writer as translator. According to Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “the role that artists and cultural organizations can perform in this paradigm shift is crucial. Artists can function as community brokers, citizen diplomats, ombudsmen, and border translators, and our art spaces can perform the multiple roles of sanctuaries, demilitarized zones, centers for activism against xenophobia, and informal think tanks for intercultural and transnational dialogue.”⁵⁵ Through Arcangel, Yamashita seriously explores the multiple roles that performance artists can play as “community broker,” “citizen diplomat,” and “border translator” in a non-national utopian project that seeks to re-organize our imaginations to articulate “social movement in the general sense of the term: the ongoing building of an alternative civilization, with its own reason, its own home, and its own system of value.”⁵⁶ Yamashita’s rendering of Arcangel in particular is vital to thinking about translation as a border-crossing experience in order to articulate social movement with its own terms, reasons, and value.

The reader first meets Arcangel in a marketplace somewhere in Latin America, perhaps somewhere in Mexico near Mazatlán. An epic narrative voice introduces him to us:

*No one knew where he came from,
or how long he had lived,
how many years
decades,*

*and yet he seemed a child,
yet not such a child to be without season
nor such an old man to be without reason. (46)*

From the very moment we encounter Arcangel we are drawn into his mythical and epic quality. No one knows where he is from but he seems like he is from everywhere and says he “had come from a long way away, from the very tip of the Tierra del Fuego, from Isla Negra, from the very top of Macchu Picchu, from the very bottom of the Foz de Iguacu” (46). No one knows how old he is and he appears to be simultaneously ancient and young. His body is not quite human, and he has “weathered skin stretched like fragile paper over brittle bones.” He has holes in his torso, which he later loops steel cables through in order to drag a broken down bus (197-198). His skin is so leathery that he resembles more of a “gnarled and twisted tree, tortured and serene, wise and innocent all at once.” His dialect is unknown and he simultaneously sounds like a slave, an immigrant, colonial, and aboriginal, and takes on multiple personas: performance artist, wrestler, border-crosser, and brujo. Arcangel has great vision and could look out and see two thousand miles of frontier, and he has been travelling for five hundred years, the time span of Euro-American colonialism. At the end of the story he moves North with a multitude of people to take on SUPERNAFTA, a personification of NAFTA, in a great wrestling match. He was a “great confusion indiscernible to all” (46-47). And, even as he was a “great confusion” and “indiscernible” and people were skeptical of Arcangel’s seemingly magical abilities, they came to believe in him. Arcangel is a perpetual crosser of spatial, linguistic, and temporal borders. He is, in other words, an embodiment of simultaneous and contradictory space and time, and the impossible made possible.

This impossibility

... was part of an accomplished performance, but no one was ever certain whether it was just a performance...He was actor and prankster, mimic and comic, freak, a one man circus act... He did big epics and short poetry...romantic musicals, political scandal... Across the border, they had a name for such multiple types: they would call him a performance artist. This designation would entitle him to local, state, federal, and private funding. (46-47)

The impossible is made possible through Arcangel's work as a "performance artist." In an interview, Karen Tei Yamashita has acknowledged that Arcangel is based on Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a self-described

nomadic Mexican artist/writer in the process of Chicanoization, which means [he] is slowly heading North. [His] journey not only goes from South to North, but from Spanglish, and then to English; from ritual art to high-technology, from literature to performance art; and from a static sense of identity to a repertoire of multiple identities... [he] is a border Sisyphus.⁵⁷

Arcangel says and does things Gómez-Peña has said and done. Yamashita states that

the first time I saw and watched him perform and read his work, I was fascinated. I've had this sensation that, in Los Angeles, he has been, in some ways, rejected—I'm not sure. Arcangel is a literary interpretation of Peña. Arcangel's performance is grotesque, freakish, yet Christ-like, accounting for 500 years of history in the Americas...He takes the poetry, and also the political conscience and history across the border.⁵⁸

While Arcangel is drawn from Gómez-Peña, she does not do so in order to demonstrate how Arcangel is based on a real person. Rather, Arcangel acts as a "literary interpretation" of Gómez-

Peña's characters. Yamashita's magical realist exaggeration of Gómez-Peña's personas is more about the seizure of a mode of discursive production and performance to question the stability of reality. Kumkum Sangari has argued that marvelous realism is a mode that is "is attached to a real *and* to a possible. The seamless quality of this mode, the difficulty of distinguishing between fact and invention, brings an enormous pressure to bear upon the perception of reality."⁵⁹

Yamashita produces a kind of seamlessness between fact and invention in which the "real" and the "possible" cohabitate. In producing this seamlessness she refuses to read the marvelous and real as antithetical realms, which is how dominant empirical modes of thinking would approach fact and fiction.

If Arcangel is an allusion to Gómez-Peña, Yamashita is also acknowledging the ways in which SUPERNAFTA signals an "official" narrative of transnationalism. There is a self-consciousness at play here because Yamashita is aware that there are official critiques of nationalism—such as the transnational narrative of NAFTA—that are different from her own critiques of nationalism. Likewise, *I Wor Kuen*'s nationalism can also be understood as a mode of resisting official accounts of transnationalism, such as NAFTA. Though as a result, pressure is placed on *I Wor Kuen*'s nationalist model, because even as the group is critical of the nation form and transnational capitalist narratives like NAFTA, *I Wor Kuen* is ultimately limited by its own nationalist and universalizing assumptions of transnationalism. *I Wor Kuen*'s mode of transnationalism is through an understanding of cohering a "community," which lends itself to official co-optation by later transnational policies such as NAFTA. Yamashita's self-consciousness asks her readers to acknowledge the competing transnational narratives that are critiques of nationalism, such as the discourse of Third World (IWK), Chicana/o literary borderlands and border-crossing narratives (Gómez-Peña), and NAFTA's borderless world

(transnational capitalism). Yamashita suggests that there is a more complicated history to minority nationalism because minority nationalism and its critiques of the nation become tied to transnational capitalist logics. Transnational capitalism comes to align with minority nationalism's critique of the nation and crossing borders to cohere "communities" in order to articulate a utopian narrative of a borderless world and freedom that is tied to the market and profits. I will further explore transnational capitalism's false utopianism of a borderless world in chapter 4. For now though I suggest that *Tropic of Orange* reveals not only a more complicated history of minority nationalism, but also foregrounds and critiques a complicated relationship between nationalism and transnationalism.

Arcangel, much like Gómez-Peña, is a weirdly wonderful freakish performance artist who is changing our political conscience as he embodies and moves a five hundred year history of violence up North. Rather than being skeptical of "invention" and seeing "invention" as outside of our reality and only seeing "fact" as our reality, political movement for Yamashita is about re-evaluating and constantly changing how we understand our competing narratives. In other words, Yamashita produces the novel's own set of values around fact, fiction, and reality in order to offer a historical consciousness that complicates narratives of a borderless world and the seemingly stark distinctions between nationalism and transnationalism.

Revolutionary Space and Time

Central to Yamashita's political vision are coalitional politics and narratives of translation that is alternative to the realist translation practices of IWK. Through the interplay of time and space, Yamashita provides a different conception of the relationship between space, time, and "Third World" mobilization. The construction of our sense of space and time has been

pivotal to the practices of 1970s social movements, for example I Wor Kuen's Marxian notion of linear time, of a revolution to come, and *Getting Together's* spatial imagination and compression of a collective Third World community. This is why disrupting our trenchant sensibilities of time and space become so central to Yamashita's novel.⁶⁰ *Tropic of Orange* dreams up impossible geographies and temporalities in ways that dramatically point out the limitations of factual utopias that seek to be realized within the developmental logic of Euro-American modernity, which posits utopia as a matter of temporal progress.

Like Gómez-Peña, Arcangel is "heading North," and in his journey North he is literally dragging the South, its peoples and borders, up North with him. When Arcangel offers to help pull along a broken-down bus, people scoff at him, but then were amazed when the bus was

harnessed to an old man's leathery person, skin pulled taut across his bony chest and empty stomach, minute droplets of blood kissing the earth, dragging everything forward. It was as the burden of gigantic wings, too heavy to fly.

Such a commotion was aroused that no one noticed, either on one side or the other of the Great Border—that Arcangel and a broken bus and a boy and an orange and, for that matter, everything else South were about to cross it: the very hemline of the Tropic of Cancer and the great skirts of its relentless geography.

Televisa, Univision, Galaxy Latin America and local border stations congregated to eyeball the event. If there were a dozen local and national stations, there were a dozen eyes, translating to a dozen times a dozen times a dozen like the repetitious vision of a common housefly. Arcangel strained for this vision even though live television had no way of accommodating actual feats of superhuman strength. The virtually real could not accommodate the magical.

Digital memory failed to translate imaginary memory. Meanwhile, the watching population surfed the channels for the real, the live, the familiar. But it could not be recognized on a tube, no matter how big or how highly defined. There were not enough dots in the universe. In other words, to see it, you have to have been there yourself.

Arcangel, despite his pains, looked out across the northern horizon. He could see

*all 2,000 miles of the frontier
stretched across from Tijuana on the Pacific,
against the sharp edge of Arizona
and the unnatural angle of Nuevo Mexico,
sliding along the Rio Grande,
tenderly caressing the supple bottom of Texas
to the end of its tail
on the Gulf of Mexico.
It waited with seismic sensors and thermal imaging,
with la pinche migra,
colonias of destitute skirmishing at its hard line,
with coyotes, pateras, cholos,
steel structures, barbed wire, infrared binoculars,
INS detention centers, border patrols, rape,
robbery, and death.*

It waited with its great history of migrations back and forth—

in recent history,

the deportation of 400,000 Mexican

citizens in 1932,

coaxing back of 2.2 million

braceros in 1942

only to exile the same 2.2 million

wetbacks in 1953.

The thing called the New World Border waited for him with the anticipation of five centuries. Admittedly, a strange one, but Conquistador of the North he was. Ah, he thought, the North of my dreams.

South of his dreams, it had been a long journey. He could remember everything. Here was a mere moment of passage. As he approached, he could hear the chant of the border over and over again: *Catch 'em and throw 'em back. Catch 'em and throw 'em back. Catch 'em and throw 'em back.* It was the beginning of the North of his dream, but they questioned him anyway. They held the border to his throat like a great knife. "What is your name?" (197-199)

There are a few things I want to point out through this passage. One is that the experience of migration, as Yamashita sees it, is narrated as a magical realist process in which awe-inspiring acts and processes, such as Arcangel dragging a bus and "everything else South" of the "Great Border" up North with his old leathery body, occur and cannot be adequately accounted for. Migration, then, is not merely a demographic shift but is a process with epistemological ramifications. The news stations are trying to capture this magical moment so that everyone not there can empirically know and witness this event; however, the local border news stations

cannot capture it all, because “the virtually real could not accommodate the magical.” Yet, just because the news stations cannot capture this Great Border-Crossing event, it does not mean that it is not happening. It is the failure of media and technology that “it could not be recognized on a tube....[and] [t]here were not enough dots in the universe” to share and capture the event. This is the “bad facticity” that Avery Gordon speaks of with which we must be comfortable. The magical here is happening, even as we do not have the capacity to record it. The magical, being something that is difficult to record and capture is often times relegated to being a myth or untruth. In other words, the magical here functions as subjugated knowledge that would otherwise remain unseen and unrecognized by dominant realist modes of representation.

As Arcangel looks toward the North, he simultaneously sees “*2,000 miles of the frontier*” of spaces, borders, and places that have been unnaturally divided. The “frontier” is a space that is not entirely dominated by one regime of power, but a space that enables certain mobilities and violences. The edges of Arizona are “sharp,” and the angles of Nuevo Mexico are “unnatural.” The north is not a land of dreams, but is filled with “*la pinche migra,*” “*colonias,*” “*coyotes,*” “*pateras,*” “*cholos,*” “*steel structures,*” “*barbed wire,*” “*infrared binoculars,*” “*INS detention centers,*” “*border patrols,*” “*rape,*” “*robbery,*” “*deportation,*” labor exploitation, and “*death.*” This unnaturally bordered northern territory is filled with violence that dates back five centuries as the modernity of the North has been reliant on a five hundred year old history of conquest. According to Guillermo Gómez-Peña, the border is a “fissure between two worlds” it is an “infected wound” between Western civilization and Mexican/U.S. border. For Gómez-Peña, the “fractured reality” of this “infected wound” is the cohabitation of “two histories, languages, cosmologies, artistic traditions, and political systems, which are drastically counterposed,” and as a result of this cohabitation Gómez-Peña has become a “cultural topographer, border-crosser,

and hunter of myths.”⁶¹ Acknowledging the artificiality of borders, the figure of Arcangel does not forget the violence of the border as it is held to his “throat like a great knife.” While Arcangel can recognize the violence that has ensued as a result of creating and maintaining borders, Arcangel also demonstrates how geographical boundaries can still be changed and altered by cultural topographers, border-crossers, and myth hunters like Arcangel/Gómez-Peña. The “hemline of the Tropic of Cancer and the great skirts of its geography” has literally moved North with Arcangel. Characters like Arcangel and Gómez-Peña reveal how borders are sites of violence, an “infected wound,” as Gómez-Peña calls it, that has splintered as well as created a plurality of identities, cultures, and border-crossers. The “infected wound” remains a utopian site for the proliferation of “transitional identities in the making,” “new cultures,”⁶² and radical conceptions of social transformation even as it is an injurious place.

Through Arcangel’s journey North, the challenge to the New World Border and revision of geographical space is something that is “defined in terms of motion, flux, and relationality, qualities more typically associated in Western philosophical modernity with temporal experience.”⁶³ Yamashita accesses subjugated temporalities and territories that have been bounded within the 500 year calendar of the New World. Reconceptualizing space, then, also involves a reorientation of how we understand time. In Kumkum Sangari’s reading of Gabriel García Márquez, Sangari argues that Márquez’s

preoccupation with circular time and the rejection of linear time... [should not be] read as evidence either of his fatalism or of his primitivism... the absence of a single linear time need not be read as the absence of a historical consciousness but rather as the operation of a different kind of historical consciousness. The play of linear time with circular time achieves its cognitive force through marvelous

realism's capacity to generate and manage various kinds of alignments, tensions, and discontinuities between sequential and nonsequential time.⁶⁴

For Sangari, Márquez's circular temporality should not be read as a form of primitivism, which is how circular time has been commonly understood. Linear time, as it has been tied to the rise of narratives of the nation state, is associated with modernity, and futurity. Unlike linear time circular time allows for the reappearance of the past in the present. In other words, our present is not totally cut off from the past, and expresses multiple, circular, and converging temporalities. Time works similarly in Yamashita's text. In Montevideo, Arcangel performs as a prophet on the steps of the opera house and "predicted doomsday based on the ancient belief that doom comes in fifty-two-year cycles. The only problem was to decipher when the first doom had occurred and other dooms hence" (48). One of the first doomsdays in the Western hemisphere might possibly have "occurred in 1494 when Columbus discovered Jamaica or in 1498 when he discovered Trinidad and Venezuela," or when he "*discovered San Salvador, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic in 1492!*," or in 1502 when "Columbus discovered Martinique." From there, Arcangel tracks other possible days of doom that followed fifty two years later from those differing points of origin. The discovery of the North Carolina in 1524 by Giovanni da Verrazano, the discovery of Canada by Jaques Cartier in 1534, the discovery of the islands of California by Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in 1542, and the discovery of Plymouth Rock by the Pilgrims in 1621 (48-49). What marks doom for Arcangel are "*The doom of discovery*" and "*The doom of conquest*" (51). A linear temporality would only be able to narrate these moments of doom as something that is part of our historical past, not something that is still occurring, but as moments that we have moved beyond in our progress as a nation. This approach limits our ability to break out of the narratives of discovery of America and traps us in a five hundred year

history. For Yamashita, these moments of “discovery” and “conquest” set a precedence for following moments of doom in the Western Hemisphere that appear, in different ways, over and over again. Circular time allows us to track how these moments of discovery are moments of recurrent genocide that still haunt our present. Seeing doom as circular also allows for the reconfiguration of these narratives, allowing us to see them in a new light in a way that will emerge different relationships and alignments for political mobilization. In other words, Yamashita’s border-crossing practice of translation opens up an alternative tactical lexicon for decolonization wherein conquest and struggles against it are not merely relegated to the past but continues in our present.

Arcangel’s journey North is not a linear narrative of migration, but is a narrative caught up in Yamashita’s sense of circular time. Yamashita’s magical realist approach affords her the ability to play with linear and circular time in order to produce a “different kind of historical consciousness” that allows for the a range of temporal “alignments, tensions, and discontinuities.” When Arcangel comes upon this “thing called the New World Border,” he does not merely see the border as a single migration or movement from Mexico to the United States. Rather, he sees a “great history of migrations back and forth—in recent history.” It is not about his individual entry into the U.S. but a collective history of migration that includes “*the deportation of 400,000 Mexican citizens in 1932,*” the “*coaxing back of 2.2 million braceros in 1942,*” and the exile of “*the same 2.2 million wetbacks in 1953.*” Arcangel understands his journey North in connection to multiple histories of migration, and describes “the meeting of collective forms of time...and individual forms of time.”⁶⁵ Migration, then, cannot only be understood as individual, linear narratives of movement, but must be comprehended as part of previous and present temporalities.

This acknowledgement of the convergence of individual and collective time “produces that abolitionist time of both acute patience and urgency.”⁶⁶ And, according to Gordon,

[a]bolitionist time is a type of revolutionary time. But rather than stop the world, as if in an absolute break between now and then, it is a daily part of it.

Abolitionist time is a way of being in the ongoing work of emancipation, a work whose success is not measured by legalistic pronouncements, a work which performe must take place while you’re still enslaved.⁶⁷

The existence of abolitionist time or revolutionary time is crucial to Yamashita’s utopian narrative. Utopia for Yamashita is not an easily recognizable “successful” world-stopping phenomenon; rather, it is, as Gordon says, “a daily part of it,” and absolutely connected to what came before. It is about recognizing how everyday occurrences are always already part of larger systems and histories of subjugation and contestation. Arcangel sees in “the thing called the New World Border” as something that “waited for him with the anticipation of five centuries.” And, faced with a border that has been five centuries in the making, he understands himself as a “strange... conquistador of the North... The North of [his] dreams.” It seems surprising that Arcangel would identify himself as a conquistador, harkening back to the Spanish and Portuguese explorers and soldiers who captured the Americas for the Spanish and Portuguese Empires five hundred years earlier. According to Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “the conquistadors have been replaced by slick politicians and corporate businessmen, and their mercenaries by mestizo soldiers, psychotic Marines...”⁶⁸ In making this strange alignment with the previous conquistadors Yamashita draws attention to the ways in which those conquistadors were the point of origin for the New World Border, and its brutality, that is now awaiting Arcangel. However, Yamashita has Arcangel identify himself as a “strange” conquistador because unlike

the earlier conquistadors he is not interested in capturing the Americas for imperialism but interested in conquering the North for the purposes of living out his dreams of emancipation, stressing the cohabitation of dominance and resistance. This is one way Yamashita is able to co-opt and re-make a term that has been associated with a five hundred year history in which “Europeans and North Americans assumed the right to name everyone else.”⁶⁹ Even as Arcangel is bounded by the five hundred years of history through the New World Border he, as an artist, cultural organizer and intellectual, is re-defining the border and the North for his dreams in the “making of a society beyond Columbus.”⁷⁰

Imagining a Western Hemispheric Coalition

Unlike the “linguistics of community” of *Getting Together*, Yamashita’s magical realist novel produces Pratt’s notion “linguistics of contact” to imagine “coalitional politics.” Bernice Johnson Reagon has importantly critiqued the utopian impulse of cultural nationalism in “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century” in which she likens cultural nationalism to a “little barred room where you check everybody at the door.” Through this barred room everyone is checked at the door so that they can “act out community. You pretend that your room is a world.”⁷¹ The problem with the barred room is that there are “only folk like you” in that room and that room is “totally inadequate for surviving in the world with many peoples.”⁷² While Mohanty and IWK writers believe that a third world “imagined community” can preserve difference and build coalition, Reagon, much like Pratt, argues that community is “act[ed] out” through “checking” difference at the door. Coalition, for Reagon, is done on the street, not in the comfort of a home, a womb, or through “common experiences.”⁷³ Coalition is work that you do everyday that makes you feel like you are “gonna keel over any minute and die... you feel threatened to the core.”⁷⁴ But, you do this work so that “the barred rooms will not be allowed to

exist.”⁷⁵ Pratt’s “linguistic of contact,” and the border-crossing projects of Gómez-Peña, Yamashita, and Anzaldúa, and Reagon’s sense of coalition all articulate the richness of the meeting of contradictions in the production of a Third World politics that is not mobilized around a coherent sense of “community.” While *I Wor Kuen* relied on practices of translation that would harmoniously cohere an “imagined community” of the Third World, Karen Tei Yamashita’s “linguistic of contact” and border-crossing narrative is very much in line with a coalitional Third World politics that is constantly interrogating, disrupting and threatening the harmony of a “linguistics of community.”

The political identity and geographical demarcation of the “Third World” has been integral to liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s and continue to be integral to emancipatory utopian projects at the end of the twentieth century. Yet, Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* is an intervention into the ways in which the “Third World” has been historicized, mapped, and articulated. *Tropic of Orange* is a novel that continues the mobilization of “Third World” people; however, unlike *Getting Together*’s imagined community of the “Third World,” which emerges through a realist mode of language that was founded upon a stringent notion of linguistic difference and geographical boundaries of nations, Yamashita’s deployment of magical realism in re-orienting her readers’ concept of space and time emerges a hemispheric revolution that is not confined to the “old colonial hierarchy of First World/Third World.”⁷⁶ For Guillermo Gómez-Peña, the “binary models of us/them, North/South, and Third World/First World are no longer useful in understanding our complicated border dynamics, our transnational identities and our multiracial communities” in a post-NAFTA/post-Cold War America.⁷⁷ The appeal to “[make] a society beyond Columbus” is a demand for an understanding of life and communities outside of the boundaries that European conquests had set upon Western

hemispheric territories. In the post-Cold War moment, as Gómez-Peña argues, we can no longer understand our communities and locations through the binary of the First World/Third World binary because they “have mutually penetrated one another. The two Americas are totally intertwined” and the “complex demographic, social, and linguistic processes that are transforming this country... are being reflected in the art and thought produced by Latinos, African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, and Anglo-Europeans.”⁷⁸

Rather than understanding struggles in the U.S. as disconnected from other territories in the Western hemisphere, Yamashita demonstrates the ways in which Western hemispheric struggles are intertwined. The reader sees this play out in a scene after Arcangel has crossed the border when Yamashita gives us a snapshot of the city from Manzanar’s perspective. Manzanar is standing atop the freeway, looking down at the grid of the city. He sees “his map of labor” in which people are moving around Los Angeles, rushing off to work, and daily hires being picked up in trucks. And then, all of a sudden Manzanar looks out and notices a “new kind of grid”. Manzanar first senses this new grid when he looks out and notices that people on overpasses, street corners, balconies, and park benches are waving branches, pencils, toothbrushes and carrot sticks like batons, as Manzanar does everyday. These newly emerging conductors stop the movement of traffic everywhere. The grid of the city in this moment is not defined and changed by “inanimate structures or other living things but by himself and others like him” (239). The city changes because of people “like” Manzanar, people who are seeking to see and change the city in a different way. Here, it is through a collective practice of conducting the city, and creating music and sounds that otherwise would not be there. And, in this collective practice of conducting the city, the landscape of the city changes.

When asked in an interview about her use of the trope of mapping in exploring the “romance of transnational mobility” Yamashita replies, “I used the metaphor of the land moving, but actually it’s the humans who have moved. The geography has changed because humans have created this transition.”⁷⁹ The grid is susceptible to change by people and the grid alters again when Manzanar notices how “the entire City of Angels seemed to have opened its singular voice to herald a naked old man and little boy with an orange followed by a motley parade approaching from the south” (239). This is the moment in the novel in which the stories of all the characters, occurring across the western hemisphere, meet and converge in Los Angeles. This convergence significantly changes not only the grid and space of the city, but also the meeting of different peoples in the Western hemisphere for a collective rebellion in the streets of Los Angeles. The valley of the freeway

was no longer only ten lanes across or one mile long; it was becoming the entire city and bigger than a tiny island or a puny country the size of San Bernardino. And the approaching parade was dragging in the entire midriff (and maybe even the swaying hips, burning thighs, and sultry genitals) of the hemisphere. The rational forces of the North looked south at the naughty old man who waved his penis around and shook their big collective head. This was a gesture of war, was it not? (240)

For Yamashita, and borderland scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, territory and space are always linked to embodiment. As the homeless, the Los Angeles city dwellers, and the motley parade from the South, including an “naked old man” (Arcangel) and a “boy with the orange” (Sol), inhabit the space of the freeway, the freeway expands and becomes “bigger than a tiny island or a puny country the size of San Bernardino.” Together, this motley crew of characters makes up

something “bigger” or more than the recognizable space of the nation state. In other words, together, they exceed the logics of the nation because they cannot be recognized as a collective force within the framework of the nation. This collective force is a hemispheric force, not merely in geographical terms, but in terms of the people that inhabit that space, which is evident through the ways in which Yamashita personifies the hemisphere. The “midriff,” “swaying hips,” “burning thighs,” and “sultry genitals” of the hemisphere is being “dragged” in by the parade approaching from the south as the “naughty old man” irreverently waves his penis around. Yamashita playfully revisits the stereotypes of the north and south, with the north being “rational,” and the south as “burning,” “sultry,” exotic, primitive and “naughty” all at once. She does this not because she believes that the south is primitive, exotic, and sexual, but because she is making a commentary on the limits of the “rationality” of a North that can only understand the presence of the south in the north as a “gesture of war.” The south in the north, in this manner, exceeds the “rationality” of the North.

The coalitional Western hemispheric rebellion emerges through the performances of Los Angeles dwellers’ performances of conducting music and street occupation and the South’s emergence as a collective force of disparate peoples moving north to battle SUPERNAFTA. Yet, “despite the celebratory nature of Manzanar’s great laboring choir” and Arcangel’s northern migration to fight injustice, they are met with gunfire, and the military “might of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, the Coast and National Guards, federal, state, and local police forces of the most militaristic of nations [that] looked down as it had in the past on tiny islands and puny countries the size of San Bernardino” (240). Yamashita connects this event to histories of U.S. imperialism, violence and war that have been waged upon small islands and countries in the past and demonstrates how the U.S. state is treating the poor and people of color in Los Angeles

the same way the “rational” North has always treated “third world” nations and its peoples.

Yamashita imagines a social movement that involves disparate groups of people experiencing similar and different subjugations in the Western Hemisphere and as subjects of different colonialist and imperialist regimes. This links the poor, homeless, and colonized people living in the western hemisphere as a farce against the oppressive might of the U.S.. Viewing social movement in this way, as a Western hemispheric coalition, allows for the recognition of the existence, and possible formations, of novel non-national collectivities and subjectivities that is not accomplished through an “imagined community,” but a notion of coalition based on modes and zones “of contact,” not “common experiences” alone.

Amidst the military violence many die including Emi, Manzanar’s granddaughter, and many of the homeless and helpless communities in Los Angeles “ran in terror, surrendered, vomited, cradled the dying.” Manzanar watched and “recorded every scream and cry and shudder with dumb incomprehension” and witnessed “the rising tide of that migration from the south—not foreign to the ravages of war—never stopped, clamored forward, joined the war with both wooden and real weapons, capital, and plunder” (240-241). When the homeless and “well-intentioned” are forced to run away and surrender, the multitude from the south rises up to join the war, using “wooden and real weapons, capital, and plunder.” Yamashita’s Western hemispheric coalition provides a new cartography through which we can broaden our understanding of the relationship between political movements and identity in an effort to change our “conception of the United States as a discrete national entity, a social and political formation whose boundaries are clear, fixed, and traversed only in the most obvious ways.”⁸⁰ But Yamashita’s version of border-crossing as translation obscures boundaries and a notion of space and time. In doing so, she demonstrates the relationality between disparate people in the Western

Hemisphere. Even when the Los Angeles locals retreat, the south “never stopped” and continued to “[clamor] forward,” sustaining the war against U.S. military forces.

Toward a Third World Women of Color Feminist Politics

I discuss the limitations of Asian American nationalism by reading *Getting Together* alongside *Tropic of Orange* not merely to critique I Wor Kuen, but to situate Yamashita as part of the ongoing labor of Third World politics, beginning in the 1970s when Asian American nationalists joined Third World social movements through an engagement with translation practices. Integral to Third World politics were the ways in which Asian American nationalism organized through cross-racial and cross-national alliances. And even though they did so through translation practices that produced stringent notions of nations, borders, temporality and “good” facticity, I am not advocating that we do away with Third World politics and cross-racial and cross-national alliances. Instead, I am interested in how Third World politics is a persistent possibility that need not be in realist representations of third world people and experiences. This is the project with which Yamashita working. Yamashita’s magical realist utopian narrative of translation undoes borders for the purposes of re-imagining cross-racial and hemispheric collaborations in ways that do not seek to translate third world lives in a one-to-one mode of correspondence.

I am not arguing that projects of “bad facticity” are the only mode through which to think about social change. Most assuredly I Wor Kuen was able to effect great change by building alliances, implementing social movement practices, and taking part in a public Asian American writing practice. Following Avery Gordon, I have also found that we can no longer afford to ignore the work of fiction in imagining political movement. This does not mean that we only

retreat into fiction, but there must be a constant negotiation between “good” and “bad” facticity. *Tropic of Orange* is articulating a project—of translation, of western hemispheric coalition, of border-crossing, of literature—however, it is not a complete project, just as *I Wor Kuen* is an incomplete project. There is no complete project, and to think that there is a complete project is false utopianism. The work of social movement needs to pay attention to fiction just as fiction needs to be historicized and understood within the context of social movement practices.

By situating Yamashita alongside Asian American nationalism, Chicana feminist discourses of the Borderlands, Reagon’s coalitional politics, and Pratt’s “linguistics of contact” we can see how Yamashita is part of a continuing project that seeks to imagine what it means to have a Third World women of color feminist politic that can re-organize our imaginative, literary, cultural, and social practices. Yamashita’s Third World women of color feminist politic is not organized around commonalities or a harmonious cohesive community that is based in reality as we know it. Rather, Yamashita’s sense of cross-racial alliances is organized around “the difference between and within racialized, gendered, sexualized collectivities” that traffic within alternative notions of time and space in ways that cannot be fully comprehended by dominant modes of comparison that depend on the empirically knowable.⁸¹ A Third World women of color feminist practice is not about teaching us how to “[live] and [breath] in the place blinded from view,” nor is it about realistically translating “the place blinded from view.” Rather, this practice points towards our inability to see that “place blinded from view.” Through that inability to see, Yamashita’s model of a Third World women of color feminist politics moves us to self-critique and recognize how hegemonic power is conserved and reproduced. The “something” that is blinded from our view does not need to be actualized or realized or translated, but can stay in the realm of imagination, of writing and border-crossing

translation practices, because it draws attention to the limitations of dominant practices of cross-racial collaborations that depend upon “good” facticity and our inability to see.

¹ Avery Gordon, “Something More Powerful Than Skepticism” in *Keeping Good Time*, 191.

² *Ibid.*, 122.

³ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵ I refer to I Wor Kuen as a revolutionary nationalist group because they have acknowledged that they are not cultural nationalists. As revolutionary nationalists they were aligned with a Third Worldist politics, and did not mobilize solely around being Chinese. In other words, revolutionary freedom, not the preservation of Chinese American culture was the end goal of their nationalism.

⁶ Darko Suvin, *The Metamorphosis of Science Fiction*. In Chapter 3, “Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia” Suvin argues that utopia must be understood as a literary genre that has provided alternate realities that are critical commentaries on the present. While utopias can be understood as “ideal,” or “better” pictures of the world, recognizing that the utopian is a literary genre allows us to see how utopia is “a construct [that] is *located in this world*,” 42. Suvin defines the utopia as “the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis,” 49. See also Patrick Parrinder’s *Learning from other Worlds* for responses to Suvin. I understand the utopian through its literary form, and the ways in which the literary form of the utopian has shaped social movements notion of a “livable existence.”

⁷ For more on utopia and nationalism see Nikhil Singh’s *Black is a Country*.

⁸ <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v2i2/YAMASHI.HTM> An Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita by Jean Vengua Gier and Carla Alicia Tejada University of California, Berkeley.

⁹ Avery Gordon, “Something More Powerful Than Skepticism,” 122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ William Wei, 212-213.

¹² “Alex Hing: Former Minister of Information for the Red Guard Party and Founding member of I Wor Kuen” interviewed by Fred Ho and Steve Yip, 285, in *Legacy to Liberation*.

¹³ William Wei, 215 and Daryl Maeda, 22.

¹⁴ William Wei, 215.

¹⁵ Alex Hing interview, 295.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ In the *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* Darko Suvin discusses the ways representational effects the utopia and cognitive mapping is not a mode of escapism, but provides an alternative realism. British Marxist feminist Sheila Rowbotham also discusses utopian forms that are not escapist, but argues how utopian practice are pre-figurative politics, *Beyond the Fragments*, 146.

¹⁸ For more on a critique of Lenin’s arguments around vanguardism for the Leninist theory of the state, please see Michael Ryan’s *Marxism and Deconstruction*.

¹⁹ Vladimir Lenin’s *What is to be Done?*, 13.

²⁰ Lenin, 51. See Nancy C.M. Hartsock's "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism" in *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. by Sandra Harding, for more on different kinds of vanguardism and standpoint epistemology.

²¹ Ibid., 103.

²² Ibid., 108.

²³ Ibid., 109.

²⁴ Ibid., 55.

²⁵ It is worth noting the complex practices of translation, bilingualism, and collaboration in *Getting Together* as representing a break with traditional Marxist modes of newspaper writing. Unlike Lenin's utopian vision for an all-Russian newspaper in the early 1900s, *Getting Together* conceives Asian American culture as a coalitional, transnational and collaborative practice between Chinese and English writers and speakers. Viewing *Getting Together* as a bi-lingual and collaborative text that translated Chinese to English and English to Chinese, and allows different readers to read letters and articles that they otherwise would not be able to, complicates traditional Marxist approaches to the use of periodicals that see the newspaper as a text that would merely disseminate the vanguard's knowledge in order to bring about revolution. The notion of vanguardism is expanded through *Getting Together*, as revolutionary knowledge is being dispensed not only by I Wor Kuen, but through submissions from disparate communities of people.

²⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," 4-5.

²⁷ Ibid., 4.

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, Gayatri Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty have also significantly theorized the status of translation.

In "The Task of the Translator" Walter Benjamin provocatively engages with the question of translation and the role of the translator in continuing the "afterlife" of the original, in which a "pure language" is the unity of two different languages. Benjamin argues that through the translation "the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were. It cannot live there permanently, to be sure, and it certainly does not reach it in its entirety" (71-75). Rather than focusing on what gets lost in translation, which is what many tend to focus on, Benjamin finds the "mode" of translation productive and special because the changed text reveals hidden facets in the original, even as more obvious features of the original are rendered indecipherable. The original, in its translated form, is not a reproduction of the original, but is a "supplement to the language in which it expresses itself," and Benjamin sees this as "harmony" in which "the pure language" is exposed (79). This "harmony" that Benjamin identifies in the mode of translation is, as Lawrence Venuti has stated, "a speculative approach...linked to a particular discursive strategy," which produces "a utopian vision of linguistic 'harmony'" (Venuti 71). The utopia of translation here is envisioned as a speculative and experimental literary practice in which "the reader of the translated text is brought as close as possible to the foreign one through close renderings that transform the translating language" (Venuti 71-72). In other words, the "harmony" of the "pure language" that emerges marks a mode in which different languages and meanings can co-exist and be communicated, and the original text as well as the translation can be viewed as fragments and partial texts that reveal something that would not otherwise be read and known.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak makes the distinction between Benjamin's mode of translation as "a translation as freedom-in-troping, where a pure language emerges, and what she calls "Translation-as-violation," in contrast to "freedom-in-troping." In "Translation as violation" there is a mode of perceiving a language as subordinate. "The narrative practice sanctions this usage and establishes it as 'correct,' without, of course, any translation. This is British pidgin, originating in a decision that Hindusthani is a language of servants not worth mastering 'correctly'; this is the version of the language that is established textually as 'correct,'" 162. For Spivak, then, translation works in a similar way to Pratt's contact zone, in which unlike Benjamin, translation should not be theorized as unity of language, but as a deconstruction of the original.

Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* argues for a "nonsociological mode of translation" which are based on "very local, particular, one-for-one exchanges... One critical aspect of this mode of translation is that it makes no appeal to any of the implicit universals that inhere in the sociological imagination... [and] does not function in the manner of a scientific third term, for it has no higher claims of descriptive ability, it does not stand for a truer reality [and there are no] universal set of rules. There are no overarching censoring/limiting/defining systems of thought that neutralize and relegate differences to the margins, nothing like an overarching category of 'religion' that is supposed to remain unaffected by differences between the entities it seeks to name and thereby contain. The very obscurity of the translation process allows the incorporation of that which remains untranslatable," 85-86.

²⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, "Linguistic Utopias," 50.

³⁰ *Getting Together* July/Aug 1971, 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² See Jean-Luc Nancy's "Of Being-in-Common" for a critique of community.

³³ The Statute of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934 stated that socialist realism Socialist Realism "is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism." *On Socialist Realism by Andrei Sinyavsky writing as Abram Tertz.*

³⁴ *Getting Together*, Vol. 2, December issue, 148.

³⁵ For more on anonymity see Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* and Lauren Berlant's "National Brands/National Body: *Imitation of Life*." Warner and Berlant argue that abstract citizenship is attained through acquiring a new body in order to participate in the political public sphere. This new body, however, is white, male, and middle class, and transcendable. Whereas "minority" bodies are understood as too particularized, 113.

³⁶ Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism*, 13-14.

³⁷ <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v2i2/YAMASHI.HTM> An Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita by Jean Vengua Gier and Carla Alicia Tejeda University of California, Berkeley. My italics.

³⁸ Gordon, 187, my italics.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 131, 132.

⁴⁰ According to Jameson, magical realism is "a classic interpretive option... [that may] be read as peculiar new forms of realism (or at least of the mimesis of reality), at the same time that they can equally well be analyzed as to many attempts to distract and to divert us from that reality or

to disguise its contradictions and resolve them in the guise of various formal mystifications?” Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” 228.

⁴¹ David Mullan has argued that “magical realism” is a word that has been most commonly defined by the Western world in reference to third world texts associated with the fantastic. This means that in categorizing a text as “magical realist” we are also placing a particular paradigm and imposing a certain order upon the magical realist novel. With this paradigm in mind, what seems to be “magical” to the first world reader might be seen as being very “real” to a native of that culture. In identifying what is and is not real in a magical realist text, we must be careful of setting up a binary between what is “real” and what is “magical”, because to do so would be suggesting the aberrance, and otherness of the magical within the novel, creating the hierarchy Mullan, David. “Magical Realism: A Problem.” 1999.

⁴² Amaryll Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic* and Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, “Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s” in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*.

⁴³ Williams, 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵ *The Colombia Guide to the Latin American Novel Since 1945*, Raymond Leslie Williams, 7.

⁴⁶ Avery Gordon, 193.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 20.

⁵⁰ Anzaldúa, 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵² Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 37.

⁵³ Anzaldúa, 19.

⁵⁴ <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v2i2/YAMASHI.HTM> An Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita by Jean Vengua Gier and Carla Alicia Tejeda University of California, Berkeley.

⁵⁵ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “The ‘90s Culture of Xenophobia: Beyond the Tortilla Curtain” in *The New World Border*, 71.

⁵⁶ Avery Gordon, 129.

⁵⁷ Guillermo Gómez-Peña. “Introduction” to *The New World Border*, i.

⁵⁸ “An Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita,” Jean Vengua Gier and Carla Alicia Tejeda.

⁵⁹ Kumkum Sangari, 162.

⁶⁰ See Ernst Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope*, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” and Fredric Jameson’s Chapter 2 “Versions of a Marxist Hermeneutic: III. Ernst Bloch and the Future” in *Marxism and Form* for more on the differences within utopia and nonsynchrony.

⁶¹ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 37.

⁶² Gómez-Peña, “Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and Borders” in *English is Broken Here*, Coco Fusco, 154.

⁶³ Thomas Foster’s, “Cyber-Aztecs and Cholo-Punks: Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s Five-Worlds Theory,” 46.

⁶⁴ Kumkum Sangari, “The Politics of the Possible,” 172.

⁶⁵ Avery Gordon, 197.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Gómez-Peña, “From Art-Mageddom to Gringostroika: A Manifesto Against Censorship” in *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 60-61.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Bernice Johnson Reagon “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” 358.

⁷² Ibid., 358.

⁷³ Ibid., 389-360.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 356.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 362.

⁷⁶ In Thomas Foster’s, “Cyber-Aztecs and Cholo-Punks: Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s Five-Worlds Theory” he notes how The First, Second, and Third Worlds in Gómez-Peña’s schema correspond to the standard post-1955 Bandung Conference mapping of global social space, the three-worlds theory. In the introduction to *The New World Border*, Gómez-Peña suggests that the “old colonial hierarchy of First world/Third World” is being replaced by “the more pertinent notion of the Fourth world,” defined as “a conceptual place where the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas meet with the deterritorialized peoples, the immigrants, and the exiles” (7). Foster notes that Gómez-Peña “cites the collapse of the opposition between First and Second Worlds, with the breakup of the Soviet Union, as making it possible to go beyond the model the Third World and to define non-national modes of collective identity,” 63.

⁷⁷ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “The multicultural paradigm: an open letter to the national arts community (1989)” in *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 46.

⁷⁸ Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s “The Border is... (A manifesto)” in *The New World Border*, 43.

⁷⁹ In an interview Jean Vengua Gier asked Yamashita, “Your novels contain migrating characters and, in many instances, these characters are searching for a home and/or community, for example in the founding of Japanese agricultural colonies in your novel, *Brazil Maru*. However, in *Tropic of Orange*, the landscape itself moves, distorting the geo-political grid that defines the region. How does the trope of mapping allow you to explore the reality and the romance of transnational mobility?” To which Yamashita replies, “In *Tropic of Orange*, I used the metaphor of the land moving, but actually it's the humans who have moved. The geography has changed because humans have created this transition. I suppose it's fantastic and more radical to talk about the land moving, in terms of the artistic or visual effects of the book. But the real message is that people are moving. And that has changed the landscape entirely, because they've taken their culture and their landscape with them. I really have been aware of this because of the fact that I've moved so many times (for example, when Ronaldo immigrated, and I migrated back to Los Angeles). That's probably why I wrote this book; it was so striking to me that this change in Los Angeles had occurred, and that we were a part of that change. It was a way of documenting it, as well.”

⁸⁰ Robin D.G. Kelley’s “How the West Was One,” 123. For Kelley, the most obvious ways U.S. boundaries are traversed are through “immigration, international conflicts, movements of capital and labor...” However, Kelley is more interested in how we might explore alternative “streams of internationalism that are not limited to the black world” in order to broaden our understanding of black identities and political movements, (124).

⁸¹ Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson, “Introduction” to *Strange Affinities*, 9.

Chapter Three

In Search of the Most Authentic Black Subject: Black Documentary, Black Nationalism, Julie Dash, and the Post-Cold War Racial Liberal Moment

In chapter one I argued that the 1968 U.S. Cold War racial liberal state employed the genre of dystopia in the *Kerner Commission Report* for the development of state policy to attend to urban race riots. Central to the commission's dystopian narrative was the hypervisibility of black urban criminality, as well as unequal living conditions, through the use of documentary photography, which the state asserted could transparently and adequately represent black life for the U.S. public. The *Kerner Commission Report* approached documentary practices as the medium that could convey to a white audience, in particular, "a sense of the degradation, misery, and hopelessness of living in the ghetto" that would cultivate an "understanding or appreciation of... a sense of Negro culture, thought, or history."¹ In the moment of 1968 the documentary form was seen as a mechanism that could transparently render inequality for the solicitation of white sympathy for black inequality. White sympathy is solicited as the proper vehicle for ending racism and undergirding this notion is the idea that an authentic black cultural identity exists. In other words, the commissioners believed that the visual representation of black dystopian realities of "degradation, misery, and hopelessness" could be transparently conveyed to a white public. Furthermore, *The Kerner Report* contends that black life is not reducible to the urban ghetto condition, but that there is a black "culture," "thought," and "history" that can fully express black traditions and pasts. The documentary impulse here becomes problematic not only because it reduces blacks to ghetto inhabitants, but because documentary is claiming that blacks must and can be seen as something more. This would inevitably lead to a utopia of moving toward a better future through an appreciation of what is not reducible to ghetto life. This logic produces a ruse where black people are essentialized, and that there is an authentic blackness that

is better than the current conditions that are degrading their true cultural identity. *The Kerner Report's* resistance to black poverty, therefore, produces the very claims to defining black identity from a white perspective. In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which black feminist critical utopists in the 1990s, such as Julie Dash, challenge this very logic.

Chapter two explored the ways in which the racial liberal state logic of representation and authenticity comes to affect minority revolutionary nationalist groups in the 1970s. A central argument I made was that the emergence of Asian American revolutionary nationalism took up the utopian form to articulate fixed notions of space in imagining the “third world” as a galvanizing force for social movement. I Wor Kuen’s newspaper *Getting Together* is an exemplary Asian American nationalist text that takes up Marxist utopian discourses of the proletariat to imagine a cohesive community of “Third World” people. Tied to this imagination are fixed notions of geographical space. Understanding Asian American revolutionary nationalism’s utopian longings for a better world allows us to understand important critiques revolutionary nationalism made about U.S. state power; however, Asian American feminists such as Lisa Lowe and Kandice Chuh have also argued that minority nationalisms replicate hegemonic state logics of identifying subjects. This chapter further explores the ways in which minority nationalism persists in the 1990s.

In the previous chapters I also read Cynthia Kadohata and Karen Tei Yamashita’s 1990s novels as being dialectically linked to the moment of the Cold War racial liberal state. I suggested that Kadohata’s heterotopia provides an alternative utopian account to the realist and teleological dystopia of the racial liberal state and Yamashita’s magical realist utopia is a counter narrative to the realist utopia of minority nationalism that followed similar logics of the Cold War state. This chapter is an engagement with the moment of the 1990s—a period that was

immersed in multiple debates about authenticity and a period that produced women of color feminist narratives like *In the Heart of the Valley of Love*, *Tropic of Orange*, and one of the textual objects of this chapter, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*.

I begin this chapter by revisiting my previous chapters to mark the ways in which the 1990s signal a continuation and a break within the regime of documentary practices that flourished under the racial liberal state and minority nationalism of the Cold War period. While documentary has been a correlative to truth telling even before the Cold War, the 1960s-1980s period of the Cold War was an era in which documentary was supposed to transparently reveal truths about race, and racism, and offer a way to achieve racial equality. Unlike dominant state documentary images of African Americans, black documentaries under the Cold War period attempted to challenge stereotypical stories of the urban black poor from the viewpoint of blacks. Also, they differ from dominant state documentaries because black documentarians' duties had the utopian impulse to point out the problem of racial inequality, and to "define black reality," and beyond that, they were also tasked with another utopian drive. They were tasked with providing solutions for "a way out," to get the black community elsewhere.

This chapter investigates how the logic of authenticity and documentary practice remains a preoccupation of the post-Cold War moment of the early 1990s, but marks a shift from Cold War racial liberal state logic. The 1990s not only signals a change in "reading" documentary footage, as with the case of the Rodney King trial, but the notion of authenticity itself is productively brought to crisis. Black nationalist utopian narratives of an authentic black male subject persist in movies like *Malcolm X* by Spike Lee just as intellectuals like Stuart Hall called for the "end of the innocence of the black subject," or the end of the Black Nationalist utopian subject. Black feminist filmmaker Julie Dash enters this conversation by upending the

documentary form to re-vise what authenticity might mean for black cultural politics. Like the King verdict, Dash believes that documentary footage does not transparently reveal the “truth” or “reality”; however, unlike the King verdict she does not assert a better truth claim.

Rather, Dash produces a black feminist critical utopia that re-thinks the documentary utopian impulse of the U.S. state and Black Nationalism that embodies the critical utopia that Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan begin to theorize. Baccolini and Moylan argue that critical utopia demonstrates an awareness of the historical tendency of the utopia genre to limit the imagination to one particular idea. Authors of critical utopias reclaimed the emancipatory utopian imagination while they simultaneously challenged the political and formal limits of the traditional utopia. By forging visions of open futures, critical utopian writings developed a critique of dominant ideology and traced new vectors of opposition. My goal with reading Dash as a critical utopist coincides with Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan’s strategies of rethinking the utopian through “critical” utopia and dystopia. For Baccolini and Moylan there is potential in redeploying the conservative genre of utopia for feminist subversive politics and oppositional strategies because there’s a “self-reflexivity” present in critical utopias that “simultaneously challenge the political and formal limits of the traditional utopia.”² While the question of race is not central to Baccolini and Moylan’s critical approach, I situate my line of inquiry alongside their desire to critique the conservative leanings of traditional utopia and dystopia. In challenging the “formal limits” of utopia, Dash also challenges racist and sexist norms that have accompanied those traditional forms.

I argue that Dash’s black feminist critical utopia emphasizes speculative temporalities to critique Black Nationalist utopian linear temporalities that reproduce politics driven by a desire to represent black authenticity (e.g. the figure of the black male revolutionary subject as the telos

for black cultural politics), which serves to reproduce conditions of inequality. By speculative temporality I mean that Dash is not attached to a sense of time that unfolds neatly and culminates in a triumphant moment for the hero. Dash's speculative temporality — as seen through flashbacks, the breaking of the tempo in a scene, slow motion and dissolves, the mixing of past and present in one moment, and overlapping images in the film — offers a story of multiple and intersecting lives and experiences, which are told through Dash's manipulation of temporality. In doing so, Dash struggles against utopian ties to producing new norms of authentic blackness and offers a different relationship to the future that contradict the ways in which the liberal U.S. State, traditional black documentary, and Black Nationalism are tied to notions of authenticity that reproduce the conditions of inequality.

Representational politics of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s viewed the camera as having the capacity to reproduce authentic experiences of oppressed minorities and as having the capability to provide transparent accounts of U.S. racial inequality and solutions to that inequality. The desire for authenticity and documentary aesthetics has organized a wide range of political positions and movements as diverse as the Black Arts movement³, black documentary film, and Blaxploitation films of the 1970s. While the Black Arts movement was an aesthetic movement that was focused on poetics, not documentary, there was still a demand for art that “would actually reflect black life and its history.”⁴ The 1960s-1970s were peak years in black filmmaking in the context of a changing U.S. liberal state that called for realist strategies in dealing with racial conflict. The 1990s, however, met the question of documenting the real or authentic subjects in much more disparate ways, as women of color feminists and queers of color critiqued the production of authentic subjectivity. Blackness, they proposed, existed in all kinds of different forms, and as such, a critique of essentialism must be established. There is an

assumption within the drive toward authenticity that a group can be cohered, which will then lead to a utopian revolutionary moment; however, women of color feminism and queer of color critique would argue that we must critique this logic of authenticity that is tied to essentialism. But, the problem is not that there needs to be more subjects, or that there are not enough subjects available; the problem lies within the logic of authenticity. While women of color feminists and queer of color critiqued the production of minority male subjects as the authentic subject created for change, this critique does not move to assert more revolutionary subjects embodied by more women, races, or sexualities. To offer more authenticity reproduces conditions of inequality, and instead there must be a critique of liberalism's reliance on the authenticity of political, cultural, and social life as the means for social change. As Kendall Thomas has illuminated,

In the retreat to a heterosexist conception of black identity, the jargon of racial authenticity does not repudiate but instead relies on the very racism from which it purports to declare its independence, which it merely transposes into a darker, homophobic key. In this respect, the heteronormative vision of racial identity that would exclude the expression of sexual difference among African Americans does not exorcise but rather incorporates the ideology of white supremacy into the very body of black America, and with it, the phobic conceptions of black sexuality *as such* that white supremacy has always insinuated.⁵

Dash is not choosing or promoting the authenticity of a black female subject as a solution to the problem of inequality because to do so would be reproducing the ideology of white supremacist structures that black feminists like Dash are seeking to upend. Rather, Dash's speculative temporality disrupts and critiques the formal logics of time that produce notions of authentic

subjects to change the formal logics that reproduce power and social inequality. I will expand on this argument in my reading of Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* at the end of the chapter.

Significantly, the Rodney King beating in 1991 and its subsequent trial in 1992 led to another racial crisis and unrest that rivaled the riots of 1960s. Almost three decades after the racial crisis and uprisings of the 1960s arose another pivotal moment of urban unrest around the beating of Rodney King. Concomitant to this event emerged a proliferation of cultural production, interpretations, and representational practices. This event, I argue, would come to open questions around documenting "reality" and authenticity across the nation, but more specifically for African American cultural politics. And, as a result, critiques of black representation and authenticity abound within academia, popular black culture, and the post-Cold War U.S. racial liberal state.

Like most people across the country at the time I, as an eleven year-old child living in Long Beach, California, would see the image of the beating of Rodney King being played over and over again on T.V. The video, filmed by a local resident George Holliday, captures a moment on March 3, 1991 in which Rodney King is surrounded by several LAPD police officers at the end of a high-speed chase in the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles, California. Holliday's video begins with Rodney King being tased by Sergeant Stacey Koon. In the video, King is on the ground, he then rises and moves towards another police officer, who then hits King with a baton on the head. Two police officers then continue to hit King with their batons while King is on the ground.

Under the logic of the racial liberal state, this video should have served as an adequate representation of a dystopia in which a black man, Rodney King, is on the ground, being continually beaten, and tased by several white police officers. This is what the viewer sees

because this is what the camera captures. Under the documentary logic of the Cold War racial liberal state the viewer is told to read Rodney King as a victim of police brutality and violence. In other words, Holliday's video shows us a "real" moment of inequality and injustice. However, the "defense attorneys for the police in the Rodney King case made the argument that the policemen were endangered and that Rodney King was the source of that danger."⁶ On April 29, 1992, the police officers were acquitted. This moment marks a significant shift in the modalities of seeing under the Post-Cold War racial liberal state. Whereas under the Cold War racial liberal state the Rodney King video would serve as a vehicle that captures a moment in which a black man is a victim of white racism, the Post-Cold War racial liberal state tells us to interpret the video footage as an instant in which Rodney King, a black man, is in actuality a threat to the white police officers, and potentially the whole community.

While snapshots of the King footage mirror the images in *The Kerner Commission Report* Holliday's video is, in 1992, *interpreted* by the police's attorney and the Simi Valley courtroom jurists as a moment in which the white officers were only protecting themselves against the possible violence of King. Judith Butler astutely asks, "How do we account for this *reversal* of gesture and intention in terms of a racial schematization of the visible field?"⁷ In other words, how is it that a group of white officers beating a black man are then seen as victims? How is it that the attorney is able to take away the jurists' sympathy for King and invoke sympathy for the officers on trial? According to Butler,

the jurors came to see in Rodney King's body a danger *to* the law, then this 'seeing' requires to be read as that which was culled, cultivated, regulated—indeed, policed—in the course of the trial. This is not a simple seeing, an act of direct perception, but the racial production of the visible, the workings of racial

constraints on what it means to “see.” Indeed, the trial calls to be read not only as instruction in racist modes of seeing but as a repeated and ritualistic production of blackness... This is a seeing which is a reading, that is, a *contestable* construal, but one which nevertheless passes itself off as “seeing,” a reading which become for that white community, and for countless others, the same as seeing.⁸

This way of seeing “implicat[es] the defense attorneys in a *sympathetic* racist affiliation with the police, inviting the jurors to join in that community of victimized victimizers.”⁹ The jurists are asked to see King’s dangerous black body as a threat to whiteness, and the white community. Rather than producing sympathy for the beaten black body, with which Cold War racial liberal logics of *The Kerner Report* sympathized, in this post-Cold War moment, there is a reversal in which sympathy for the white officers is what leads to their acquittal. This sympathy for the police officers, by the jurors and by the attorney, is predicated upon a new mode of “seeing” documentary footage, which distinctly marks a break with the logics of the U.S. racial liberal state.

I argue, then, that while the U.S. racial liberal state rationalized documentary practices and forms as having the ability to transparently represent inequality and the authentic lives and histories of African Americans, the 1990s marks a different moment in which visual technologies are no longer merely treated as transparent accounts of reality. In the discourse surrounding the Rodney King beating, under the post-Cold War racial liberal state in 1992, there is an assertion for the need for the interpretation of documentary visual practices in order to reclaim state power. This moment witnessed a spread in video surveillance and an increase in amateur video in which everyone with a camera— not just the state, professionals, or institutions— could record anything they see if they had a camera and produce their own documentaries, or versions

of reality. The King trial can very much be read as the state's response and assertions as the preeminent authority and judge of truth and justice. In other words, in 1992, documentary and visual texts no longer represented a transparent account of the real as it did with *The Kerner Report*; instead, visual technologies were seen as needing institutions to interpret and tell its viewers how to understand the truth, or the authenticity, of what the viewer was seeing. The police officers were acquitted precisely because viewers were told to not believe what they were seeing—white police officers brutally beating a black man. Instead, viewers were told that Rodney King controlled the situation, presented a threat to the police officers, and that the officers acted in “self-defense.”¹⁰

In studying the shift in the logics of reading documentary practices, I seek to track a genealogy of the state to read for the ways the state engages with cultural forms to produce its own rationality. To elaborate, *The Kerner Report* employs the dystopian genre in order to produce a narrative of the racial liberal state as having the authority to represent the reality of inequality, and therefore, as the authority on resolving racism. Reading state texts such as *The Kerner Report* as a cultural text that employs the literary genre of dystopia reveals the ways in which state logics gains the status of rationality. Understanding *The Kerner Report* as a cultural text that employs literary genres and forms such as dystopia, then, reveals the ways in which cultural productions are employed in order to produce a narrative of the racial liberal state as the leader of the free world. Situating this chapter, a chapter about the moment of 1991, alongside 1968 allows me to understand the ways cultural formations, such as *The Kerner Report*, are turned into rational logics of the U.S. state. As we can see through the Rodney King trials, the post-Cold War racial liberal state of the 1990s is no longer operating under the same rationality of transparent visual representation as the 1967 U.S. racial liberal state. The Post-Cold War

racial liberal state instead employs the dystopian image of the King beating to argue against the transparency of meaning for documentary footage. In other words, the dystopia is not the nightmare for King—the nightmare of a black man being brutally beaten because of white racism. Instead, the dystopian narrative the jurors are being asked to see is the threat of the black male subject—a threat against which the Post-Cold War racial liberal state argues that it can protect innocent U.S. citizens. The Rodney King trial introduced a different argument to the conversation around representation and authenticity in 1992 as documentary footage was no longer transparently revealing the truth, but instead called for interpretation by the court. This was not, however, the only mode of understanding documentary practices in the 1990s.

Black filmmakers in the 1990s were very much at the forefront of interpreting and re-framing black representational politics in a post-Cold War moment that no longer strictly upheld traditional logics of documentary and truth. Just as they did in the 1960s, black filmmakers in the 1990s continued to actively engage with the questions of documentary, representation, and authentic subjects, albeit in disparate ways. This is the focus of this chapter. This chapter studies the ways in which black filmmakers in the 1990s take up the question of authenticity and documentary. First, I will track the emergence and peak of black documentary in the 1960s through to the 1980s to investigate the question of representing black authenticity in the Cold War racial liberal moment. Second, I will study the 1990s as a moment that saw a burgeoning cohort of black filmmakers that questioned notions of authenticity, representational practices, and form in disparate ways. For some, like Spike Lee and John Singleton, documentary and realist practices of Black Nationalism remained a stronghold for interpreting black politics. In his epic film *Malcolm X*, for example, Spike Lee borrows from minority nationalist utopian production of black authenticity through the black male subject. For black feminists filmmakers

like Julie Dash, documentary is not so cut and dry. I will end the chapter by exploring how Dash's significant 1991 film *Daughters of the Dust* is a refusal of the documentary form and is a refusal of what Stuart Hall calls, "the innocence of the essential black subject." Reading Dash's marginalized text as a refusal of documentary form and the essential black subject helps to read for the uneven consequences of projects of authenticity that have been produced by the cultural forms of the state, black documentary, and Black Nationalism.

As part of a genealogy of black documentary, I am interested in the discontinuities between the dystopian and utopian forms of black documentary, and black feminist films like *Daughters*. Furthermore, I am interested in the questions around authenticity that are opened by black documentary and Dash. Even as Dash was trained as a documentary filmmaker in her earlier career, and moved to the West Coast to work on narrative film, she represents a break with traditional black documentary film practices and its ties to authenticity. I read *Daughters* as a response to black filmmaking practices that were deeply entrenched in the logics of authenticity which were core values of racial liberalism and minority nationalism's mediation of U.S. capitalist culture and social formation in the Cold War period.

Projects of Black Authenticity, The Cold War Racial Liberal State, Black Documentary and Black Nationalism: A Brief Genealogy of Black Documentary Film Practices, 1960-1980

In order to better understand the black documentary traditions from which 1990s filmmakers Spike Lee and Julie Dash draw upon, as well as depart from, this next section provides a brief genealogy of black documentary film practices from the 1960s to the 1990s. Julie Dash is part of a complicated lineage of black filmmakers who have long asked questions about who can speak for the black community, how to best represent the community's problems, and how to resolve the community's problems. To understand Dash's black feminist critical

utopia that necessitates, what Stuart Hall has called, the “end of the innocence of the black subject or the end of the innocent notion of an essential black subject,” it is important to understand the ways in which the “innocence” of the black male subject emerged in black documentary film as the most authentic and powerful subject for black cultural politics.

Filmmakers and critics in the U.S., and other Western industrial nations have referred to “documentary” film as a form of democratic and social pedagogy since the late 1920s. In 1929, pioneering Scottish documentary maker John Grierson supposedly coined the term “documentary” to describe non-fiction film “as the ‘creative treatment of actuality.’” British documentary filmmaker, film historian and critic, Paul Rotha asserts that the “essence of the documentary method is its ‘intellectual ability’ to draw out the ‘meaning *behind* the thing and the significance *underlying* the person.”¹¹ From its inception documentary film practices have been rooted in the belief that documentary had the ability to represent actuality, get to the truth, and display an authenticity that is not easily identifiable. Documentary came to be treated as a democratic form and social pedagogy because “[i]ts *aesthetic* of truth—of objectivity, authenticity, accuracy, spontaneity, exposure, and free speech—has made documentary an important crucible of responses to this perceived crisis of democracy, and a crucible, as well, of the role of the intellectual in mediating between dominant and oppressed groups, between state and people.”¹² It is important to note that there is an “aesthetic” of “objectivity,” “authenticity,” and “accuracy” that comes to “mediate” the “crisis of democracy,” and “dominant and oppressed groups.” Tracking the changing aesthetics of documentary practices helps track how objectivity— for the state, for minority nationalism, for black cultural politics—is being constituted.

What is particularly distinct about the 1960s is that the “objective,” “authentic,” and “accurate” aesthetics of documentary becomes explicitly deployed by the U.S. racial liberal state to 1) represent the unequal living conditions and lives of African Americans; 2) point out a history of white racism in the U.S.; and 3) provide a solution to racial inequality by appealing to white sympathy. Although the state is mediating racial crisis through the aesthetic of the documentary form of *The Kerner Report*, and because documentary is granted an inherent “objectivity” and “authenticity,” state documentary appears as an unmediated text and, as a transparent and linear account of urban black life. As *The Kerner Report* argued, witnessing, understanding, and appreciating “Negro culture, thought, or history” was important because the white-oriented mass media has historically underrepresented the black urban masses, and has failed to present multiple images of Black Americans, resulting in the exclusion of African Americans from the mainstream. As a result, the Commission found that African Americans’ exclusion led to their social alienation and political frustration, which in turn led to the disruptive urban riots. To prevent urban uprisings the Commission found that the media needed to change its white orientation, increase black representation, and present more positive and accurate images of African Americans. The Kerner Commission’s mandate led to corporate-backed initiatives by network television producers of entertainment, news, and advertisements that would more adequately represent the black community.¹³ As a response to the urban race riots of the 1960s, the *Kerner Commission Report* emerged as the official state response to the problem of black inequality in the U.S. The racial liberal state dystopia of the *Kerner Commission Report* rationalized the logic that proper representations of black subjects would quell black unrest and end racial inequality.

In the same period, black documentaries¹⁴ also emerged as a significant cultural practice. Television became an incredibly important venue for African American documentary in response to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) call for more public affairs programming that would also address the experience and concerns of African Americans. The FCC had for many years been assailed by political activists, picketing, sit-ins, and boycotting that called for programs that were germane to African Americans. Following World War II, "television became the leading sponsors of documentaries."¹⁵ Over three dozen documentaries on topics related to African Americans were produced from 1963 through the summer of 1968.¹⁶ Similar to state documentary practices, black documentaries also aimed to depict the realities of urban black life and to "define black reality"; however, black documentarians sought to do so through the production of images of African Americans *by* African Americans. Black documentaries, then, were viewed as projects through which African Americans could articulate their own experiences to counter dominant narratives of the media and the state. Unlike state documentaries that tended to treat the documentary of African American communities as an opportunity to learn about and view the lives of the "other" of urban black life, black documentaries emphasized, according to Cutler and Klotman,

the ties between the makers and their subjects. Rather than using documentary as a form of visual anthropology that investigates 'the other,' African American documentarians tend to express an identification with their subjects and a sense of shared concerns. Thus, the impulse to explore 'the other' is virtually absent from African American documentary, as is the anthropological gaze of so much mainstream nonfiction work. Instead of defining antinomies between the outsider film/videomaker and the insider subject... African American documentaries

illuminate communal values and subjectivities. By focusing on films about African Americans made by African Americans.¹⁷

In other words, Cutler and Klotman see the distinct value in black documentary work because there is a reciprocal relationship between the filmmaker and the film's subject. The subjects in black documentaries are not "othered," as they are in *The Kerner Report*. Black subjects in black documentaries are not merely on display to teach white Americans about poor black Americans, nor is the objective to shore up white sympathy.

Instead, black documentary sought to challenge mainstream stereotypes of African Americans and strove for self-expression. For example the *Black Journal*, the first nationally broadcast television series, was designed to display the concerns of, and for, the black community beginning in June 1968, the same year *The Kerner Report* called for an increase in African American representation. With William Greaves acting as executive producer, *Black Journal* sought to provide "much more than an expose for the white audience... [and] was conscious of the educational function of documentary filmmaking for a black television audience."¹⁸ According to William Greaves,

a lot of documentary film movement—filmmaking from a black perspective—are films that are weapons in the struggle for freedom, for equality, for liberation and self-expression, and all those human rights... these films tend to agitate... they're activist, advocacy-oriented productions.¹⁹

For filmmaker Michelle Parkerson documentary was a new "political tool," and for Alonzo Crawford, film had the power to "raise social consciousness... we went to war, and... we used the camera."²⁰ William Greaves actively called for socially engaged black documentaries that worked toward the following goals: to "define black reality, pointing to a problem or a struggle;

pointing to a problem or a struggle; explain how and why the situation evolved; and most importantly, suggest a way out.”²¹ Describing Greaves’ goals, filmmaker St. Clair Bourne stated,

If you didn’t do this, then you were really derelict in your duty... It did not have to be *the* way out, but you had to show people trying to attempt to resolve the difference... We could actually get inside and show a direction out.²²

Unlike dominant state documentary images of African Americans, the new black documentaries attempted to challenge stereotypical stories of the urban black poor. Also, they differ from dominant state documentaries because black documentarians’ duties had the utopian impulse to point out the problem of racial inequality, and to “define black reality,” and beyond that, they were also tasked with providing solutions for “a way out,” and to get the black community somewhere else.

These calls for “defining black reality,” “pointing out a problem,” and “suggest[ing] a way out” demonstrates the ways in which documentaries like *Black Journal* were highly influenced by Black Power and Black Nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s. I argue that the “duties” and assumptions of black documentary closely align black documentary with minority nationalist utopian practices that I discuss in Chapter 2. While the *Kerner Commission Report* employed documentary photography to narrate the dystopia of urban crisis and racial segregation in the U.S., documentary would be taken up by black filmmakers of the post-war period to produce utopian visions of an authentic black experience for black liberation through the representations of present dystopian conditions. Ironically black documentaries affirmed the documentary practices of the U.S. state, even as they attempted to contest the racial liberal logics of the state. The shared faith in documentary film remains, for me, an unexamined site through which the political, cultural, and social practices of U.S. ethnic minority groups replicate the

state power they were attempting to critique. In other words, while black documentarians critiqued the dominant images of African Americans in the media, the medium of documentary itself was still seen as an unfettered and ideal medium that could access the “truth” of the black community. Later, I will further discuss the ways in which minority nationalist utopian narratives take part in the debate around questions of authenticity in the 1990s through a discussion of Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X* as an iteration of black nationalist ties to black authenticity and representational politics.

Black Journal produced a Black Nationalist utopia in multiple ways. By focusing on Black Power and Black Nationalist figures, such as the Black Panthers, Huey Newton, Stokely Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver, one can note the ways in which *Black Journal* embraced their political ideologies as valid and productive responses to racism. Aligned with the Black Panthers and international struggles, *Black Journal* aired an interview with an imprisoned Huey Newton, and conducted an interview with Stokely Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver at the Pan African Cultural Festival in Algiers in 1969. *Black Journal* also covered union and labor activities through the issue of racial discrimination, sought to educate its viewers on the relationship between decolonization and national liberation and emphasized self-determination by supporting the demands for control over communities and education.²³ Tasked with representing diverse political ideologies—not merely radical standpoints—and movements for social justice within the African American community, *Black Journal* was also charged with airing the “real” social, cultural, and political lives of African Americans. In other words, black documentaries such as *Black Journal* sought to represent the lives, struggles, and solutions that were *more* accurate than the representations of African Americans by mainstream white media *for* a black audience.

The invention of an authentic black subject as a tool for political struggles in the 1960s and 1970s is a utopian narrative of Black Nationalism. Black documentary filmmakers such as Kathleen Collins, St. Clair Bourne, Alonzo Crawford, Michelle Parkinson, and William Greaves, sought to represent authentic black subjectivities. According to Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler,

[f]or these filmmakers and others, documentary is the most compelling mode with which to present an alternative, *more authentic narrative* of black experience and an effective critique of mainstream discourse.²⁴

While state documentaries believed that all we had to do was show images of urban African Americans, black documentaries called for solutions that included correcting and critiquing dominant representations of urban blacks. The solution to this was through the representation of “*more authentic narrative[s]* of black experience.” Beginning in the 1960s, then, black documentary became a privileged site for utopian narratives of defining blackness and producing authentic subjects for black cultural politics. Imbedded within the desire to produce counter representations was a strong belief that producing “more authentic narrative[s] of black experience” was the solution. This belief in the representation of the “more” authentic black subject produces closed notions of authenticity that harbor the belief that the true answer to our racial crisis is already here and all we have to do is reveal the truth of inequality by representing and giving voice to the authentic subject. Black documentaries produced utopian narratives of the most “authentic” black subject through linear time and representations of the urban ghetto.

The proliferation of black documentary, along with its utopian practices and sentiments around authenticity, would carry on into the 1970s as community activists and black Americans continued to challenge their local television networks and public television stations.²⁵ In the

1970s, filmmakers such as Henry Hampton founded independent film companies like Blackside Inc. and produced films that received airtime on public television. In 1987 Blackside Inc. launched one of the most successful documentary program aired on Public Broadcasting System (PBS), *Eyes on the Prize: Americans' Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. *Eyes on the Prize* drew in 40 million viewers, and won numerous awards and was followed by a sequel, *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-1985*, which aired in 1990. These series employed historical footage and music to tell the stories of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, and had proponents and opponents of the “civil rights struggle to speak for themselves,” offering various viewpoints.

In the wake of black cultural nationalism, women and gay rights, the defeat in the Vietnam War, the loss of hegemony over Iran and Nicaragua, Watergate, the Arab oil shocks, and inflation in the late 1970s, commercial films of the 1980s took a turn toward cinematic and political conservatism and sought to manipulate “the audience’s response and assent to its reassuring mediations of dominant social and political values.”²⁶ Under the conservative bent of filmmaking in the Reaganite 1980s— the final decades of the Cold War Racial Liberal State— the issues of social inequality, race, gender, and social transformation in the U.S. were suppressed in the service of promoting the steadfastness of U.S. social and political “values” as the leader of the free world. Beginning in the mid-1970s a new wave of Hollywood films marked the rise of an ideologically conservative cycle of “backlash” filmmaking that engaged white America’s social fears. After more than a decade of creative and experimental filmmaking, Hollywood returned to a thematically and formally conservative and linear ideology and style. By the beginning of the 1980s major studios were no longer independent and had been absorbed into megamedia conglomerates that saw filmmaking as an investment, turning filmmaking into a

media-integrated and global mass entertainment market. As a result, feature films became formulaic commodities that turned a profit through distribution and exhibition, which led to a decline in the mainstream industry's toleration of countercultural expression, experimental, and creative filmmaking.²⁷ With Hollywood's shift to the right, racist stereotypes and caricatures abound as films with black narratives and leading roles were pushed to the margins.

Furthermore, African American actors and filmmakers were confronted with the "recuperation" of inequalities they sought to eradicate in the civil rights and Black Power years of the 1960s and 1970s and there was a reversal in black gains in the film industry.²⁸

Amidst the turn in political discourse—the turn from a racial liberal discourse of white sympathy for black inequality, to an invocation of sympathy for a white America under attack—black documentaries in the 1980s indeed continued to be made. 1980s Reaganite retrenchment in public television funding greatly altered black documentary as black directors were driven to produce films primarily about "classic," high-profile subjects.²⁹ At the same time, African American social activists, journalists, actors and screenwriters continued to pressure the film industry, and many adhoc committees and civil rights organizations fought the discriminatory and racist practices in film and television.³⁰ As I mention above, documentaries such as PBS's *Eyes on the Prize* were aired in the 1980s and 1990s and won several awards and public television continued to be an important venue for minority programming. While programs similar to *Eyes on the Prize*, like *Black Journal*, of the late 1960s-early 1970s were accompanied by a Cold War racial liberal climate that supported the proliferation of "authentic" black representations in the formation of a U.S. racial liberal state, the moment of the 1980s marks the beginning of the end of the Cold War racial liberal state discourse that endeavored to promote "authentic" representations of racial inequality. The cinematic and political conservatism of the

1980s in many ways can be understood as moment that reversed the boom in political, cinematic, and cultural representations of African Americans, which laid the groundwork for the reversal in the Rodney King trial of which Judith Butler speaks.

“I am Malcolm X”: The Persistence of Black Nationalism in the Post-Cold War Moment

1992 signals a particularly significant moment for black cultural politics because of the constellation of debates around notions of representing black authenticity. Black documentary in the Post-Cold War period exists in the aftermath of black nationalist utopias of authenticity in the 1960s and 1970s; the Cold War racial liberal state discourse of authenticating black suffering for white sympathy of *The Kerner Report*; the rise of narrative film on the West Coast through the Los Angeles Film Rebellion; the social and political reversal of racial equality of the Reagan years and the concomitant conservatism of Hollywood and commercial filmmaking; and the switch in documentary logic around the Rodney King trial. I began this chapter with a discussion of this reversal in 1992 with the King verdict—a reversal of documentarian logic in which the viewer is no longer supposed to believe her own eyes. This new way of reading documentary footage fomented a backlash of black films in the 1990s that would draw on the black documentary utopian logics of the 1970s, which is best exemplified in Spike Lee’s epic 1992 film *Malcolm X*.

The opening credits of *Malcolm X* has been declared a highly symbolic moment in the 1990s black film wave. In the opening of *Malcolm X* Lee insists on the urgency of the issue of African American human rights in the 1990s, as Lee intercuts slow-motion scenes from the video of the King beating. Ed Guerrero argues that the opening of Lee’s film is making a statement about the constitution of national identity, and black demands for emancipation.³¹ For me,

moreover, this opening of *Malcolm X* signals a reclamation of black documentary filmmaking as having the authority to re-frame and re-read a “more authentic” understanding of black experience.

As the opening credits roll, we see an image of the U.S. flag, with the words “Malcolm X” imposed upon the flag. Denzel Washington as Malcolm X sounds out over a full-screen U.S. flag:

Brothers and Sisters I’m here to tell you that I charge the white man. I charge the white man with being the greatest murderer on earth. [*loud cheers*]. I charge the white man with being the greatest kidnapper on earth. [*loud cheers*]. There is no place in this world that that man can go...

[*Image of the Rodney King beating. A small white car, King on the ground, white officers standing over King, beating him.*]

...and say he created peace and harmony. Everywhere he’s gone...

[*Back to image of the red, white, and blue flag.*]

...he’s created havoc. Everywhere he’s gone, he’s created destruction. So I charge him with being the greatest kidnapper on this earth!

[*Scene of King beating*].

I charge him with being the greatest murderer on this earth! I charge him with being the greatest robber and enslaver on this earth!

[*Image of U.S. flag fills the screen.*]

I charge the white man...

[*Rodney King video.*]

... with being the greatest swine-eater and drunkard on this earth! He can't deny the charges...

[U.S. flag]

You can't deny the charges! We're the living proof of those charges! You and I are the proof.

[Scene of King beating].

You're not an American. You are the victim of America! You didn't have a choice coming here. He didn't say: 'Black man, black woman come over and help me build America.' He said, Nigger, get down in the bottom of that boat...

[Image of U.S. flag beginning to burn].

...and I'm taking you over there to help me build America.'

[King beating scene].

Being born here does not make you an American. I'm not an American you're not an American. You're one of the 22 million black people...

[Switch to U.S. flag continuing to burn]

...who are the victims of America. You and I, we've never seen democracy.

[Scene of King beating]

We've never seen democracy in the cotton fields of Georgia. No democracy down there.

[Flag continues to burn]

We didn't see any democracy in the streets of Harlem, in the streets of Brooklyn, in the streets of Detroit, Chicago.

[King beating scene]

Ain't no democracy there. No, we've never seen democracy.

[Flag burning].

All we've seen is hypocrisy. We don't see any American dream.

[King beating].

We've experienced only the American nightmare.

[Sound of cheers and music as the flag burns into the shape of an X].

Spike Lee inter-cuts George Holliday's documentary footage of the King beating, with the image of a burning U.S. flag, and employs the documentary technique of a voice-over of Malcolm X to narrate the image the viewer sees. This scene provides an interaction with three icons: the iconic scenes of Holliday's 1991 video, the supposed icon of "freedom" and "independence" of the U.S. flag, and the presence of Malcolm X, an icon of black liberation. Through this interaction, the audience gets a juxtaposition of time—of 1991 and the 1960s—and Malcolm X's words are brought into the 1990s as if he is describing the white police brutality against Rodney King. Rather than reading the King video as the jurists and lawyers did—that the policemen needed to beat King to protect themselves—by framing the scene with Malcolm X's words, Lee is saying that the viewer is witness to exactly what she is seeing—the unjust and brutal beating of a black man by white police officers. We are seeing the truth, according to Spike Lee, even though the white institution might want to tell the viewer otherwise. Contra the verdict of the King trial, Lee is saying that we are seeing and witnessing white violence on a black body, and this becomes even more apparent if the viewer historically situates the scene of violence of Rodney King with black experience in the U.S. According to the voice-over, the black body itself becomes "the living proof of those charges" against "the white man" as the "greatest murder," the "greatest

robber and enslaver on this earth.” For Lee, African Americans living in 1992 have still “never seen democracy” and have only experienced “the American nightmare.”

Just as Lee employs documentary techniques of the voice-over and documentary footage to mark the persistence of injustice in the 1990s, the film follows in the Black Nationalist utopian logics of black documentary that attempts to demonstrate a solution or a way out for African Americans. Although the opening scene moves back and forth between the racial violence of the 1990s, Black Nationalism of the 1960s, and an abstract supposed universalism of the U.S. flag as a sign of freedom, a teleological logic that is tied to black authenticity remains. For Lee, in order to move toward a more democratic U.S. for blacks is by watching Malcolm’s progression in *Malcolm X* from a life of crime, incarceration, political awakening, conversion to Islam, and assassination over the running time of three and a half hours. The teleological movement of the film can be read through the development of Malcolm as the best revolutionary figure with which all black children should come to identify.

While the beginning of the film opens with Malcolm X’s words, the film ends with Malcolm X’s assassination. Following the dramatization of the assassination of Malcolm X are a series of black and white documentary footage of Malcolm X and the black community and a voice-over of Ossie Davis’s eulogy from 1965. Davis calls for everyone to “honor” and remember the “gallant young champion” because “Malcolm was our manhood. Our living, black manhood. This was his meaning to his people. And in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves.” The assertion of Malcolm’s manhood as an Afro-American man is set against the “small, too puny, [and] weak...word” of “Negro.” The “best” of African Americans, then, is defined through Malcolm’s masculinity against the nonmasculinity, small, puny, and weakness of effeminacy. As Phillip Brian Harper writes,

the dominant view holds prideful self-respect as the very essence of healthy African-American identity, it also considers such identity to be fundamentally weakened wherever masculinity appears to be compromised. While this fact is rarely articulated, its influence is nonetheless real and pervasive. Its primary effect is that all debates over and claims to ‘authentic’ African-American identity are largely animated by a profound anxiety about the status specifically of African-American *masculinity*.³²

In other words, the work of self-determination, self-definition, self-respect, and self-representation in black documentaries beginning in the 1960s were organized around a claim to black authenticity that could not risk appearing “weak.” To compromise the masculinity, or strength of this project would be to compromise the right to produce authentic notions of black identity and experience.

Just as the masculine black subject becomes a universal subject for Black Nationalism and black documentary, the figure of Malcolm X becomes the universal figure for identification at the end of the film. After the voice-over of Ossie Davis’s eulogy in *Malcolm X*, the camera moves us into a 1990s classroom. An African American female teacher in the U.S. explains to her class that we celebrate May 19th, as Malcolm X day. She continues to powerfully say: “Malcolm X is you. All of you. And you are Malcolm X.” Then, one at a time, an African American boy stands up and says, “I am Malcolm X,” followed by another little boy “I am Malcolm X” then an African American girl saying, “I am Malcolm X.” Then, the camera cuts to black children in Africa. One by one they stand and declare: “I am Malcolm X.” The camera moves to the front of a Soweto classroom, where Nelson Mandela appears as a schoolteacher. He recites Malcolm X’s 1965 speech saying, “... we declare our right on this earth to be a man, to

be a human being, to be given the rights of a human being, to be respected as a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intended to bring into existence..." The camera then cuts to footage of Malcolm saying, "by any means necessary" to finish the speech.³³

To be clear, my critique of Spike Lee's film is not a dismissal of its important contributions to black cinema, and movie making in general. Indeed, *Malcolm X* remains an important text for black cultural representational politics and conversations around black authenticity. My critique above expresses my interest in the ways in which *Malcolm X* shares in minority nationalist utopian practices of documentary that sees the text of the film as an instructive for how to gain political consciousness. By the end of the film, Malcolm X achieves a universal status globally, as the children—boys and girls in the U.S. and Soweto— proclaim, "I am Malcolm." The film, therefore, follows in the minority nationalist utopian practice that primarily identifies male figures as the motor for revolution, which is the consequence of a film that strives to represent black authenticity.

Furthermore, while narrative films such as *Malcolm X* reproduce minority nationalist documentary logics, the film is not exactly like black documentary and Black Nationalism of the previous decades, because the film also opens up a space to question the status of documentary and authenticity. Even though black narrative films like *Malcolm X* go back to Black Nationalism and its aesthetics of realism and documentary, *Malcolm X* is a narrative film that complicates black documentary. Spike Lee is upfront with the fact that *Malcolm X* is an interpretation of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and is not a docudrama, which can be noted in the stylization and added framing of the Rodney King Riots, and the bookending of the film with Nelson Mandela—events that were not part of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The film, then, is a flexible interpretation of the autobiography, yet still holds onto documentary

techniques. Films like *Malcolm X*, and even more so *Daughters of the Dust*, diverge from traditional black documentary, and remain a part of the project of producing and questioning black authenticity. Lee begins to “question the boundary between documentary and certain narrative films.”³⁴ The 1990s becomes a key moment in which the transparent aesthetics of documentary form becomes complicated and the lines between documenting and narrativity are blurred.

The next section explores the ways in which black feminist filmmaker Julie Dash engages with this question of black documentary and authenticity and, more so than Spike Lee, helps to name the fiction of minority nationalism and the racial liberal state logics of authenticity. Unlike Dash, Spike Lee holds onto documentary logics of black authenticity that reproduce what Stuart Hall calls the “innocence of the black subject” or “the innocent notion of an essential black subject.”³⁵

“...the end of the innocence of the black subject or the end of the innocent notion of an essential black subject”: The Critiques of Women of Color Feminist and Queer of Color Filmmakers Under the Post-Cold War Racial Liberal State

Working in the late 1980s and 1990s Julie Dash is part of a cohort of filmmakers that oppose the logic of traditional and black documentary and significantly contributed to black cultural politics in the post-Cold War moment. Black documentarians have a complicated relationship with documentary forms as they have always had to balance traditional formats of documentary in order to have a film made, distributed, and released with the desire to experiment with their work to break the conventions of traditional documentary. Born on October 22, 1952 in Long Island City, Queens, New York, Julie Dash never planned on being a filmmaker as she rarely saw images of black women in film, much less images of black female filmmakers. Later, however, she would be trained as a documentary filmmaker and would earn a Bachelor of Arts

degree at the Leonard Davis Center for the Arts in the David Picker Film Institute in 1974. Soon after, she moved to Los Angeles to join the UCLA film school. While East Coast filmmakers, including Dash, were making documentary films, West Coast filmmakers in this period were involved in the production of narrative film.³⁶

In an interview with Houston Baker, Dash speaks of her training as a documentary filmmaker, stating:

Because of the political climate of the times, it was something that was much in demand; and it was easier to get people to teach you the format. You could just grab a camera and shoot, shoot, shoot. There was so much stuff on the street happening and you could just shoot it and then come back and edit it into story. We had a goal, at one point, of doing newsreels for the community. Everything was community oriented there were lots and lots of speakers on the streets. And so we had access to political dialogue going on every weekend, and we did film those people and come back and try to make a little documentary newsreel film about them.³⁷

Documentary for black filmmakers provided an opening for black artists to easily learn a format, and provided an accessible medium to quickly capture images to produce a story for the community. As Dash has said, “I always knew I wanted to make films about African American women. To tell stories that had not been told. To show images of our lives that had not been seen.”³⁸ How Dash decided to tell these stories that “had not been told,” however, would prove to be her greatest contribution to black aesthetic politics. As a political tool, documentary film provided a valuable starting point for Dash, because she wanted to produce stories for and about the black community. We still see Dash’s interest in documentary in the opening of her film as

she frames her narrative of *Daughters* with information about the Sea Islands and the Gullah people. Yet, documentary film proved to be inadequate for Dash.

At the same time as the boom of black documentary on the East coast was happening, on the West Coast a focus on narrative film through the L.A. Film Rebellion was emerging in the midst of shifting political ideologies and events, which would come to greatly affect the form of documentary and debates around authenticity.³⁹ The University of California, Los Angeles in the early 1960s proved to be an important point of cultural movement and political engagement for black filmmaking, which was a result of the Watts Rebellion of 1965, the death of Bunchy Carter and John Huggins at UCLA in 1969, and the confrontation between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism. In 1967, two years after the assassination of Malcolm X and the Watts Rebellion, Charles Burnett arrived at UCLA. Haile Gerima arrived from Ethiopia by way of Chicago in 1968, the year Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and the Tet offensive was launched in Vietnam. These political events and uprisings came to converge with the arrival of a new breed of filmmakers that would come to generate the Black independent movement in Los Angeles, a filmmaking school that lasted from 1967 to 1982.

The “Los Angeles School” or, as it is also sometimes called, the “Los Angeles Rebellion” signifies a cultural movement in Black independent filmmaking. Emerging in two waves, the first wave of the L.A. Film School included Haile Gerima and Charles Burnett among many others. Julie Dash, Bill Woodberry and Alile Sharon Larkin, just to name a few, would make up the second wave.⁴⁰ The L.A. Film School was found by African and African-American students, mostly from UCLA’s Theater Arts Department and their politics were deeply informed by the Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Movement, anti-war movement and national liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin American. Accompanying Third World liberation

consciousness arose the need to incorporate an international perspective, or Third World Cinema, which included Cuban national cinema, a leading film movement on the Third World front that focused on interrogating and examining national goals for a socialist society. This led first wave L.A. Film School participants to organize the Third World Film Club, which focused on screening Cuban, African, and other Third World films at UCLA.⁴¹ While there was not a coherent aesthetic that was organizing these filmmakers, there was a shared commitment to an experimental environment of filmmaking and an interest in finding new modes that opposed commercial filmmaking content and techniques for radical politics.

Women of color feminist and queer of color filmmakers toward the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s significantly opposed closed notions of black authenticity that would primarily see the representations of black masculine subjects as the answer to emancipation worldwide because these black representational practices reproduced hetero-normative and sexist logics. Innovating works such Marlon Riggs' 1989 film *Tongues Untied* complicated "notion[s] of an innocent black subject." Rather than produce films about iconic black men—such as Frederick Douglass, Nelson Mandela, Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr., the dominant subjects for black documentation and emancipation—Riggs' film focuses on pervasive homophobia in black independent filmmaking and black characterizations of supposedly black men within the rap music and popular music by black artists scene, and looked at not only just how black gay men are represented in music and films and TV by black artists, but also by black directors.⁴²

According to Riggs, black masculinity has been promoted in the service of creating a strong identity of black subjectivity. This is why there has been so much focus on "icons like Malcolm

X that seems to provide a kind of certainty, a closure, around what it means to be black and a man, what it means to be empowered.”⁴³ Traditional black documentary has understood black empowerment as being achieved through “certainty” and “closed” notions of black masculinity. The achievement of a secure and authentic black identity is produced through homophobia and anti-feminism—because homosexuality and feminism are linked to a fragile and disintegrating identity—in black independent filmmaking. This is why for Riggs experimenting with the documentary form by “meshing documentary, performance, autobiography, narration, stock footage compilation” is important in questioning and offering alternative documentary practices that question traditional representations of blackness.

Debates over and about black authenticity were not merely confined to state discourse, cultural nationalism, and popular culture, but also abound in academic circles in the early 1990s. Stuart Hall’s 1992 essay “What is ‘black’ in black popular culture?” argues that

the essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and de-historicizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic. The moment the signifier ‘black’ is torn from its historical, cultural, and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorize, by inversion, the very ground of the racism we are trying to deconstruct. In addition, as always happens when we naturalize historical categories (think about gender and sexuality), we fix that signifier outside of history, outside of change, outside of political intervention. And once it is fixed, we are tempted to use ‘black’ as sufficient in itself to guarantee the progressive character of the politics we fight under –as if we don’t have any other politics to argue about except whether something’s black or not.⁴⁴

Minority nationalism's project of producing "the most authentic" black reality, or "the most authentic" black subject is an essentializing project that "naturalizes and de-historicizes difference." "Naturalizing" and "de-historicizing" difference suggests that there is a core of selfhood that has been unaffected by power, which results in making claims for the self. By tearing "black" away from its cultural and historical and political ties and instead treating the signifier as a "natural, biological, and genetic" phenomenon, the structure of race and power is "valorize[d]." This is the consequence of holding onto and reproducing authenticity.

The figure of Malcolm in the film *Malcolm X*, for instance, gains a universal status that transcends his moment of the 1960s as Spike Lee layers Malcolm's words onto the violent moment of the Rodney King beating of 1991. Malcolm gains universal status that transcends the geographical borders of the U.S. and gender as any child—boy or girl—can supposedly claim: "I am Malcolm X." And, while it is important to make historical and transnational connections, it is dangerous to proclaim over and over again the existence of an essential black subject of liberation. To revise blackness in this way reproduces, as Hall suggests in the quote above, masculinist fixed notions of gender and sexuality. Hall is defining intersectionality here, as he views movements that merely focus on one category—such as the redefinition of blackness—as foreclosing upon other categories of gender and sex as though these signifiers stand "outside of political intervention." In other words, this project of producing an authentic and essential black subject for political movement relegates gender and sexuality in the interest of racial politics.

In naming the dangers of claiming an authentic black subject, Stuart Hall speaks of "the end of the innocence of the black subject or the end of the innocent notion of an essential black subject." The "innocent notion of an essential black subject" is the utopian narrative of Black Nationalism. Stuart Hall writes,

There is no guarantee, in reaching for an essentialized racial identity of which we think we can be certain, that it will always turn out to be mutually liberating and progressive on all the other dimensions. It *can* be won. There *is* a politics there to be struggled for. But the invocation of a guaranteed black experience behind it will not produce that politics. Indeed, the plurality of antagonisms and differences that now seek to destroy the unity of black politics, given the complexities of the structures of subordination that have been formed by the way in which we were inserted into the black diaspora, is not at all surprising. These are the thoughts that drove me to speak, in an unguarded moment, of the end of the innocence of the black subject or the end of the innocent notion of an essential black subject.”⁴⁵

The idea that “the invocation of a guaranteed black experience” cannot produce a liberating and progressive politics becomes a powerful critique in black cultural politics in the early 1990s. For Hall, we must give up the essentialized subject because this subject reduces the “plurality of antagonisms and differences” and restricts the potential for disparate political interventions. This is the consequence of projects organized around authenticity. In the Cold War period, narrative forms such as documentary established the “innocent notion of an essential black subject” as the primary way to imagine social change and social movement. Even though the “essential black subject” is a discursive formation of the racial liberal state and by Black Nationalism, it becomes an “innocent notion” because it appears as if it were a natural category. It turns out, though, the “essential black subject” is not so “innocent.” The logic that revealing the truth of African American experience would lead to racial equality becomes a naturalized logic that does away with its discursive formation. This naturalization of the black subject promulgates the idea that there is an essence of blackness that can be fully captured and represented. As such, authentic

black subjectivity becomes key to racial liberal film practices that were ascribed the ability to effect social transformation. Black agency in Black Nationalism was primarily imagined through a male black subject that is attached to a performance of black masculinity. The dependence upon authentic black male subjects for political, social, and cultural change is rooted in the notion that all of our political actors are already here and we need not look further for alternative and speculative catalysts for social movement. This does not mean, however, that we must look for more essential subjects, which is often the response to this problem. To do so reproduces the very structures of inequality that it sought to disrupt. This approach is too limiting and disables imaginative and novel modes of intervention. Searching for speculative catalysts for social movement is something that Dash, I argue, takes up in *Daughters*. And, because documentary forms have been so influential in producing and fixing an authentic black subject realist documentary films are, then, also the aesthetic forms against which women of color feminist filmmakers such as Julie Dash struggle.

Julie Dash's 1992 film *Daughters of the Dust* is a significant achievement not only because it was the first full-length film released to the general public in the U.S. by a black woman centered black women, not iconic black male figures like Malcolm X, Frederick Douglass, or Martin Luther King, Jr., but also because of the film's aesthetic interventions into black documentary. Dash brilliantly combines speculative, griot, and documentary techniques to produce a critical utopian narrative that maintains a black feminist emancipatory vision that works to undermine the "innocence of the essential black subject." Dash intervenes in black cultural politics, not to produce more adequate images of black inequalities, but to produce alternative notions of time, and concomitantly, alternative notions of authenticity and subjectivity. Unlike traditional black documentary Dash does not have faith in the revelation of

authenticity for social equality; rather, she argues for a different approach. Dash has said in an interview:

Once I decided I was going to tell stories through film, and once I decided that I was not going to be a documentary filmmaker, but I was going to tell narrative stories (because I was excited about the literature of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison and all the poets of the time), I decided that I wanted to tell a story that was authentic *to* African American culture – authentic to the point where it was not like something you could turn on the television and see. I wanted it to be more like a foreign film and so deeply into the culture that it appeared to be foreign.⁴⁶

While Dash has inherited the language of authenticity from liberalism, nationalism, and earlier black filmmakers, she is also signifying a discontinuity with these traditional understandings of authenticity. For Dash, documentary has been inadequate in not only telling the stories of African American culture, but has also been inadequate for imagining projects of equality. Narrative stories, such as Walker's and Morrison's, offer her a different language of authenticity. "Authenticity," for Dash is "not like something you could turn on the television and see" as William Greaves and other black documentarians believed. Dash is not interested in rendering an authentic representation *of* African Americans; rather, she wants to tell stories that are "authentic *to* African American culture."

In other words, Dash is not on a quest for representing the essence of the black subject, as though her film stands outside the realm of mediation. The racial liberal state cast the documentary form—a form that has been stripped away of its narrative function—as "logical," "truthful," and "objective"— in the interest of U.S. global ascendancy, just as black documentary similarly cast away the narrativity of its form in the interest of producing a cohesive and

authentic black masculine subject. In other words, documentary film and photography during the Cold War period were not seen as mediating narratives—as something that have been framed and plotted by a storyteller, director, writer, or photographer—but as simply and transparently displaying reality. This served in the interest of the U.S. state because it perpetrated the myth of the U.S. as the leader of the free world. This logic also allows Black Nationalism to create a seemingly solid and whole identity of the black male as the subject who could bring about revolution and change. These practices produced themselves as logical and natural by presenting documentary photography and film as transparent representations, not cultural mediations.

Like the Rodney King verdict, then, Dash believes that the viewer does not see a transparent “truth” in documentary footage, and what the viewer sees needs to be interpreted, switching the logic of the Cold War racial liberal state and Black Nationalism. However, Julie Dash’s project is very different from the logics of the Rodney King verdict. Unlike the King verdict, Dash is not invested in making another truth claim. While *The Kerner Report* argued for the transparent documentary of black lives, King’s verdict has a different orientation toward documentary where documentary is no longer transparent but is in need of an institutional interpreter. This re-orientation toward documentary ultimately reasserts the law as having the authority to interpret the “truth” of George Holliday’s video. Even as the Rodney King case demonstrates a different account of liberal documentary practices and state legitimating practices, the verdict nevertheless holds onto a claim to accessing the truth. Instead of seeing the spectacularization of King’s body as a sign of social inequality and as a cause for addressing racial inequality, the spectacle of King’s body is instead used to re-establish state legitimacy, and as having the authority to interpret the King footage. Furthermore, the state’s interpretation of the King video works to legitimate state violence. The ruling shows that it is acceptable for white

police officers to brutally beat King because he poses a potential threat. Unlike minority nationalism that depends on the black male subject as a figure for liberation, the King verdict relies on a narrative of “an essential black subject” as the present and imminent threat to U.S. law and order. Dash is not re-asserting “an essential black subject,” or a truth claim about African American culture. Instead, Dash simultaneously inhabits and refuses the documentary form—a form that has always been associated with truth claims about an essential black subject—in order to connect the documentary form to acts of speculation.

I argue that Julie Dash re-signifies the category of authenticity by creating a film that is “authentic *to* African American culture,” rather than a film “about” African American culture. The preposition that Dash uses here “to,” instead of “about,” is very important. Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X* is very much a film *about* Malcolm X’s life. Developing his life story from pre-incarceration, prison, political awakening, and Islamic conversion, Lee wants his viewing black audience to learn *about* Malcolm and black revolution. He is, in other words, teaching his audience a story about black revolution and figures in hopes of raising black consciousness in issues of inequality and struggle. Realist films and traditional black documentary give its viewers narratives *about* black culture. Historically, black film has answered the question of authenticity with providing “accurate” content to create visual representations that matches the content, to produce meanings of blackness.

Dash, on the other hand, creates a visual narrative that disrupts this representational practice. While the “to” in Dash’s statement about producing a film “authentic *to* African American culture” may be read in a similar way as a film “about” Malcolm—in a way that parses out truths from untruth—I argue that the “to” here for Dash functions as a mode of address. Black documentary also sought to address black viewers, but did so through an

attachment to representing black authentic experiences, lives, and revolutionary blueprints. While a film “about” African American culture would suggest the knowability and representability of black culture, a film that *addresses* African American culture inculcates the African American viewer in the production of African American culture. In *Daughters*, the content about the Gullah is less important than the formal features of the film that Dash conjures to address her viewers. In this case the “content is the fact that during the process of performance the dramatic power of narrative as a form is celebrated. The simple *content* of the stories is dominated by the ritual act of story-telling itself.”⁴⁷ A story “about” black culture privileges the content, whereas Dash’s narrative that speaks “to” black culture focuses on the forms with which Dash, as a storyteller, chooses to engage with her viewers.

Black spectatorship for Dash is “not an either/or proposition of passive acceptance versus oppositional criticism played out only between individual viewers and films. Rather, it [is] a varied, performative, and social element of Black film culture.”⁴⁸ Dash does not treat her viewers as passive receptacles; nor does she treat them as purely oppositional viewing agents. *Daughters* is not a film that seeks to reflect her audience’s reality back to them, as if the film were about them; rather, she seeks to create *Daughters* as a “foreign film” for her various imagined viewers to decide, and to reflect, not merely to react and identify with the film. As an anti-essentialist film, there is nothing innate about blackness, and there is nothing innate about her viewer’s connection to the Gullah people, even if her viewers are black. The viewers’ possible acts of reflection and unexpected spectatorial practices coupled with the space of the theater are part of Black film culture. And here, “culture” is addressed not as something that is essentialized and de-historicized, but something that is continually being constituted, made, and changed by black viewers, directors, writers, and producers. Black viewing practices, then, are very much a part of

Dash's critical utopian project that seeks out speculative practices for a better world. The authentic mode of black realist film and black documentary cannot be speculative; however, Dash reminds us that we must be. In the next section, I argue that Julie Dash purposefully "fails" to document Gullah culture in order to disrupt the "innocent notion of an essential black subject."

"... refusing to satisfy on a documentary level"

Soon after Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust* first premiered at the 1991 Sundance Film Festival in Utah, film critic Todd Carr wrote the following review in *Variety*:

'Daughters of the Dust' plays like a two-hour Laura Ashley commercial. Wildly indulgent and undisciplined as a piece of filmmaking, Julie Dash's feature does possess a unique look and feel that, in addition to its inherent ethnographic interest, will appeal to some people. Set in 1902, highly impressionistic work focuses upon the Gullah, descendants of slaves who lived on the islands off South Carolina and Georgia and had their own very distinctive traditions and way of speaking in a Caribbean-like accent known as "Gullah" or "Geechee." Ostensible event framing the action is the imminent departure of the large Peasant family from their Sea Island home to the mainland and the North. But the true preoccupation here has to do with cultural memory and ethnic preservation, admirable aims that are unfortunately undercut by Dash's stylistic gambits... Regardless of how much research was done, film refuses to satisfy on a documentary level. Gorgeously shot in the style of a fashion layout by A. Jafa Fielder, pic is redolent with slow dissolves, languid camera moves and a jerky, experimental form of slow motion that makes one not want to see another camera

trick for another six months. Everyone's happy, everyone looks great and nearly everyone seems to be so pleased with the state of life on the island that one can only wonder what has motivated them to plan the crossing to what will assuredly be a confrontation with racism, poverty and misery. "Progress" for their people is the alleged, and ironic, reason, but on this, as on so many other points, Dash displays an antihistorical, antiinformational bent that is highly frustrating in light of the waves of repetitive seaside footage. Island life is idealized to the point of illustrating it as a paradise, which makes their plan to leave look absurd... For work that is so heavily into its own ethnicity, one is left with any number of unanswered questions relating to Gullah history...⁴⁹

Carr's review is an expression of a critic's deep desire for historical information and an accurate documentary of an unfamiliar culture, the Gullah. One can gather Carr's genuine desire to learn more about Gullah life and culture on the Sea Islands at the turn of the century. The Gullah, or Geechee, people live on the islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia and began to migrate to the mainland to urban areas like Charleston and Savannah. In the early twentieth century, Gullah people began to migrate to New York. Frequently, the Sea Islands were used as the first stop in the New World for enslaved West Africans. On these islands, West African and New World cultures blended to form a unique language, culture, and religious practice that persist to this day. Viewers like Carr desperately want to learn more about this unique and different culture living in the U.S. Through this review we can witness Carr's desire to see an instructional film that not only gives us more information about the unique history, culture, and lives of the Gullah, but also explains why this particular Geechee family, the Peazants, wants to

move North to the mainland. Ultimately, one can note a white man's longing for an African American female filmmaker to provide him with that information.

I begin this section with Todd Carr's criticism as an expression of the expectations around "ethnic preservation," documentary, and history telling with which black filmmakers have been tasked. Carr wants Dash to interpret the "truth" of the Gullah culture so that he may bare witness to an "authentic" black experience. Were that Carr's critiques and desire for representations of black authenticity exceptional and aberrant. Black documentaries importantly recognized documentary film as a site of struggle and as a medium through which normative racialized logics of the racial liberal state were reproduced. Yet at the same time, black documentarians' commitment to representing "authentic" black experiences and histories created viewers, like Todd Carr in the 1990s, who came to expect black subjects to produce authentic black experiences in the "urban black ghetto" for personal and social enlightenment. In other words, I see critics like Todd Carr as symptomatic of black documentarian promises of counter representations that could provide access to true and authentic black identities and culture. Carr tasks Julie Dash with providing her audience with a history of an authentic Gullah culture, even though this was not her project. Counter narratives, under the banner of authenticity, end up reproducing dominant logics of representational politics of time and space. Carr's limited colonialist utopian reading and romantic desire for access to a true and authentic Gullah identity disables him from recognizing the important cultural and aesthetic interventions of Dash's film.

His desires for insight into the Gullah culture ascribes an "inherent ethnographic interest" to Dash and her film, which he dismisses as an "antihistorical" and "antiinformational" "Laura Ashley commercial." For Carr, *Daughters* is a failed documentary because the "film refuses to satisfy on a documentary level," and leaves its viewers with more "unanswered questions

relating to Gullah history.” In other words, Carr sees Dash’s film as a failure because it does not offer a transparent and clear account of Gullah women’s life and culture and does not adequately engage with the “cultural memory and ethnic preservation” of the Gullah. Thus, she is “antihistorical” and “antiinformational.” This is the conclusion we might all reach if Dash were indeed attempting to produce a traditional documentary about the Gullah. Instead of asking why Dash might perhaps be purposefully producing a “failed documentary,” he asks why all of these “happy” and content people would leave this “idealized” island for the “racism, poverty and misery” that awaits them in the North. This is the question that arises if we simply read Dash’s film as a utopian narrative about a beautiful island filled with happy and content people as Carr does.

The new wave of post-Blaxploitation and socially conscious black filmmakers in the 1990s such as Spike Lee (*Do the Right Thing*, *Malcolm X*, *Clockers*), John Singleton (*Boyz N the Hood*), and Albert and Allen Hughes (*Menace II Society*, *Dead Presidents*) marked a new wave of Black realist films that were highly marketable because they followed a formula of documentary that attempted to capture and represent the “community,” or the “real lives” of black heroes.⁵⁰ These films were indeed marketable because they narrated coming-of-age stories of young black men that followed a linear temporality and realist style that is easily recognizable and pleasurable to their viewers. Unlike successful commercial films such as *Malcolm X*, Dash was inspired to tell stories about black women offering a different filmic temporality that is not as pleasurable. In other words, the slow dissolves and overlapping images disrupt the realist aesthetics of black documentary and the black realist films in the 1990s.

In contrast to the high commercial value of black realist films like *Malcolm X*, Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* struggled to find a distributor. Indeed Spike Lee did have problems

finishing his movie and went over the twenty-eight million dollar budget Warner Bros. had set by five million dollars; however, he did not have a problem with the distribution of his movie and after receiving monetary backing from stars like Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey, and Michael Jordan, to name a few, Warner Bros. agreed to give him the rest of the money. For Dash it was a completely different experience. Not only was she a black woman in an industry that was run by male filmmakers, she was a black woman who wanted to make a movie about black women at the turn of the century.⁵¹ She was not backed by a big film studio like Warner Bros. but found funding for her film through the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fulton County Arts Council (GA), the Georgia Council on the Humanities, Appalshop, and Southeast Regional Fellowship (SERF), but it was still not enough and she continued to struggle to get the film made. According to Dash,

I was told over and over again that there was no market for the film. The distributors talked about the spectacular look of the film and the images and story being so different and thought-provoking, yet the consistent response was that there was ‘no market’ for this type of film. Again, [she] was hearing mostly white men telling me, an African American woman, what my people wanted to see. In fact, they were deciding what we should be allowed to see. I knew that was wrong. I knew they were wrong.⁵²

I argue that *Daughters* goes against the standard formula of black films that Hollywood was promoting at the time. Dash shares,

Hollywood studios were generally impressed with the look of the film, but somehow they couldn’t grasp the concept. They could not process the fact that a black woman filmmaker wanted to make a film about African American women

at the turn of the century—particularly a film with a strong family, with characters who weren't living in the ghetto, killing each other and burning things down.⁵³

Not only did Dash disrupt Hollywood commercial films about black gangsters or black male heroes, Dash's film about Gullah women at the turn of the century disrupted the standardized temporality and spatialization that accompanied commercial films as well as documentary films. Part of the reason Dash's film was not considered "commercial" and was unappealing to many of its viewers was the film's treatment of temporality, which can be noted in reviews such as Todd Carr's. Carr, like the Hollywood studios, praises the visual appeal of the film, even as they were irritated with Dash's unsettling filmic tempo. Dash's speculative temporality dares to ruminate on and muddle time. By this, I mean that Dash is not attached to a sense of time that unfolds neatly and culminates in a triumphant moment for the hero. Dash's speculative temporality—as seen through flashbacks, the breaking of the tempo in a scene, slow motion and dissolves, the mixing of past and present in one moment, and overlapping images in the film—offers a story of multiple and intersecting lives and experiences, which are told through Dash's manipulation of temporality. *Daughters* disrupts linear narrative films and refuses to give us a coherent black subject and winds up providing pleasure to some viewers and not others. This is why her speculative temporality—with its disruptions, fits, and starts—is displeasureable to commercial film.

Dash's disruptive speculative film practice is deeply entrenched in her connection to Third World cinema and the rebellious film movement in Los Angeles. As part of the second wave of the Los Angeles Film Rebellion at UCLA Dash was undoubtedly affected by the conflicting ideologies, political and cultural movements, and Third World Cinema aesthetics circulating around and through Los Angeles. Unlike commercial Hollywood that focused on a

hero-dominated perspective and linear narrative of the hero's growth or black documentary that attempted to provide the most authentic identifiable black subject, Dash employs Third World Cinema aesthetics of temporality to complicate notions of blackness and authenticity. As Toni Cade Bambara has noted, Dash's narrative strategies and aesthetics are aligned with "progressive world film culture movements that bolster socially responsible cinema—Cuban, Caribbean, African, Philipino/Philopina, Cine Nuova, USA Multicultural Independent."⁵⁴ Aligning herself with the de-colonizing film practices of Third World Cinema, Dash employs an alternative temporal aesthetic in order to engage with debates of authenticity. Dash returns us to utopian and dystopian narratives of black representational practices to diagnose how their formal features uphold the commitment to authenticity. Dash recognizes that the struggle over representation and the mediation of race and gender in the late twentieth century is a struggle over narratives of time.

Contra to readings such as Carr's that would dismiss Dash as producing a "failed," "antihistorical," and "antiinformational" documentary, I argue that Dash's "failed documentary" provides an opening for a black feminist critical utopian practice as a response to the black documentary practices that reproduce the logics of minority nationalist utopia. While Carr reads *Daughters of the Dust* as a failed documentary film that refuses to satisfy his desires for a glimpse of Gullah history, I approach Dash's refusal to satisfy these desires as an important intervention into discourses of authenticity that would effectively come to cohere black subjectivity. In other words, her project is rich precisely because of her "failure" to document and disrupt the "true" stories of African Americans and "authenticity" of black subjects that are attached to "successful" documentaries.

A central component to Dash's "failure" to document is the temporality of her film, which is one of Carr's annoyances with *Daughters*. Dash's temporality, according to Carr is filled with "slow dissolves, languid camera moves" and "jerky, experimental form of slow motion," are merely seen as "camera tricks" and disrupts a linear narrative of "progress" for Carr. Dash's sense of time is central to Dash's critical utopian film that moves the utopian form away from a spatial imaginary to a utopian narrative about time. As I have suggested in my previous chapters, utopian and dystopian forms, as deployed by the racial liberal state and minority nationalisms, are influenced by Marxist realist temporalities in producing closed notions of authentic subjects for revolution. Black documentary and films like *Malcolm X* that are attached to minority nationalism have likewise shared a realist discourse of authenticity that have been dependent upon a notion of time as progressive, and linear. In traditional documentaries,

found materials are adduced as direct, formally transparent signifiers of the Real. Footage may be edited into montage sequences juxtaposing disparate sources or production contexts... but such formal liberties rarely emphasize or substantially modify visual aspects of the original scenes. Their primary function is to advance an expository or argumentative process. In the avant-garde, however, found footage is frequently denatured by optical printing, looping, changes in speed and other techniques which can themselves be thematized by an overarching critique.⁵⁵

Documentaries that are viewed as successful might be cut, or set next to different images, in different ways as with the photography of *The Kerner Report*, black documentaries, or Spike Lee's usage of Rodney King, but what remains is the assumption that the footage are

“transparent signifiers of the Real.” While Dash is not working with “found materials” she is playing with changes in speed in order to change our notion of time and “the Real.”

Because narratives of authenticity deeply limit our capacity to imagine social change beyond the prism of realism, Dash’s critical utopia challenges the formal limits of the genre by interrupting realist time in her refusal to deliver narratives of authentic racialized subjects. Closed notions of authenticity harbor the belief that the true answer to our racial crisis is already here and all we have to do is reveal the truth of inequality by representing and giving voice to the authentic subject. This can be noted in the ways Marxist utopias of progress have produced a liberal white male subject and the ways minority nationalisms have narrated racialized men as the motor for revolution and as the subjects against which others are measured and ultimately relegated. Yet, Dash is not interested in producing a new “reality,” a new truth, or authentic subject because she recognizes that projects that strive to narrate authenticity reproduces racialized and gendered hierarchies. In “failing” to document Dash instead produced speculative practices of time and space that allowed Dash to dwell in a narrative practice that constantly asks, “what if?” These are the practices that are central to Dash’s black feminist critical utopia.

I argue that Dash creates a speculative temporal utopian narrative that disrupts the “progress” and “linear” production of a cohesive Geechee subject. Harking back to what Dash says about wanting an “authenticity” that feels foreign, Dash’s speculative temporality contributes to the aesthetics of *Daughters* as a foreign film that feels unfamiliar and as something we cannot easily or fully comprehend and know. Dash’s critical utopian narrative can be placed within a longer genealogy of black women writers like Zora Neal Hurston, Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Toni Cade Bambara, who have also presented critical commentaries on documentary, ethnography, authenticity, and subjectivity.⁵⁶ Dash has said in an interview:

in the new world it is the women who have become Griots (religious story tellers) of their culture. It was the literature of black women in the early 1970s that inspired me to become a filmmaker of dramatic narratives. Before that I made documentaries, but after reading Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, I wanted to tell those kinds of stories. I see myself as a disciple of Black women writers.⁵⁷

These black feminist writers have focused on speculation, against authenticity and documentary, as a dominant mode of storytelling and Dash has greatly been influenced by black feminist literature and the ways in which they have speculated theoretically about the world, in ways that have not been attached to producing totally accurate and truthful stories of black communities. Dash, then, is part of a cohort of black feminist literary critical utopists that come to recognize the utopian and dystopian as sites of contestation in which to speculate, interrogate and write against normative notions of temporality, spatiality, and subjectivity for social movement and equality.

While Dash's film engages with black documentary practices, she also marks a break with these black film temporalities and attachments to authenticity, and is more closely aligned with black feminist literary traditions that lay emphasis on practices of speculation in ways that disrupt and question notions of authentic subjectivities. In an interview, Dash has said:

I think we need to do more than try to document history. I think we need to probe. We need to have the freedom to romanticize history, to say 'what if,' to use history in a speculative way and create speculative fiction. I think we need to feel free to do that. We need to expand upon an idea, upon our thoughts on fact.⁵⁸

Although Dash still retains elements of ethnography and documentary, she recognizes that merely trying to "document" "facts" is not enough. Rich projects, instead, lie in "romanticizing

history,” and creating “speculative fiction” that expands our notions of “fact.” In an interview with bell hooks, bell hooks describes *Daughters of the Dust* as “mythopoetic” because “it brings us what could be called ethnographic details, though in fact it’s set within a much more poetic, mythic universe.” To which Julie Dash replies,

It’s interesting that you say mythopoetic, because *Daughters of the Dust* is like speculative fiction, like a *what if* situation on so many different levels.

Like *what if* we could have an unborn child come and visit her family-to-be and help solve the family’s problems.

What if we had a great-grandmother who could not physically make the journey north but who could send her spirit with them.

What if we had a family that had such a fellowship with the ancestors that they helped guide them, and so on.

Myth, of course, plays a very important part in all of our lives in everyone’s culture. Without myth and tradition, what is there? So there is the myth of the Ibo Landing, which helped sustain the slaves, the people who were living in that region.

Then they go into the myth of Ibo Landing. Refused to live in slavery, flew back to Africa, or walked into water and drowned themselves.⁵⁹

By invoking these “what if” scenarios in *Daughters*, Dash addresses her viewers and invites them to speculate on what might have possibly happened in the past, and what might be possible in the future. The speculative conjunction “if” presents the viewer with a hypothetical or possible situation that invites the viewer to ponder what might happen “if” these things were to happen. As a conjunction, “if” is a word that is used to join sentences, or clauses. It is also used to

coordinate words in the same clause. By presenting these hypothetical scenarios in *Daughters* Dash leaves her viewers to ponder their possible consequences, rather than providing them with concrete answers. Her viewers are very much a part of her critical utopian project of speculation that offers fragments of utopian possibilities. Dash does not say to her viewer: “this is what happened in the past,” “this is the history of African American culture,” or “this is African American culture.” Instead, African American culture is composed of speculations and ruminations by Dash and her audience. Taking on the role of storyteller, Dash does not view her audience as passive viewers, but weaves a speculative narrative to entreat her viewers to collaborate in a creative process of storytelling.

For Dash, speculation is the practice of asking her viewers: “what if” seemingly astonishing and impossible acts are equally valued as “facts” or “historical events”? By bringing “ethnographic details,” or the materiality of Gullah history, into the realm of the mythic Dash produces a critical utopia about speculative time and challenges her viewers to rethink, among many other things, storytelling, black culture, filmic practices, the role of myth and the role of facts. Indeed the work of speculation here contrasts against documentary practices to demonstrate how speculation is equally, if not more, important and valuable. Thinking about our “what ifs” allows us to dislodge concrete and static knowledge, and allows the viewer to think differently about not only astonishing places but also astonishing times and possibly astonishing consequences and results. “What if” the “family’s problems,” of rape, labor, and migration, could be “solved” through a figure that has not yet been born? What if the present could find answers in a ghostly figure that not everyone can see? What if Nana Peasant and their ancestors’ spirits follow the Peasants to protect and guide them?

Dash also presents the viewer with the myth of Ibo Landing. The story has long been told in the Sea Islands that Africans brought to the Islands who refused to live in slavery either walked into the Atlantic Ocean and drowned themselves, or flew back to Africa. The myth of Ibo Landing and the “what ifs” in *Daughters* finds answers in spirits and mythology and allows for ghosts and spirits to protect the Peasant women, and Africans flying to escape slavery. Accompanying these possibilities are alternative notions of time that are not attached to facts and authenticity. If Dash’s film were merely teaching her viewers about Gullah culture they would not be able to participate in her creative process. Luckily, this is not Dash’s approach, and her viewers are allowed to fill in the blank, as it were. They are left to wonder and contemplate what if these myths, spirits, and unborn children could help us imagine different pasts, presents, and futures. As I discuss earlier, African American documentary, in its attempt to represent the authentic, is reliant upon linear notions of time. Finding the most realistic representations becomes in the late twentieth century, the most valid way of knowing and documentary becomes a locus of answers for the present. In other words, narratives of authenticity and truth are attached to narratives of non-speculative time. Because, to speculate would mean that one could not document a truth. To speculate would be to undermine claims to authenticity.

The rest of the chapter will focus on Dash’s acts of speculation. Dash’s “black feminist critical utopia” is an explicit engagement with a disruption of traditional documentary form as a way to imagine an “end of the innocence of the essential black subject.” Dash’s filmic practice represents both a continuation of and break with the utopian and dystopian epistemological and formal values of black documentary and Black Nationalism. The aims of reading *Daughters* as a black feminist critical utopia in the moment of the 1990s is to track the ways in which discourses of black authenticity in black documentary relied on linear narratives of time and a spatial

narrative of the urban ghetto which produced black male subjects as the motor for revolutionary action. I argue that Dash's black feminist critical utopia is a refusal of authenticity that shifts our understanding of utopia from one that is connected to regimes of spatiality to a utopia based on regimes of time. Dash helps us come to understand the ways in which time has become a central way through which claims to authenticity have been narrated. I define black feminist critical utopia as the constant use of utopian literary forms and devices to envision race in ways that are incompatible with dominant antiracist minority representational practices that have been deeply attached to, and have produced, normative notions of "authentic" black subjects. Black feminist critical utopia present us with a significant intervention into the utopian aesthetics of film and the kinds of subjects and logics of inequality that are created. Black feminist critical utopias are self-reflexive narratives that delineate a divergence from, and a critique of, Black documentaries and Black Nationalism, which reproduced the conditions of inequality through the utopian narratives of black revolutionary men.

A Black Feminist Critical Utopia: Speculative Temporal Practices in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

The film opens with the sound of African music. Following the documentary form, the following information appears onscreen:

At the turn of the century, Sea Island Gullahs, descendants of African Captives, remained isolated from the mainland of South Carolina and Georgia.

As a result of their isolation, the Gullah created and maintained a distinct, imaginative and original African American culture.

Gullah communities recalled, remembered and recollected much of what their ancestors brought with them from Africa...

After the text, there is a shot of hands, palms open, filled with dirt. The sun is setting as we get a close up of the indigo, blue-stained hands of a young black woman, a Young Nana Peazant. The year is 1860. In her hands, she holds Sea Island soil, and the strong wind slowly blows the dust from her hands, and the soil fall through her fingers.⁶⁰ The image of the hands dissolves into an image of a fully dressed Nana Peazant washing herself in the water. She is now eighty-eight years old and the great-grandmother of the Peazant family. Off screen Nana Peazant's voice hauntingly announces,

I am the first and the last.

I am the honored one and the
scorned one.

The scene then dissolves to a shot of Eli and Eula Peazant's, Nana's son and daughter-in-law, bedroom and the camera moves even more slowly across the room, exploring its interior. There is a nightstand with a large bowl next to a bed draped in sheer white fabric. Eula is lying beneath a thin white quilt. Off screen the woman continues to speak:

I am the whore and the holy one.

I am the wife and the virgin.

I am the barren one, and many
are my daughters.

The image of Eli and Eula Peazant's bedroom slowly fades into a scene of a river with a boat in the distance. The flowing white curtains from Eula and Eli's bed are briefly overlaid onto the entire image of the water and boat. Then, there is a clear image of the river and boat without the overlay. The image dissolves into a close up of the boat. Three black men are guiding the boat through the river. Yellow Mary Peazant, a light-skinned Peazant woman, is standing in the boat,

wearing a white dress, a hat with a mesh veiling, heavy make-up and her hand is perched on her hip. She is returning to Ibo Landing for a family reunion before the younger Peazants migrate from the Sea Islands to the mainland. We later find out that Yellow Mary is a prostitute who is returning with her lover, Trula. The scene dissolves into a close-up of Yellow Mary as she rubs the St. Christopher's charm around her neck. Again, off screen Nana Peazant speaks:

I am the silence that you can
not understand. I am the
utterance of my name.

The scene fades to a black screen for three seconds until the title of the movie appears. We then see the Sea Islands, an island chain separated from the mainland by marshes and tidal estuaries that extends along the Atlantic coast, from Savannah to the north of Charleston. We hear “talking drums” sending messages from island to island. After the shot of the islands from above, the viewer then sees the trees on the island and the location and time of the film: THE SEA ISLANDS OF THE SOUTH, 1902.⁶¹ The camera pauses on this information for nine seconds.

Within these opening images of *Daughters*, Dash announces her speculative critical utopian strategies for re-thinking the question of resignifying black authenticity in black film. These strategies include layered dissolves, a slow temporal narrative, and a complex layering of narrative voice that pulls together the past, present, and future that disrupts the temporality of black documentary and Black Nationalist utopia and lends itself to speculative time and spaces. In speaking about speculative temporal practices, I am referring both to the non-linear narrative of *Daughters*, as well as the tempo or rate and speed of the film. Dash employs these strategies not to present a “more authentic” story of black life but to disrupt dominant modes of black documentary that relies on narratives of authenticity and individual subjectivity. Dash draws

upon documentary, black photographic techniques, and black feminist writers to present a complicated narrative film that questions ethnographic desire for authenticity through the production of estranging, multiple, intersecting, and collective narratives and subjects. Even though Dash begins the film by employing a documentary practice of narration by framing the story with information on the Gullah people, for those who approach the film as a documentary on Gullah people as Todd Carr does, they will always be dissatisfied because she quickly questions the mode of documentary and its truth claims as the sole vehicle for black cultural politics.

Dash translates black feminist literary traditions of questioning ethnography, documentary, spatial and temporal logics, into an innovative black feminist visual film practice which can be noted through her use of dissolves, which produces speculative temporalities and subjectivities. I read the dissolves and overlapping images as a commentary on the temporal modes utilized by black documentary and films like *Malcolm X* that are tied to the realist aesthetics of minority nationalism that promise to provide clear and adequate representations of black reality. As Ntongela Masilela has written, Dash “develop[s] several narrative lines that intersect each other and, in the process, constitute[s] a dense narrative structure” that facilitates the examination of “the power of the imagination to alter reality, and the perpetuation of tradition and its transformation through continuity and discontinuity.”⁶² While Todd Carr describes the movie as “redolent with slow dissolves, languid camera moves and a jerky, experimental form of slow motion that makes one not want to see another camera trick for another six months,”⁶³ I argue that Dash’s “slow dissolves” and “experimental form of slow motion” are more than just camera tricks and does more than merely mark the passage of time, but is part of the formal address “to” Dash’s viewers. The dissolves interrupt and break up the images on the screen,

constantly interrupting the facticity of what the viewer sees and hears throughout the film. Nana Peasant, Eula, and Yellow Mary's storylines and images cut into each other and overlap to create new images that refuses to offer her viewer a singular or "authentic" story about Gullah culture, and challenges her viewers to see film in a new way.

These dissolves can be seen as marking, as Masilela argues, "a new aesthetics of cinematography consonant with the lived experience of time and consciousness by Africans in the Diaspora."⁶⁴ This is not to say that Dash is using these aesthetics to talk "about" Africans in the Diaspora, but instead we must understand the "lived experience of time and consciousness by Africans in the Diaspora" as being connected to a process. In other words, to think about the "lived experience" of Africans in the diaspora is to understand "the idea of diaspora...as a response—a utopian eruption of space into the linear temporal order of modern black politics which enforces the obligation that space and time must be considered relationally in their interarticulation with racialized being." According to Paul Gilroy, the "racialized being" must be understood in relationship to temporality, historicity, memory, modernity, and narrativity because these forms, processes, and principles are central to understanding the "response" that is diaspora and "black political countercultures that grew inside modernity."⁶⁵ Dash challenges her viewers to think differently about the "racialized beings" they see onscreen and by doing so, she inculcates her viewers in her process of rethinking black film aesthetics, identity, and cultural politics. While Dash's speculative temporality represents a third world notion of time that lays emphasis on process rather than content, and paradoxically appears to bring us back to a new norm and a new authentic representation of third world people, I argue that her critical utopia is not about creating a new norm. She is engaging in questions of third world time, authenticity, and representation to critique norms that fix reality. Dash's speculative temporality aligns more

closely to the “lived experience of time and consciousness by Africans in the Diaspora” but is about the processes that have come to either erase or produce black cultural practices, not about a more adequate representation.

Dash’s mode of time is important, not because it leads to authentic stories, but because they provide commentary on existing norms and these norms’ inability to narrate a black feminist critical utopian temporality that emphasizes fragmentation. I am arguing, then, that her speculative temporality critiques norms so that we can start to imagine a black feminist utopian temporality that opens onto what the utopian genre should do. Rather than trying to gain total access of Dash’s utopia, she is telling us that the utopian is not a wholly accessible way of thinking because we are already so heavily governed by norms. A black feminist utopian temporality, though, is a constant practice of critiquing norms. This is how we get fragments of utopia that cannot totally be pieced together, known, or imagined. These fragments of Dash’s black feminist critical utopia can be noted in the opening of the film that I describe above.

The documentary information about the Sea Island Gullahs is juxtaposed against Nana’s hands, and the viewer gets a quick glimpse of 1860 before we are in different moments in 1902. The viewer then sees Eli and Eula, then Yellow Mary and Trula, in different spaces and scenes. Nana Peasant is in the fields working, then in the water, Eli and Eula are in the private space of their bedroom, Yellow Mary and Trula are on a boat in the river, returning home. The visual images of Nana, Eula, and Yellow Mary stand in contrast to the opening information at the beginning of the film. The text promises a story about Gullah communities and descendants, but these images point to fragmented identities, narratives, and histories. None of these women are exactly the same and all of them inhabit very different spaces and histories, even though they are descendants of the Gullah. Yet, their lives are intertwined. The still, overlapping image of Eula’s

bedroom imposed upon the image of Yellow Mary on the boat is an image that is pieced together with experiences and people from different scenes, but forces the audience to see each separate scene in different ways. This different way of seeing begins to open onto a black feminist utopian temporality that emphasizes breaks in visual narrative.

These glimpses or fragments of utopia remain important. Dash uses dissolves to interrupt the images and tempo of her film not only to disrupt the linear passage of time but also to break up notions of individual lives and subjectivities that accompany narratives of linear time. Her speculative temporality does not seek to reify time and experience in the same way as black documentary or *The Kerner Report*. Unlike black documentary, Dash does not produce a linear and singular narrative because she is not interested in documenting and telling the story of authentic Gullah people. Instead, the dissolves help each character's story and scene bleed into the next character's storyline to produce an intertwining narrative about black female subjectification that is open-ended. Dash's black feminist utopia is fragmented and serves as a critique of normalizing coherent narratives.

In many ways Dash takes part in black feminist ethnographic practices that seek to redefine ethnography, such as Zora Neale Hurston does in her 1935 piece *Mules and Men*. Lynda Hoffman-Jeep has argued that Hurston's African American tales, "on multiple levels, especially linguistic, narrative, and source-related... both break and concurrently establish a new direction in the ethnographic tradition."⁶⁶ bell hooks has stated that

... *Daughters of the Dust* becomes a kind of critical commentary on the ethnographic film, because one might talk about Viola as a kind of contemporary anthropologist—the ethnographer, and Mr. Snead as the ethnographic filmmaker, and the film explodes that. It disrupts their vision and it says that, in fact, she

can't really give up on those traditions of the past, and still be a whole self. That's so explicit in the film.⁶⁷

Like Hurston and Naylor, Dash engages in questions of ethnography. Mr. Snead, the photographer who accompanies Viola, a family member who is returning to the Sea Islands, cannot possibly capture this overlapping and complex story. While Viola wants Mr. Snead to act as an anthropologist, as someone who will interview and photograph Gullah culture, Dash highlights Mr. Snead's incapacity to capture the complex life of the Gullah. There is not a singular authentic Gullah woman or experience that could be easily translated into a picture. After a series of interviews and sightings of Eula and Eli's unborn child, *Unborn Child*, Mr. Snead himself changes and attention is called to the "fact that in conventional films we're seduced by technique and fail to ask what's being filmed and in whose interest, and by failing to remain critical, become implicated in the reconstruction/reinforcement of a hierarchical ideology."⁶⁸

In questioning this dominant ideology of film, Dash "expresses solidarity with international cadres whose interrogations have been throwing all codified certainties about film into crisis."⁶⁹ Dash's black feminist critique of American nationalism also stylistically aligns Dash with postcolonial critiques of American nationalism. At the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, Dash was exposed to cinematographers from Tunisia, Guyana, and Turkey who produced non-Western work that was not formulaic. Rather than structuring the film as a formulaic Western documentary that presents "facts" and linear narratives of the lives and migration of a Gullah family that privileges the "logical" unfolding of linear time. Dash turns to African and African American modes of representation, which helps add to the foreignness of her film. For instance, Dash structures the story in a way that an

African griot would recount a family's history. The story would just kind of unravel. This very important day would unravel through a series of vignettes...

The story would come out and come in and go out and come in, very much the way in Toni Cade Bambara's work one character would be speaking to another and then it goes off on a tangent for several pages and then she brings it back and goes out and back again.⁷⁰

Dash breaks with a linear narrative and instead "brings it back and goes out and back again," allowing the story to unravel through multiple temporalities. This allows Dash the freedom to blur the past, present, and future, and myth and realism, which we can see just her opening scene. In the few opening minutes of her film, the viewer is drawn into 1860 with Nana Peazant the head of the Peazant family as a slave, then 1902, post-emancipation where the viewer sees her children Eula and Eli, and we later find out that Eula is carrying Unborn Child in her womb. The scene then dissolves into the boat with Yellow Marry returning home. From the beginning of the film Dash refuses to give her viewers a story about an individual woman. The story is not only about Nana Peazant, nor is it only about Yellow Mary or Eula.

Spike Lee also integrates multiple time periods in *Malcolm X*. By providing a voice-over of Malcolm's words to frame the moment of the King beating of 1991 Lee is engaging in questions of history and the present. For Lee, it is important to understand the present by way of history; however, Lee's use of time ends up reproducing Malcolm X as a universal black subject that can frame any moment. Unlike Dash, Lee does not break away from the linear narrative of Black Nationalism that strives to attain equality through men like Malcolm who "was our manhood, our living, black manhood." In other words, while *Malcolm X* is about the progressive unfolding of a black man's developmental journey from a life of crime, prison, education, and

political awakening—an awakening that Lee is arguing that African Americans in the 1990s must also experience—Dash’s film unfolds in a much different way.

Dash successfully breaks away from the Black Nationalist utopia of black manhood and presents her viewers with an alternative filmic tempo through carefully composed scenes that disrupt realist temporalities. Dash questions the standard frame rate of conventional film practices of the U.S., which she draws from Third World Cinema. As Bobo argues, “through the careful composition of individual shots, and through editing in such a way that the scenes become iconic portraits, the images resonate beyond their duration on the screen.”⁷¹ This is also a result of Dash contracting Arthur Jafa (A.J.) as director of cinematography. A.J. questioned most generic film conventions. He also questioned the standard of twenty-four-frames-per-second rate, which has been the conventional speed for rendering truth through film in the U.S., as the best kinesthetic rendering of black experience.⁷² Dash and A.J. instead changed the frame rate to underscore certain temporalities—the future or the past within the present. Within the same scenes the shots stop and pause at different moments to capture “portraits” of significant moments.

For instance, as Toni Cade Bambara points out, Steven Spielberg’s 1985 version of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, which is set in the same period of *Daughters*, quickly moves over the year in which the film takes place—1902. *Daughters*, on the other hand, lingers on the date and location—1902, Ibo Landing—for nine seconds, six beats longer than Spielberg’s pause on the date.⁷³ Again, Dash’s slow meditation is not arbitrary, but serves to provide an alternative tempo to commercial films like *The Color Purple* where time is less important. Dash locates time as the feature that has to be disrupted with her move from realism to a black feminist cinematic politic that lays emphasis on speculation. 1902 is very important to Dash because capturing the

date and location of the film as a portrait draws attention to the importance of this historical moment for the subjects of the film—a group of people who are one generation out of bondage, and whose people were slaves merely forty years earlier. By doing this, Dash revisits the history of colonialism and slavery in the Americas as a crucial moment in black identity formation, shifting the focus away from Black Nationalism’s emphasis on representations of black masculinity. Moreover, time is important for Dash because Dash recognizes that power—the power to narrate black history, lives, identities and experiences—is inherited in form and naturalized through temporality. The problem with Hollywood cinema is that mainstream Hollywood films like *The Color Purple* have the power to naturalize time. Dash’s black feminist critical utopia challenges her viewer to consider what it means to say that our sense of temporality is naturalized by mainstream cinema, especially when that temporality has dictated the ways in which we have come to know history, identity, and storytelling.

As Jacqueline Bobo and Ntongela Masilela have discussed, Dash’s “layered dissolves” is a re-creation of and homage to James Van Der Zee, one of the first black photographers in the U.S. and an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Sometimes Van Der Zee’s portraits were composed of superimposed images, combining multiple photos in one image that pulled the past, future, or otherworldly things into the object he captured with his camera. In image 1, for instance, Van Der Zee superimposes an image of a child onto a wedding picture of a young black couple. The faint image of the child is a marker of things to come but is not yet here. Image 2, is a picture of Florence Mills, a famous African American singer, dancer, and comedian. Here, Van Der Zee super-imposes an image of Mill looking out over her casket.



Image 1



Image 2

Dash pays homage to and situates herself within a history of innovative black photographic representational techniques. Moreover, Dash employs the layered dissolves to disrupt the tempo of film and disrupts dominant practices of photography that attempt to capture a truthful moment. As one scene dissolves into the next the audience's viewing experience is slowed down as viewers are given multiple objects and scenes overlapping as one image. Similar to Van Der Zee's superimposed pictures, Dash uses the technique of layered dissolves that combines multiple images to superimpose one shot on another. Just as Van Der Zee employed this technique to give an image that captures the future of the newly wedded couple, and the eerie presence of the late Florence Mills, Dash's overlapping of images is playing with the temporality of the film which points to the multiple narratives and storylines of the film. Unlike dominant films that showcases and follows the life of one main character, Dash offers us simultaneous narratives. The image of Nana Peasant, as a young woman then old, is followed by Eula's bedroom, which fades into a superimposition of Eula's bedroom onto the scene of the river with the boat Yellow Mary.

As I note earlier in the chapter, Judith Butler argues that the jurors "came to see" King's body as a danger to the law, and consequently "this 'seeing' requires to be read as that which

was culled, cultivated, regulated—indeed, policed—in the course of the trial.” This act of seeing, Butler argues, constructs a “racial production of the visible, the workings of racial constraints on what it means to ‘see.’”⁷⁴ What Butler is importantly pointing out is that the trial produces a mode of “seeing” blackness and that acts of “seeing” are not natural, but entrenched in historical processes. Dash is similarly challenging the notion that our acts of perception are natural. According to Johannes Fabian, ethnographic and anthropological rhetoric have distanced their subjects by placing them in temporal frames in ways that deny their coevalness and contemporaneity. This denial, Fabian argues, is the very thing that obstructs anthropology from an awareness of its politicized and intellectual history and context. Furthermore, the subjects of anthropology were approached as naturalized objects that were temporally distanced, rather than historically produced subjects.⁷⁵ Fabian is useful here because he points out how subjects are produced rhetorically through notions of time—whether it be their proximity or distance from the observer’s contemporary moment.

This allows us to note the ways in which Dash consciously disrupts notions of time through her overlaid images in order to disrupt dominant narratives of the universal subject. In other words, we can change our mode of perception through disrupting notions of time. This is why a large part of Dash’s project seeks to demonstrate how temporality is connected to our field of vision and is historically contingent. Linking time and perception helps Dash alter her viewer’s sense of temporality in order to change how her audience might approach the politics of writing, narrative, and subject making. Overlaying these images visually disrupts a neat and clear picture of the film’s protagonists, and inter-weaves their images and narratives in order to demonstrate the ways in which our ways of perceiving the visual field is historically contingent, not natural. She does not produce a story about one singular authentic female Gullah experience.

Daughters is not simply a linear or singular narrative about a Gullah man, or solely about Nana Peazant, Eula, or Yellow Mary, for that matter, but is a cross-generational visual narrative about multi-dimensional, connected, and disparate subjects.

Through film, Dash is able to add a voice-over component to the technique of superimposed images Van Der Zee revolutionized in order to complicate the question of who has the authority to speak and narrate the “reality” of the community or her experiences. By providing her viewer with two unreliable narrators, Nana Peazant and Unborn Child, Dash is purposefully “failing” to document. Documentary film practices, especially in *cinéma vérité*, attempt to “create intimate portraits of subjects who speak for themselves” because there is a suspicion of the “ ‘authority’ of voiceover narration.”⁷⁶ In *Daughters* Dash replicates these documentary techniques and has Nana Peazant and Unborn Child speak for themselves as well as provide a voice over in the film. The voices of Nana Peazant and Unborn Child add another layer to the overlaid scenes in order to disrupt what the viewer sees, and interrupts how the viewer might understand the lives of the Peazants. Eula’s bedroom space intrudes on the frames of Yellow Mary as Nana Peazant’s haunting words provides a voice over the images of the women:

I am the first and the last.

I am the honored one and the
scorned one.

I am the whore and the holy one.

I am the wife and the virgin.

I am the barren one, and many
are my daughters.

I am the silence that you can

not understand. I am the
utterance of my name.

Here, the “I” represents so many people that it must not be a realist “I.” The “I” here is not just referring to the speaker, Nana Peazant, but signals a collective and speculative “I” that is made up of contradictory and multiple subjects. She is “honored” and “scorned”; she is a “whore” and “holy”; “wife” and “virgin; “barren” and the mother of many daughters. And lastly, she exists both as “silence” and an “utterance.” This last contradiction can be read in two ways. The first is that these women are viewed as inscrutable, as subjects that cannot be understood because they are so different. And, she can only come into being through her naming. The second reading is that the “utterance of [her] name” has paradoxically created spaces of silence in which this collective “I” could never be understood or heard. In this latter understanding, then, she resists the ways in which she has been uttered, named, and described, and the space of silence in which we cannot hear her points to the inadequacy of how she has been named by others. And, as the person naming the contradictions of the women we see in the film, Nana Peazant herself is also marking herself as not being able to adequately represent the contradictions of the women in her family. Although Nana Peazant is the voice that frames the beginning of the film, and is the voice of authority on the women in her family, she does not know about another crucial character in the film, Unborn Child.

Complicating this overlapping visual and aural narrative is the use of an unusual narrator, the unborn child of Eula and Eli Peazant, Unborn Child. Lee Edelman argues that the “imaginary form of the child” has become a heteronormative emblem of the future that can suture wholeness.⁷⁷ While scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz agree with the idea that the future is homophobically envisioned as a space for children, not for queers, Muñoz argues that the future

should not be abandoned, as Edelman argues. For Muñoz, Edelman’s “antirelational approach” disables the imagination of a utopian future as a place and time for queer subjects, which is a notion of futurity that we most hold onto.⁷⁸ I see Dash’s *Unborn Child* as part of a project that seeks to reclaim and redefine futurity, in relationship to the present and past, in the same vein as black feminist writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.⁷⁹ In *Meridian* and *Beloved* children are not merely abstract figures. *Meridian*’s Wild Child and *Beloved*’s ghost are narratives about “the lingering inheritance of racial slavery” that makes possible different stories and histories. Through the narratives of children, Walker, Morrison, and Dash offer “some important lessons for how to counter ‘strategies of terministic violence and displacement.’” These child figures are what Avery Gordon calls a “haunting... animated worldliness... [and] the shadowy grip of ghostly matters” that “stretches at the limit of our imagination and at the limit of what is representable in the time of the now, to us, as the social world we inhabit.”⁸⁰

Similar to Van Der Zee’s use of a child to point toward the future (Image 1), Dash also includes *Unborn Child* as an interesting superimposed figure into the present moment of 1902 on the Sea Islands, a place and time *Unborn Child* exists only by virtue of being in Eula’s belly and one of our narrators. While Van Der Zee tries to disrupt a static image and moment of a wedding photo through the superimposition of the child, film allows Dash to take this disruptive figure of the future further by superimposing both *Unborn Child*’s ghostly image and voice onto the present. The camera slowly moves across the façade of Eula and Eli’s house, a sloping shanty painted indigo blue. A young girl’s voice speaks, “My story begins on the eve of my family’s migration north. My story begins before I was born.” The viewer sees a shot of Eula in bed, inside the shanty, underneath her quilt. She is sleeping next to Eli, and his back is turned to her. Eli is upset because Eula is pregnant, and the film suggests that a white man has raped Eula, even

though we never see the scene of rape or the rapist. Unborn Child speaks again, “My great great grandmother Nana Peazant saw her family coming apart. Her flowers to bloom in a distant frontier. And then there was my ma and daddy’s problem.” We get an image of a wall with paintings on Eula and Eli’s house. Unborn Child off-screen continues,

Nana prayed and the old souls guided
me into the new world. I came in time for the big celebration. To be among my
cousins, my aunties and uncles. I can still see their faces. Smell the oils in the
wicker lamps. I can still hear the voice of Auntie Hagar calling out for her
daughters Iona and Myown.

Even though Eula has not yet given birth to Unborn Child, Unborn Child’s story begins even before she is born, in a place she has never been because Eula will give birth to her after their migration north onto the U.S. mainland. She is present though because of Nana’s prayers, and the old souls that helped her arrive in the new world for the celebration of her family’s migration. Even though she has yet to meet them, she is happy to be with her family. And, even though no one can see her, she has senses and can see their faces, smell the oils in the lamps, and hear their voices. In film, Dash materializes a being that has not yet been materialized. In other words, Dash gives us a ghostly image of Unborn Child—someone who has not yet been born—and gives her the “authority” to describe to her audience what is going on, even though the idea that Unborn Child could have experiences and senses before her birth seems implausible. The audience is offered a speculative view point through an unreliable source who also becomes the viewer’s only source of information. This unreliable narrative structure is a core aesthetic value of Dash’s black feminist utopia as it undermines the “truth.” Dash’s narrator automatically undermines her own authority to speak and know what is going on even as she speaks and is

heard by an audience. As a speculative narrative figure, Unborn Child's voice frames the way viewers might understand what they see on screen, and can also speculate on what might be possible through Dash's narrative and opens up onto new ways of knowing.

Unlike black documentary, Dash lets go of the notion that she must provide her viewer with a narrator that can fully tell the truth about the subjects and events of the film. Her innovative film techniques of dissolves and speculative narrators makes her film a "failed" documentary; however, what we get instead are practices of speculating on the possibilities of "what if" the future can speak to the past, and "what if" we can never know authenticity as we understand it? What else do we have?⁸¹ Dash's black feminist answer is that we do not have the authenticity that we believe we can capture on film, but instead we must have different imaginations about time that reveal and challenge realist temporalities that would seek to naturalize our sense of perception. Black documentary is not about documenting the future because to do so would be involved in a speculative project; rather, black documentary aims to describe or explain what has already happened. Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* does not provide alternative notions of time even though Lee joins the 1960s with the 1990s. Lee instead relies on the teleology of becoming a political subject *like* Malcolm, which naturalizes time in such a way that allows his viewers to identify with a singular subject, Malcolm X. Against these practices, Dash seeks to disrupt temporalities that produce singular political subjects that are naturalized through realist narratives of time that fail to account for the historical emergence of political subjects.

Black documentary, Black Nationalism, and realist black films lay emphasis on representing past and present struggles *for* a more just future. Documentary for the most part is documentation of the past and or present, and rarely about the future. How can you "document"

or provide an “authentic” account of the future? Because documentary is about reproducing the “actuality” of what has happened, it would be impossible for documentary to claim a truthful future. And, by believing that the truth of historical and present inequalities can be revealed and inhabited these film practices produce closed notions of authenticity that prohibits speculative visions of social equality. Dash aligns herself with non-western modes of narrative film and instead of articulating the African American experience of the Gullah as being wholly tied to the U.S. or Africa—in aesthetics, in form, and in geography—*Daughters* presents speculative, defamiliarizing, and estranging notions of what *might* be. She does not give us the certainty that black documentary film traditionally promises.

Dash sets up these contradictions—the contradictions of female subjectivity, the contradictions of time, the contradictions of truth and facticity—not because she promises a resolution or claims to knowing truth; rather, *Daughters* points to the inability to resolve these contradictions. Resolving contradictions by producing singular authentic subjects, in different ways, is the work of the liberal racial state, minority nationalism, and traditional black documentary film. Dash does not attempt to replicate the practices of the Post-Cold War Racial Liberal State that re-assert U.S. state authority to tell the public the “truth” of what she sees, as with the case of the King beating. U.S. state and legal institutions and minority movements sought to resolve the contradictions of race and gender by providing clearly marked and authentic subjects to narrate social inequality and social transformation. For Dash and black feminist cultural workers of the 1990s, inhabiting, not resolving, these contradictions open up ways of mobilizing racialized and gendered identities for social transformation, not inserting new authoritative subjects who can interpret truths. Dash allows us to understand the limitations of

the racial liberal and minority logics of authenticity and singularity that rely on the erasure of contradictions.

Black documentary film cannot tell the speculative story of *Unborn Child* and the *Peazants* and *Daughters of the Dust* remains an important film because of its refusal of the documentary form. The film's refusal to produce a clear, linear plot and narrative to produce identifiable Gullah subjects, and the film's refusal to provide the viewer with an authoritative narrator who can speak to the truth of what happened in 1902 is Dash's great contribution. By refusing these narrative practices, Dash gives us the freedom to speculate on alternative notions of time in order to re-imagine our past, present, and future for racialized and gendered politics that do not re-produce the social inequalities that are consequential to the "innocence of the black subject." And, by heralding the "end of the notion of the innocent black subject" Dash allows us to continue asking: "what if?"

¹ "Documenting Social Issues: Black Journal, 1968-1970" Tommy Lee Scott, 73.

² Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, *Dark Horizons*, 2.

³ For more on the Black Arts movement, see Daniel Widener and James Smethurst. While the Black Arts Movement has been dominantly understood as the "cultural wing" of the Black Power Movement, a movement that was confined to the East Coast between 1965 and 1975, scholars such as James Smethurst have argued that Black Power could easily be understood as "the political wing of the Black Arts Movement." This reconfiguration points to the centrality of the black arts for understanding black political movement in the postwar period. Daniel Widener also usefully opens up the Black Arts Movement as a movement that spans the postwar period and extends beyond the East Coast and shifts our spatial and temporal understanding of the Black Arts Movement.

⁴ According to Amiri Baraka, "The movement by young, black artists in the 60s to create an art, a literature that would fight for black people's liberation with as much intensity as Malcolm X our 'Fire Prophet' and the rest of the enraged masses who took to the streets in Birmingham after the four little girls had been murdered by the Klan and FBI, or the ones who were dancing in the street in Harlem, Watts, Newark, Detroit. We wanted an art that would actually reflect black life and its history and legacy of resistance and struggle! We wanted an art that was as black as our

music... An art that would educate and unify black people in our attack on an anti-black racist America” (x). Amiri Baraka’s “Forword: The Wailer” in *Visions of a Liberated Future* by Larry Neal.

⁵ Kendall Thomas “Ain’t Nothin’ Like the Real Thing”: Black Masculinity, Gay Sexuality, and the Jargon of Authenticity,” 66.

⁶ Judith Butler, “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia,” in *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Riots*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams, 15. For further discussion on the ways the Rodney King trial reverses the logic of the seeing and produces a narrative of whiteness grounded in white male vulnerability and white endangerment, see Thomas Foster’s *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory*.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹ Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15, my italics.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁴ In “Uptown where we Belong: Space, Captivity, and the Documentary of Black Community” Mark Frederick Baker and Houston A. Baker, Jr. write that “*Black documentary* is any film or video (whether made by a black director or not, whether ‘fiction’ or ‘nonfiction’ under traditional academic definitions) dealing specifically with the situation of African personhood in America in its myriad transmutations. Black documentary seeks not only to record and interpret the obvious surface oppression of African Americans (Ellison’s eviction scene), but also to uncover the underlying politics and forces of the system (‘rightlessness’ as signified by manumission papers and bills of sale) that has brought about and sustains African American oppression. This is the necessary ‘sobriety’—a characterization drawn from the work of the scholar Bill Nichols—that black film or video must possess in order to earn the title *black documentary*. Under this definition what traditional academic scholarship designates as *non-documentary* or *fiction* may be included as *black documentary*” (218).

¹⁵ “Eyes on the Prize: Reclaiming Black Images, Culture, and History” Elizabeth Amelia Hadley, 105.

¹⁶ Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary*, 74.

¹⁷ “Introduction: Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video” Janet K. Cutler and Phyllis R. Klotman in *Struggles for Representation*, ed. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, xix.

¹⁸ “Documenting Social Issues: Black Journal, 1968-1979,” Tommy Lee Scott, 77.

¹⁹ “Introduction” to *Struggles for Representations*, ed. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, xviii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

²² *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

²³ “Documenting Social Issues: Black Journal, 1968-1970” Tommy Lee Scott, 84-90.

²⁴ “Introduction” to *Struggles for Representation*, ed. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, xvi-xvii. My italics

²⁵ “Eyes on the Prize: Reclaiming Black Images, culture, and History” Elizabeth Amelia Hadley, 100-101.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁷ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 113-115. These vigilante films that marks the “right cycle” countercurrents can be seen in films such as *Rocky* (1976) and *Star Wars* (1977), Guerrero argues.

²⁸ In addition to the escalating political activism and its protests against representations of blackness in Hollywood, the film industry was facing an economic crisis as “cinema admissions were down by fifty million since the 1950s and MGM auctioning off Judy Garland’s shoes from the Wizard of Oz, Hollywood has been seeking fresh ways out of its financial trauma,” Jon Hartmann, “The Trope of Blaxploitation in critical Response to ‘Sweetback,’” 383. According to Ed Guerrero in *Framing Blackness*, at the same time, Hollywood recognized the consumer power of urban blacks who had been, during the postwar years, pushed into Northern urban centers. After the urban riots, demographics continued to shift as whites moved to the suburbs, leaving urban cities and theaters to a young black population. Hollywood discovered that while “blacks made up 10-15 percent of the population, they made up more than 30 percent of the audience in first-run, major-city theaters,” 84.

²⁹ “Paths of Enlightenment: Heroes, Rebels, and Thinkers,” Clyde Taylor, 125.

³⁰ Guerrero, 120.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³² Phillip Brian Harper, *Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American identity*, ix.

³³ At the time of the filming of *Malcolm X*, Nelson Mandela had just been released after being imprisoned for twenty years. Mandela could not finish Malcolm’s famous speech by saying “by any means necessary” because he was afraid that the apartheid government would use it against him. *By Any Means Necessary: Making of Malcolm X*.

³⁴ Cutler Introduction, xxxi.

³⁵ Stuart Hall’s “What is this ‘black’ in black popular culture?” in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, 474.

³⁶ “Making Daughters of the Dust” Julie Dash, 1-4.

³⁷ “Not Without my Daughters” interview, Julie Dash and Houston A. Baker, Jr.

³⁸ “Making *Daughters of the Dust*,” Julie Dash, 4.

³⁹ Interview with Houston Baker, 154-155.

⁴⁰ Ntongela Masilela’s “Women Directors of the Los Angeles School,” 22 and “The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers,” 108. Daniel Widener’s *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*, 256-257.

⁴¹ Masilela, “The Los Angeles School of Black filmmakers,” 110. Masilela sites Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s 1967 film *Memories of Underdevelopment* as an example of Cuban cinema.

⁴² Marlon Riggs in *Struggles for Representations*, ed. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, 380.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 474.

⁴⁶ Interview with Nelson George at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. My italics. <http://www.sundance.org/festival/article/from-the-collection-julie-dashes-1991-sundance-award-winning-daughters-of-th/>

⁴⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 200.

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*, 17.

⁴⁹ Todd Carr, "Daughters of the Dust," *Variety* Review, January 28, 1991.

⁵⁰ For more on the relationship on between documentary and this wave of films, see "Uptown where we Belong: Space, Captivity, and the Documentary of Black Community" Mark Frederick Baker and Houston A. Baker, Jr., Chapter 7 in *Struggles for Representations*, ed. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, 238.

⁵¹ In "Making *Daughters of the Dust*" Dash speaks about her pregnancy during preproduction. She says, "I had two choices—to put off the production for at least another year or to have an abortion. I made my decision to go forward with the filming of *Daughters*. I flew back to Atlanta to have the abortion. This was a painful decision many women have had to face... *Daughters* would become the child that I would bear that year" (10). The difference between Spike Lee and Julie Dash's films are not merely in content, but in the production process. Dash's guerilla approach to funding and distribution of her film was not the only difference, but also the ways in which the materiality of their gendered bodies affected their positions and filmmaking experience.

⁵² Julie Dash, "Making *Daughters of the Dust*," 16, 25.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁴ Toni Cade Bambara, "Preface" to *The Making of Daughters*, xiii.

⁵⁵ "Springing Tired chains: Experimental Film and Video" Paul Arthur, Chapter 9 in *Struggles for Representations*, ed. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, 273.

⁵⁶ For Gloria Naylor, see *Mama Day*.

⁵⁷ Interview with Karen Alexander 1993, 22.

⁵⁸ "Not Without my Daughters" interview, Julie Dash and Houston A. Baker, Jr. 163.

⁵⁹ "Dialogue Between bell hooks and Julie Dash" April 26, 1992, in *Making Daughters of the Dust*, 29.

⁶⁰ I gathered some of this detailed information from the screenplay in *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Film*

⁶¹ *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Woman's Film*, Julie Dash, 75-76.

⁶² Ntongela Masilela, "Women Directors of the Los Angeles School," 33,

⁶³ Todd Carr, "Daughters of the Dust," *Variety* Review, January 28, 1991.

⁶⁴ Masilela, 38.

⁶⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 191, 198.

⁶⁶ "Creating Ethnography: Zora Neale Hurston and Lydia Cabrera" *African American Review*, Fall, 2005, Lynda Hoffman-Jeep, 11.

⁶⁷ "Dialogue Between bell hooks and Julie Dash" April 26, 1992 in *The Making of Daughters of the Dust*.

⁶⁸ "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: *Daughters of the Dust* and the Black Independent Cinema Movement," Toni Cade Bambara, 133.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “Dialogue Between bell hooks and Julie Dash” April 26, 1992 in “Making *Daughters of the Dust*” by Julie Dash, 32.

⁷¹ Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers*, 134.

⁷² Toni Cade Bambara, “Preface” to *The Making of Daughters of the Dust*, xv.

⁷³ Toni Cade Bambara, “Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: *Daughters of the Dust* and the Black Independent Cinema Movement,” 130.

⁷⁴ Butler, 16.

⁷⁵ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 18.

⁷⁶ “Introduction: Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video” Janet K. Cutler and Phyllis R. Klotman, in *Struggles for Representation*, Janet K. Cutler and Phyllis R. Klotman, xxiv.

⁷⁷ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 31.

⁷⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 11.

⁷⁹ Barbara Christian. “An Angle of Seeing: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta’s *Joys of Motherhood* and Alice Walker’s *Meridian*.” In this essay, Christian discusses the ways African American motherhood “became a battleground for racist and sexist ideology” because of slavery. Slave women were valued not just for themselves but also for their ability to reproduce and create more slaves. In *Meridian* “The Wild Child,” a young girl who is motherless and becomes pregnant dies. Christian argues that this story of the young black girl “takes us back to Africa and to the violence of U.S. slavery” (101). *Meridian* remains tormented by the memory of slave mothers who starve to feed their children. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 139.

⁸⁰ Gordon, 165-166, 162.

Chapter Four

Antechambers for Struggle: Zapatistas, Chicana Feminism, and Utopian Spaces in a Post-NAFTA Era

We aren't proposing a new world, but something preceding a new world: an antechamber looking into the new Mexico. In this sense, this revolution will not end in a new class, faction of a class, or group in power. It will end in a free and democratic space for political struggle. This free and democratic space will be born on the fetid cadaver of the state party system and the tradition of fixed presidential succession.

Subcomandante Marcos, "Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle"

This final chapter studies the ways contemporary Chicana feminists, such as Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, take up Science Fiction to narrate fragmented utopias in a Post-NAFTA, Post-Cold War moment. In my previous chapter I discussed the potential of 1990s speculative fiction in black feminist critical utopian works such as Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. I argued that Dash's critical utopia, unlike the utopian projects of Black Nationalism, is imagined as a project that does not seek to reveal cohesive truths, but instead sees the utopian project as speculative and fragmented. Rather than producing a didactic lesson on how to be "the" revolutionary subject, a fragmented utopian project entreats Dash's viewers to join the collaborative process of critiquing the normative inequalities that were reproduced via the universal subject of Cold War liberalism and Black Nationalism. In doing so, Dash produces critical utopian visions that cultivate a collective process of storytelling that introduces new acts of speculation that re-invigorate our political imaginations.

I seek to extend the discussion on fragmentation and speculative utopias that I began to explore through Julie Dash's film. Here, I argue that fragmented utopias are central to Chicana feminism in the post-Cold War period as the world becomes increasingly fragmented in an era of transnational capitalism as typified through the North American Free Trade Agreement

(NAFTA). More specifically, I will ruminate on the critical potential of fragmented dystopias and utopias through the work of Chicana feminist writers and scholars Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita. Sánchez and Pita's 2009 dystopian novel *Lunar Braceros*, I argue, must be read as part of the complex and competing utopian projects that are imagining global fragmentation in the 20th-21st century. With modern capitalism utopia, as Philip Wegner has argued, becomes less about ideal societies and more about the imagination of particular national shapes, forms, and spaces of imagined societies.¹ Utopia emerges in modern capitalism so centrally because it becomes the mechanism for spatial production and the imagining of subjects for the coherency of the nation. While utopia is central to modern capitalism because the genre allows for the narration of a bounded nation, utopia emerges in an era transnational capitalism to re-narrate national boundaries.² Shifting modern capitalism's investment in the nation form, conventional transnational capitalist narratives produce utopian narratives of borderless worlds. One of NAFTA's central vision is a utopia of moving beyond borders. Turning to Lisa Nakamura's discussion of Internet utopia is useful for me here. Nakamura argues that in the 1990s communications corporations such as MCI and AT&T touted the Internet as a "pure, democratic, cerebral form of communication," or as a "utopia, pure no-place where human interaction can occur."³ Cyberspace becomes a utopia because it sketches a future in which "difference is either elided or put in its proper place," consumers become "part of a global network [that] will liberate the user from the body with its inconvenient and limiting attributes such as race, gender, disability, and age."⁴ Along with this promise of moving beyond race, gender, ability, and age is "a solution to social problems," through the production of a "radical form of democracy that refers to and extends an 'American' model of social equality and equal access."⁵ Nakamura's discussion of Internet utopia is very much revealing of the conventional utopian discourse of a

borderless world that circulated in the 1990s. Nowhere is this fragmented and borderless utopia more evident than in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). I argue that NAFTA is paradigmatic of this utopia of a borderless world in which the elimination of borders is supposed to serve as a solution to global economic, racial, social, gendered crises.

This chapter explores the ways in which utopia is employed and changes within a shift from modern capitalism to transnational capitalism under neo-liberalism. What I find is that the transnational capitalist utopia is a different kind of utopian narrative from traditional modern capitalist utopian conceptions. Under transnational capitalism the utopian narrative is no longer about upholding the boundaries of the nation-state, but is about moving beyond borders, as transnational corporations seek to disorganize and fragment national space and the globe in the interest of profits, not the nation-state. This fragmentation seems like Foucault's notion of heterotopia; however, it is actually anti-heterotopia because it seeks non-heterogeneity and the excision of difference and contradictions for homogeneity across borders.⁶ Nakamura reminds us that transnational utopias "claim a world without boundaries for us... and by so doing they show us exactly where and what these boundaries are, and that is ethnic and racial. Rather than being effaced, these dividing lines are evoked repeatedly" and the "language of American corporate technology" becomes the transnational language that is supposed to "end all barriers between speakers."⁷ In other words, transnational capitalist utopias that tout a borderless world in which differences *should no longer* matter, a world where heterogeneity should exist harmoniously; yet hierarchies and divisions are reinscribed over and over again as a language of U.S. transnational capitalist discourse seeks to erase heterogeneity in the name of "democracy," "equality," and "free market." I will later discuss more fully how transnational capitalist utopia narratives of moving beyond borders relies on a traditional and conservative re-universalizing narrative of the

developmental subject that tells the story of “underdeveloped” subjects that are in need of NAFTA for their own good. This narrative serves to not only universalize complex and distinct processes of transnational capitalism but it also produces an individualist narrative of development in which NAFTA becomes the answer to the “development” of migrant laborers and third world women.

Under modern capitalism, we have long lived with competing utopian imaginaries, representations and narratives of space that have sought to cohere national boundaries, as I have argued in my previous chapters; however, our the post-Cold War moment forces us to reckon with the ways in which NAFTA has ushered in an age of transnational capitalism that is no longer merely in the service of binding the nation. Instead, we are confronted with NAFTA’s transnational capitalist narrative that seeks to profit from the disorganization of national space and its fragments. This is the inquiry I begin with in this chapter. Dialectically linked to the seemingly overwhelming and totalizing narrative and spatial imaginary of NAFTA, exists the counter-narratives and imaginations of The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN). Chicana feminists Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, I argue, are aligned with the Zapatista desire, forms and categories, and politics that are alternative to the neoliberal project of NAFTA. What I find is that these writers and theorists—the Zapatistas, Subcomandante Marcos, Pita, and Sánchez— are sharing in a project that lays emphasis on a speculative and fragmented approach to forms, subjects, and culture. They are, after all, taking up the project of fragmentation that has been mobilized by NAFTA.

The first part of this chapter explores the impoverishment of transnational capitalist utopian thinking, as exemplified through NAFTA. As a response to NAFTA, the Zapatistas employ performative language, not rational discourse, to create political fictions through the

form of communiqués. By creating critical fictions, I argue that the Zapatistas are accepting their status as doing figural work, which is their innovation to politics and social movement. I then argue that Beatrice Pita and Rosaura Sánchez' *Lunar Braceros* is a response to a response, or rather, *Lunar Braceros* is a fictionalization of Zapatista tactics, and also a response to the false utopianism of NAFTA. Subcomandante Marcos, Pita, and Sánchez purposefully take up speculative utopian aesthetics in order to re-imagine a politics of fragmentation for a cultural politics that is alternative to the false utopia offered through NAFTA. To clarify, however, that there is no equivalence of practice between the literary project of Pita and Sánchez and the political fiction of Marcos. I spend much time in this chapter reading the false utopia of NAFTA, and the utopian imaginations of the EZLN because I read *Lunar Braceros* as having a dialectical relationship with NAFTA and the EZLN. This chapter ends with a discussion of the ways Pita and Sánchez are part of a borderlands Science Fiction tradition and are employing literature to intervene in national and transnational capitalist narratives of development. As a novel of communiqués, *Lunar Braceros* takes the cultural work of the EZLN into the space of the novel form in order to disrupt the developmental narrative and re-theorize borders and boundaries in a fashion very much in line with artist and writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña. Against the teleological and universal narrative of transnational capitalism, *Lunar Braceros* is a critical dystopia that is not about fixed and unchanging spaces, but provides an account of literary antechambers that treat space and time as speculative practices to imagine alternative utopian cartographies.

The Utopian Spatial Imaginary of NAFTA and the Developmental Subject

Ceremonially signed on December 17, 1992 by U.S. President George H.W. Bush, Mexican President Carlos Salinas, and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney the North

American Free Trade Agreement— the established response to a series of peaceful negotiations between the United States, Mexico, and Canada— was officially signed and came into effect on January 1, 1994 under President Clinton’s term in office. The stated goals of NAFTA are to eliminate barriers so that goods and capital could leave and enter the three countries more easily. Increase in trade between the three nations was the main goal set forth by NAFTA proponents, followed by the goal to “increase... direct financial investment across the three economies.” NAFTA supporters argued that these aims would positively affect all three economies due to an increase in foreign direct investment, gross domestic product, and job creation.⁸

Rather than approach NAFTA strictly as an economic foreign policy, I take up Saldaña-Portillo’s characterization of NAFTA as a “fiction of development” that “was promulgated under the operative fiction that territorial borders could be porous to goods and capital but closed to those laborers whose impoverishment is often the result of NAFTA-style development.”⁹ While it is important to note the narrative form of NAFTA, I do not do so to dismiss the very real material effects of this narrative. I am, instead, making an argument about the power of narrative. As the “fulcrum” of the neo-liberal moment¹⁰, NAFTA has powerfully reorganized our global division of labor through its transnational capitalist narratives of borders, and trade. The closed entity of the nation form is no longer functioning as the financial fix for modern capitalism and NAFTA comes to serve as a regulatory framework across states. The shift to transnational capitalism under NAFTA necessitates a reorganization of space and the nation. I want to further push this characterization of NAFTA as a fiction to think about the kind of fiction the architects of NAFTA produce. Studying the *kind* of fiction of development NAFTA relies on gives insight into *how* the fiction of NAFTA is created. Utopia, I argue, is the genre that becomes most fitting to tell the story of NAFTA’s narrative of development because NAFTA is a spatial narrative,

albeit a different spatial narrative from the utopia of modern capitalism of which Wegner speaks. Utopia continues, under transnational capitalism, as the narrative because it is a form that allows for the re-configuration of spatial logics.

Approaching NAFTA as a fiction of development helps to identify the spatial utopia that NAFTA creates. NAFTA's brief "Preamble," which precedes the full trade agreement, consisting of twenty-two chapters, "Notes," and "Annexes" lays out the overall goals and outcomes for NAFTA. The Preamble reads as follows:

The Government of Canada, the Government of the United Mexican States and the Government of the United States of America, resolved to:

STRENGTHEN the special bonds of friendship and cooperation among their nations;

CONTRIBUTE to the harmonious development and expansion of world trade and provide a catalyst to broader international cooperation;

CREATE an expanded and secure market for the goods and services produced in their territories;

REDUCE distortions to trade;

ESTABLISH clear and mutually advantageous rules governing their trade;

ENSURE a predictable commercial framework for business planning and investment;

BUILD on their respective rights and obligations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and other multilateral and bilateral instruments of cooperation;

ENHANCE the competitiveness of their firms in global markets;

FOSTER creativity and innovation, and promote trade in goods and services that are the subject of intellectual property rights;

CREATE new employment opportunities and improve working conditions and living standards in their respective territories;

UNDERTAKE each of the preceding in a manner consistent with environmental protection and conservation;

PRESERVE their flexibility to safeguard the public welfare;

PROMOTE sustainable development;

STRENGTHEN the development and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations; and

PROTECT, enhance and enforce basic workers' rights;

This "Preamble" serves as an introduction, or a preliminary or preparatory statement, that states the document's purpose, aims, and justification. Each statement is a commitment between the three countries, and indeed all of these commitments seem positive and everything points to an emergence of an ideal geo-political alignment between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. The first two aims: to "STRENGTHEN the special bonds of friendship and cooperation among their nations" and to "CONTRIBUTE to the harmonious development and expansion of world trade and provide a catalyst to broader international cooperation" narrate a story of "friendship" and "cooperation" between the three countries that is highly idyllic. NAFTA is intended to create a "harmonious development" through an expansion of trade. These points do not read like a policy, but craft a romantic story about what NAFTA will create, which entails the act of envisioning a new understanding between the three nations. Rather than being totally separate, the nations will become "friends," have a "mutually advantageous" relationship, and will be more closely bound through porous borders and trade. This new relationship between the three countries is reliant upon a re-imagination of space in the Western Hemisphere, in which Canada, the U.S., and Mexico have more porous borders to produce the Americas as an geographical economic zone. The permeability between the three countries is discursively established in the developmental narrative of this preamble.

Furthermore, the Preamble builds on a progressive, linear, and Western civilizational narrative that produces a free-market utopianism that renders obsolete the enclosed spatial precepts of the modern nation state. All of the capitalized words at the beginning of each commitment: “STRENGTHEN, CONTRIBUTE, CREATE, REDUCE, ESTABLISH, ENSURE, BUILD, ENHANCE, FOSTER, CREATE, UNDERTAKE, PRESERVE, PROMOTE, STRENGTHEN, and PROTECT” produce a narrative in which all three countries will equally benefit, be “strengthened,” “protected,” and “fostered” if we can imagine a world where these nations are not totally separate and closed off from one another, but are more open for the movement of capital. These words are also forward-looking in that they are adjectives that suggest development. These countries will *become* stronger; they *will be* “enhanced” through this trade agreement. The utopian temporality of progress here is tied to the imagination of the convergence of the U.S, Canada, and Mexico. The notion of a self-contained national economy is challenged as the notion of a new global economy and commodification are presumed to be the answer.

NAFTA promises to help the U.S. develop because it would provide the U.S. with manufacturers and access to Mexican workers, and give investors access to Mexican property and financial assets.¹¹ For Mexico, NAFTA “represents an attempt [for Mexico] to integrate into the global economy through trade liberalization and a reconfiguration of Mexico’s authoritarian state.”¹² In signing NAFTA, Mexico was attempting to imagine and project a more Mexican democratic state. In an attempt to distance Mexico’s image from the authoritarian regimes of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Mexico was now imagined as part of a new geographical imaginary that includes the U.S., the world’s supposed leading democratic nation. Mexico’s proximity to the U.S.—not only in terms of geography, but also in agreeing to U.S. trade policies

and approach to global economic integration—reinforces the image of the U.S. as the leader of the free nation, as the nation that can provide an ideal model for the global economy.

In many ways, then, NAFTA becomes representative of the next logical and rational phase of capitalism that does not merely serve to uphold the cohesion of the nation-state but instead can move beyond borders by producing spatial fragmentation for transnational capitalism. As a cultural text that passes itself off as rational politics, NAFTA remains connected to an empirical reality in which there is a struggle between who or what is deemed “rational.” In his “Remarks on the Signing of NAFTA” on December 8, 1993, Bill Clinton proclaimed:

I believe we have made a decision now that will permit us to create an economic order in the world that will promote more growth, more equality, better preservation of the environment, and a greater possibility of world peace. We are on the verge of a global economic expansion that is sparked by the fact that the United States at this critical moment decided that we would compete, not retreat.

In a few moments, I will sign the North American free trade act into law. NAFTA will tear down trade barriers between our three nations. It will create the world’s largest trade zone and create 200,000 jobs in this country by 1995 alone. The environmental and labor side agreements negotiated by our administration will make this agreement a force for social progress as well as economic growth.
...

Today we have the chance to do what our parents did before us. We have the opportunity to remake the world. For this new era, our national security we now know will be determined as much by our ability to pull down foreign trade barriers as by our ability to breach distant ramparts. Once again, we are leading.

And in so doing, we are rediscovering a fundamental truth about ourselves: When we lead, we build security, we build prosperity for our own people.

Those who can “compete” in this “critical moment” of “global economic expansion” are “rational,” or the creators of “an economic order in the world” that will lead to growth, equality, environmental justice, and world peace. This is the logic of global capitalism. A new global economic expansion will lead to world peace, equality, justice, social progress and economic growth. And, those who are not competitors in this new world market are missing out on “the opportunity to remake the world.” As President Clinton declares, this is “the chance to do what our parents did before us.” “Remaking the world,” as “our” parents did, claims U.S. authority to lead the world toward democracy vis-à-vis “pull[ing] down foreign trade barriers...to breach distant ramparts.” There is a new national formation here that is reliant upon a re-organization of the nation form, and the developmental narrative of NAFTA becomes its rationalization.

Saskia Sassen usefully demonstrates how studies of globalization should not treat the national and the global as hermetically enclosed entities; rather, Sassen argues, we must study the ways in which the national has been undergoing a process of disassembling, or “denationalization,” since the Bretton Woods conference in 1944. As scholars such as Josefina Saldaña-Portillo argue, the Bretton Woods Conference was the “birthplace of modern development as social engineering on a global scale.”¹³ According to Sassen, by the 1980s there were elaborate laws that were developed that “secured the exclusive territorial authority of national states to an extent not seen in earlier centuries. But there has been a considerable institutionalizing, especially since the 1990s, of the ‘rights’ of non-national firms, the deregulation of cross-border transactions, and the proliferation of privatized systems of law internal to specialized fields.”¹⁴ The protection of rights for “non-national firms,” the

“deregulation” of borders, and the increase of privatized systems work to strategically denationalize space and foreign policy for transnational capital, and not in the interest of the state.

“Denationalization,” however, does not signal “postnationalism,” as denationalization is Meant to capture processes that take place inside the national State. For [Sassen], then, the key issue distinguishing the novel condition was not that it took place necessarily outside, beyond the confines of the national State but rather, [her] concern was to specify the particular ways in which the development of a global economy necessitated a variety of policies that had to be implemented in national economies through national institutions.... [D]enationalization captured processes that were to be distinguished from older notions of extraterritoriality. Particular cases [she] focused on included a variety of national State agencies and committees, which have emerged as the institutional ‘home’ inside the national for the implementation of various new rules of the game necessary for the development and maintenance of a global economic system.¹⁵

Through denationalization Sassen is naming a shift in our conception of space and nation. She is not asserting that nations are irrelevant or nonexistent. In fact, nations are incredibly pertinent to the global economic system because the “development” and “maintenance” of the global economic system is implemented within national economies and through the institutions of the nation, even as these economies and institutions work to alter the function of the state element itself.¹⁶ Under transnational capitalism, global economic processes no longer solely take place outside the nation, but are originating in multiple states’ actions and policy in ways that are

imbricated within local and national policies and institutions. In other words, transnational capitalism does not get rid of states but destabilize, reorient, and fragment them.

While Sassen's notion of denationalization is incredibly useful to help delineate the shift from modern capitalism to transnational global processes, Lisa Lowe insightfully argues that we cannot merely understand this transformation in terms of denationalization. While the Cold War era was justified through "'official' historical narratives... for the purpose of unifying national identity" U.S. capitalism has shifted

production to the third world, making use, in low-cost export assembly and manufacturing zones, of Southeast Asian and Latin American female labor in particular, the proletarianization of nonwhite women has led to a breakdown and a reformulation of the categories and the relations of national, racial, and gender difference that were characteristic of the earlier, more nationalist-inspired orientalism. This contemporary shift toward the transnationalization of capital is not exclusively manifested in the 'denationalization' of corporate power but, more important, is also expressed in the reorganization of oppositional movements and constituencies against capital that articulate themselves in terms and relations other than the 'national'—notably, movements of U.S. women of color and third world women.¹⁷

Transnational capitalism has not merely increased corporate power but has re-articulated the "categories" and "relations" of "national, racial, and gender difference" beyond a "more nationalist-inspired" era. Shifts in capitalism have, therefore, inaugurated shifts in subject formation as oppositional movements, figures, and categories—in particular U.S. women of color and third world women opposition to capital—are emerging from the transnationalization

of capital. Indeed, naming new systems of domination is important; yet, Lowe reminds us that we must also study the ways in which oppositional and new subjects are formulated under transnational capitalism.

Subjects under transnational capitalism are produced at the limit of the state in a struggle over who or what is deemed “rational” and who or what is figured as a cultural object that can be represented and improved. Saldaña-Portillo has usefully argued that within this new era of development

emerged two new manifest subjects: the modern, fully developed subject and its premodern, underdeveloped counterpart. These subjects are *manifest* because their level of development appears as self-evident. What needed to be explained was not *whether* these subjects were developed but rather *how* the developed subject came to be so, and how the underdeveloped subject might follow in his path.¹⁸

Portillo reveals how there are two types of subjects in contemporary fictions of development. First is the “modern,” “fully developed subject” of countries like the U.S., and the other subject is the “underdeveloped” subject who is now being given the opportunity to “follow in [the developed subject’s] path.” These types of subjects, as Saldaña-Portillo shows us, must be “explained” through fictions of development. In a discussion on gay transnational politics Martin Manalansan demonstrates the ways in which “gay” is given meaning through the developmental narrative of an unliberated homosexuality that “culminates in a liberated, ‘out,’ politicized ‘modern,’ ‘gay’ subjectivity.”¹⁹ This linear narrative, Manalansan argues, “is meaningful within the context of the emergence of bourgeois civil society and the formation of the individual subject that really only occurs with capitalist and Western expansion.”²⁰ The narrative of an underdeveloped subject that “becomes” developed, like the unliberated gay subject that gains

liberation through a “modern” politicized subject is also given meaning through a similar temporalized narrative that attains meaning through a capitalist and Western expansionist framework. This account of time, according to Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan,

enable the production of binaries such as uncivilized/civilized, traditional/modern, backward/industrialized, and underdeveloped/developed that justify, under the guise of Reason, often violent transformations of society and ‘nature... in this universalized story of Progress, migration and its upheavals are reduced to a necessary, if sometimes unfortunate, subplot in the unfolding of History in Europe’s image.²¹

There is a convincing link between narratives of development, the production of binaries, and rationality. “Reason,” as Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan demonstrate, is attached to notions of “Progress,” as narrated through the mimicking of Western ideals. This overwhelming story of Progress takes precedence over the “subplots,” or the specific violence, hierarchy, and disenfranchisement that take place in this great story of “Progress.” Manalansan, Saldaña-Portillo, Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan all remind us that there must be an interrogation of the seemingly natural binaries that are placed upon subjects that live within and outside of transnational capitalist ideals.

While transnational capitalism is still reliant on a narrative of Western development it is not wholly like the narrative of modern development. NAFTA’s transnational capitalist narrative of development is utilitarian, and argues for individual rights by making people into money. While the transnational capitalist developmental narrative is still an individualist narrative it now also speaks of the gendered and migrant individual subject through a discourse of migrant rights, worker’s rights, and women’s rights, which produces the conditions for telling the stories of

fragmented subjects across nations, rather than the cohesive subject of the nation state. Central to this narrative of development is also a story about the kind of subject that would most succeed in this new global configuration. And, the subject that is “strengthened,” “fostered,” and “protected” is the developmental subject. Saldaña-Portillo argues that

the discourse of development requires an epochal change in its subject. It requires the subject to become an agent of transformation in his own right, one who is highly ethical, mobile, progressive, risk taking, and masculinist, regardless of whether the agent/object of a development strategy is a man or a woman, an adult or a child.²²

It is the subject of development that is valuable in this narrative, because he is the “innovative” and “creative” subject that can take part in this new global economy. This is the subject who can succeed and do well in this new spatial narrative of development. This is not merely a story about linear progress, but of spatial progress.

Gayatri Spivak helps to complicate this notion through her argument that “the word ‘Development’ covers over the economics and epistemic of transnationality. ‘Women in Development’ can be its worst scam.”²³ Narratives of development simultaneously operate through the fragmentation of space, even as they seek to homogenize subjects across borders. “Development” becomes a “scam” according to Spivak because it is a fiction that lacks the study of specific imperial formations of regions in the consideration of diasporic, disenfranchised, and laboring women. This is similar to what Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan also argue.

Developmental narratives universalize the complex and distinct processes of transnational capitalism through the homogenization of spaces through the discourse of rational progress of the underdeveloped world. The developmental narrative of transnational capitalism is not merely

a temporal and teleological story, but a story that relies on spatiality. This is a story about subjects across nations, about fragmented and disparate subjects, that transcend the narrative of a singular nation. I read NAFTA as a developmental narrative to reveal how the rationality of transnational capitalism is produced through an arbitrary distinction between the rationality of new logics of NAFTA and other subjects and spaces that are figured as “underdeveloped.”

The figures of “underdeveloped” subjects, as best exemplified through migrant laborers, and third world women, reproduce an individualist narrative of development in which these subjects come to represent a fragmented group living in a fragmented world of transnational capitalism, who are in need of development. Donna Haraway argues that there has been a worldwide rearrangement of social relations from white capitalist patriarchy to an “informatics of domination.” In this new system, concepts like “primitive” and “civilized” are “irrational,” and “at the level of ideology, we see translations of racism and colonialism into languages of development and underdevelopment.”²⁴ An “informatics of domination” refers to “the scary new networks” that have resulted in a “massive intensification of insecurity and cultural impoverishment, with common failure of subsistence networks for the most vulnerable.”²⁵ Since this impoverishment “interweaves with the social relations of science and technology, the urgency of a socialist-feminist politics addressed to science and technology is plain.”²⁶ I concur with Haraway that there is urgency in addressing what she terms an “informatics of domination” as it is linked to science and technology. Science Fiction Chicano writers like Sánchez and Pita recognize that the subject of development is no longer primarily citizens under this new system, as it was with modern capitalism, but are the subjects of a new world order and system.²⁷ As such, they are interrogating narratives of development and a borderless world. I will later argue that Sánchez and Pita are writing against characters of development by fictionalizing Zapatista

writing tactics of communiqués. They are, then, part of a cohort of borderlands Science Fiction writers who are writing against discourses transnational capitalist discourses of development and borders.

So far I have discussed how NAFTA is a cultural text that passes itself as a rational politics. Passing as a rational and logical politics naturalizes the binaries of “developed” and “underdeveloped” subjects, which ends up reproducing the inequalities that transnational capitalism claims to end. Imagining “world peace,” equality, justice, social progress, and equitable economic growth through NAFTA entails a logic of rationality that is tied to Western expansion, development, and empiricism that limits the ways in which we might imagine a more just world. In challenging the rationality of NAFTA as the preeminent model for social progress, I continue my inquiry into the work of speculative dystopia and utopia. Transnational capitalism has not merely “denationalized” corporate power, or reorganized the nation-state, as Lisa Lowe reminds us. Under this new mode of capitalism arose a re-organization in social movements and oppositional movements that directly challenge the logics of NAFTA. And, because NAFTA’s utopian narrative is completely closed off to speculation in its attachment to Western precepts of empiricism, I am curious about how oppositional movements and critics of NAFTA turn to speculative fiction in order to imagine alternative forms and categories of subjects, social movements, and culture. The following section, then, studies how Sánchez and Pita are very much aligned with the speculative aesthetic practices of the Zapatistas. I argue that Sánchez, Pita, and the Zapatistas critically employ culture for their speculative acts because they understand the centrality of cultural mind shifting for social movement.

Zapatismo Making of “A World Made of Many Worlds”: Speculation, Antechambers, and Communiqués

The Zapatista insurrection arose on January 1, 1994 in response to Salinas de Gotarí's signing of NAFTA, which "broke the social contract with the peasant classes, which was put in place by the 1917 constitution and solidified by Lázaro Cardenas's agricultural policies."²⁸ As a result of this broken contract basic grain subsidies, government networks for peasant agriculture, and price supports were dismantled in Mexico. Agriculture was deregulated, and the Mexican constitution was altered so that communal lands could be privately sold to foreign interests. Mexico's food, seed, and feed markets were open to competition from Canada and the U.S., which led to the migration and displacement of peasants who could no longer compete with the mechanized grain exports of the new mechanized market.²⁹ While NAFTA claimed to be "mutually beneficial" to all countries involved, a great imbalance resulted. The material reality of Mexico's lopsided economic development, and the social welfare of Mexicans deeply contradict the utopian narrative of NAFTA, which on its governmental website, still boasts an increase in "trade and investment flows," and that "U.S. Economic Growth during the 14 years of NAFTA Has Been Strong."³⁰ According to the website, "NAFTA has been good for Mexican agriculture" because "[t]rade growth has been remarkably balanced, with U.S. agricultural exports to Mexico increasing by \$7.3 billion and U.S. agricultural imports from Mexico increasing by \$6.7 billion during the last 13 years."³¹

These statistics point to one of the "fiction[s] of development" Saldaña-Portillo names, which is the story that NAFTA is a "success in terms of its limited goals."³² What this utopian developmental narrative of NAFTA cannot register, however, are the ways in which NAFTA affects the "life and death of those alienated from their own labor by the privatization of the economy and the geography of Mexico: fishermen, masons, campesinos. They [do not] register the brutal migration of the displaced rural subalterns in the face of a pervasive change in social

and economic relations.”³³ In this quote, Saldaña-Portillo brings us back to different kinds of workers and connects them to the land. Through the fishermen she evokes the sea, with the mason she conjures the earth’s stone, and with the campesinos we are reminded of farmers and sharecroppers who work the land and feed the people. Here, we are given a different spatial imaginary than the spatial imaginary offered by NAFTA. It is one that is about labor and the land and sea and reveals the limits and impoverishment of NAFTA’s false utopian vision. As I have discussed earlier, transnational capitalist speculative practices are about investment for future profits, not for the workers themselves. NAFTA’s rationalizing discourse is abstract and overlooks these contingencies of struggle and can only pose itself as rational through the suppression of the material effects of transnational capitalism. NAFTA’s utopia of a borderless world in which profits, products, and capital can move more freely across borders cannot actually take the material lives of workers into account. The lives and struggles of these fishermen, masons, campesinos, and the displaced rural subalterns under these new social and economic relations are the very subjects and processes that need to be excised in order for NAFTA to narrate its utopian vision. In the quote above, Saldaña-Portillo demonstrates the ways in which the EZLN was a response to the ways NAFTA’s fiction of development was contingent upon the “life and death” of the laborers, fishermen, masons, campesinos, and rural subalterns that have been alienated and displaced by “the privatization of the economy and the geography of Mexico” under NAFTA. She demonstrates the degree to which NAFTA ruses itself as a rational logic through the suppression of its own contradictions—the contradictions of the subjects who have been disenfranchised, displaced, and alienated under NAFTA’s social and economic relations.

The EZLN's project is one that counters and reveals this ruse and is engaged with imagining a spatial imaginary that returns us to the workers, indigenous, and displaced people of Latin America. This is why this section reads *Lunar Braceros* alongside the writings of Subcomandante Marcos. Indeed, *Lunar Braceros* is a critical dystopian SF novel that is intervening in the fragmentation and speculative practices produced through NAFTA by sharing in the utopian vision of the Zapatistas.

When I speak of spatial imaginary—of NAFTA, of the Zapatistas, of *Lunar Braceros*, and of borderlands Science Fiction— I am also alluding to the ways in which space is imagined through narrative, even as the architects and proponents of NAFTA could never confess to its acts of narration and fiction. Through the utopian developmental narrative of NAFTA, space is abstract, borderless, fragmented and then unified and homogenized as an economic zone; for the EZLN, space is brought back to the earth, land, and the of laborers, the indigenous, and dispossessed in the form of communiqués and performative acts. Later, I will argue that *Lunar Braceros* is aligned with the EZLN conception of tying space to laboring subjects, and understand borders in relationship to work. At the same time, *Lunar Braceros* is employing Science Fiction literature as a way to think about borders. I will further discuss this literary intervention in my reading of *Lunar Braceros*.

While NAFTA establishes its status as a rational logic of capitalist progression by suppressing its cultural formation, the EZLN self-consciously employ words and writing to imagine the making of new worlds. Subcomandante Marcos writes:

Many words walk in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds make us.

There are words and worlds that are lies and injustices. There are words and

worlds that are truths and truthful. We make true words. We have been made from

true words. In the world of the powerful there is no space for anyone but themselves and their servants. In the world we want, everyone fits. We want a world in which many worlds fit. The nation that we construct is one where all communities and languages fit, where all steps may walk, where all may have laughter, where all may live the dawn. We speak of unity even when we are silent. Softly and gently we speak the words that find the unity which will embrace us in history and which will discard the abandonment, which confronts and destroys us. Our word, our song and our cry, is so that the most dead will no longer die. So that we may live fighting, we may live singing. Long live the word. Long live Enough is Enough! Long live the night which becomes a soldier in order not to die in oblivion. In order to live the word dies, its seed germinating forever in the womb of the earth. By being born and living we die. We will always live. Only those who give up their history are consigned to oblivion.³⁴

Marcos' writing here is quite poetic as he makes an argument about the role of "words" in the making of worlds, and in envisioning "unity." He acknowledges the power of words, and writes "many words walk in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds make us. There are words and words that are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds that are truths and truthful. We make true words. We have been made from true worlds." Marcos forces us to reckon with the ways in which worlds have been made from words, and how these words and worlds have "made us." Just as words have been used to create worlds of "lies and injustices," so too can words help re-make and imagine new worlds. As a project that is invested in re-making and re-envisioning the world, the Zapatista movement is a social movement that recognizes the effects of words, on our imaginations, and on our material lives. Marcos draws attention to the ways in which words,

stories, narratives, have been taken up by “the powerful” to create worlds that leave little space for “their servants” and how they need to take up words to create their own political fictions. While NAFTA seeks to strategically unify fragmented spaces and subjects through the dissolution of difference and “underdeveloped” subjects that cannot be folded into the narrative of transnational capitalism, the unity that Marcos speaks of here is different. For Marcos, “unity” is viewed as a “world in which many worlds fit” and his notion of a unified nation is one in which “communities and languages fit, where all steps may walk, where all may have laughter, where all may live the dawn.” This unity is not about folding all worlds, communities, languages, and people into one master narrative of development. Rather, Marcos changes the dominant notion of what “unity” might look like, as his unity is about the existence of difference, and of modes that live outside of the “world of the powerful.” Indeed, as Marcos proclaims, “long live the word,” for as long as the word lives, radical action will exist, worlds will die and be re-born, but as long as the word lives on, there will always be social movement that will serve as the “words,” “song,” and “cry” of insurgency.

With the acknowledgment of the function and importance of words, Marcos shows how through writing and narrative speculation has come to centrally inform the false utopianism of transnational capitalist narratives. Speculation becomes important to oppositional narratives by Sánchez, Pita, and Subcomandante Marcos’ writing precisely because NAFTA’s mode of rationality is also reliant upon a mode of speculation. Subcomandante Marcos has beautifully written,

In the world of those who live and kill for Power, there is no room for human beings. There is no space for hope, no place for tomorrow. Slavery or death is the choice that their world offers all worlds. The world of money, their world,

governs from the stock exchanges. Today, *speculation* is the principal source of enrichment, and at the same time the best demonstration of the atrophy of our capacity to work. Work is no longer necessary in order to produce wealth; now all that is needed is speculation.

Crimes and wars are carried out so that the global stock exchanges may be pillaged by one or the other.

Meanwhile, millions of women, millions of youths, millions of indigenous, millions of homosexuals, millions of human beings of all races and colors, participate in the financial markets only as a devalued currency, always worth less and less, the currency of their blood turning a profit.

The globalization of markets erases borders for speculation and crime and multiplies them for human beings. Countries are obliged to erase their national borders for money to circulate, but to multiply their internal borders.³⁵

I have discussed the ways in which NAFTA is tied to rationality; however, as Marcos demonstrates, transnational capitalism is different from the previous modern capitalist logics that are stringently empirical. The new logic of rationality under transnational capitalism is speculative. Marcos discovers that transnational capitalism is a speculative venture, in which risky business dealings are happening on a global scale for capital gain. To be sure though, financial speculation here is not the same as the speculation of Science Fiction, because the specific processes are different. Science Fiction purposefully employs de-familiarization (of the past, present, and future) in its strategies while capital financial speculation articulates a relationship between wealth, investment, and the future. In this quote, Marcos is defining capital financial speculation in which “human beings” are no longer important; human “capacity to

work” is no longer important within a system of finance capitalism. Instead, “the world of money” is more important than “human beings.” While Science Fiction speculates through defamiliarization in order to warn us about our current conditions, or at times offer us alternative worlds, capital financial speculation offers a closed world that speculates on the future only in terms of investment. NAFTA speculates in the name of development and the growth of transnational corporations and finance capitalism. Speculation here is only about the fluctuation in the market values of tradable goods. NAFTA’s world of speculation is about eliminating other worlds, and about producing a new master narrative of capital that is still tied to the individual narrative of development. NAFTA is a normative utopian project because it connects its rationality and empirical reality to capitalist speculations. It is within this “world of money,” this world where “crimes and wars” are carried out in the service of global stock exchanges, that women, youths, indigenous, homosexuals, and “human beings of all races and colors” are expected to live and survive, not as valued subjects, but as “devalued currency.” Within this singular and closed world human beings exist as “devalued currency” who are “always worth less and less,” and “the currency of their blood turning a profit.” The bodies of human beings are no longer worth much in this new world order, as transnational capitalism eliminates borders across nations for the circulation of profits and commodities, only “to multiply their internal borders.” Reading NAFTA as a utopian speculative narrative of capital finance in this way points toward the impoverishment of utopia of capitalist thinking. This limited and closed vision is as close to utopia as capitalism can come, and as such, it cannot be the utopia upon which social and global movements rely. Below, I turn to Sánchez and Pita’s novel *Lunar Braceros* as a text that produces a dystopia that is alternative to NAFTA’s speculative utopia of financialization.

Marcos' words eerily mirror Saskia Sassen's argument about the denationalization of territories. The hierarchies within nations are not being eliminated but are, instead, being multiplied. The utopian developmental narrative of NAFTA promises "world peace" and "social justice" by bringing nations together through breaking down borders; yet, all the while, borders, hierarchies, privileges, protection, and social inequality are increasing within and across national boundaries. As Sassen demonstrates, transnational capitalism works through a re-orientation and reconfiguration within the nation. Marcos adds the notion of speculation to Saskia Sassen's insight on denationalization. Central to the utopian spatial logic of NAFTA is the way in which the rationality of NAFTA is tied to acts of speculation. The spatial logic of NAFTA—its fragments, denationalization, national reconfigurations, and master narrative of development—, in other words, is an effect of transnational capitalism's speculative practices.

Marcos usefully demonstrates how NAFTA employs acts of speculation to suture transnational capitalism's paradoxes. He writes,

The suppression of trade barriers, the explosion of telecommunications, the information superhighways, the power of financial markets, the international free-trade treaties, all contribute to the destruction of nation-states. Paradoxically, globalization produces a fragmented world made up of watertight compartments barely linked by economic gangways. A world of broken mirrors that reflect the useless global unity of the neoliberal puzzle.³⁶

Transnational capitalism indeed contributes to the "destruction of nation-states" and at the same time creates a "fragmented world made up of watertight compartments" or a "world of broken mirrors" to help narrate global unity under neo-liberalism. Transnational capitalism strategically fragments and unifies the world. The fragmentation that is produced through transnational

capitalism is sutured by a narrative of speculation to tell the story of a global unity that is organized around the logic of the free market. Unity for NAFTA means the excision of subjects, objects, and ways of thinking that do not benefit the market, because these things are no longer valuable to the market.

As a rational narrative of transnational capital, NAFTA passes itself off as a natural logic or step in capitalism, rather than a cultural text. Its speculative practices too, then, are passed off as rational and remained linked to empiricism. Sánchez, Pita, and Marcos purposefully employ writing—through the novel form, SF, and communiqués—to illuminate the important function of cultural mind-shifting for an alternative politics. Unlike NAFTA, *Lunar Braceros*, and the Zapatista communiqués are not seeking to pass off as a new rational economic policy, or strategy that are trying to unite fragmented spaces and subjects, or empirically ground acts of speculation. Indeed, these writers—albeit differently—directly engage with fragmentation and speculation because these are the terms with which they are met by NAFTA and transnational capitalism. However, they take up fragmentation and speculation and integrate them into their cultural aesthetics. They do so not to reveal an empirical reality or a global unity that is dominated by a logic of transnational capitalism, but rather to imagine new forms and categories that are alternative to the ones offered to us by NAFTA's developmental narrative that seeks to unify fragmented spaces as an economic zone. Unlike NAFTA, these texts do not seek to produce a unity out of the world's fragments, or make speculation rational. These writers do not fear living and breathing within fragmented and speculative spaces, and instead find within these spaces modes of articulating their impossible demands for a new world order, a new epistemology of the territoriality and space, and of subjects and nations.

Recognizing the fiction of NAFTA, and its very real and material effects, the Zapatista insurrection discovers that in countering NAFTA, they are also in a struggle over cultural production, narrative, and discourse. The “words” of the Zapatistas, their cultural force, is what ultimately proves to be most haunting and influential component of their movement. José Rabasa has insightfully argued,

[t]he communiqués of Marcos and the CCRI-CG evoke a history where the enemy has always been victorious, but they also formulate a discourse on violence that grounds its purity in the impossibility (paradoxically, also the condition of possibility) of its demands. Although the Zapatistas are a military force, the power of their violence resides in the new world they call forth—a sense of justice, democracy, and liberty that the government *cannot* understand because it calls for its demise. Marco’s multiple subject positions fulfill tactical and strategic functions within his discourse.³⁷

According to Rabasa, communiqués tell the history of Western domination even as they “formulate a discourse on violence that grounds its purity in the impossibility... [and its conditions of possibility] of its demands.” The CCRI-CG (The Comandantes of the Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee of the EZLN), through Marcos’ writing, offers a form through which the impossible might be articulated, and this is why communiqués are “pure.” Rabasa points us to the notion that the Zapatistas are a force to be reckoned with precisely because they are able to “call forth” a new world, through their written communications, that has its own “sense of justice, democracy, and liberty” that governments are unable to understand because this “new world” can only come about through the demise of the government. The Zapatistas are not dangerous for the Mexican government because their world already exists, but

they are dangerous precisely because they are conjuring a world that does not yet exist. While transnational capitalism seeks to ground acts of capitalist speculation in empiricism, by hoping to gain profits through the most accurate speculations, the Zapatistas' acts of speculation is not about triumphing in a capitalist market. Rather, their power lies in the space of fiction. Marcos' communiqués are "pure" in the sense that they are evoking a world that is unintelligible to the Mexican government and narratives of Western expansion. The worlds they imagine pose a threat to the "world of the powerful" because they are not bound by an empirical reality. In other words, they can imagine the demise of transnational capitalist institutions because they are operating against its empirical rationality.

While NAFTA creates a new world order that is seen as the next natural step in global capitalism, it is important to note that the Zapatistas are not interested in proposing a clear picture of a new world. In the "Second Declaration," Marcos writes:

We aren't proposing a new world, but something preceding a new world: an antechamber looking into the new Mexico. In this sense, this revolution will not end in a new class, faction of a class, or group in power. It will end in a free and democratic space for political struggle. This free and democratic space will be born on the fetid cadaver of the state party system and the tradition of fixed presidential succession.³⁸

The proposition of "an antechamber looking into the new Mexico"—not a new world—is thought provoking. For the Zapatistas, it is not the teleological end product of having a more just, peaceful, or better world. In this way, then, they are not following the developmental logic of transnational capitalism because the arrival at a new world becomes less important under this rubric of the antechamber. For Marcos the value is not placed upon the "new world," but the

value is placed upon the “antechamber” that precedes the new world. This is the speculative space in which the Zapatistas are proposing that we live and struggle. An “antechamber” is a smaller room that leads into a larger room. The “ante” in the word suggests that it is a room that precedes, or comes before the larger space. In this term, “antechamber,” Marcos is linking notions of time and space. It is in this time and space that precedes the “new world,” in the antechamber, that we must continually “look” into and speculate upon a new Mexico. In this space and time, before the teleological goal of the “new world,” in the space that precedes a new nation, is where “words” are working to create new conditions of possibility and impossibility. I see the speculative nature of the antechamber as being strongly linked to the cultural production of the Zapatistas. Writing and the word are integral to this antechamber as they provide a means through which to “look” anew.

Marcos’ communiqués and notion of the antechamber are not only intervening in the developmental narrative of NAFTA, but his writing is also proposing an alternative to the teleology of vanguardism and the figure of the revolutionary nationalist subject. Marcos has written:

The writing of the texts was one of my jobs, but the communiqués themselves are produced in two different ways: One is that the members of the committee, or a collective of the committee, see the need to make a pronouncement about something, that is, “to say their word.” First, the principal points of what is going to be said are proposed and debated, and then they order me to write it up, using the debate as my general orientation for what to say. Later I present the written communiqué, they revise it, take out some things, add some others, and, finally, approve it or reject it. The other method is that, on the arrival of information from

far off parts or confronted by a fact that I think merits it, and seeing the value of commenting on it, I propose to the committee that we send out a communiqué. I then write it and present it as a proposal. It is discussed and approved or rejected. Did I say ‘rejected’? Yes, even though the current circumstances contribute to the appearance that Subcomandante I Marcos is the “head” or “leader” of the rebellion, and that the CCRI is just the ‘scenery,’ the authority of the committee in the communities is indisputable. It is impossible to sustain a position there without the support of the leadership of this indigenous organization.³⁹

The democratically elected CCRI-CG and Marcos are highly aware of the potential for the discursive production of Marcos as a protagonist for the EZLN. Here Marcos reminds us that he is always subordinate to the collectivity of the EZLN, and that writing is his “job.” The ideas, arguments, and words of the communiqués do not all originate with Marcos; rather, ideas emerge from members of the collective of committee who want to make an announcement, or “to say their word.” These ideas are then collectively discussed, debated, and “they order [Marcos] to write it up.” The communiqués, then, are not written by an individual revolutionary subject (Marcos), but is thought up, imagined, revised, approved, or rejected through a collective process. Indeed, Subcomandante Marcos’ fluency in Spanish is indispensable to the EZLN’s need to “[translate] its own ideas and methods to the metropolis”⁴⁰ but his position as a writer “arises from his subordination to collective processes. He is a mouthpiece for a larger community, but more important, his authority is based on his direct participation in the actual rebellion. Subcomandante Marcos is merely a medium, but also more than one.”⁴¹ One of the ways in which the communiqués serve as an intervention in nationalist discourses of the revolutionary subject is to emphasize the collective process of the communiqués, and Marcos’ subordination to

the CCRI-CG. Marcos and the CCRI-CG are incredibly aware of how Marcos might be perceived as the “leader” or the “head” of the rebellion and that the CCRI merely serve as the “scenery” or the backdrop to the heroic narrative of the revolutionary figure of Marcos. There is a recognition here of the “mediating” function of Marcos himself.

Rather than produce a natural, or unquestioned hero, or protagonist for the revolution, “this subordination of Marcos has much to do with safeguarding him as with keeping in check his protagonist tendencies.”⁴² There is a “tendency” to see Marcos as a protagonist because he is the most recognizable member of the EZLN, and a primary writer. However, this propensity to see Marcos as the main protagonist is the tendency of nationalism to promote and find revolutionary articulation through a singular revolutionary subject. As I have discussed in earlier chapters, the desire for singular revolutionary subjects re-inscribe the very hierarchies that they seek to undermine because they reproduce the logic of the individual subject and the conditions for relegating and subordinating others in the name of that individual subject. This is why the CCRI-CG and Marcos emphasize the idea that this is what social movements must avoid, and they stress the ways in which Marcos is subordinate to the collectivity of the EZLN. Indeed, the awareness of the function of culture, in the form of the communiqués, lays emphasis on the fictionality of Marcos the vanguard. Whereas nationalist revolutionary subjects are figures that are taken for granted, the EZLN recognizes the fictions—such as the fiction of Marcos—that they are able to create through their writing. As Rabasa reminds us, “we must keep in mind that ‘he’ is a series of communiqués, interviews, and speeches that have been recorded in video, and not some sort of coherent and consistent self behind the statements he utters.”⁴³

Undermining the constitution of the vanguard is an important feature of the revolutionary spaces, or the antechambers, the EZLN are attempting to imagine. When Mexican government

officials seized on the anonymity of Marcos and tried to discredit him by suggesting that Marcos was gay Marcos replied with the following poem,

P.S.: About this whole thing about whether Marcos is homosexual: Yes, Marcos is gay. Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, Asian in Europe, Chicano in San Isidro, Anarchist in Spain, Palestinian in Israel, Indigenous in the streets of San Cristóbal, bad boy in Nez, rocker in CU, Jew in Germany, ombudsman in the SEDENA, feminist in political parties, Communist in the post-Cold War era, prisoner in Cintalapa, pacifist in Bosnia, Mapuche in the Andes, teacher in the CNTE, artist without gallery or portfolio, housewife on any given Saturday night in any neighborhood of any city of any Mexico, guerrillero in Mexico at the end of the twentieth century, striker in the CTM, campesino without land, fringe editor, unemployed worker, doctor without a practice, rebellious student, dissident in neoliberalism, writer without books or readers, and, to be sure, Zapatista in the Mexican Southeast.⁴⁴

This communiqué connects back to my discussion of spatial imagination above, where I began to argue that spatial imagination for the Zapatistas is about linking workers, laborers, and contradictory subjects to an alternative mode of understanding space. This communiqué evokes a spatial imaginary that runs counter to the socio-economic zone of NAFTA by claiming that Marcos is composed of multiple and contradictory subject positions that are linked to the spaces of San Francisco, South Africa, Europe, San Isidro, Spain, Israel, San Cristóbal, Nez, Germany, Bosnia, the Andes as well as different temporalities such as the “post-Cold War era,” “the end of the Twentieth century,” and “neoliberalism.” The CCRI-CG is disrupting the reader’s notion of a stable subject, fixed spaces, and linear time. In imagining an alternative notion of space and

subjects the CCRI-CG is also demonstrating the degree to which our notions of temporality must also shift.

The Mexican government seizes upon the anonymity of Marcos, gives meaning to him, and portrays him as a gay man in order to undermine the Zapatista movement. Indeed, if the Zapatista movement were following the nationalist rationality of the Mexican government or revolution in which the vanguard is a strong—and straight—leader, a homosexual high-ranking member in the EZLN would prove detrimental to the movement. However, rather than play into the heteronormative logics of the Mexican government by denying that Marcos is gay, the CCRI-CG and Marcos instead recognize the ways in which the figure of Marcos is part of a cultural and political struggle of subject-making. Instead of denying Marcos' homosexuality, the CCRI-CG “admit” to Marcos being gay. In fact, they add, he is also a black man, a Chicano, an anarchist, an Asian, a feminist, a teacher, a prisoner, a sexist in a feminist movement, a housewife, and definitely a Zapatista, among many other minoritized positions. Not only is Marcos' response a rejection of vanguardism, it is also a rejection of NAFTA's narrative of the “underdeveloped” subject. Unlike the narrative of transnational capitalism, the “indigenous in the streets of San Cristóbal,” “the housewife” in Mexico, the landless campesino are not subjects that need to be “become” “modern,” politicized, or integrated into the system of global capital, through NAFTA's normative linear sense of time. Instead, these so-called “underdeveloped” subjects are part of Marcos' and the CCRI-CG's speculative and fragmented practice of thinking about revolutionary, politics, culture, and its subjects. Marcos becomes, then, a figure of multiple temporalities, not merely of multiple continents, countries and cities. S/he is a “Communist in the post-Cold War era,” a “housewife on any given Saturday,” and a “dissident in neoliberalism.” Marcos is not merely a figure of our present moment, but this communiqué

reminds the reader that the Zapatistas are a response is a product of the Cold War and neoliberalism, as well as subjects that live in “any city” in Mexico “on any given Saturday.” This communiqué reminds us that our everyday notions of space and time is shaped and formed by historical moments and time.

In this communiqué Marcos becomes a collective embodiment of multiple minorities and subject-positions that have been excluded from the vanguard, revealing the uneven rationality of vanguardism and revolutionary nationalist discourse. Under the “rationality” of vanguardism, it is impossible to see these minoritized figures as the revolutionary subject because they do not quite fit the heteronormative and gendered vision of a leftist leader. By this I mean to argue that Marcos and the CCRI-CG are addressing the ways in which discourses of a singular revolutionary hero reproduces inequality and hierarchies of race, sex, class, and gender. In rejecting “his always already commodified identity as the ‘revolutionary leader’ of the Zapatista insurgency throughout the world’s abject and outcast, Subcomandante Marcos slyly rejects the vanguardist role that his pen and weapons have overdetermined.”⁴⁵ Through naming the possibilities of Marcos’ multiple subject positions, the CCRI-CG are demonstrating that it should not matter who the “real” Marcos is, because the movement, and the collectivity that makes up the movement, are more important. Instead one should recognize the cultural mediation of Marcos and the ways in which he becomes a speculative figure for disrupting cultural, political, and social assumptions of what a revolutionary subject should look like.

I have written about the subjects, spatial, and temporal imagination of Marcos’ communiqués at length because I wanted to study how communiqués provide Marcos and the CCRI-CG with a form through which to speculate on the utopian notion of antechambers. My next section explores the ways in which *Lunar Braceros* pulls the EZLN’s acts of speculation,

the space and time of antechambers, and the form of communiqués into the realm of literary fiction. I want to consider how the science fictionalization of these strategies makes new interventions into borderlands literature as well as social and political movement.

***Lunar Braceros* as Borderlands Science Fiction: Speculation, Antechambers, and Communiqués**

This final section reads Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's 2009 novel *Lunar Braceros: 2125-2149* as a critical dystopia that employs Science Fiction as a response to NAFTA's developmental narrative, and the political strategies of the EZLN. Set in the twenty-second century, *Lunar Braceros* tells the tale of a young boy, Pedro, who comes to learn about his mother and her friends' migration to the moon as manual laborers for lunar colonization in the not too distant future. On the moon, the laborers learn that they will not be returning to earth, because it is more lucrative for their employees to kill off the lunar braceros and ship back the moon's resources back to earth.⁴⁶ The group bands together and eventually makes it back to earth. Pedro, and the reader, learns of this story through a series of letters, texts, and emails primarily from Lydia to her son Pedro, but these missives are also writings by Lydia's friends. While the storyline of the lunar braceros is at the forefront of the novel, and drives the novel forward, Pedro and the reader come to learn about many other stories that are pieced together through the fragments of writing. The pieces of writing tell a complex story about a dystopian post-Cold War world, labor, borders, the dissolution and emergence of nations. These pieces of writings also offer fragmented visions of utopia that are powerful in their modes of speculation. Using the speculative and defamiliarizing elements of Science Fiction, Sánchez and Pita form speculative practices that lay emphasis on the work of fragmentation—in writing, in narrative, in imagining space, and subjects.

As Chicana speculative fiction produced in the post-NAFTA era *Lunar Braceros* is very much aligned with the Zapatista movement, which is seeking to narrate utopian spatial imaginaries to counter NAFTA's "borderless world." While Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros* cannot be understood outside of the Zapatista movement and moment it is important to note that they are making a very different intervention. Unlike the political fiction of the Zapatistas, *Lunar Braceros* is part of the literary tradition of borderlands Science Fiction that emerges as a response to transnational capitalism's "borderless world." While the EZLN is a project about political fiction, Sánchez and Pita are working out shared issues through literary fiction. Theirs is a literary and formal project that is part of a cohort of borderlands Science Fiction writers who intervene in spatial imaginaries that counter the nation and transnational capitalism. Sánchez and Pita fictionalize the formal strategies of the EZLN's communiqués in a Science Fiction novel in order to return us to the material effects of transnational capitalism, and its false utopianism. Moreover, they do so to conjure a dystopia and utopia that responds to the vacant utopianism of transnational capitalism's borderless world and the EZLN's emphasis on the materiality of the land, its workers, and subjects. Sánchez and Pita employ speculative practices of Science Fiction to counter the financialization speculation of transnational capitalism that would seek to abstract and fix a topographical economic zone. As a result, *Lunar Braceros* is a utopia that provides an alternative speculative narrative that does not rely on the individual, developmental subject of transnational capitalism; nor, does it narrate a singular revolutionary subject. The force and contribution of *Lunar Braceros* is its status as literary fiction and the ways in which the novel draws attention to the interplay of spatiality and temporality. As a borderlands Science Fiction novel, *Lunar Braceros* is a critical utopia that employs the formal precepts of space and time in order to imagine speculative spaces of struggle against the borderless utopia of

transnational capitalism. The rest of this chapter is devoted to exploring how *Lunar Braceros* draws on the techniques of the EZLN and pulls them into literature in order to imagine literary antechambers as providing an alternative imaginary to the nation and transnational capitalism.

Chicana scholar Lysa Rivera has usefully situated *Lunar Braceros* within a tradition of Chicano/a SF practices that began to take hold during the Chicano movement [*el movimiento*] in 1967. Chicano/a writers working in SF have for decades “mined the icons and language of science fiction to articulate experiences not only of alienation, displacement, and marginalization but also those of survival, resistance, and resistance.”⁴⁷ Science Fiction literary critic Darko Suvin has importantly argued that science fiction is the literature of cognitive estrangement that can give us an alternate reality. Suvin defines cognitive estrangement as a combination of de-naturalizing techniques and realist cognition that offers an alternative representational logic to the author’s empirical argument. Estrangement confronts the normative system with a different point of view and a new set of norms that allow the reader to recognize her/his norms in de-familiarized ways. Cognition for Suvin implies “a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author’s environment.”⁴⁸ Unlike the realist author who believes that he can properly dispense the real, the SF writer purposefully de-familiarizes what we conceive as the real to confront our norms with a de-familiarized norm, revealing the artifice and fictive quality of the world, and offering a different account from the objective world of realism. As a result, the reader simultaneously get norms and their de-naturalization, whereas realism takes norms for granted under the belief that realist writers are not narrating or mediating reality for us in some way. While Suvin’s argument for SF is not political, I am interested in the ways in which Chicano/a writers like Sánchez and Pita take up SF techniques for political means. As Catherine Ramírez notes, “these innovative cultural workers

have transformed what was once considered the domain of geeky white boys into a rich, exciting, and politically charged medium for the interrogation of ideology, identity, historiography, and epistemology.”⁴⁹

Chicano/a writers, directors, and theorists, such as Luis Valdez, Oscar Zeta Acosta, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Roberto Sifuentes, Ruben Ortiz Torres, Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, and Alex Rivera, have taken up “borderlands SF” as a speculative response to “late capitalism and information technologies, to militate against global capitalism’s starvation of the indigenous to fatten the capitalists.”⁵⁰ I also read *Lunar Braceros* as part of “borderlands Science Fiction” that, in the shadow of NAFTA, borrow from SF metaphors and motifs to write about the problems of the “so-called ‘Fourth World,’ which ostensibly declares the utopian elimination of borders but actually promotes the ‘multiplication of frontiers and the smashing apart of nations’ and indigenous communities.”⁵¹ Lysa Rivera locates the ways in which borderlands SF is a response to the utopian imagination of the removal of borders—a utopia because the notion that borders could be removed implies the elimination of boundaries between people, ideas, profits, and uneven development—that ultimately results in the fracturing of nations and indigenous communities. What is fragmented is not only nations, but also the indigenous communities within them, and from this fragmentation of indigenous communities arises movements such as the Zapatistas.

As part of a borderlands Science Fiction tradition, *Lunar Braceros* must also be understood in the context of works such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s “post-Mexican literary hypertext,” *The New World Border*. *The New World Border* is a collection of “texts and images [that] have been conceptually arranged, that is, they are meant to engage, expand, challenge, and reveal one another contextually.” As “literary hypertext”

[t]he reader follows multidirectional links that connect throughout the book, emulating the endless journeys and border crossings which are at the core of [his] experience, and therefore [his] art. In fact, [he] encourage[s] readers to create their own order for the material.”⁵²

In telling this story, *Lunar Braceros* is composed of fragmented writing that mimics the writing practices of the Zapatistas’ communiqués as well as the hypertext of Gómez-Peña. The novel is composed of drawings by Mario A. Chacon. Cartoonish artwork, images, and drawings of skeletons, earth, the moon, and the lunar braceros are dispersed throughout the fragmented entries. The novel begins with the following passage:

June 2148

Tío, my mother left me these nanotexts with lunar posts, lessons, bits and pieces of conversations, and notations with friends who sent them to me after she and my Dad went up North eight years ago. I put them all together and I’ve been reading them over and over, and now I think it’s time you read them. I hope these will reach you through our clandestine network. I hope to see you soon (5).

This short piece is written by Pedro to his Tío Ricardo and frames the novel for us. The reader learns from the beginning of the book that s/he will be reading a novel that is made up of different texts: “nanotexts, lunar posts, lessons, bits and pieces of conversations, and notations” from Pedro’s mother and friends. *Lunar Braceros*, then, is a text that is composed of fragmented messages. *Lunar Braceros* is a collection of the “bits and pieces” Pedro receives from his mother.

One way of reading *Lunar Braceros* is to read it as an epistolary novel, which is a novel made up of a series of documents, letters, diary entries, newspapers, or more recently, blogs, radio, or e-mail. Often times the epistolary form is viewed as a realist technique because it supposedly imitates real life, tells a story from multiple points of view, and has an omniscient

narrator. The epistolary novel has been known to have the ability to “offer a full and convincing representation of the ‘inner lives’ of its characters.”⁵³ At first it might appear that *Lunar Braceros* is an epistolary novel, but I argue that its formal features are in fact more related to the historical moment of the Zapatistas and the communiqués that emerge as written records and reports of that movement. Reading *Lunar Braceros* as a Science Fiction novel of communiqués allows me to read the novel as a project in fragmented writing that is not ascribing to realism, even as it is aligned with the Zapatistas. Sánchez and Pita are not attempting to mimic their own reality, nor are they attempting to dispense a new reality or rationality to their readers.

Rather than reading *Lunar Braceros* as an epistolary novel I approach the text as a Science Fiction novel of communiqués. The CCRI-CG, primarily through Subcomandante Marcos, issue communiqués—a selection of statements, missives, and reports— from Chiapas, Mexico beginning in 1995. As such, Sánchez and Pita take part in a writing practice that is operative within social movement groups like the Zapatistas. Reading *Lunar Braceros* as a dystopia that pulls the strategies of communiqués into the novel form and the Science Fiction genre, illuminates the importance of the work of literature for projects that seek to imagine and summon new worlds, political projects, and imaginations of equality that “formulate a discourse on violence that grounds its purity in the impossibility [...and its conditions of possibility] of its demands.”⁵⁴ In other words, *Lunar Braceros* employs the genre of Science Fiction—a genre that is not attached to producing an empirical reality—in order to “demand” the “impossible.”

I am not arguing that Sánchez and Pita are merely mimicking the Zapatistas’ communiqués, because to do so would be arguing that *Lunar Braceros* is attempting to be a realist text. The reader does not receive or read one missive at a time as with the EZLN’s communiqués. Instead, *Lunar Braceros* is a novel in which the reader sees all the entries in a

collection, with interspersed drawings. Pedro has “put them together” and has been “reading them over and over.” As a novel of communiqués that is also akin to Gómez-Peña’s “hypertext” *Lunar Braceros*’ readers follow “multidirectional links” of “journeys and border crossings” of multiple writers and characters in the novel. A “hypertext” is generally talked about as text that is displayed on a computer or electronic device that has links to other texts that readers can access immediately. This concept of the hypertext defines the structure of the Internet and gives easy access to information and connection to a “borderless” world. As a hypertext novel, *Lunar Braceros* might appear to be re-creating the logics of NAFTA’s false utopia in which

the media, computer communications, cyber-space, and the global economy have already created a single, borderless world community. They speak of ‘total culture’ and ‘total television,’ a grandiose pseudo-internationalist world view a la CNN that creates the illusion of immediacy, simultaneity, and sameness, thereby numbing our political will and homogenizing our identities.⁵⁵

Instead, the hypertextuality of *Lunar Braceros* follows Gómez-Peña’s reformulated notion of hypertext in which the text is made of “multidirectional links,” not links that allow the user to easily access more information. The reader of *Lunar Braceros* is being challenged to “create their own order” for the material. Like Gómez-Peña’s hypertextuality, Sánchez and Pita’s novel of communiqués is redeploying hypertext in order to rethink conceptions of borders. *Lunar Braceros* is not a hypertext to access and reproduce a “total culture” and a “single, borderless world community” that aims to homogenize “our identities.” The novel is not following the linearity of a developmental narrative or subject of NAFTA.

I read *Lunar Braceros* as a Science Fiction hypertext novel that is a novel composed of communiqués—letters, texts, emails, and messages—that are written and deployed by a

collective of characters, rather than an individual writer, in the novel. Sánchez and Pita are employing Science Fiction and dystopia to speculate on the role of collective writing in the imagination of space, time, and subjects in terms that are similar to the Zapatistas. I argue that reading *Lunar Braceros* as a novel of communiqués allow us to take the cultural work of the Zapatistas into the space of the novel. Similar to the collective writing process of the communiqués, *Lunar Braceros* is disrupting the developmental narrative, but it is doing so through a disruption of the novel form. Traditionally the novel form has been about the journey of an individual who grows over the course of the novel, providing us with a potent narrative of development. *Lunar Braceros* is written by two authors, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, and is very much involved in a collective writing process that is not interested in telling the story of an individual subject of development. They use the form of the communiqués in order to disrupt their reader's sense of what development, or social movement, should look like. And, as Pedro tells us at the beginning of the novel in June 2148, the "nanotexts," "lunar posts," "lessons," "bits and pieces of conversations," and "notations" his mother Lydia left him are not merely written by her, but also some of her friends. At certain moments in the novel, it is unclear who writes what. The effect of this form of writing is to evoke a fugitive and precarious mode of communication that is part of, in Pedro's words, a "clandestine network" rather than a discretely bound text that is giving an unmediated access to Lydia's history or thoughts. The reader does not merely "learn" from Lydia, but receives contradicting messages and texts from the various writers in the book. This story, then, is not merely about Pedro's political awakening and his emergence as a political leader. He is instead part of a collective struggle, a "clandestine network," that is historical, always changing, and ongoing.

The novel is transparent in that it tells the reader from the beginning that the book is organized by Pedro and he is responsible for how the communiqués are organized. As a hypertext, the reader is given freedom to then make sense of the images and the entries and to even re-order the pieces of knowledge and fiction they are reading. I have demonstrated how the spatial imagination for the EZLN has been about the material effects of labor, land, and displaced subjects of transnational capitalism's borderless utopia. I argue that Sánchez and Pita add to this discussion the centrality of borderlands Science Fiction in opening up alternative notions of borders and space. I argue that *Lunar Braceros* pieces together a dystopian world that has been affected by NAFTA and transnational capitalism while at the same time it is a utopian project that imagines how we might have social change and a better world. Through a critical dystopia, then, *Lunar Braceros* is a novel that sees the function of literature as a central component to a project that cannot disavow the materiality and horror of the violence of transnational capitalism and at the same time provides a different space for narrative to work to imagine a different place. I believe this space is something that the EZLN are beginning to get at through the notion of antechambers, which is also a notion that is operative in *Lunar Braceros*; however, antechambers for Sánchez and Pita lays emphasis on the work of borderlands Science Fiction in imagining an alternative "utopian cartography" of struggle.⁵⁶ According to Gómez-Peña, NAFTA "has created the largest artificial economic community on the planet" that has come to powerfully designed "a new economic and cultural topography... for us."⁵⁷ As such, Gómez-Peña asserts that it is "the work of the artist... to force open the matrix of reality to introduce unsuspected possibilities. Artists and writers are currently involved in the redefinition of our continental topography."⁵⁸ Reading Sánchez and Pita's novel alongside Gómez-Peña's work allows me to track the ways in which *Lunar Braceros* brings in the EZLN's communiqué

writing practice and imagination of antechambers into literature to imagine alternative “utopian cartographies.”

Sánchez and Pita use the genre of a dystopian SF to imagine a future history in which denationalization has taken place, only to erupt in new national formations, and movements similar to the Zapatistas continue to survive and struggle. While NAFTA promises a world of “harmony,” “friendship,” or as President Clinton claimed in his speech, “world peace,” the future history in *Lunar Braceros* renders the world of NAFTA as a nightmare in which undesireables—mainly the homeless and unemployed people of color— are separated onto reservations, commodities are valued over the lives of workers, and borders are eliminated and rebuilt into new national configurations. In a letter to Pedro, Lydia tells him of a future history where a “civil war” breaks out between the East and the West. This ultimately leads to the Pacific Rim Allies Treaty (PRAT), which creates the new state of Cali-Texas in 2070, and also includes northern Mexican states. Lydia writes,

That was the end of the United States as it had been known till then and within a space of 30 years, Cali-Texas had become the hegemonic economy of the world, more powerful even than its ally, the Russo-Chinese Confederation, or even the European Community, although economically.... It was still the re-shuffled NIO that really called the shots. All that may sound like ancient history to you, but you have to remember that it all broke apart only some thirty years before I was born.

(11)

As we learn from Pedro’s opening message, Pedro’s “present day” is 2148, during which he is trying to search for his uncle Ricardo. This letter from his mother, Lydia, was written before 2148, and is telling him about the year 2070 when the U.S. ends and the nation “Cali-Texas”

emerges as the new world power, more powerful than the “Russo-Chinese Confederation”—which we can assume is another powerful and new economic power, and the “European Community.” In this future, the world has lived out Sassen and Marcos’ insights that transnational capitalism no longer seeks to only privilege nation states, as the nations in our—the readers’—moment have fallen and been reconfigured. As Lydia tells Pedro, “all that may sound like ancient history to you, but you have to remember that it all broke apart only some thirty years before I was born.” 2070 is a moment in Pedro and Lydia’s history, but it is the reader’s future. Sánchez and Pita are writing a “future history,” a SF concept that John W. Campbell Jr. uses to describe an “elaborately constructed temporal universes.”⁵⁹ According to Lysa Rivera, “future history enables SF writers to situate their imaginary futures somewhere along a projected historical time line, one that often begins during or shortly after their real-life historical moment and extends into the future.” In these imaginary futures processes of historical change are just as important as the stories of the characters.⁶⁰ Historical change in *Lunar Braceros* is not teleological, however, as it is with NAFTA’s developmental narrative. Rather, historical change in *Lunar Braceros*, according to Lysa Rivera and Catherine Ramírez, is about remembering our past. Ramírez reminds us that

more than mere escapism, science fiction can prompt us to recognize and rethink the status quo by depicting an alternative world, be it a parallel universe, distant future, or revised past. Good science fiction re-presents the present or past, albeit with a twist. It tweaks what we take to be reality or history and in doing so exposes its constructedness.⁶¹

With this in mind, the reader of *Lunar Braceros* can see the ways in which racial, gendered, and class oppression are imbedded in colonial history. And, even as the world changes, and new

national spaces such as Cali-Texas emerge, hierarchies are rebuilt and remade under a logic of transnational capitalism.

Indeed this temporalization of revisiting the colonial past is very much operating in *Lunar Braceros*. However, I also want to read the future history in *Lunar Braceros* as providing a temporality that opens up onto the space of an “antechamber.” Although Sánchez and Pita do not use the CCRI-CG’s language of “antechamber” in their novel, this concept is useful for imagining the ways in which time and space are being redefined in order to imagine alternative utopian cartographies. Like Marcos, the speculative space and work of the antechamber is about a reconfiguration of our sense of time and space against nationalist spaces that are dictated by “absolute boundaries” that “function only ‘as a field’ or a ‘container, a co-ordinate system of discrete and mutually exclusive locations.’”⁶² While *Lunar Braceros* should be read in relationship to Marcos’ antechamber, the spatial imaginary in the novel is also closely aligned with Gómez-Peña’s conception of the Fourth World. Part of his conceptual space is the notion of the Fourth World—a conceptual place where the indigenous peoples meet with the diasporic communities. In the Fourth world, there is very little place for static identities, fixed nationalities, ‘pure’ languages, or sacred cultural traditions. The members of the Fourth World live between and across various cultures, communities, and countries. And our identities are constantly being reshaped by this kaleidoscopic experience. The artists and writers who inhabit the Fourth World have a very important role: to elaborate the new set of myths, metaphors, and symbols that will locate us within all of these fluctuating cartographies.⁶³

Rather than giving us a static vision of a new world, the worlds that Sánchez and Pita create in their future history are varied and always changing, and the “fourth world” of the antechambers in *Lunar Braceros*

embody a concept of spatial relations defined in terms of motion, flux, and relationality, qualities more typically associated in western philosophical modernity with temporal experience. The opposition between the bounded spaces of the first three worlds and the more complex spatiality of the fourth and fifth therefore also causes the boundary between the Fourth and Fifth Worlds to remain open.⁶⁴

Writers and artists play a central role in the elaboration of new “myths, metaphors, and symbols” for our understanding and experience of spatiality and temporality, which is integral to the making of identities, geographies, languages, and nationalities. In the novel, Pedro learns about the place where he was born, Chinganaza, located in Ecuador’s southeastern region, in the Amazon jungle area that was reclaimed by Ecuador from Peru in 2050. Displaced indigenous tribes turn Chinganaza into a communal agricultural commune and marks Chinganaza as that important “conceptual” example of the “fourth world.” The importance of literature is that it can shuttle between the materiality of transnational capitalism as well as imagine conceptual spaces that can alter our sense of time and geography. The world of Chinganaza as a site of utopia and hope in the novel is set in drastic contrast against the violence of the space of Cali-Texas. Under Cali-Texas profits are valued over the lives of people of color, indigenous populations, and the homeless. Lydia and her fellow lunar braceros are disposable laborers that are part of a program that seek to kill them in order to bring back more resources from the moon.

Chinganaza in the novel remains an important actual and conceptual space that exists only because of social movement and struggle. The reader is not absolutely certain who writes the following piece to Pedro, but we can assume that it is Lydia. She writes:

The butterflies of Cali-Texas are different. We have the Monarchs there as well; but unlike up north, these Ecuadorian monarchs migrate south from Mexico. How are they different? I'll tell you one thing. I think the butterflies of the Amazon region are more beautiful and there certainly is a greater variety. Do you see them? Yes, they're everywhere. There's one in your hair right now. The sad thing is that this area of the Amazon is the only one that has survived as jungle and as communal property, and that's thanks to the indigenous movements of the 21st century. You've heard the story, right? After the hemispheric wars, the indigenous coalitions of Ecuador's oriente gained ecological control of these lands and that's why once again it was possible to say, "El Ecuador es, ha sido y sera un país amazónico." Because back in the 20th century, in 1942 the Rio de Janeiro protocol gave Peru all this Amazonian area. At that point the important thing of the U.S. was the second world war. Right? Right, yes, the Indigenous War of 2070 was the major war of the entire Andean region against the dispossession and exploitation of the remaining indigenous peoples. They had been inspired by the Zapatista Movement in Chiapas many years before. With this reterritorialization, limited as it was, the Indians regained some of their lands and managed to survive and flourish to a certain extent, although they are still today surrounded by NIO corporations that would love to get their hands on this area.

But so far, so good. That's why we came here; you were born here; that's why we live here, Pedro. (84-85)

The opening of this entry speaks of butterflies in different places: Cali-Texas, Ecuador, and Mexico and sets these locations within a historical and future historical framework. There is a stark contrast of space here as Cali-Texas' fauna is found to be inferior to the richness of this Amazonian region. According to the writer, "the butterflies of the Amazon region are more beautiful and there certainly is a greater variety." Amazon becomes a utopian space that has the most beautiful butterflies. There is an abundance of them as one lands in Pedro's hair. This area in the Amazon is a utopia because "after the hemispheric wars, the indigenous coalitions of Ecuador's oriente gained ecological control of these lands." Chinganaza is the only area left in the Amazon "that has survived as jungle and as communal property, and that's thanks to the indigenous movements of the 21st century." According to Lydia here, in 1942 the Rio de Janeiro protocol gave this area to Peru. With the Indigenous War of 2070 there was an uprising by indigenous peoples in the Andean region against dispossession and exploitation, resulting in the reterritorialization of the area in which indigenous peoples regained their lands. The war of 2070 was, according to Lydia, inspired by the "Zapatista Movement in Chiapas many years before." At the edges of their world they are always "surrounded by NIO corporations that would love to get their hands on this area." In this entry, temporality is opening onto historical spatial change, both real and speculative. Sánchez and Pita draw upon a real historical event, such as the Rio de Janeiro protocol of 1942, which meant to resolve territorial conflict between Ecuador and Peru, and adds to this event a story about an Indigenous War that takes place in 2070. Furthermore, the authors name the Zapatista Movement that "happened many years" as providing an inspiration for the Indigenous War, but we are left to wonder how many years before 2070. The reader is left

to wonder about what phase of the Zapatista Movement inspired further action. Has it already happened, or is it something that will happen in the future, closer to 2070? What remains clear, however, is the fact that indigenous struggles such as the Zapatista Movement are integral to the imagination of social change. Indeed, the Indigenous War of 2070 has not happened (yet); however, its possibility remains because of the current impossible demands of the Zapatistas.

I argue that the utopian impulse in *Lunar Braceros* is not located in the place of Chinganaza itself, but in the speculative utopian space, antechambers, or spaces of deferral, that are being opened up. A critical dystopia or utopia for Sánchez and Pita cannot be about staying in comfortable and beautiful places. For Sánchez and Pita it is not about the proposition of a perfect new world, to recall Marcos' words, but rather an “antechamber looking into the new” world. In one of the missives in *Lunar Braceros*, the writer writes:

IT BECAME CLEAR IN OUR DISCUSSIONS AT NIGHT IN CHINGANAZA THAT CHANGE HAD TO COME THROUGH STRUGGLES WITHIN THE CHOLO RESERVATIONS. SEVERAL OF US IN THE GROUP, BOTH –EX TECHS AND EX-MINERS CAME FROM RESERVATION BACKGROUNDS. THERE ARE NOW RESERVATIONS IN TEXAS, IN NEW MEXICO, IN ARIZONA, IN CALIFORNIA, IN UTAH, IN COLORADO, IN OREGON, AND IN WASHINGTON. THERE ARE ALSO RESERVATIONS IN CHIHUAHUA AND NUEVO LEON. ONCE WE HAD COME TO SOME MAJOR DECISIONS, WE BEGAN TO ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH GROUPS WITHIN ALL OF THESE SITES. THAT WAS NINE YEARS AGO, SHORTLY AFTER PEDRO WAS BORN. THROUGH THE YEARS

THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW MEETINGS IN COAHUILA AND BAJA WITH DELEGATES FROM THE RESERVATIONS, THAT IS, WITH RESIDENTS OF THE RES'ES THAT HAVE HAD TRUSTY POSITIONS AND COULD GO IN AND OUT WITHOUT ANY PROBLEM. THERE ARE INSIDE CALI-TEXAS NON-RES GROUPS FROM LA PROLE AS WELL INTERESTED IN HELPING OUT, ESPEICALLY WITH THE PROCUREMENT OF WEAPONS. PLANS HAVE BEEN SET IN MOTION AND WE ARE NOW EAGER TO RETURN AND BECOME INVOLVED.

THIS IS NOT MERELY A PERSONAL THING, NOT AN INDIVIDUAL BATTLE, ALTHOUGH I HAVE MUCH TO RESENT. IT WILL BE A COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE, A CLASS STRUGGLE. WHAT PACOMIO TRIED TO DO OH SO MANY CENTURIES AGO, THE INDIANS IN CHINGANAZA HAVE ACHIEVED AND NOW WE TOO MUST ATTAIN THIS FREEDOM FROM EXPLOITATION ON THE RESERVATIONS IN CALI-TEXAS. CHINGANAZA WILL SERVE AS AN INSPIRATION FOR THE FUTURE CHANGES IN CALI-TEXAS. OUR STRUGGLE WILL BE THE BEGINNING OF A DIFFERENT WORLD.

(117-118)

Pedro is constantly reminded by these communiqués that he cannot stay in the safe place of Chinganaza while Cholo reservations still exist. Within the confines of Chinganaza Lydia and her friends realize that there cannot be change if they forget about the Cholo Reservations from which several of them come. Organizing with the reservations in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Chihuahua, and Nuevo Leon becomes central

to their political imagination. The spatial imaginary here is very similar to Gómez-Peña's utopian cartography, which he describes as

a map of the Americas with no borders; a map turned upside down; or one in which the countries have borders that are organically drawn by geography, culture, and immigration, and not by the capricious hands of economic domination and political bravado.⁶⁵

Here, having “no borders” is a very different from NAFTA's “borderless world.” Similar to Gómez-Peña's utopian cartography, “the New World Border,” the antechambers of *Lunar Braceros* is a “conceptual map of Arte-America—a continent made of people, art, and ideas, not countries.”⁶⁶ Rather than having a borderless world for profit and investment, Pita and Sánchez's “borderless world” is evident through the collectivity and links between reservations in different regions and cities. While the reservations are an effect of “the capricious hands of economic domination and political bravado” these spaces are being linked differently for collective action in a more “organic” way. We learn from this missive that nine years after Pedro's birth, the group established contact with these reservations, held meetings with delegates from the reservations as well as groups who are not living in the reservations. The missive reads, “THIS IS NOT MERELY A PERSONAL THING, NOT AN INDIVIDUAL BATTLE, ALTHOUGH I HAVE MUCH TO RESENT. IT WILL BE A COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE.” Even though collective struggle is difficult and can lead to resentment—because it asks this writer to leave the confines and comforts of Chinganaza—struggles must be collective. Collectivity here does not link up fragmented geographical locations for a strategic unity that excises subjects, objects, and modes that do not benefit the market, as is the tendency of transnational capitalist narratives like NAFTA. Instead, Sánchez and Pita ask us to think about all these fragmented spaces—Texas,

New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, La Prole, Coahuila, Baja, and Chinganaza— as part of a collective struggle, which forces a reconfiguration of these spaces as discrete locations.

The purpose of speculation in *Lunar Braceros* is not meant to suture a single, truthful global narrative, which homogenizes difference. Sánchez and Pita are not interested in re-asserting the vision of a new world, or a truth claim of what the new global narrative is should be. Rather, they lay claim on the importance of the “struggle” as “the beginning of a different world.” Like Marcos’ antechamber, the collective struggle in *Lunar Braceros* is about a practice of “looking into” a new world. The space in which we can “look in” is the place of value, and within this space the “new world” is deferred. Within this space of deferral, of “looking in,” collectivities are made and re-made, and utopian spaces are created and taken down by transnational capitalism. However, in these critical dystopian narratives of spaces of deferral, of the antechambers, the reader is able to imagine, and create new narratives through the hypertextuality of the novel. While Chinganaza will serve as an “inspiration” for the new world, Chinganaza is not what the new world will look like. But, the possibility of having spaces like Chinganaza moves the group to leave and continue to struggle with groups of people who live in dire spaces. This logic is not merely about creating places like Chinganaza, but it is about being inspired by spaces to imagine struggle for change. Lydia tells Pedro, “[y]ou’ll undoubtedly be involved in the production of new spatial relations, maybe—hopefully—even in outer space, on another planet, but I want you never to forget this particular place, our commons, and that it represents a rejection of everything that is hegemonic and dominated by capital relations” (25). These writers remind us that the struggle for our present moment and the future is a struggle over how spatial relations are made and re-made. This struggle, this antechamber, this space of

“inspiration,” this beginning or thing that precedes a new world, this space of deferral, is the speculative space that has value for the Zapatistas and Pita and Sánchez because it provides a mode of thinking and existing against and beyond the teleological narrative of Western discourses of political movement, development, and subjects.

Spatial relations are constantly shifting, and by the end of the novel the utopian space of Chinganaza, the Commons where Pedro has lived his whole life, is crumbling. The disintegration of Chinganaza underscores the ways in which struggle must continue even if we have won spaces like Chinganaza because these utopian places of community and freedom live under constant threat, which is what Lydia and her group of friends realize. Hundreds of thousands of new settlers in the Andean region move south to live in uncontaminated lands near the Amazonian forests because Indians are being dispossessed of what they regained through earlier struggles and hundreds are dying. Clearly, the developmental narrative and the developmental subject of transnational capitalism cannot be our sites of hope and struggle. Rather, the subjects of hope and struggle becomes about the collective writers of *Lunar Braceros*, and the displaced people throughout the Americas. And, these subjects are importantly connected to the land.

In the last entry of *Lunar Braceros* we learn that the Cholo Reservations are not the only sites of struggle as the Andean region and Chinganaza are “becoming a new site of struggle.” This is why the space of the antechamber becomes important. To live, breathe, and struggle in the antechamber means that even when our utopian spaces disintegrate all hope is not lost. This is because the focus of the antechamber is to create novel ways of “looking” into new worlds that alter our notions of space and time against dominant narratives. The antechamber, as I have discussed above, is not an insertion of a new universal world or the actual utopian place; rather, the notion of antechambers recognizes the force of culture and modes of speculation in

imagining social equality. Critical utopia, in other words, cannot be understood through the actualized places themselves—as with Chinganaza—and is, rather, about living in speculative and conceptual spaces rather than fixed and unchanging places.

While Chinganaza is one of the only utopian spaces in *Lunar Braceros*, by the end of the novel Chinganaza is disintegrating. Rather than losing all hope, however, Pedro seeks to join his family and the friends of his family in struggling for change. In the last letter, Pedro tells us, “I’m not a kid anymore. I’m eighteen now and can help out” (120). He writes of his plan to leave for Mexico, to head north in search of his uncle, grandparents, and aunt. The novel, then, ends at the beginning of the story. The novel ends just as it begins, with a letter from Pedro to his Tío Ricardo. We learn from Pedro’s letter that he does not know where his parents are, as they and their friends disappeared after leaving Chinganaza. While the first message is dated June 2148, there is no date on the last entry. But, from the title of the novel *Lunar Braceros: 2125-2148* the reader can infer that the last entry is also from 2148. The end of the novel ends where the first entry of the novel begins. The reader winds up at the beginning of the novel in many ways, except for the fact that the reader has read the missives between the bookended letters by Pedro. The reader is refused a developmental story of Pedro, or of any other hero, for that matter, as we learn from Pedro’s last letter that he is uncertain as to where his mother, Lydia, is. Even though this is the end of the novel, the reader does not get the sense of closure, or an ending. Instead, we are offered a new beginning: Pedro having the desire to search for and join his family and friends in struggle. *Lunar Braceros* is a novel that pushes us to think about spaces of struggle, speculation, and antechambers as modes through which to think about social movement, and that is what the book formally carries out through the structure of the novel itself.

The book in its entirety is not a novel about Pedro, but is about the dystopian world his parents lived in before he was born, the world outside of the utopia he was born and raised in, and how he must think about collectivity and spatialized projects of the 22nd century. In resisting a neat and tidy conclusion and keeping the story open-ended, Sánchez and Pita entice their readers into participating in subversive and clandestine narratives. This is the cultural force of *Lunar Braceros*. As a critical dystopia, the novel does not “entirely abandon the future, even if that future appears bleak beyond imagining.”⁶⁷ Amidst an apocalyptic future exist utopian spaces like Chinganaza. And, even when those spaces fall, new struggles and political collectivities emerge and offer “a prolonged consideration of things to come.”⁶⁸ This open-endedness, this “consideration of things to come,” is precisely the work of Sánchez and Pita’s critical dystopia.

¹ According to Phillip E. Wegner “narrative utopia plays a crucial role in the constitution of the nation-state as an original spatial, social, and cultural form.” Wegner argues that the formal spatial precepts of utopia help produce the nation-state as the agent and locus of capitalism. In other words, the formal features of utopia “serves as an in-between form that mediates and binds together” different representational acts in the conceptualization of cognitive space, lived experiences, theoretical perceptions, and the world in which we live. *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, xvi, xvii, xviii, xx.

² Masao Miyoshi has argued in “Borderless Worlds,” “bourgeois capitals in the industrialized world are now as powerful, or even far more powerful, than before. But the logic they employ, the clients they serve, the tools available to them, the sites they occupy, in short, their very identities, have all changed. They no longer wholly depend on the nation-state of their origin for protection and facilitation. They still make use of the nation-state structure, of course, but their power and energy reside in a different locus,” 732.

³ Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes*, 87.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶ Foucault’s notion of heterotopia connects the production of unified space and the rise of heterotopian space (e.g. the private vs. public space or the metropole vs. the colony). There are no clear divisions between public and private, or metropole and colony as normative spaces are dialectically linked to other seemingly contradictory spaces. In other words, you cannot have the colony with the metropole, or the metropole without the colony and as such, the colony disrupts the space of the metropole. With heterotopia, alterity is revealed, and there is a switch in perception of alterity.

⁷ Nakamura, 95.

⁸ María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “In the Shadow of NAFTA: *Y tu mamá también* Revisits the National Allegory of Mexican Sovereignty,” 754.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 757.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 759.

¹¹ Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Douglas S. Massey, “Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-U.S. Migration,” 103.

¹² *Ibid.*, 101.

¹³ For more on the Bretton Woods Conference, see María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo’s *The Revolutionary Imagination of the Americas and the Age of Development*. The Bretton Woods Conference took place in New Hampshire in July 1944. The conference served as a foundation for the establishment of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). “Free trade among free nations” was cited as a way to gain peace and prosperity in the postwar period (19-23). For more on the Bretton Woods Conference also see Masao Miyoshi’s “A Borderless World?” and David Harvey’s *The Conditions of Postmodernity*.

¹⁴ Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, 230.

¹⁵ Saskia Sassen, “The Need to Distinguish Denationalized and Postnational,” 577.

¹⁶ Subcomandante Marcos provides a useful way of understanding how this is specifically happening in “The Fourth World War Has Begun.” He writes, “Neoliberalism does not only fragment the world that it wants to unify, it also produces the politico-economic center that directs this war. It is urgent that we talk about megapolitics, which incorporates national politics and links them to a center with global interests whose logic is that of the market. It is in the name of the latter that wars are fought, credit granted, and merchandise bought and sold; that diplomatic recognition, economic blocs, political alliances, immigration laws, international ruptures, financial investment—in short, the survival of whole nations—are decided. Financial markets are not interested in the political colors of a nation’s leaders. What counts, in their eyes, is respect for the economic program. Financial criteria impose themselves on everyone. The rulers of the world can tolerate the existence of a left-wing government, on the condition that it does not adopt measures that damage the workings of the market. They will never accept a politics that breaks with the dominant model. In the eyes of megapolitics, national politics is led by little people who must bend to the diktats of the financial giants.’ It will always be this way... until the little people rebel,” 568.

¹⁷ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 103.

¹⁸ María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination of the Americas and the Age of Development*, 27.

¹⁹ Martin Manalansan, “In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma,” 487.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 488.

²¹ Vinay Gidwani, K. Sivaramakrishnan, “Circular Migration and the Spaces of Cultural Assertion,” 189.

²² Saldaña-Portillo, 9.

²³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World,” 13. According to Spivak, women of the new and old diaspora are in demand by transnational agencies for employment and collaboration. She writes, “Women, with other disenfranchised groups, have never been full subjects of and agents in civil society: in other words, first-class

citizens of a state. And the mechanisms of civil society, although distinct from the state, are peculiar to it. And now, in transnationality, precisely because the limits and openings of a particular civil society are never transnational, the transnationalization of global capital requires a poststate class system. The use of women in its establishment is the universalization of feminism of which the United Nations is increasingly becoming the instrument,” 7. Spivak demonstrates how “[t]he disenfranchised new or old diasporic [woman’s]... entire energy must be spent upon successful transplantation or insertion into the new state, often in the name of an old nation in the new. She is the site of global public culture privatized: the proper subject of real migrant activism. She may also be the victim of an exacerbated and violent patriarchy which operates in the name of the old nation as well—a sorry simulacrum of women in nationalism,” 8.

²⁴ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” 162.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 161, 172.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁷ To develop this idea I might want to consider Giorgio Agamben’s notion of homo sacer in *Homo Sacer and Bare Life* as an example of an alternative to the citizen. This figure of homo sacer is simultaneously excluded and included from the law.

²⁸ Saldaña-Portillo, 764

²⁹ Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Douglas S. Massey, 105.

³⁰ Please see the “NAFTA Facts” sheet on the following website to read more statistics about “NAFTA Benefits.” <http://www.ustr.gov/sites/default/files/NAFTA%20Benefits.pdf>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Saldaña-Portillo, 757.

³³ *Ibid.*, 769.

³⁴ Subcomandante Marcos, “Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle,” 88.

³⁵ Subcomandante Marcos, “Tomorrow Begins Today,” 117, *my italics*.

³⁶ Subcomandante Marcos, “The Fourth World War Has Begun,” 567-568.

³⁷ José Rabasa, *Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista Insurgency, and the Specter of History*, 57-58.

³⁸ Subcomandante Marcos, “Second Declaration,” 46.

³⁹ Marcos and CCRI-CG 1995, 26-27.

⁴⁰ B.V. Oguín, “Of Truth, Secrets, and Ski Masks: Counterrevolutionary Appropriations and Zapatista Revisions of *Testimonio*,” 172.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴² José Rabasa, *Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista Insurgency, and the Specter of History*, 51.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁴ Marcos and CCRI-CG 1995, 214. “The Majority Disguised as the Resented Minority,” 31 May 1994.

⁴⁵ Oguín, 157.

⁴⁶ This storyline is similar to Duncan Jones’ British 2009 science fiction film *Moon*. In *Moon*, the central character Sam Bell nears the end of his solitary 3-year job mining helium-3 on the far side of the Earth’s moon. He comes to find out that the company he works for has not been upfront with him, as he discovers his clone, and they realize that the incoming “rescue” team will kill them both. Unlike *Lunar Braceros*, *Moon* is not about a collective group of laborers, but is the story about a singular protagonist who makes it back to Earth.

⁴⁷ Lysa Rivera, "Future Histories and Cyborg Labor: Reading Borderlands Science Fiction after NAFTA," 415.

⁴⁸ Darko Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," 377.

⁴⁹ Catherine Ramírez, "Afrofuturism/Chicanafuturism: Fictive Kin," 186.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 416.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 416.

⁵² Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border*, ii.

⁵³ For more on the epistolary novel please see Joe Bray's *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness*. Bray dates the popularity of the epistolary novel back to the late seventeenth and eighteenth century that began as an experimental form that faded away when the third-person novel gained momentum in works by Jane Austen and George Eliot. Bray discusses the various debates around the epistolary novel and notes how for some, such as Ruth Perry epistolary fictions "transcribe 'uncensored streams of consciousness', that they 'think out loud—on paper'" (1980: 119); for Watts "the use of the epistolary method impels the writer towards producing something that may pass for the spontaneous transcription of the subjective reactions of the protagonists to the events as they occur'" (192); and for Day the epistolary form allows characters to " 'think on paper'" (1966:8). Bray argues that under these approaches to the epistolary form, there is an assumption that the form of the letters offers a transparent and unmediated view into the interiority of consciousness, which is what Bray argues against.

⁵⁴ José Rabasa, *Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista Insurgency, and the Specter of History*, 57-58.

⁵⁵ Gómez-Peña, 10.

⁵⁶ In "The Free Trade Art Agreement/El Tratado de Libre Cultura" in *The New World Border* Gómez-Peña proposes a "utopian cartography" of "the New World Border" against the "sinister cartography of the New World Order" of NAFTA, 6-8.

⁵⁷ According to Gómez-Peña, NAFTA "is based on the arrogant fallacy that 'the market' will solve any and all problems, and it avoids the most basic social, labor, environmental, and cultural responsibilities that are actually the core of any relationship between the three countries," 8-9.

⁵⁸ Gómez-Peña, 6.

⁵⁹ Lysa Rivera, 418.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Catherine Ramírez, 186.

⁶² Thomas Foster, "Cyber-Aztecs and Cholo-Punks: Guillermo Gómez-Peña's Five-Worlds Theory," 46.

⁶³ Gómez-Peña, 7.

⁶⁴ Foster, 46.

⁶⁵ Gómez-Peña, 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁷ Lysa Rivera, 432.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Coda

Women of Color, Utopia, and Comparative Racialization

This dissertation explored two main lines of inquiry. The first addressed the way women of color literature may provide a genealogy of liberal subject formation; and the second studied how the genre of utopia mediates the racial organization of the U.S. state during the Cold War period and its aftermath. I found that the deployment of utopia by women of color literature in the so-called post-Cold War racial liberal moment marks the limits of liberal notions of equality and inclusion. Each chapter explored these limitations. Through the process of writing the dissertation I have found shared thematics and issues that have arisen across the disparate women of color texts by Cynthia Kadohata, Karen Tei Yamashita, Julie Dash, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita that can contribute to an analytic of comparative racialization.

In Chapter One and Chapter Three, for instance, I focused a great deal on the dystopian visual documentary practices of the Cold War racial liberal state and black documentary film. Chapter one explored how *The Kerner Report* might be read alongside Kadohata's *In the Heart of the Valley of Love*. I argued that Kadohata's text revises the visual teleological logic, and the liberal subject, of *The Kerner Report* through an engagement with the dystopian genre. Chapter three is also an engagement with documentary practices; however, I studied the limits of the liberal subject in the domain of black documentary film and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. I have found that I could not study Kadohata's text in isolation from black feminist practices and critiques of visual culture because *In the Heart* and *Daughters* demand a comparative mode of thinking that is foreclosed under liberal and nationalist imaginations.

Following Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson, I understand women of color literature as offering a comparative mode of thinking that is "in distinction to comparative race scholarship

that simply parallels instances of historical similarity across racial groups in the United States.” Rather than merely studying commonalities between racialized communities, women of color literature offer analytics that imagine “alternative modes of coalition beyond prior models of racial or ethnic solidarity based on a notion of homogeneity or similarity.”¹ To further explore these chapters as a project of comparative racialization I would want to consider the role of documentary photography and film in the proxy wars in Asia during the Cold War. Rather than shedding light on the wars being waged abroad, *The Kerner Report* produced the U.S. as a nation focused on resolving its internal social and racial inequalities. I would like to consider how the realist documentary practices of the Cold War state and nationalism, and Kadohata and Dash, might limit or reveal questions around the role of documentary in the representations of the Korean War, and the Vietnam War for Asian American studies. Instead of studying documentary in order to articulate “ethnic solidarity,” “homogeneity,” or “similarity” between Asians, Asian Americans, and African Americans, I hope to understand the ways in which the state documentary practices of *The Kerner Report* hypervisibilized African Americans U.S. urban riots to erase U.S involvement in the wars in Asia. This consideration might help me further track the contradictions of U.S. occupation in Asia and a U.S. racial liberal state that was simultaneously declaring itself “leader of the free world.”

In Chapter Two and Chapter Four, the Borderlands and transnationalism became central inquiries in my exploration of the utopian genre. In each respective chapter I studied what transnationalism looked like when imagined by minority nationalist groups like I Wor Kuen, NAFTA, and women of color literature by Karen Tei Yamashita, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita. While transnationalism for NAFTA served to unify the Western Hemisphere through a

developmental narrative it also did so through the elision of racialized and gendered labor exploitation on a global scale.

What I found in Chapter Two and Chapter Four was that Yamashita, Sánchez, and Pita share a narrative practice of speculative fiction writing that countered the developmental narrative of NAFTA and its developmental subject. To develop these lines of inquiry I would like to further explore the ways *Tropic of Orange* and *Lunar Braceros* are building on a history of borderlands speculative fiction writing. I have connected both texts to the practices of Guillermo Gómez-Peña; yet, I would like to explore what it means to read Asian American texts alongside Chicana/o texts. How might this kind of reading practice allow me to track the significance of the “Chicanoization,” to borrow from Gómez-Peña, of an Asian American text? What might reading *Tropic of Orange* as a borderlands text open up for Asian American studies and comparative racialization practices? And, what influence might Asian American texts like Yamashita have on later Chicana novels such as *Lunar Braceros*?

At the end of this dissertation I find that I am left with more, yet different and productive, questions that remain unanswered. I do believe that contemporary women of color literary utopia and dystopia remain central to the ways in which we can imagine alternative practices for thinking about language, emancipation, social movements, and representational politics. Not because they are about new societies or better futures, they are not offering us those visions. What they do offer is a critical language and an alternative epistemology of space and time that demand a rethinking of utopia itself.

Central to this rethinking of utopia is an imperative toward an analytic of comparative racialization. Situating women of color literature as an analytic for comparative racialization may serve as “a blueprint for coalition around contemporary struggles.” Hong and Ferguson have

noted, “because the dominant mode of comparison is an epistemological structure, the alternative comparative method of women of color feminism is rendered *illegible* within this dominant schema. [They] situate culture... as the site where such alternative comparative modes are imagined and brought into being.”² Likewise, I situate women of color literature as a site to locate alternative comparative modes that articulate coalition in novel ways that are not only based on homogeneity or similarity. Literary works by women of color cannot be thought about in isolation, or merely as being “similar” to each other, but rather must be understood within a broader conjuncture of Cold War cultural politics, U.S. state practices, nationalism, liberalism, and counter-insurgency.

Also fundamental to rethinking utopia is a critique of empiricism and its concomitant comparative logics, in the Cold War period, which is why speculative utopia is pivotal to this woman of color cohort. Kadohata’s linguistic heterotopia, Yamashita’s magical realist utopia, Dash’s critical utopia, and Sánchez and Pita’s borderlands science fiction dystopia all offer critical utopias that rely on speculative practices that are unanchored in empiricism. As such, Kadohata, Yamashita, Dash, Sánchez and Pita are building on and contributing to a rich history of speculative fiction writing that runs counter to the empirical comparative rationalities of nationalisms, the U.S. State, and NAFTA. Their speculative utopian practices are vital to their imagination of alternative comparative and coalitional politics. For these reasons, literature remains an important site of critique for our times.

¹ Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson, “Introduction,” *Strange Affinities*, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

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