

Black Nationalist Speculations: Empire, Gender, and Genre in 19th- and 20th-Century
African American Literature

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Abstract

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“Black Nationalist Speculations: Empire, Gender, and Genre in 19th- and 20th-Century African American Literature” investigates black nationalist literature to trace how its imagined utopian spaces articulate a relationship between nationalism, imperialism, and domesticity. It situates the emergence of this literature historically, focusing on writing from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries. It argues that this historical moment is integral to investigations of black nationalism because of how black thinkers during this period began to think through the relationship between racism at home and U.S. foreign policy abroad. Indeed, at the same time that racial violence within the U.S. reached a height at the dawn of U.S. abolition and following the Federal regulation of Jim Crow in 1896, U.S. empire was simultaneously expanding into the Caribbean and the Pacific. This political and economic expansion was a major factor in how black intellectual thinkers in the United States were able to speculate about freedom beyond U.S. borders. As they began to articulate racial oppression as a transnational hegemonic structure, they both influenced, and were influenced by, anti-colonial resistance movements in these colonized spaces. As such, this project argues that turn of the century black nationalism was both made possible and influenced by the expansion of U.S. Empires.

Because the texts in this archive speculate about the establishment of independent, black nations, they are often taken up by critical utopian studies, a subset of science fiction studies. Science fiction scholars have argued that this type of speculative literature serves as the precursor to what would later come to be recognized as science fiction. Across its four chapters, this dissertation intervenes into these conversations by situating gender as central to the problems that arise in the nationalist formations represented in these utopian worlds. Rather than arguing for their inclusion into the science fiction canon, it uses feminist critiques of the nation to argue that the texts’ inability to reconcile the relationship between nationalism and domesticity leads to the inevitable failure of otherwise revolutionary spaces. The texts in this dissertation’s archive

represent varying forms of the “nation,” at times imagining spaces with definitive political boundaries, and at others thinking about the role of the “nation” as marking racial identity, whether through internationalism, transnationalism, or Pan-Africanism. Regardless of the form of nationalism represented in the texts, however, this project reveals the difficulty of disarticulating nationalism from the bourgeois institutions that necessarily remain a part of it. By bringing together sf studies and feminist critiques of the nation, this project envisions a new way of thinking about the centrality of heteropatriarchy to the nation-form. Simultaneously, it problematizes our understanding of speculative fiction by emphasizing the gendered exclusions that arise as these thinkers work to speculate about alternative nation forms.

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Introduction

Black Nationalist Speculations: Empire, Gender, and Genre in 19th- and 20th-Century African American Literature

Progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, the best ones do what great poetry always does: Transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.

-Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (2002)

I. Black Nationalism and Internationalism in the United States

In 1830 black nationalist abolitionist David Walker published his pamphlet *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, But in Particular and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*. In this pamphlet Walker openly and contentiously called upon black Americans, both enslaved and free, to take control of their condition and to collaboratively initiate abolition. Published in Boston and circulated amongst enslaved people in the South, this document was viewed as a threat to the status quo and would later be credited with the institution of the infamous literary laws that made it illegal for slaves to learn to read or write. Expressing an unrelenting critique of the institution of slavery and the people who openly or inadvertently supported it, Walker's *Appeal* was so radical that even famed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was taken aback by both the tone and content of the piece.¹ Providing scathing critiques of the conditions to which African Americans were subject, as well as of the insufficiency of the nation's efforts to redress these contradictions, Walker argued for black self-autonomy and

¹ See Kazanjian, David. *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 26; Wilentz, Sean. "Introduction: The Mysteries of David Walker." *David Walker's Appeal*. 1830. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), vii-xxiii, vii. Manisha Sinha also notes that Garrison came to admire Walker, and that Walker's *Appeal* was the first piece of literature to receive review in his newspaper. Sinha, Manisha. *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 218-9; hereafter cited parenthetically.

black-led revolutionary movements. The sentiments expressed in his *Appeal* have led historian Sterling Stuckey to credit him with “creating” black nationalist ideology.²

The fact that Walker’s *Appeal* was startling to white abolitionists is significant for two reasons. For one, the pamphlet’s reception demonstrates the differing political ideologies that existed within and amongst groups concerned with achieving racial equality and/or uplift. Rather than existing as a homogenous group, Walker’s radical break from some of the more dominant abolitionist rhetoric, and the concerned response it received from abolitionists, showcased the disparate ways that abolitionists sought to appeal to Americans to convince them to fight, either with words or with weapons, to end slavery. And, secondly, when considered within longer histories of black nationalism in the United States, the controversy sparked by the publication of this document shows the ways that black nationalist ideology emerged as part of an epistemological debate concerning the relationship between the United States and its histories of slavery and racism more broadly. For example, at the center of Walker’s *Appeal* was a critique of the white abolitionists’ failures to effectively denounce Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, a 1785 publication documenting and explaining, for a French audience, the emergent American way of life.³ Often credited with laying out the foundational principles for what would soon become the touchpoints of American democracy and liberalism, in this *Appeal* Walker condemned Jefferson’s praise of American individualism and his claims about the biological inferiority of African Americans. Walker argued that because such a large percentage of white Americans believed Jefferson to be “one of as great characters” to have “ever lived among the

² See Stuckey, Sterling. *Going Through the Storm: The Influence of African American Art in History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 87. Here Stuckey considers both Robert Alexander Young and David Walker as creating black nationalist ideology because of the ways they “speculated on the status of African peoples in a way which broke beyond the shackles which American sought to impose on the African mind.”

³ Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. 1785. (New York: Penguin, 1999).

whites,” African Americans should be skeptical that these Americans would ever fully renounce their indebtedness to him and the republican principles he advocated for. Walker warned “let no one of us suppose that the refutations which have been written by our white friends are enough.” Instead, he argued, “the charges of Mr. Jefferson” must be “refuted by the blacks *themselves*, according to their chance.”⁴ Expressing skepticism as to whether white abolitionists would ever fully vilify the founding father’s stance on slavery or the racist ideologies behind the republican principles he theorized for the nation, Walker believed that it was up to black people to take their fight for freedom into their own hands.

“Black National Speculations: Empire, Gender, and Genre in 19th- and 20th-Century African American Literature” considers the ways that African American writers have used literature to critique U.S. racial nationalism from the years before abolition through the Jim Crow era. Just as Walker’s writing threatened Garrison, other African American writing sparked controversy in conservative and liberal circles. Such writings expressed separatist political ideologies more radical than those taken up by groups concerned with national reform. Not so much invested in appeasing the dominant white population in power, black nationalist literature articulated unrelenting critiques of American racism in ways that showed its deep-seated relationship to U.S. national culture. This dissertation examines how literature expressed these forms of black nationalism and enabled imaginations of revolution different from those offered in mainstream reformist rhetoric.

As it investigates the ways that these writers used literature in order to imagine freedom outside of U.S. racial nationalist contexts, “Black Nationalist Speculations” finds that they engaged and experimented with different literary genres in order to imagine freedom at different

⁴ Walker, David. *David Walker’s Appeal*. 1829. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 14-5.

moments in U.S. history. Although Walker has been credited with formally starting the U.S. black nationalist tradition with the publication of his *Appeal*, as black nationalist writers continued to express their beliefs they began engaging with different literary genres. Participating in the political tradition of Walker in new idioms, these writers take up his argument *for* black-led revolution and freedom and begin to speculate about *how* this revolution might be achieved. In order to do so, they engaged with emergent literary genres that enabled them to express visions of what other worlds might look like. “Black Nationalist Speculations” argues that speculative fiction, a genre of literature often affiliated with imagining social possibility, provided these writers with an effective means for imagining freedom.

A key intervention made in this project is that engagement with speculative fiction enabled these writers to express their black nationalism in ways that exceeded the limits of American political borders and the confines of American national culture. Although the texts I treat were produced by people living in the United States, many of whom never stepped foot outside of U.S. borders, engaging with speculative genres allowed these writers to imagine different worlds in new places, and that the people who made up these worlds were not just African Americans, but black people from across the diaspora.⁵ This means that although the writers envisioned black *nationalist* worlds, they were simultaneously thinking about forging connections across the national borders that divided contemporary political maps of the world. Because of this, there are necessarily global dimensions to their thinking, as the people in the utopian worlds they imagine come from different parts of the globe. The relationship between genre and internationalism is important then because it is through the process of rejecting those genres mobilized within U.S. reformist rhetoric and initiatives that these writers were able to

⁵ With the exception of Martin Delany, who travelled extensively throughout Western Africa, none of the writers examined in this dissertation traveled outside of the United States.

imagine freedom beyond the U.S. It was also through these genres that they were able to represent worlds with reversed racial hierarchies and ones that considered the relationship between U.S. race policy and its expanding empire. Speculative fiction, a genre that imagines utopian possibilities, provided the ideal literary medium for African American writers to do so. This genre was not so much concerned with convincing a white audience about the fact of racial violence, but instead provided more fantastical accounts of black revolution that would be viewed as improbable and unbelievable to a mainstream audience.⁶

However, as these writers produced emergent speculative genres, they both borrowed from and revised dominant literary genres affiliated with U.S. racial nationalism. “Black Nationalist Speculations” finds that, as they revise nationalist literary genres in order to imagine worlds where racial liberation is possible, their representations of gender remain the site where their otherwise radical negotiations with mainstream U.S. culture are unresolved. It argues that the problematic representations of gender in the treated texts reveal how these writers remained trapped by the limits of literary form and its relationship to American nationalist projects. Across its four chapters this dissertation shows how, rather than neatly adopting a speculative form that breaks from genres used in mainstream U.S. nationalist culture, the utopian worlds imagined in these texts struggle to break with these more dominant literary forms. “Black Nationalist Speculations” argues that this tension is mostly clearly seen as the writers work to negotiate the relationship between gender and nationalism in their imagined black nationalist spaces. Thus, a key contention is that at the same time that both the speculative literary form and the U.S

⁶ For more on the relationship between speculative fiction, utopia, and African American literature, see Bould, Mark. “Revolutionary African-American SF before Black Power SF,” *Extrapolation* 51.1 (2010): 53-81; hereafter cited parenthetically. Leonard, Elisabeth. “Race and Ethnicity in Science Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 253-63. Tal, Kali. “That Just Kills Me: Black Militant Near-Future Fiction,” *Social Text*, 71 20.2 (2002), 65-91; hereafter cited parenthetically.

imperial context allowed these writers and thinkers to imagine a decolonized African diasporic world in new and important ways, the liberated spaces they imagined often recapitulated gendered forms of exclusion embedded in the nationalist frameworks that they sought to dismantle.

II. The Abolitionist Movement, Black Nationalism, and African American Literature

“Black Nationalist Speculations” argues that engagements with speculative genres provided a central way for African American writers to imagine what their nationalist and internationalist worlds might look like. In situating literary genre as a primary method through which these writers imagined freedom, I consider how black nationalist writing emerges alongside of the abolitionist movement, a movement concerned with racial justice which, like black nationalism, has a legacy extending beyond the nineteenth century. In the years before Emancipation, abolitionist newspapers played a central role in persuading U.S. citizens of the evils of slavery. Presenting, amongst other things, testimonies by formerly enslaved people, these newspapers served the dual purpose of convincing Northern readers about the cruelty of life under slavery, and of generating a community of people that would come together to unite in the fight for abolition. Begun initially as collaborative efforts amongst both white and black Americans, nearly every anti-slavery society had its own newspaper, and these newspapers mobilized many genres, including autobiographical testimonies and sentimental fiction, in order to promote the cause.

Above all, slave narratives held a central role in the abolitionist movement because of the ways they provided first-hand accounts of the horrors of life in slavery. While pro-slavery Americans often accused abolitionists of embellishing the violences, arguing that enslaved

people were, in many cases, treated like family and provided with accommodations that allowed them to live comfortable lives, these slave narratives directly countered such arguments by illustrating how slavery was, indeed, both a violent and inhumane institution. Telling stories about, amongst other things, the ways the institution was designed to break up the traditional American household, and the effects that this had on both enslaved and slave-holding families alike, slave narratives worked to appeal to the sympathy and morality of white Americans through sentimentalist tropes that highlighted the ways that the institution contradicted the principles of freedom, individualism, and Christian morality upon which the nation was founded.

Within the field of literary study, scholars have cited the slave narrative as marking the beginning of the African American literary tradition.⁷ Yet, these historiographies of the field are problematic because they reduce African American literature to a category of writing designed exclusively for the purpose of protesting U.S. racial violence. In his 1949 essay “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” James Baldwin argues that the tendency to read African American literature this way both expects and requires writers to produce literature within a binary framework that already assumes a fixed and static relationship between oppressor and oppressed. The conventions of the “protest novel,” Baldwin argues, force African Americans to accept “a theology that denies him life, that...admits the possibility of his being sub-human,” and that leaves him “constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth.”⁸ The adaptation of such literary forms only reaffirms the ways that:

the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society; they accept the same criteria, they share the same beliefs, they both alike depend on the same reality.

⁷ See Davis, Charles T. and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “Introduction: The Language of Slavery” in *The Slave’s Narrative*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁸ Baldwin, James. “Everybody’s Protest Novel.” 1949. *Notes of a Native Son*. (New York: Beacon Press, 1955), 23; hereafter cited parenthetically.

Within this case it is romantic, more, meaningless, to speak of a ‘new’ society as the desire of the oppressed, for that shivering dependence on the props of reality which he shares with the *Herrenvolk* makes the truly ‘new’ society impossible to conceive (21).

For Baldwin, the protest novel is limited because the act of writing it reinscribes and reifies American race relations at the same time that it prohibits the writer from imagining a fully liberated world, one where U.S. racial hierarchies can actually be dismantled.

“Black Nationalist Speculations” considers the ways that historiographies of the African American literary tradition that reduce the literature to the status of protest fail to consider the ways that the tradition emerged within structures of power that informed what these writers were expected to say, and how they were allowed to say it. As John Sekora has noted, the problems that Baldwin calls attention to in his critique of the twentieth-century protest novel actually began in the nineteenth century with the slave narrative. Indeed, the slave narrative was produced within systems of power that often left the slave narrator indebted to his or her abolitionist sponsor, a sponsor who was typically in a relatively superior position of power due to both his or her race and financial status. The power held by the sponsor necessarily affected both what was told in the narrative, and how that information was narrated.⁹ And, relatedly, such historiographies of African American literature assume that, through protest, the literature served a singular purpose, namely to promote anti-racist reform within a U.S. nationalist context. This historicization is problematic because it fails to consider the ways that African American writers have taken agency within their own writing in order to imagine freedom on their own terms. This dissertation intervenes into these conversations about the history of the African American literary tradition by showing that black abolitionists, and black nationalists who followed in their

⁹ Sekora, John. “Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative,” *Callaloo* 32 (1987): 482-515.

tradition, experimented with literary genre in innovative ways in order to imagine freedom outside of U.S. racial nationalist frameworks. This literature differed greatly from the accounts of slavery offered and assumed in the slave narrative genre and in the literature Baldwin critiqued for the “violence they do to language” and “whatever excessive demands they make of credibility” (18).

“Black Nationalist Speculations” highlights the ways that black nationalist thinkers expressed and produced visions of their dreams in ways that paralleled the methods used by, yet remained separate from, white mainstream society. Just as abolitionist movements relied upon newspapers sponsored by various anti-slavery societies in order to disseminate information, around the same time that these newspapers emerged as the primary method for doing so, black-owned newspapers also emerged as ways to generate solidarity and support within the African American community. The first black-owned newspaper, the *Freedom’s Journal*, was founded by Samuel Cornish in New York in 1827 under the auspices that “too long have others spoken for us” (qtd. in Sinha 201). With the inauguration of this newspaper, which its editors claimed served the purpose of acting as “a medium of intercourse between our brethren in different states” (qtd. in Sinha 202), abolitionism was redefined in ways that centered the voices and needs of people within the African American community. While these newspapers published slave narratives much like the interracial and white-owned abolitionist newspapers, they differed from abolitionist newspapers run by white people in important ways. Early on they served a dual purpose of both disseminating information and of creating a national “imagined community” through print culture much in the same way that Benedict Anderson has famously argued that newspapers did beginning with the emergence of the printing press in the seventeenth century.¹⁰

¹⁰ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso, 1983).

Beginning in the antebellum years, and maintaining their popularity amongst black middle-classes well into the twentieth century, these newspapers disseminated information concerning the black community and publicized and circulated Black artistic production throughout the Jim Crow era. Each of the literary texts examined in this dissertation, with the exception of Sutton Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio*, appeared for the first time in one of these black-owned African American newspapers.

These newspapers also allowed African Americans writers to experiment with new, emergent genres in ways that they were often unable to when writing for white-owned or interracial abolitionist papers. Not so much concerned with convincing a white audience about the horrors of slavery or, later, the violences of Jim Crow fascism, in these newspapers African Americans were able to produce literature that did not merely argue *for* freedom within American liberal nationalist terms, but instead they speculated about *what* substantive freedom might look like. Each of the texts examined here experiments with both dominant American and emergent experimental literary genres in order to speculate about freedom in ways that take the existence of racial violence within the United States as a fact. They then move beyond forms of protest writing in order to imagine *what* freedom might look like. Just as Benedict Anderson has famously argued that the emergence of the printing press, and the subsequent rise in national print culture, were central agents in the development of nationalism from the seventeenth century onwards, these black newspapers forged international communities across disparate groups of black people living throughout the United States and beyond, and helped to generate black nationalist sentiment in different moments in U.S. history.

Because of the ways they speculate about national and international worlds, the literary texts in my archive have most notably been taken up in studies of black speculative fiction. As a

genre, speculative fiction has long been concerned with imagining utopian worlds and social possibility. Scholars of utopian genres often cite Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), a novel that represents an early vision of socialism, as the beginning of the utopian literary tradition.¹¹ More's *Utopia* expresses anxieties about the privatization of property and government that simultaneously arrived with the rise of nation-state formations in early modernity and literature following in this tradition has been marked by its concern with imagining radically transformed social worlds.¹² As Frederic Jameson has noted, "the Utopian idea...keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is" (110-11).¹³ Because of this it has been viewed as a literary genre concerned with challenging the status quo. As a genre, then, utopian literature, and the speculative literature that has emerged in this tradition since the sixteenth century, make sense as a choice for African American writers seeking to imagine worlds free from racial violence.

Yet, historically, African American literature has not been considered within studies of speculative fiction. Just as scholars and activists in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s advocated for the American literary canon to expand to include more African American writers and writers of color, scholars of speculative fiction have noted the importance of incorporating this literature into the speculative fiction canon. As Mark Bould has noted, including these writers helps reorient the genre to serve a more definitively social justice purpose. Although Thomas More's *Utopia* emerges in the context of the concern and discontent affiliated with the rise of capitalist economies and the individualistic nature of the cultures it produced, subsequent utopian literature

¹¹ Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and Utopian Imagination*. (New York: Methuen, 1986), 1-2.

¹² More, Thomas. *Utopia*. 1516, ed. Paul Turner. (New York: Penguin, 1965).

¹³ Jameson, Frederic. *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1974). See also Tom Moylan who argues that utopian literature reflects the modern subject's concern, anxiety, or disillusionment with a world rapidly changing socially, politically, and economically (1-2).

has been taken up in many different contexts, and has often been regarded disparagingly as “charming romance[s] intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision” (qtd. in Bould 76). Including African American literature in this speculative fiction canon would help reframe the genre in ways that reveal its full revolutionary potential, as African American speculative fiction has definitively and consistently imagined social transformation.

A second reason it is important to consider African American speculative fiction as a genre relates to the historicizations of the African American literary tradition outlined above. Considering African American speculative fiction within more traditional African American literary canon formations opens room for discussion as to how conventional literary genres were often bound to and affiliated with American national culture in ways that limited the imaginative potential offered to African American writers. Rather than using literature to imagine themselves into the national body as often demanded by white abolitionist groups, “Black Nationalist Speculations” argues that, through speculative fiction, African American writers have been able to imagine distant worlds where black revolution, rather than mere national reform, might be possible. As these writers considered the possibility of finding freedom outside of the United States, they engaged in literary practices that definitively departed from the autobiographical nature of work affiliated with the abolitionist movement and slave narratives, and from the protest novels that Baldwin claims characterized African American writing throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Experimenting with these genres allowed them to imagine freedom outside of the confines of U.S. national culture as they envisioned worlds where international black revolution might be possible.

Scholars of speculative fiction have argued that the genre serves as a precursor to contemporary forms of science fiction, and “Black Nationalist Speculations” finds that this is

particularly the case for African American literature. As scientific technology evolved over the course of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, science fiction emerged as a way for these writers to imagine how technology might help them establish utopia. As Kali Tal notes, because of the historical and material circumstances that have made technological innovation less available to African Americans, in the African American literary tradition speculative fiction is precursive to science fiction. This is because speculative fiction engages with similar imaginative practices in order to imagine worlds with different social hierarchies, despite the fact that these texts have not always engaged with some of the more traditional elements of science fiction (68). So, while in cases such as Martin Delany's *Blake; or, the Huts of America*, the text examined in this dissertation's first chapter, these worlds do not always contain the type of advanced science and technology seen, for example, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1822), a text that was both published before *Blake* and does engage explicitly with scientific technology, Tal's deconstruction of the genre shows that African Americans have always been participating in this tradition through the ways that they have used literature to imagine utopia. Like Bould, Tal argues that incorporating earlier African American texts into the speculative and science fiction canon would help reorient the genre toward serving a more social justice platform.

Yet, while the tradition of black speculative fiction has been largely celebrated for the ways that it has both contested white narratives of modernity and for how it has imagined possibilities for black future freedom, another tenant of black speculative fiction important to this dissertation is its relationship to black nationalist sentiment. Indeed, because writing in this category often mobilizes a nation-state framework as it imagines an alternative to U.S. racial nationalism, the writers of these genres of fiction have frequently been positioned within histories of black nationalism. Because of this, black speculative fiction has had a complicated

relationship to gender as it often works within nationalist frameworks that are masculinist. Frederic Jameson has famously argued that utopian representations in literature have always been embedded in dominant ideology, reflecting the ways that our imaginations are always “hostage” to our own mode of production.¹⁴ Similarly, in his work on “Critical Utopias,” Bill Ashcroft notes that literary utopias encounter trouble as they administer certain boundaries, controls, and limits on their imagined world in order to see the imagined possibility become reality.¹⁵ The fact that they encounter representational “trouble” means that utopia is always intimately connected to its counterpart, dystopia. While dystopia differs from utopia in that its projections of the future contain profound pessimism, Jameson notes that the contradictions of utopia allow these representations to be “Utopia and dystopia all at once” (*Archaeologies* 21). “Black Nationalist Speculations” argues that while these utopias might appear to be revolutionary spaces of liberation for some, they are simultaneously dystopian for the black women they try, or do not try, to incorporate into their vision.

In making this connection between black nationalist utopia and what might be viewed by some as a black feminist dystopia, I draw from Susan Gillman and Alys Weinbaum who, through a reading of W.E.B. Du Bois’s discussion on “the uplift of women” in *Darkwater*, discuss what they coin as the “politics of juxtaposition.” Arguing that while in this work Du Bois “positions multiple political issues and related world historical movements for social justice as associated, as necessarily juxtaposed, if not interlinked, or self-consciously interwoven,” his rhetoric simultaneously elides the question of “how black women might be included, as a group, within

¹⁴ Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. (New York: Verso, 2005), xvii; hereafter cited parenthetically.

¹⁵ Ashcroft, Bill. “Critical Utopias,” *Textual Practice* 21.3 (2007): 411-31, 412.

the analysis.”¹⁶ Similarly, “Black Nationalist Speculations” argues that, in black nationalist speculative fiction, the imagined utopia is often dystopia for African American women. Indeed, for African American speculative fiction the connection between utopia and black nationalism has meant that the limits have always been bound by the heteropatriarchal confines of national ideology. “Black Nationalist Speculations” is concerned with the ways that black speculative fiction both enables African American writers to imagine freedom, and how it simultaneously reinscribes heteropatriarchal constructions of the nation as it imagines black nationalism. It finds that while black speculative fiction should rightly be celebrated for the ways that it experiments with literary genres in order to counter U.S. racial nationalist cultural formations, it still struggles to be fully liberated from heteropatriarchal structures. Across four chapters, this dissertation argues that gendered freedom remains a site of struggle for these writers as they work to imagine radically transformed social worlds.

III. Race, Empire, and the Black Radical Tradition

As the writers examined in this dissertation use speculative genres in order to imagine spaces of freedom outside of the United States, the internationalist scope of their thinking leads them to articulate racism at home with U.S. and European imperialism abroad in ways that show how both are part and parcel of the same racist ideologies. Indeed, as they speculate about united revolutionary fronts made up of people living in distant parts of the world, the spaces where these revolutions take place are by no means arbitrary, and instead reveal that these writers were concerned about what imperial expansion abroad might mean for the future of race relations at

¹⁶ Gillman, Susan and Alys Eve Weinbaum. “Introduction: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Politics of Juxtaposition.” In *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. by Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1-34, 3.

home in the United States. Thus, a central organizing argument for “Black Nationalist Speculations” is that black nationalist speculative fiction was necessarily internationalist in scope, and that, through their speculations about utopia, black writers of speculative fiction were able to consider racism in the United States as part of a larger, global phenomenon intimately related to the expansion of capitalist global empire into the Caribbean, Pacific, and Africa.

“Black Nationalist Speculations” makes these connections between U.S. race policy and the nation’s imperial expansion abroad by considering the black Marxist tradition theorized by Cedric Robinson and taken up by black radical scholars and activists who came both before and after him. In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Robinson revises Marx and Engel’s theory of class revolution in order to situate not only class differentiation, but race and processes of racialization, at the center of the emergence of capitalist world systems. Robinson argues that traditional Marxist theorists have failed to recognize slavery as something more than merely a “‘pre-capitalist’ stage of history,” and because of this they have focused too much attention on the forms of class struggle that emerged in the factory systems of industrial Europe.¹⁷ To revise this, and to account for the ways that the trans-Atlantic slave trade existed as the largest capitalist world economy long before Europe’s Industrial Revolution, Robinson charts a continuous pattern of ethnic, cultural, and racial exploitation that persists from the pre-modern era into the fifteenth century with the more concrete appearance of capitalist economic exchange. Revising the history of capitalism in this way allows Robinson to show how capitalism and processes of racial differentiation have always been synonymous with one another. Not so much a distinct rupture from the feudal order, “capitalism was less a catastrophic revolution (negation)

¹⁷ Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 4; hereafter cited parenthetically

of feudalist social orders than the extension of these social relations into the larger tapestry of the modern world's political and economic relations" (10).

Notably, the primary economic trait that linked the feudal order to the new nation-state economy was the need to organize society into different groups according to race and ethnicity. Robinson notes how the "social basis of European civilization was 'among those whom the Romans called the 'barbarians,'" a term used to mark "peoples...of diverse races with widely differing cultures" (10). Significantly, the "schemes of classification" that marked certain peoples as barbarians were part of complex systems of differentiation not exclusive to peoples living within Europe. Rather, Robinson observes:

the vast majority of the barbarians 'came not as conquerors, but exactly as, in our own day, North Africans, Italians, Poles cross into Metropolitan France for work.' In a relatively short time, in the southern-most European lands that were bounded by the Western Roman Empire, these people were entirely assimilated by the indigenous peoples as a primarily slave labor force (11).

The necessity and impetus to differentiate people based on race and geographical origin was thus not new to the period formally marked as the beginning of the capitalist era, as race and ethnicity have always been mobilized as justification for exploiting people's labor.

When considered in the context of the black radical tradition, the stakes of explaining the emergence of capitalist economies this way are twofold. For one, as Robinson's theorizations move outside of nationalist frameworks in order to think about capitalism as part of a larger global process, it considers how capitalism has always been a *world* economic system reliant upon racial differentiation. While more traditional Marxist historians have been preoccupied with understanding the economic formation through its relationship to "industrial and manufacturing

centers” that developed with the rise of the Industrial Revolution, considering the ways that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was not only part of, but precursor to, the same economic processes helps us comprehend capitalism as not merely a nationalistic, but rather a global, phenomenon (4). Indeed, the slave trade was not merely a system confined to a particular national framework, but rather it existed as a global economy that extended beyond the nation form, across oceans and continents. So, while in traditional historiographies of the Age of Exploration, Portugal has often been understood as “the singularly ambitious historical agent...symbolizing a nation” (101), the strength behind Portugal as a “historical force” came precisely through its close relationship to other European nations, namely Italy, Spain, and Britain. Because of this, capitalism has never been merely a national phenomenon, but rather is something that has emerged in the context of a global economy reliant upon both the slave trade and the acquisition of land in Africa, Asia, and the New World.

Broadening out our understanding of capitalism to consider it within this global context allows for a conceptualization of the multiple forms that class struggle has taken in different historical, political, and social contexts. Robinson argues that the limits of Eurocentric Marxism are its failures to realize that

out of what was in reality a rather more complex capitalist world system..., other revolutionary forces emerged as well. Informed as they were by the ideas and cultures drawn from their own historical experiences, these movements assumed forms only vaguely anticipated in the radical traditions of the West...And among them was the persistent and continuously evolving resistance of African peoples to oppression (4-5).

Thinking about the trans-Atlantic slave trade as the inaugural moment in the consolidation of modern capitalism allows us to understand the captured African’s resistance to enslavement as a

form of class struggle. In the third section of *Black Marxism*, Robinson provides historical examples that show how black radical thinkers have understood the position of slavery within longer histories of capitalism, and argues that the black radical tradition emerges from this understanding that global capitalist systems have always been reliant upon racial differentiation and exploitation. Citing Du Bois's 1935 *Black Reconstruction* as the first historiographical work to articulate slave resistance in these revisionist Marxist terms, Robinson suggests that Du Bois's foundational black radical text positions the enslaved African laborer as an incipient proletariat figure, and that the text has provided black radical thinkers coming after Du Bois with ways to theorize history in order to reimagine Marx's theory of revolution. This reconceptualization of class struggle thus allows Robinson to link the development of class struggle to larger, more global processes of racial exploitation. As he points out, Du Bois famously concludes his ambitious and ground-breaking historiographical work by invoking contemporary forms of racial exploitation linked to early twentieth-century U.S. and European imperialism.¹⁸ New World slavery, then, and the captured Africans who fought against the conditions of their enslavement, were precursor to the Marxist revolutions occurring in urban industrial spaces, and necessarily always centered a critique of the global dimensions of capitalism, and of revolutionary resistance to it.

Each of the texts examined in this dissertation are part of this black radical tradition because of the ways they understand global capitalism as reliant upon the exploitation of racialized bodies, whether that be at home in the United States, or abroad in American and

¹⁸ In the concluding pages of his 728 page historiographical work, Du Bois writes: "Immediately in Africa, a black back runs red with the blood of the lash; in India, a brown girl is raped; in China, a coolie starves; in Alabama, seven darkies are more than lynched; while in London, the white limbs of a prostitute are hung with jewels and silk. Flames of jealous murder sweep the earth, while brains of little children smear the hills." Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*. 1935. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 728.

European colonies. “Black Nationalist Speculations” finds that, as black nationalist writers imagine spaces of racial liberation outside of the United States, they necessarily link U.S. race policy at home with U.S. and European imperial expansion into Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. While at different moments throughout African American history the United States made gestures indicating that race relations within the country might be on a progressive path toward improvement, each text examined in this dissertation expresses a profound skepticism as to how the material conditions of African Americans living within the United States might be improved while the nation continued to rely upon the exploitation of racialized bodies in its colonies abroad. Each text examined in this dissertation demonstrates an awareness as to how U.S. racial ideology was mobilized to justify the nation’s imperial investments abroad, understanding it as not something merely concerned with the exploitation of racialized bodies at home.

Two central works of literary criticism inform the reading practices used to make these connections. In her book *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* Amy Kaplan argues that the United States’ imperial endeavors West on the North American continent, South into the Caribbean, and East into Africa, shaped the ways that American domestic culture, and conceptions of American identity, developed in different moments of U.S. imperial history. Rather than imperialism existing as a series of foreign policies separate from those being made within the borders of the continental United States, Kaplan’s work shows the ways that the “cultural phenomena we think of as domestic or particularly national are forged in a crucible of foreign relations.”¹⁹ In *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Male Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*, Michelle Stephens takes up Kaplan’s arguments within a Black Studies framework in order to think similarly about the ways that global empire

¹⁹ Kaplan, Amy. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.

influenced the cultural production of Caribbean male intellectuals in the early twentieth century. In this book Stephens argues that “the experience of Empire” revealed by Kaplan “is not at all new to the inhabitants of colonial space.” According to Stephens, “Caribbean intellectuals have been living and therefore wrestling with these particular imperial languages of hybridity and sovereignty as well as their transformations and mutations in world politics over the course of the twentieth century.”²⁰ Stephens’s arguments are important here for the ways that they show how the cultural production of black people living in colonized spaces demonstrated an acute awareness of the ways that the “particular imperial languages of hybridity and sovereignty as well as their transformations and mutations in world politics” were understood by black intellectuals as they imagined black nationalist spaces and black internationalist solidarities (11). “Black Nationalist Speculations” contributes to these conversations about nationalism, internationalism, and empire by arguing that, through speculative fiction, African American writers have been able to forge connections between these two cultural phenomena as early as the nineteenth century.

“Black Nationalist Speculations” is organized into four chapters. Chapter 1, “*Blake; or, the Huts of America* and the Emergence of a Black Internationalist Literary Genre,” lays out the literary historical framework for the project by showing the ways that Martin Delany’s *Blake; or, the Huts of America* (1859-61), a serialized novel often considered to be the first African American speculative text, emerges as a response to debates about how free African Americans might be incorporated into the national body following Emancipation. It argues that this first African American speculative text was produced as a refutation to the politics of mainstream abolitionism, a movement which Delany openly critiqued in his non-fiction for the ways that it

²⁰ Stephens, Michelle. *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Male Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 11; hereafter cited parenthetically.

failed to renounce racist stereotypes of African Americans. Viewing abolitionist literature as overly concerned with appealing to both pro- and anti-slavery circles alike, this chapter argues that, in *Blake*, Delany breaks from the slave narrative genre in order to imagine a world where international revolution, rather than U.S. nationalist reform, might be possible. As *Blake*'s experimentation with genre leads Delany to produce this emergent black internationalist speculative text, he is able to envision a world where not only enslaved people living in the United States, but also people living in spaces affected by nineteenth-century imperial formations, unite to overthrow their colonizers.

Chapter 2, "'Two Terrible and Discordant Sounds': Genre, Empire, and the Masculine Black Nationalist Imagination of Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio*" examines Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), a novel that tells the story of two black male protagonists who devise a plot to establish Texas as an independent black state. Literary scholars have debated whether they ought to position *Imperium* as a black nationalist text, and whether Griggs ought to be recognized as a conservative or radical thinker. Rather than trying to decipher Griggs's politics, this chapter reads the novel alongside labor and contract theory that highlights the centrality of family life to liberal definitions of freedom in the early years of Jim Crow segregation. Reading the novel for the forms of bourgeois, masculinist domesticity represented in the novel, this chapter argues that the two male protagonists' inability to revise bourgeois constructions of nationalism lead to the collapse of the otherwise revolutionary space.

Chapter 3, "Your Wife and Not Your Wife: Gender, Family, and the Domestic Politics of Pauline Hopkins's Black Internationalism," turns to Pauline Hopkins's work in *The Colored American Magazine* and considers how she treats internationalism as a counter-force to white supremacy in the United States. During the time that Hopkins served as editor for the magazine

its contributions began to forge explicit connections between domestic racism and the United States' imperialist endeavors in the Pacific and Caribbean. Yet while Hopkins's non-fiction remains critical of these imperial projects, her only explicitly internationalist work of fiction, *Of One Blood* (1902-03), is unable to produce the same structural critique of U.S. domestic and foreign policy. This chapter reads *Of One Blood* alongside of the magazine's anti-imperialist non-fiction and argues that the novel's failure to include African American women into its Pan-African utopia reveals the incompatibility of the utopian form with an internationalist politics accountable to the gendered dimensions of U.S. imperialism.

Chapter 4, "'Black International Anti-Fascism: Imperialism, Genre, and Romance in George Schuyler's *Black Empire*,'" examines George Schuyler's *Black Empire* (1936-38), a serialized novel that speculates about a black international organization overthrowing Western imperialism in Africa. It reads *Black Empire* in the context of interwar politics and the many international communist organizations that emerged in the period. While, with the outbreak of fascism in Europe, many of these organizations abandoned their more radical anti-imperialist politics, *Black Empire* tells the story of a black organization that maintains this critique. This chapter argues that *Black Empire*'s use of both satire and speculation allows Schuyler to centralize issues concerning race and imperialism as it forges connections among Western liberalism, fascism, and capitalist economies. Unlike the novels examined in the previous chapters, Schuyler's exposure of the imperialist sentiments that unite imperial Britain and fascist Italy enable him to disarticulate bourgeois domesticity from revolutionary internationalism. Doing so allows him to produce an intersectional critique that considers both race and gender in his internationalist politics

The Coda concludes the dissertation with a reading of Marvel's record-breaking film *Black Panther* (2018). This conclusion considers how the film draws on literary genres that have long been used to imagine black liberation, and positions the film within the tradition of African American speculative fiction. It brings together the conversations on both the possibilities of speculative genres and the problems of gender in black nationalist imaginations examined in the previous four chapters, and it reads *Black Panther's* representations of its female characters, particularly Nakia, Shuri, and the Dora Milaje, as producing a revolutionary black nationalist imagination accountable to the gendered dimensions of mainstream bourgeois nationalism. This Coda argues that the film reaches beyond the gender trappings that more traditional black nationalist speculative texts have encountered by engaging in a revisionist historical practice that merges its critiques of the past, present, and future.

Overall, "Black Nationalist Speculations" contributes to African American literary studies by situating speculative fiction as a pinnacle medium through which to imagine spaces liberated from white imperialism. Along with literary studies, these arguments have stakes for both Black Studies and feminist studies. The project's focus on speculative fiction offers new ways to think about different forms of black nationalism, internationalism, and transnationalism and the problems that black nationalist thinkers encounter as they work to represent utopia. And, its focus on representations of gender, family, and alternative national formations has stakes in ongoing debates about nationalism occurring in feminist studies. By pushing Black Studies to think about the gendered ways that national formations have been historically imagined, "Black Nationalist Speculations" provides new ways to consider the relationships among race, gender, and nationalist formations in black speculative fiction.

Chapter 1

Blake; or, the Huts of America and the Emergence of a Black Internationalist Literary Genre

I. Introduction

Following Harriet Beecher Stowe's publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, African American abolitionist Martin R. Delany engaged in a public debate with Frederick Douglass concerning the novel's relationship to ongoing struggles for black self-determination. In a series of letters that Douglass would eventually publish in his Rochester-based newspaper *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Douglass and Delany debated, among other things, Stowe's intentions in publishing what was, at the time, considered to be a groundbreaking novel signaling a landmark moment for the abolitionist cause.¹ While Douglass viewed Stowe as a trustworthy ally, Delany was skeptical of a number of things concerning Stowe's novel and her relationship to black freedom struggles. Delany's critique of Douglass's editorial decision to praise Stowe in his newspaper was based on principles that would collectively come to constitute the black nationalist platform for which Delany is now perhaps best known.

Delany's first critique was that he viewed Douglass's praise for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as indicative of the growing impulse for African Americans to pander to the political desires of what was then a predominantly white-led abolitionist movement.² According to Delany, this trend too often silenced African Americans and formerly enslaved people, people whom he

¹ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, formerly called *The North Star* was established after Frederick Douglass merged his paper with abolitionist Gerrit Smith's newspaper, the *Liberty Party Paper*, after *The North Star* suffered from a series of financial problems.

² The newspaper, over the course of two years, documented the travels of Stowe, praising her for raising awareness about the conditions of slavery in the U.S. at the same time that it defended her from critics who accused her of profiting from the book's sales. See, for example, "From the N.Y. Tribune: Mrs. Stowe's Visit to England," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (April 8, 1853), accessed September 17, 2018, *Accessible Archives*. "St. Louis, March 15, 1853," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (April 15, 1853), accessed January 15, 2019, *Accessible Archives*. "The Testimonial to Mrs. Stowe," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (June 10, 1853), accessed September 17, 2018, *Accessible Archives*.

believed had much more urgent and genuine stakes in the matter than their white Northern counterparts. In this series of letters Delany straightforwardly accused Douglass of privileging writing by white abolitionists over that of African Americans, using his own experience in seeking publication in the paper as an example to make his point. In the same year that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was released, Delany submitted parts of his essay *Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* to Frederick Douglass's *Paper*. In this piece Delany advocated for African American emigration, arguing that the only solution to the present condition of African Americans in the country was "a new country, and new beginning,"³ a radical argument when compared to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which notoriously represented white women as the saviors of the African American race. In the letter published in the paper, Delany accused Douglass of giving his submission a "cold and deadly silence," while noting, on the other hand, that submissions by white abolitionists always received "some notice" by the newspaper, whether or not the writings were "good or bad."⁴ The stakes of Douglass's publishing politics were high, according to Delany, who feared that these acts would undermine more radical factions of the African American abolitionist movement.

The second principle underlying Delany's criticism of both Stowe and of Douglass's decision to promote her work related to the emigrationist platform championed toward the end of Stowe's novel. For Delany, Stowe's decision to have the formerly enslaved George Harris relocate his family to Liberia seemed to promote the agenda of the American Colonization Society (ACS), an organization which Delany was deeply skeptical of. Founded in 1817, the ACS had a long and complex relationship to both white nationalist and white abolitionist groups

³ Delany, Martin R. *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People*. 1852. (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 205; hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁴ Delany, Martin R. "Letter to Frederick Douglass, 10 July 1852." *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. by Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 221-3, 222.

alike. As an organization, the ACS founded the country of Liberia in the early 1820s as a place to send free African Americans with the hopes that their removal from the United States would lessen the risk of a slave revolt on U.S. soil. For the ACS, free African Americans in the U.S. posed a threat to the maintenance of racial hierarchies established under the slave system. While the ACS had, by the time of Delany's writing, ceded its control of Liberia to the African Americans it had previously relocated there, Delany was skeptical of Joseph Jenkins Roberts, Liberia's first African American president, because he appeared to be "a man whom the Colonizationists and slave-holders in the United States extolled to the skies."⁵ In his letters to Douglass, Delany critiqued Stowe's stance on emigration, arguing that her "sneers at Hayti" and simultaneous "holding up [of] the little dependent colonization settlement of Liberia in high estimation" were indicative of Stowe's beliefs that African Americans should be "subservient to...white men's power."⁶ According to Delany, both Stowe and the ACS were deeply invested in maintaining existing racial hierarchies, even if they supposedly supported African American liberation.

In 1852 Delany began drafting his only novel, *Blake; or, the Huts of America*, as a response to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.⁷ In this novel, which traces the international voyages of the black revolutionary Henry Blake, Delany brings together his skepticism of white abolitionist

⁵ "Liberia," *The North Star* (2 March 1849), in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. by Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 144-8, 145.

⁶ Delany, Martin R. "Delany and Douglass on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." (18 April 1853), in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. by Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 22-37, 232. For more on the relationship between *Blake* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Miller, Floyd J. "Introduction." *Blake; or, the Huts of America*, ed. by Floyd J. Miller. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), xi-xxv; hereafter cited parenthetically. Sundquist, Eric J. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) Yellin, Jean Fagan. *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature 1776-1863*. (New York: New York University Press, 1972).

⁷ Although the first installment of *Blake* was published seven years after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Gilroy, Levine, Sundquist, and Yellin speculate that Delany began writing it in 1852, and Miller notes the ways that the novel "in theme and content" serves as an "antithesis to Mrs. Stowe's picture of a mulatto hero..., slave docility, Christian endurance and Liberia as the ultimate destination of the successful fugitive slave" (xx).

politics with his scorn for the ACS's promotion of African American emigration, and in doing so he articulates an emergent black nationalist ideology. Through Henry's journeys, *Blake* tells the story of black liberation that is directed and executed by black people themselves, without the aid of a white savior figure, such as the infamous Eva from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As Henry escapes slavery in Mississippi and travels across the U.S. South, to Canada, to Cuba, to Africa, and back to Cuba in order to spark a massive international slave revolt, this novel, along with his work on emigration, has earned Delany the title of "Father of Black Nationalism."⁸ Through Henry's journeys and stirrings he plants the seeds that will spark this black nationalist revolution, eventually producing the blueprint for a black-run government, one which resolves the problems he sees with the ACS and Stowe's representations of it in her novel.

This chapter argues that the novel's expression of black nationalism emerges alongside of concerns that Delany had about the expansion of U.S. empire, and his understanding as to how this expansion related to the future of slavery in the United States. For Delany, in this decade leading up to the Civil War, concerns about the relationship between U.S. imperial expansion and the future of slavery throughout the United States and Caribbean were intimately connected. Just as he questioned the ACS's commitment to racial uplift by way of its efforts to expatriate free African Americans to Liberia, Delany remained a staunch critic of U.S. imperial expansion, suspicious that U.S. efforts to acquire new lands, both on the North American continent and beyond, were merely manipulative schemes devised by pro-slavery politicians looking to increase the representation of slave-holding states and territories in Congress. Indeed, following a series of events occurring throughout the 1850s, including the 1854 publication of the Ostend Manifesto in which pro-slavery Southerners advocated for purchasing Cuba from Spain as a

⁸ See Painter, Nell Irvin. "Martin R. Delany: Elitism and Black Nationalism." *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Leon Litwack and August Meier. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 149-72, 149.

slave state, Delany knew that slavery and land acquisition always went hand in hand. In this way Henry's decision to center his revolution and to establish his government in Cuba is not merely incidental, as Cuba existed as a site of contestation over both U.S. imperial expansion into the Caribbean and of the future of slavery on the mainland.

Situated within this particular moment in the histories of both slavery and imperialism in the United States, I open the dissertation with a reading of *Blake* because of the role that genre has in allowing Delany to produce a black internationalist politics that emerges by articulating U.S. imperialist expansion to debates about slavery in the years before the Civil War. Just as Amy Kaplan observes the ways that constructions of the domestic and the foreign had always been bound together and articulated through certain literary forms,⁹ Martin Delany was well-aware of the relationship between empire and literature, and, as such, rejecting the formal elements of abolitionist writing were central to his articulation of a revolutionary black nationalist politics. And, while both *Blake* and *Condition* refute the arguments about emigration championed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Blake*, in particular, is unique because it provides both an ideological and formal critique of the abolitionist politics behind Stowe's novel. Indeed, literature was a central weapon mobilized by the abolitionist movement to appeal to the morality of the early Republic and to show them the evils of slavery. Relying primarily on realism and sentimentalism, abolitionist literature served a very functional role as it worked to convince a predominantly white Northern audience that slavery was, in fact, as bad as they claimed it to be. In *Blake*, Delany rejects the desire to pander to these privileged white Northerners as he tells the story of black revolution through a more speculative genre. In doing so Delany produces a black

⁹ Kaplan, Amy. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

internationalist literary genre, one that moves beyond the genre trappings affiliated with U.S. nationalist imperialism.

This chapter argues that by engaging with the speculative genre, *Blake* imagines a world where a black internationalist revolution, rather than mere nationalist reform, is possible. In doing so, the various social constructions that have allowed the United States to emerge as a white nationalist imperialist force in the years before the Civil War, one dependent upon the capitalist exploitation of both racialized and gendered bodies, can become disarticulated from each other as the revolution is imagined. Yet, as *Blake* comes to realize this by tracing Henry's travels across the novel's seventy-four chapters, gender remains the site most constrained by the formal representations of revolution.¹⁰ As such, this chapter traces the genre work performed in *Blake* to show the ways that the novel contains formal tension as it works to break away from the nationalist literary forms affiliated with abolitionism in order to produce a new, radical internationalist genre. The analysis provided in this chapter shows that a sustained critique of gender is necessary to the production of an internationalist revolution, but also that certain literary forms foreclose the possibility of producing this critique, particularly those that remain part of the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement.

II. Nationalist Abolitionism vs. Black Radical Internationalism

Martin Delany began writing *Blake* in the decade before the abolition of slavery and the subsequent outbreak of the Civil War. This decade proved to be a pivotal moment for both codifying the relationships between race and citizenship within the national sphere, and for

¹⁰ The final chapters of *Blake* have been lost, rendering it impossible to know if the making of the revolution that Delany documents throughout the novel actually comes to fruition. This chapter, however, like previous scholarship on the novel, is more concerned with examining how representations of U.S. and European slavery and imperialism produce the black nationalist and internationalist solutions proposed in what remains of the novel.

establishing the United States as an economic and political competitor on the international imperialist stage. While for abolitionists such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, the connections between U.S. slavery and the expansion of U.S. empire were not necessarily part and parcel of the same capitalist project, for black nationalist Martin Delany, unveiling these connections proved central to the struggle for African American liberation.¹¹ This section reads the representations of New World slavery presented in *Blake* as indicative of his critiques of nineteenth-century abolitionism. It argues that, rather than producing a nationalist vision of revolution grounded in reformist rhetoric aiming to revise U.S. racial policy within the confines of the current political structure, the novel articulates an early form of black internationalism. This black internationalism emerges from an understanding of the interconnected relationship between nationalism and racism, and from awareness that this connection means that racism cannot be abolished through and within nationalist frameworks. This section examines the ways that the novel articulates these relationships, and argues that it does so by showing how the key European and North American colonial powers invested in the Caribbean and Atlantic at the dawn of the Civil War share a mutual interest in maintaining New World slave economies. While conventional narratives of the abolitionist movement have historically framed Britain as an ally to enslaved individuals as the movement spread from Britain's colonies, to the United States, to Spanish and, eventually to Portuguese colonies, in *Blake* the political differences between these

¹¹ Manisha Sinha argues that nineteenth-century abolitionists were, in fact, more invested in and committed to radical, revolutionary change than they have previously been given credit for by contemporary historians. A tenant of their radicalism, she notes, derived from the understanding that slavery and imperialism were intimately connected. In claiming that Delany's radicalism emerges as a critique of these abolitionists I do not mean to discredit U.S. abolitionists' anti-imperialist stance. Rather, I suggest that for abolitionists such as Martin Delany, and in texts such as *Blake*, the fight against both slavery and imperialism required an autonomous resistance led by black people living in these varying colonized spaces. See Sinha, Manisha. *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); hereafter cited parenthetically.

imperialist nations collapse, and African Americans themselves become the agents who produce and instigate revolutionary change.

Born on May 6, 1812 to a free African American mother and an enslaved father in what is now Charlestown, West Virginia, Martin Delany was exposed early on to the multifarious, and oftentimes competing, theories on abolition and African American liberation circulating in the decades before formal Emancipation. Insistent upon her children receiving a substantial education, Delany's mother moved her family from Charlestown to Western Pennsylvania after receiving threats from local authorities for teaching her children to read and write. In Pennsylvania the young Delany received a more formal education, studying at a school run by the Reverend Lewis Woodson, a black Methodist minister who himself was an early black nationalist,¹² and his mother's commitment to her children's education served as an example for Delany throughout his life. As a young adult in Pittsburgh, Delany was invested in both science and literature, studying medicine and founding one of the earliest African American newspapers, the *Mystery*. His investments in writing were closely bound to his involvement in the Pittsburgh political scene, and he organized and attended black political conventions throughout the 1830s and 1840s. In 1847 he left Pittsburgh for Rochester, where, alongside of Frederick Douglass, he served as a coeditor to the *North Star* for eighteen months before leaving the paper to attend Harvard Medical School. After several months Delany was dismissed from Harvard because of his race and, as Robert Levine notes, this had a profound influence in the development of the black nationalist politics for which he would come to be known. Immediately after this dismissal in 1852, he published *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People*

¹² Stuckey, Sterling. *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 14.

of *United States*, an essay which, as mentioned above, articulates this nationalism by advocating for black emigration to Central America, South America and the Caribbean.¹³

While biographers of Delany have marked the connection between his dismissal from Harvard and his turn towards an emigrationist, black nationalist ideology, the radicalization of his politics during this era was not solely related to these personal experiences with racism. Indeed, the 1850s were marked by a series of events that drove Delany to increasingly doubt the possibility of achieving liberation within a U.S. nationalist framework. One of the most pivotal events that marked his shift towards a black nationalist ideology was the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In *Condition*, published only two years following the passing of this law, Delany printed the full Supreme Court record affiliated with this case alongside of exposés declaring that, in the wake of this law, the need for African Americans to emigrate and establish their own national space was even more pressing. With African Americans living in the North no longer safe from the grasp of slave catchers, Delany contended that this law most severely affected African Americans living in the North who had never experienced slavery since they did not possess the paperwork to confirm their free status. Furthermore, this law proved that the preservation of slavery was not merely an issue of “states’ rights” as Southern Democrats had previously tried to frame the debates. Now, Delany argued, “it is useless to talk about our rights in individual States: we can have no rights there as citizens.” At this moment Delany’s outlook on the position of African Americans in the United States turned more fatalistic, and he argued that it is “useless for us to contend against [the Fugitive Slave Act]” because “to suppose its repeal, is to anticipate an overthrow of the Confederative Union” which, Delany believed, was

¹³ Levine, Robert S. “Introduction.” *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. by Robert S. Levine. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 1-22, 1.

unlikely to happen. For Delany, the only “remedy” to the problem could be found when considering “the emigration of the colored people” (*Condition* 159).

Seven years following the passing of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, the Dred Scott decision in 1857 pushed Delany further toward the belief that emigration was the most effective means for achieving liberation.¹⁴ In this landmark case, the Supreme Court ruled that African Americans could not be citizens of the United States, regardless of their status as either free or enslaved. In *Blake*, Delany makes explicit reference to this case through a debate staged at Colonel Stephen Franks’s Mississippi plantation where Henry and his wife are both enslaved at the time of the novel’s opening. In this scene, Franks entertains a visitor at his home, a judge from the North who serves to quell Colonel Franks’s anxieties about the increasing sectional divide between the North and South. The Northern judge reaffirms his commitment to “Southern Principles,” and does so by quoting, verbatim, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney’s concluding remarks in the Dred Scott decision. Just as Taney declared that “[African Americans] had no rights which the white man was bound to respect,”¹⁵ Judge Ballard expresses support for this regressive decision, affirming his belief that “it was a just decision of the Supreme Court...that persons of African descent have no rights that white men are bound to respect.”¹⁶ Staging this debate as an interlude to the chapters that narrate Henry’s provocation of a massive slave uprising, *Blake* explicitly positions Henry’s call to revolution within the context of the

¹⁴ Along with Delany, the Dred Scott decision inspired many prominent African Americans intellectuals to view emigration as the best method for achieving African American liberation. As Levine notes, following this decision, people such as Henry Bibb and Mary Ann Shadd Cary, began to advocate for African American emigration to Haiti. See Levine, Robert S. “Debating Black Immigration.” *Martin Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. by Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 181-6, 182.

¹⁵ *The Case of Dred Scott in the United States Supreme Court. The full opinions of Chief Justice Taney and Justice Curtis, and abstracts of the opinions of the other judges; with an analysis of the points ruled, and some concluding observations.* (New York: H. Greeley & Co., 1860), 9. Accessed 23 January 2019. *The Library of Congress*.

¹⁶ Delany, Martin R. *Blake or the Huts of America*. 1859-61, ed. by Floyd J. Miller. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 10-1; hereafter cited parenthetically.

increasingly oppressive U.S. race policies consolidated following Supreme Court decisions such as the one in *Dred Scott*.

In both his fiction and non-fiction Delany made it clear that both these debates concerning the preservation of slavery as exemplified through the Fugitive Slave Act, as well the apparently dismal path to African American citizenship implicit with Taney's report in the *Dred Scott* decision, were ideologically bound to U.S. imperial expansion. For Delany, this was an easy connection to make given that the debates surrounding *Dred Scott* in particular were explicitly narrated through their relationship to U.S. expansion West. For one, a major victory for pro-slavery Americans in the *Dred Scott* decision reached beyond the issue of legal citizenship for African Americans by repealing the precedent set in the 1820 Missouri Compromise that prohibited slavery in the Louisiana Territory north of the 36° 30' latitude line. With the reversal of this order, the possibility for establishing newly acquired Western territories as slave states reopened. Articulating the stakes of these debates in the years before the *Dred Scott* decision, Delany argued in a speech made at the National Emigration Convention in 1855 that "nor are the Territories free from oppression. Oregon has instituted a law, prohibiting a colored person from testifying against a white, and also from settling in the Territory. And those who now reside there, do so by the merest sufferance." In this same speech, Delany called attention to "the outrages in Kansas" when, following the series of events known as "Bleeding Kansas," a law had passed it became illegal to bring an enslaved person to Kansas in order to free them.¹⁷ Like the issues surrounding the acquisition of the Oregon territory, this crisis emerged in the context of debates concerning the legal status of slavery in newly acquired states and territories.

¹⁷ Delany, Martin. "Political Aspect of the Colored People of the United States." (24 August 1855), in *Martin Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. by Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 280-90, 285; hereafter cited parenthetically.

His concern about the legality of slavery in these territories expanded beyond U.S. acquisition of land on the continental United States. Indeed, at this time, he was also deeply concerned about the status of slavery in U.S. territories beyond the mainland. In this same 1855 speech made at the National Emigration Convention Delany claimed that the United States's annexation of places such as the Sandwich Islands in the South Atlantic were "devised by a pernicious pro-slavery cabinet at Washington" and that such acquisitions "would end not only in the annihilation of the name of the Sandwich people, but, in the total extinction of every right and privilege belonging to that people, the whole being usurped and swallowed up by the impudent assumption of 'white superiority'" ("Political Aspect" 286).

And, more explicitly related to *Blake's* concerns with Cuba, in 1854 a group of European diplomats appointed by President Franklin Pierce drafted the document known as the Ostend Manifesto which proposed that the United States take Cuba by force if Spain refused to sell the island to them. While the writers of the document were, allegedly, invested in purchasing Cuba in order to support the will of the white Cuban elite who themselves sought independence from Spain, for Delany the United States's interests in the region were clearly linked to its desire to maintain slavery. In an 1859 article written in the *North Star* Delany warned of "this perfidious wicked design." Acknowledging Cuba as a strategic "key-of entry to the United States from the East," Delany cautioned that there was "a tie doubly as strong as all the other commercial interests...which binds this foreign child in embryo to a most sympathising mother- it is the iron-linked and yet unbroken chain of slavery."¹⁸ His skepticism of U.S. imperial expansion was thus deeply intertwined with his concerns about the future of slavery in the nation. In light of the heightened national crisis being framed as a problem of sectional divide between an anti-slavery

¹⁸ Delany, Martin R. "Annexation of Cuba," *The North Star*. (April 27, 1849), accessed Jan. 23, 2019, *Accessible Archives*; hereafter cited parenthetically.

North and a pro-slavery South, for Delany any pro-imperial sentiment expressed by U.S. politicians was deeply intertwined the nation's efforts to maintain both national and global racial hierarchies.¹⁹

Returning to the scene staged at the Franks' plantation early in the novel, along with serving as a commentary on the 1857 Dred Scott decision, the conversation between Colonel Franks and Judge Ballard also allows Delany to forge this connection between the future of slavery within U.S. borders and the expansion of its territories abroad. And, for Judge Ballard, the tie that links slavery and imperial expansion, in his opinion, is economic. Indeed, this conversation reveals that, despite his position as a Northerner, by supporting the United States's purchasing of Cuba, he also supports the Southern economy. The Judge reassures Franks that "my large interest and responsibility in the slave-labor products of Cuba, should be, I think, sufficient evidence of my fidelity to Southern principles, to say nothing of my official records, which modesty should forbid my reference to" (*Blake* 60). In a moment of self-revelation, he admits that while he had "not before been engaged in the slave trade, because until recently [he] had conscientious scruples about the thing...a little sober reflection set [him] right on that point. It is plain that the right to buy implies the right to hold, also to sell; and if there be right in the one, there is in the other...[he has] therefore determined, not only to buy and hold, but buy and sell also" (*Blake* 60). Here he recognizes that, as a supporter and benefactor of slave economies, he is no more moral than those who more directly engage in the slave trade through the buying and selling of people. Through this conversation, then, the novel erases any differences previously believed to have existed between a pro-slavery South and an anti-slavery North, as

¹⁹ See Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations*. Here Sundquist notes that Delany creates a "fictive world in which Cuban and American slavery are yoked together in historical simultaneity" (184-5).

the two regions become united through their economic investments in the nation's imperial expansion.

While these scenes on the Franks' plantation reveal the intimate economic ties between the North and the South in order to show that freedom within the United States remains a structural impossibility for African Americans, the novel's concern with enslaved populations in other New World colonies, namely those of Spain, Portugal, and Britain, allows it to similarly erase any differences existing between U.S. race policy and the policies of other colonial powers invested in the New World slave economy. As Henry travels to Cuba at the beginning of "Part II," and as the novel begins to document the makings of a revolution that extends beyond U.S. borders to both Cuba and the Atlantic world more broadly, the novel performs work that allows these various colonial powers to emerge as mutually invested in maintaining the international slave system. For example, the text calls attention to slave policies particular to Cuba under Spanish colonial rule, only to challenge beliefs that the Spanish colonial approach to slavery was less violent. In particular, the novel invokes the Cuban policy of *coartación*, a law which gave slaves the right to engage in a contract with their master in order to establish a monetary path to self-manumission. While this law has typically been used as evidence of the Spanish colonial government's leniency because it appeared to give enslaved people more rights than those granted under the U.S. system, scholars have noted that, in practice, the policy was designed to merely placate both the free and enslaved African populations on the island. Michele Reid-Vasquez argues, for example, that, although this policy produced the large free black population unique to Cuba at this time, when the white ruling class began to fear that these people might try to abolish slavery in its totality, the policy was quickly repealed. The intentions behind the policy were perhaps made most clear when, in 1844, following the rumors of a pending slave uprising,

the policy was revoked and the colonial government engaged in a year of violent repression that included heightened policing and security, and the execution of many educated elites who were members of the free black population.²⁰

Blake references this policy in a few ways. As Henry travels to Cuba and finds his wife on a plantation owned by the American Peter Albertis, he arranges to buy Maggie's freedom by invoking *coartación*. His navigation of this system, and the ensuing debate that occurs between American and Cuban slaveholders with stakes in maintaining the Cuban slave system, provide similar critical interpretations as to the supposed liberal intention behind this policy. While Henry is able to purchase his wife's freedom through *coartación*, this event also provides an opportunity for Delany to stage a debate that exposes the policy as nothing more than a tactic for maintaining complacency amongst the black population. Mrs. Albertis, for example, is initially disconcerted when she learns the details of this law. She tells her husband that she wants to return to Louisiana immediately as she fears that the free class of black people living in Cuba will use their freedom and mobility to incite an insurrection. Her husband, however, reassures her:

‘respecting the contingencies of insurrection, you are not more safe than here. In New Orleans, as in Havana, the great gun at the fort must at a certain hour every night be fired, to intimidate and keep down the Negroes, and there as here, while you are unsuspectingly sleeping your quiet bed in seeming safety, a guard for private and public safety must be

²⁰ See Reid-Vasquez, Michele. *Year of the Lash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 22; hereafter cited parenthetically. In his “Introduction” to *Blake* Miller also calls attention to the ways that the novel references earlier events affiliated with the Year of the Lash, such as those events leading up to the execution of the black Cuban poet Placido. Although Placido was executed in 1844, in the time-space represented in *Blake* he is alive and plays an active role in organizing Henry's rebellion (Miller xxiii).

kept through the night, and even secret guards through the day, to keep in check the disposition to rebellion on the part of the slave population' (*Blake* 184).

In suggesting that Cuban and U.S. slave policies are actually grounded in the same ideological goal of keeping the slaves "in check," *Blake* explains the apparent contrasting policies that define U.S. versus Cuban slavery as merely different responses to the same racist ideology.

The invocation of *coartación* also allows *Blake* to implicate Britain and its role in maintaining the trans-Atlantic slave economy, despite the formal closure of the slave trade in 1807. In this same conversation, Mrs. Albertis questions why the British have not intervened in Cuba in order to encourage and assist the enslaved population in exercising their right to self-manumission. Mr. Albertis again reassures her:

'the English have nothing to do with it; and they have no more love for Negroes than for other people. They have sympathy for the Negro because he is oppressed: but never help those, in a general sense, who don't help themselves. If the Negroes rise and take off our heads declaring their independence, the English will be the first to acknowledge it. But they'll never come and cut off our heads, politely handing them to the Negroes. The English must see that something is done before they'll recognize the doer. Until the Negro does something, the English will let him remain as he is; so don't be troubled about English Negro-interference in Cuba, nor your own country' (*Blake* 184).

Rather than representing Britain as the philanthropic liberal emancipator often evoked in abolitionist rhetoric at this time, Britain is viewed as a passive spectator, only intervening in international politics in support of enslaved Africans after they themselves have done the work of inciting the conditions for change.²¹ Mr. Albertis's take on Britain's apparent advocacy for

²¹ As noted above, Manisha Sinha has done important work to show the ways that many radical American abolitionists were skeptical of Britain's supposed liberal position on slavery in light of their imperial investments in

enslaved people represents concerns that Delany himself had about Britain's role in the international abolitionist movement. In an 1849 article written in the *North Star* Delany argued:

to suppose that England will interfere mainly on account of the regard she has for the colored people and slaves of the island is also a great mistake. Although purely an antislavery nation and tried and proven friend of the African race, yet she has no greater love for black than white, and may not be expected to interfere except her interest and commercial relations demand (Delany "Annexation of Cuba").

Sentiments such as these, coming at the end of decades of increasingly repressive policies in the United States, precipitated Delany's turn to black nationalism and emigration, as noted above. By implicating supposed allies as being more self-motivated than philanthropic, the solution for Delany, as in *Blake*, was a revolution sparked by enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals themselves.

After purchasing his wife's freedom, Henry once again turns his focus towards the revolution and he finds work aboard a Portuguese slave ship which is about to disembark from Mantanzas, Cuba to the West Coast of Africa. On the ship's return from Africa, he plans to mobilize the recently captured slaves, recruiting them for participation in the revolution which will take place in Cuba upon their return. As the ship navigates international waters that are supposedly policed by the anti-slavery British, the novel further shows the ways that the various

the Caribbean and India. However, much American abolitionist writing still praised Britain for their generosity to the abolitionist cause. For example, in *My Bondage and My Freedom* Frederick Douglass documents the twenty-one months he spent in Great Britain in order to "seek a refuge from republican slavery" after his freedom was put at risk after the 1845 publication of his *Narrative*. Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. 1855, edited by John David Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 269. Similarly, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs proclaims that, during her trip to England "For the first time in my life I was in a place where I was treated according to my deportment, without reference to my complexion. I felt as if a great millstone had been lifted from my breast. Enconced in a pleasant room, with my dear little charge, I laid my head on my pillow, for the first time, with the delightful consciousness of pure, unadulterated freedom." Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. 1861, edited by Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 183.

imperial powers in the Caribbean are united around their investments in maintaining slavery. The ship, for example, is a “Baltimore-built slaver, rigged and fitted out in New York for the trade” (*Blake* 231), and the crew consists of Portuguese, American, and Spanish sailors. Commanded by both an American and a Spanish captain, the ship sails “under either American or Spanish colors” (*Blake* 201) depending on who is in command at any given time. As with the debates staged in the earlier parts of the novel, Henry’s trip across the Atlantic allows *Blake* to reveal the interconnectedness of various slave economies. The North/South binary in the United States is disrupted as the ship was prepared in both Baltimore and New York, and the international crew of sailors allows the novel to erase national particularities of various imperial powers invested in the Caribbean during this time.

Although the ship has no British crew members, the events that unfold while Henry travels aboard the ship open up room for critiques of Britain’s ambition to enforce the law that they had advocated for back in 1807. Indeed, Britain is represented as an inadequate enforcer of its own policy, and its ineffectiveness merely perpetuates the violence that it had ultimately sought to eliminate. On the voyage back, for example, the ship encounters another ship with an unrecognizable flag sailing in the distance. The slavers’ initial fears are that the flag will prove to be British, under which circumstances their cargo of slaves will be compromised and the British will seize the slaves captured on the ship in order to release them to freedom. Yet, as the chase at sea unfolds, the tension builds up only to let down the Africans aboard when the British fail to catch the ship. While, upon first sighting the ship, the white slavers “Curse the--!” and the slaves “have a merry chant” (*Blake* 226) at the expectation of the voyage being undermined with the capture of the ship, the “daring Briton” eventually “seemed...to fall in the distance beyond the recovery of her former position” (*Blake* 230), leaving the Africans aboard once more at the

mercy of their capturers, and “the whites now...in high hopes and anticipation of pleasant and profitable termination of the voyage” (*Blake* 231).

This chase scene at sea is accompanied with, perhaps, the most violent representation of New World slavery seen in the novel. In a nod to a common trope in abolitionist literature prior to the abolition of the slave trade, the novel represents the Middle Passage as a gruesome site of decay and death, with slaves kept in vile conditions and disposed of as cargo.²² Because the American, Spanish, and Portuguese slavers are initially afraid that they will encounter legal trouble when they see the British flag sailing in the distance, they respond by unloading the slaves from the holding deck below the ship and throwing them overboard. As the crew opens the latches to the hold, “pestiferous fumes” (*Blake* 228) escape from the quarters, and Henry sees “a scene most terrible” with “men, women and children raging with thirst, famished, nauseated with sea sickness, stifled for want of pure air, defiled and covered with loathsomeness” (*Blake* 229). The crew then proceeds to throw the captured Africans overboard, unresponsive to the people “clinging to the rigging or side of the vessel” before being sent “trembling to a watery grave” (*Blake* 229). This Middle Passage scene, which harkens back to representational strategies used by abolitionists prior to the abolition of the international trade, allows *Blake* to show how British policy had done little to amend the violence affiliated with the trans-Atlantic slave economy. Indeed, with the British incapable of liberating those captured via the illegal

²² Here, I am referring to the ways the horror of the slave ship and the Middle Passage were mobilized by abolitionists advocating for the trade’s abolition. Olaudah Equiano’s *Narrative*, for example, describes his entrance into the slave quarters on the ship as follows: “I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experience in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing.” Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano Written by Himself*. 1789, edited by Robert J. Allison. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 65. Manisha Sinha likewise notes the ways that the drawings of the slave ship *Brooks* were circulated to “render the enslaved African visible to the widest possible audience” by representing the slave ship as a “living coffin” and “an exemplary instance of cruelty and inhumanity” (99).

trade, the ship sails on “with a favorable wind...clearing the water with nothing unusual occurring excepting every day to throw into the deep some half-a-dozen dead and dying captives taken from the hold, who had perished for want of sustenance in food, water, or air” (*Blake* 231).

With Britain ineffectual at policing the international waters, Henry returns to Cuba confident that the establishment of a black state remains the only solution for eliminating New World slavery. As such, he prepares for the revolution that will lead to the establishment of a black nation that will advocate for Africans who have been displaced by slavery’s centuries of violence. In a pivotal scene that occurs following Henry’s return to Cuba, the text achieves its full expression of black nationalism as Henry and his coconspirators lay out the foundation for their future government. Mirroring in many ways the structural organization of modern nation-states such as the United States, this government is organized around positions that include “Director of Civil Government...Minister of State...Minister of Justice...Minister of Foreign Affairs...Minister of War and Navy” (*Blake* 257), and it relies “upon three elementary principles: first, territorial domain; second, population; third, staple commodities as a source of national wealth” (*Blake* 262).

In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy argues that the “intercultural and transnational” nature of Henry’s journeys allows Delany to “move discussion of black political culture beyond the binary opposition between national and diaspora perspectives” (Gilroy 29). Through this move, he articulates a “version of black solidarity” that is “explicitly antiethnic and opposes narrow African-American exceptionalism in the name of a truly pan-African, diaspora sensibility” (Gilroy 27). While *Blake* does produce a vision of diasporic resistance unique for writing by African Americans in the nineteenth century, the solution that Henry ultimately proposes represents a more complex image of black liberation than a mere a utopian challenge to what

Gilroy calls a “narrow nationalist perspective” (Gilroy 29). Invested in a vision of government that is both capitalist and reliant upon territorial acquisition, *Blake’s* vision of a black nationalist regime exemplifies what scholars of black nationalism have noted as its tendency to reproduce a masculinist, national ideology. In *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*, for example, Wilson Jeremiah Moses uses Delany as exemplary of the fact that “there was no clear-cut distinction between black nationalism and assimilation.” Referring to Delany as a “black Chauvinist,” he calls attention to the contradictions between his radical racial nationalism and the assimilationist politics behind his missionary work in Liberia. Indeed, Delany found himself reliant upon white benefactors and colonizationists to fund his missions to Christianize the African continent. Furthermore, during his trips to Africa, he found that the black leaders he most identified with were not the independent African leaders who stood in opposition to colonization, but rather those who were placed in positions of power by groups such as the ACS.²³ These contradictions are represented in the class politics and governmental structure of Henry’s revolutionary Cuba.

And, Robert Levine and Michelle Stephens have noted the ways that Delany’s commitment to nationalism was grounded in its heteropatriarchal ideology. While Levine qualifies Delany’s stance to argue that despite the “reinscription of ‘conventional’ bourgeois cultural formations” in both his writing and political life, his gender politics were, for his time, progressive, Stephens observes that the type of masculinity represented through the male-liberator figure of Henry Blake relies partially upon a representation of African American

²³ Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 35-6; hereafter cited parenthetically.

women as passive figures who symbolize “domestic safety and home.”²⁴ Building from both Levine’s and Stephens’s praises and critiques of black nationalist thinkers such as Delany, in the next section I turn to examine the text’s engagement with genre. I contend that an investigation of genre reveals the representational tension that *Blake* encounters as it works to tell the story of a radical anti-imperialist revolution on the one hand, and of a black nationalist state as the end result. By situating *Blake* within a longer history of both an American and African American literary tradition, I examine the ways that the novel pushes beyond the genre conventions typically used to reproduce national ideology in order to better understand the pitfalls it encounters as it works to do so.

III. Genre and the Politics of Abolitionist Writing

While the politics put forth in *Blake* mirror much of the political rhetoric used in Delany’s non-fiction writing in the years before U.S. and Spanish abolition, this section considers how the multiple fictional genres mobilized in *Blake* allow the novel to produce an emergent revolutionary internationalism. It reads *Blake* in the context of two popular forms of fiction mobilized by the abolitionist movement, the sentimental novel and the slave narrative, in order to account for the tension that exists between his representation of radical, anti-imperialist liberation, and the construction of a capitalist nation-state as a response to it. I argue that as *Blake* breaks from these abolitionist genres, it reveals the sentimental novel’s compliant relationship to the nation-form. The primary way that it does so is by representing white women as active political agents who are complicit in maintaining the slave system, rather than as

²⁴ See Levine, Robert S. *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 5; Stephens, Michelle. *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals* (Durham: Duke U. Press, 2005), 63; hereafter cited parenthetically.

saviors of the nation's morality, such as those representations commonly associated with abolitionist literature such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although the novel expresses formal tension as it works to generate a new speculative form, reading the novel this way reveals the liberatory potential and pitfalls of an internationalist genre that centralizes critiques of the relationships among nation, race, and gender.

In thinking about genre in *Blake* as working to critique forms of privilege affiliated with white abolitionist movements such as those to which Stowe belonged, I examine the ways that the novel both subscribes to and pushes against the formal conventions of popular abolitionist writing of the time. As mentioned above, because *Blake* is believed to have been written as a response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, considering the genre Delany engages with in the novel is especially important since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has long been situated within a longer tradition of sentimental fiction. This genre, as numerous scholars have noted, has a deep historical relationship to gendered constructions of the public and private spheres.²⁵ In her early work on the genre Jane Tompkins celebrates these female sentimental novelists for the ways that they “gave women their central position of power and authority in...culture.” While before the incorporation of female writers, such as Stowe, into the American literary canon these sentimental novels were viewed as “trash” in comparison to writings by their male counterparts,

²⁵ See Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); hereafter cited parenthetically. In this work Tompkins is responding in part to Ann Douglas who argues that “[Little Eva's] sainthood is there to precipitate our nostalgia and our narcissism” in ways that anticipate the “exaltation of the average which is the trademark of mass culture.” To Douglas “Stowe's infantile heroine anticipates that exaltation of the average which is the trademark of mass culture. Vastly superior as she is to most of her figurative offspring, she is nonetheless the childish predecessor of Miss America, of ‘Teen Angel,’ of the ubiquitous, everyday, wonderful girl about whom thousands of popular songs and movies have been made. Like her descendants, she flatters the possibilities of her audience; she does not quicken their aspirations.” Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 4. Arguing that Douglas's reading is “too simplistic,” Tompkins contends that “the women in these novels make submission ‘their boast’ not because they enjoyed it, but because it gave them another ground on which to stand, a position that, while it fulfilled the social demands placed upon them, gave them a place from which to launch a counter-strategy against their worldly masters that would finally give them the upper hand,” 162; hereafter cited parenthetically.

according to Tompkins the female sentimental writers “offered a critique of American society far more devastating than any delivered by better-known critics such as Hawthorne and Melville.” For Tompkins, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as a “story of salvation through motherly love,” is “the most dazzling exemplar” of the ways that literature enabled women to understand their power and wield it for social change (133-4).

Writing partially in response to this scholarship, Hortense Spillers exposes the ways that this feminine “power” was something only ever intended to normalize universal ideals of womanhood within a specifically white brand of femininity. Although writers of sentimental fiction might have believed that their writing affirmed the power that white women held in the home, thus positioning them in a pivotal position for enlightening an otherwise oblivious reader to the incongruities that slavery posed in a society that valued distinctive divides between the public and private spheres, these novels actually lay bare the domestic sphere’s complicity with the maintenance of the institution of slavery on both a public and political level. Revealing the domestic sphere to be “the ground of the institution’s most terrifying intimacies,” Spillers argues that literary representations of white women in abolitionist writing such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reproduce stereotypical representations of African Americans as docile creatures, such as that infamously seen through the figure of Uncle Tom. At the same time, by showing the “absolute domesticity” of the institution and its inscription into the “archetectonics of the southern household,” these texts reveal slavery to be “the most public private institution,” denying the white woman of any innocent position she might have been believed to have held due to her supposed isolation within the private sphere.²⁶

²⁶ Spillers, Hortense. “Changing the Letter: The Yokes, the Jokes of Discourse, or, Mrs. Stowe, Mr. Reed.” *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*, edited by Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 25-61, 28.

Similarly, in *Scenes of Subjection* Saidiya Hartman calls attention to the inherent violence behind the altruistic intentions of white abolitionists and the writing techniques they used to conjure support for their movement. For Hartman, this violence was constitutive of the sentimental form, a genre necessary for communicating the urgency of abolition, but which at the same time normalized the relationship between physical violence and the black body. For Hartman, narratives such as Frederick Douglass's reveal the problematic consequences that come with appeals to empathy used in both fictional and non-fictional abolitionist writing. Although designed to convey the horrors of slavery to either an ambivalent Northern or, at times, to a pro-slavery Southern audience, literature relied on representations of violence in problematic ways. Hartman argues that in order to make the suffering of the slave legible to a white audience, the abolitionist writer actually obscured and normalized the violence done to the black body. In demanding that the white reader imagine themselves in the position of the abused slave, the empathy that abolitionist literature sought to conjure in its reader reveals the ways in which empathy was "double-edged" because, "in making the other's suffering one's one, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration."²⁷

Thus, for a text like *Blake*, a novel which is believed to have been written as a response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, considering the novel's relationship to what Saidiya Hartman calls "scenes of subjection" is important because it sheds light on the politics behind *Blake*'s refutation of genres such as the sentimental novel and the slave narrative, forms affiliated with the abolitionist movement. I argue that the novel refutes the impulse to empathetically appeal to white liberal values, and in doing so it produces a black internationalist genre, one that engages with speculative forms in order to imagine liberation. This genre produces a revolutionary

²⁷ Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

imagination grounded in the belief that African American liberation is not merely a matter of abolishing slavery, but rather it is something tightly bound to liberating both enslaved and colonized peoples at an international level. If, as Spillers contends, the sentimental form so often used by the abolitionists actually reproduced discourses of slavery in ways that normalized the institution's relationship to the domestic sphere of Southern life, *Blake's* engagement with alternative, speculative genres allows the novel to expose the ways that these distinctions collapse not only within Southern society, but across the nation and in different imperial contexts as well.

Delany makes this point primarily through his representations of white femininity. In the novel, not only do the gendered distinctions that separate the public and private spheres in the white household become trivial in the context of Southern slavery, but the notable binary so often mobilized by the abolitionist movement to expose the fundamental differences between life in the North and life in the South collapses as well. Indeed, in *Blake* Delany uses representations of Northern white women to disrupt both the public/private and North/South binaries. Rather than being represented as the saintly, savior figure with the power to inspire a nation to awaken to the horrors of slavery, the central Northern character of *Blake's* story is a white woman, Mrs. Ballard, who serves as the catalyst for Henry's flight. Mrs. Ballard is the wife of Judge Ballard, the man who, as expanded upon in the above section, affirms his solidarity with Southern interests at the Franks's plantation later in the novel. Mrs. Ballard, however, enters the story in the second chapter, which opens with a conversation between Mrs. Ballard and Colonel Franks concerning national policy regarding slavery and its future in the nation. Mrs. Ballard has an assertive role in this conversation, and she eases Colonel Franks's fears about the future of slavery in the context of the increasing likelihood of the outbreak of Civil War. Mrs. Ballard

reassures Franks that he should “give [himself] no concern...[he] will find the North true to the country...[the North] can have no interests separate from [the South’s]”(*Blake* 4). While Mrs. Franks, Colonel Franks’s wife, remains silent through most of this conversation, Mrs. Ballard’s assertiveness is noteworthy considering her position as both a Northerner and as a woman.

Through Mrs. Ballard, Delany also rejects the impulse to represent the North and South as regions that contain substantial political, economic, or ideological differences. While representing this divide was essential to abolitionist writing in that it projected a tangible vision of what freedom might look like following the federal abolition of the institution, *Blake* collapses this divide to show how both the North and South benefitted from the system. In this opening scene, Mrs. Ballard reassures Colonel Franks that he should not fear substantial pressure from the North because “in our country commercial interests have taken precedence of all others which is a sufficient guarantee of our fidelity to the South” (*Blake* 4). By suggesting that the North has just as much to benefit from supporting slavery, Mrs. Ballard shows the ways that the entire nation, and not just the South, benefits from the system.

And, later in the same conversation, she is represented as perhaps even more complicit with the system than her Southern cousin. She soon reveals that part of the reason for her visit to the Franks’s plantation is to ask permission to purchase a slave to bring with her on her annual winter retreat to Havana. She has her eyes set on Maggie in particular, because, having met Maggie before when Mrs. Franks brought her on a trip to visit family in the North, she was offended by the sisterly relationship Maggie appeared to have with Mrs. Franks. Finding their relationship to be an “objectionable sight,” Mrs. Ballard thus determined herself to spend time alone with Maggie, apart from Mrs. Franks, so that she could “subdue her spirit” (*Blake* 6). While Mrs. Franks vehemently protests Mrs. Ballard’s proposal to purchase Maggie, declaring

that “the children are attached to her, and so am I” (*Blake* 6), Mrs. Ballard wins the argument and Colonel Franks allows the cousin to depart with Maggie. Here, the Northern woman is represented as someone whose ideological stance is more aligned with what one might assume to be affiliated with a Southern woman, as she mobilizes family separation as a tactic to keep her slaves in positions of subordination. Rather than representing the white, Northern, female savior figure so often mobilized by the abolitionist movement, Mrs. Ballard is seen as complicit with multiple violences affiliated with the slave system.

Yet this conversation does more than merely disrupt the North/South binary so often mobilized to garner support for the abolitionist movement. It also enables Delany to set up the international framework that structures the remainder of the novel as Mrs. Ballard frames her need to acquire Maggie in the context of international slave law and policy. Claiming that, “as we cannot take with us either free Negroes or white servants, on account of the existing restrictions, I must have a slave” (*Blake* 7), Mrs. Ballard hopes to buy Maggie so that she can navigate the restrictions regarding the movement of black people to, from, and within Cuba during the period of La Escalera. Mrs. Ballard’s character thus allows *Blake* to link Cuba and the South in ways that show slavery is not merely a national concern. Rather, the situation and status of slavery in Cuba has direct implications for the slave-holding and slave-supporting class of whites in the United States. Along with challenging representations about Northern white women that the abolitionist movement relied upon, *Blake* uses Mrs. Ballard’s efforts to navigate the system as an opportunity to show that upper-class white Americans, in both the North and the South, had investments in maintaining slavery at an international level. Through these representations of Mrs. Ballard *Blake* paints an image of a white Northern woman who is far from being the empathetic individual to whom a white, Northern liberal would want to

affectively relate. Rather than maintaining a sacred, domestic life that can wield its power through its separation from the political sphere, Mrs. Ballard appears to be an active political agitator with a clear understanding of the benefits she reaps from the international slave system.

While Delany uses Mrs. Ballard to counter sentimentalist tropes as they were mobilized by white Northern abolitionists, *Blake* also does important genre work through its refutation of the formal elements of the slave narrative, another form of writing important to the political goals of this same group. While the slave narrative relied on certain generic conventions that overlapped with those used in the sentimental novels, the slave narrative differed from this form of writing through its reliance on realism. Purporting to be a truthful account of slavery as it documented the experiences of the formerly enslaved writer, at the time of *Blake*'s publication slave narratives had already proven to be successful political tools for promoting abolition on both the national and international level. Indeed, British abolitionists had used Olaudah Equiano's 1789 narrative to promote the cause in Britain's colonies, and, as Sinha notes, "the narratives of fugitive slaves, their firsthand indictment of slavery, was an effective rebuttal to the growing sophistication of the proslavery argument in the antebellum period" in the United States as well (421). As the issue of slavery continued to widen the sectional divide that was steadily growing over the course of the 1850s, slave narratives proved to be important tools for recruiting more Northerners to advocate for the abolitionist cause.

Yet, the politics attached to the production of the slave narrative were also ones that Delany would have likely contested. Although Delany himself was never enslaved which explains why he did not write in this genre, there were also certain political problems that Delany had with this form of writing. These contentions make sense in the context of his public debates

with Douglass, the debates with which I opened this chapter.²⁸ Although, on the surface, the slave narrative appealed to the abolitionist cause through the genre of autobiography, such writing was still produced within systems of power that often left the formerly enslaved indebted to his or her sponsor who was, typically, a white Northern abolitionist. This meant that the “autobiographical” sketches documented in the narratives were necessarily mediated through this amanuensis’s political desires and objectives. In his 1987 essay “Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative,” John Sekora calls attention to the ways that formerly enslaved writers were often restricted by the demands placed on them by these abolitionists. These demands often required the ex-slaves to articulate their experience through “white institutional categories.” Although allegedly biographical documents, Sekora notes that “the history of the slave narrative reveals curious movement of centers and margins” that positions “an institutional form or experience” at the center, while pushing to the periphery a “unique and distinctive experience of an individual life.” Because these narratives were used to “justify whatever position was at the moment called for” by the abolitionists, slave narratives cannot be considered outside of the systems of power that are part and parcel of their publication.²⁹

For the abolitionists, who both supported and endorsed the veracity of the information contained in the narrative, there were certain literary conventions with which ex-slave narrators were expected to engage. Just as *Blake* refuses to pander to white abolitionist desires by providing less than flattering representations of white Northern women, he also refutes the

²⁸ Significantly, Delany did not look to an abolitionist newspaper when seeking publishers for *Blake*. Instead, he turned to *The Anglo-African Magazine*, a publication which, as Stephens notes, had a predominantly black readership. See Stephens, 65.

²⁹ Sekora, John. “Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative,” *Callaloo* 32 (1987): 482-515.

literary forms valued by them. One of the ways that *Blake* does this is by making a clear departure from realism, a genre central to the production of the slave narrative. As William Andrews notes “abolitionists recognized that first-person narration, with its promise of intimate glimpses into the mind and heart of a runaway slave, would be much more compelling to the uncommitted mass of readers than the oratory and polemics of the antislavery press.”³⁰ In this context, slave narratives were meant to appear “purely mimetic...transcribing rather than interpreting a set of objective facts” (Andrews 6). By engaging in this method of writing, the ex-slave narrators were able to achieve the rhetorical goal of “reaching ‘the hearts of men’” (Andrews 5), which, abolitionists believed, would in turn recruit supporters for their cause.³¹ Thus, although told from the perspective of the enslaved, slave narratives existed within systems of power that were not exclusively concerned with centering the voices of the formerly enslaved themselves. Rather, the “truth” narrated in the novel was often mediated through the white sponsor and crafted according to the facts that the white sponsor chose to highlight about the narrator’s life. Because of this, the slave narrative was always a site of compromise between the ex-slave narrator and the abolitionist.

In suggesting that Delany’s rejection of the slave narrative form provided him with the opportunity to produce a more revolutionary imagination than that offered through the formal limits of the slave narrative, I do not mean to deny the ways that formerly enslaved writers asserted their agency through their writings in order to make their story more reflective of their own experience. Indeed, much scholarship has been written that shows how the writers of slave

³⁰ See Andrews, William L. *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988), 5; hereafter cited parenthetically.

³¹ See also Moses’s *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. Here Moses notes how “Black American slave narratives were usually sensationalistic and brutal, yet widely appealing in an age when genteel readers could accept stark realism only if they were convinced that it was truth and not fiction” (149-50).

narratives engaged strategies that allowed them to subvert the restrictions placed upon them by their white sponsors and amanuenses. These literary subversions allowed the story to more accurately reflect their own experiences and to express the concerns that were important to them. Valerie Smith, for example, has opened the door for more contemporary scholars to highlight how ex-slave narrators worked within the constraints offered by the abolitionist movement in order to tell their stories in ways that centered their voices and experiences. She notes that, while the slave narrative's relationship to abolitionists made the story a site of formal constraint for African American expression, at the same time the narratives were used as a space for experimenting with new forms that resisted the popular conventions of the time.³² Similarly, Janet Neary examines how ex-slave narrator's engaged visual strategies within their written narratives in order to "challenge...the organization and logic of racial capitalism" and "to undermine the power relations they [were] subject to both in slavery and within abolitionist discourse."³³ And, as mentioned above, Manisha Sinha's work reveals that ex-slave narrators had a foundational role in shaping the direction of the larger abolitionist movement in productive and radical ways. Slave narratives, she argues, "did not simply use or co-opt insurgent slaves" for their narratives, instead fugitive slaves used their narratives to write themselves "not just into being but also into history" (Sinha 421-2).

Rather, in calling attention to the power differentiation between the slave and the white abolitionist sponsor in the context of Delany's public contention with the white sentimentalists, we can better understand the stakes of the genre work that Delany performs in *Blake*. While Moses argues that "Delany was barred from writing a slave narrative and exploiting this medium

³² Smith, Valerie. *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

³³ Neary, Janet. *Fugitive Testimony: On the Visual Logic of Slave Narratives*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 7-9.

of publicity because he had never been a slave,” and, as such, he “did the next best thing and wrote a slave novel” (150), I argue that the genre work performed in *Blake* is much more indicative of his black internationalist political philosophy than merely a condition of his free status. In making this argument I situate my readings of *Blake* amongst those by scholars such as Mark Bould, Britt Rusert, and Judith Madera. These scholars have argued that *Blake* constitutes an early form of black speculative fiction because of how it narrates a sequence of events in which national borders, language barriers, and legal restrictions concerning the movement of both free and enslaved black people seem to pose little hindrance to Henry’s efforts to incite revolution. Mark Bould, for example, argues that *Blake* exists as an early form of black power science fiction because of the ways it “postulates a fabulous other space-time in which revolution might occur.”³⁴ Similarly, in her book *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture*, Britt Rusert reads *Blake* as a form of “proto-science fiction” and argues that, in the novel, “speculative science transforms the archetypal fugitive slave narrative into speculative fiction.”³⁵ Arguing that *Blake* was written as a refutation to the growing field of nineteenth-century racial science, Rusert notes that Henry’s engagement with the cosmological sciences in his various journeys allows him to produce “a utopian speculative science to be used in the struggle against slavery” (153). And, in *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature*, Judith Madera argues that Henry’s travels are situated within alternative formations of space and time that challenge “the logics of expansion shared by

³⁴ Bould, Mark. “Revolutionary African-American SF before Black Power SF,” *Extrapolation* 51.1 (2010): 53-81.

³⁵ Rusert, Britt. *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 164; hereafter cited parenthetically.

proslavery U.S. nationals” by representing “boundaries of time” and “expanses of space” as “set pieces that collapse under his performance.”³⁶

Contrary to Moses, who argues that, although “*Blake* was clearly the product of well-established literary and intellectual traditions, it did not make an immediate or direct contribution to these traditions” (154), I read *Blake* as an early form of black speculative fiction and suggest that across the two parts and seventy-four chapters that comprise the complete novel, the text is a productive site for investigating the relationship between African American genre experimentation and an emergent black internationalist politics. Although, as mentioned above, the novel challenges the conventions of the slave narrative from its opening pages, this revolutionary politics is emergent across the novel, rather than existing as a definitive form from the beginning. Indeed, the novel takes time to achieve this full break from nationalist conventions of the slave narrative and the sentimental novel. And, as he breaks from the literary genres traditionally mobilized by the abolitionist movement, genres which, as outlined above, rely on certain gendered appeals to morality and sentimentality, the text’s representations of gender serve as the best example of this break. “Part I,” for example, is bookended with a family reunification story. Because of this, from the moment of Henry’s escape from the Franks’s plantation up until the final pages of “Part I,” Henry’s motivation, and the representations of liberation in the novel, are centered around the maintenance of the heteropatriarchal familial structure and the reclamation of his masculinity. Indeed, it is only after the sale of his wife and the separation of his family that Henry becomes inspired to lead the insurrection. In contrast to the revolutionary figure that dominates the bulk of the novel, before learning of his wife’s sale, Henry enters the story eager to return to the Franks’s plantation. Having been sent away by

³⁶ Madera, Judith. *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 119; hereafter cited parenthetically.

Colonel Franks to perform temporary work elsewhere, Henry returns to the plantation, “smiling up the yard” (*Blake* 15) excited to find Maggie, and their son, Joe, waiting for him. At the beginning, Henry is not necessarily unlike the Uncle Tom figure that Delany so vehemently critiqued.

It is upon learning of Maggie’s sale, however, that Henry is transformed from this seemingly satisfied figure into the radical revolutionary at the center of the remainder of the novel. Because the impetus for his radicalization comes from the desire to reunite his family, however, the early stages of his revolution are necessarily bound to the reclamation of the masculinity he lost with the sale of his wife. In this way, the early pages of *Blake* are not unlike the slave narratives which sought to convert a white audience to the abolitionist cause by appealing to heteropatriarchal ideologies associated with American liberalism. For example, in *Blake* after the sale of Maggie Henry is no longer the seemingly complacent slave living with his family on the plantation and declares: “my mind is made up, my course is laid out, and if life last, I’ll carry it out” (*Blake* 16). Henry is quickly converted from the “smiling” (*Blake* 15) slave into a man who will “wait no longer” (*Blake* 16) to find justice. Here, Henry has a moment much like Douglass’s following his infamous fight with the “slave breaker” Mr. Covey. Documenting this fight as a “turning-point in [his] career as a slave,” Douglass claims that this fight “rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within [him] a sense of [his] own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired [him] again with a determination to be free.”³⁷ Just as Douglass’s threatened sense of manhood served as this pivotal moment in his transformation from a “slave” to a “man,” the sale of Henry’s wife forces *Blake* to articulate the relationship between freedom and family in ways that mirror slave narratives, revealing how, in

³⁷ Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass*. 1845, edited by John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 54.

writing by enslaved men, ideologies of resistance become mediated through representations of threatened masculinity.

With the sale of his wife serving as the catalyst for his revolutionary mission, across its thirty-four chapters “Part I” continues to bind Henry’s revolutionary agenda to the search for his wife and the reunification of his family. As Henry travels across the Southern United States, the revolution continues to be a space where participation in the revolution is determined by gender. Although Henry encounters several well-informed and self-organized enslaved women in multiple places, he persistently uses them to learn information about the organization of slaves in the region before seeking out the regions’ male leaders. Upon reaching Alexandria, Louisiana, he meets a woman from whom he learns much about the condition of slaves in the region, but “must see [her] husband” (*Blake* 73) in order to communicate plans about the revolution. Likewise, in his next stop along the Red River, he meets with several women who explain how they resist the daily violences cast upon them by their masters. Not only are these women knowledgeable about current efforts to spark insurrection in their communities, but they themselves are organized with their own resistance strategies. Henry recognizes them as intelligent and is curious as to why their master doesn’t sell them, given that he could likely profit greatly due to their intelligence. The women tell him that they prevent their own sale by making it clear that they would refuse to go since they know that “da plantehs da don’t want us widout we willin’ to go.” However, despite being impressed with their knowledge, Henry asks them to refer him to a “clever good trusty man” (*Blake* 78) with whom he can talk to about his own mission. As such, he confirms that his revolution is something to be executed by men.

Yet, despite these reversions back toward the masculinist interpretation of freedom often evoked in slave narratives written by formerly enslaved men, Henry’s almost supernatural jumps

across “boundaries of time” and “expanses of space” (Madera 119) allow him to simultaneously critique the possibility that this type of freedom might exist in any space under the influence of American or European imperialism. At the conclusion of “Part I” *Blake* offers a critique of freedom as it is defined through these liberal discourses of subjectivity. Having successfully travelled from plantation to plantation across an incredible expanse of space between Texas and Virginia, Henry returns to Mississippi to find six of his friends from the Franks’s plantation and to lead them to freedom in Canada. As Henry and his companions reach Canada after a difficult journey, which includes a narrow escape from slave catchers in Indiana, “Part I” concludes with the group arriving in Canada and the fugitives that Henry leads to freedom celebrate their arrival by conducting three marriages. In many ways, this reunion and unification through marriage is, again, reminiscent of both the sentimental genre and the slave narrative. The family is reunited after years of separation due to slavery, and they are able to sanctify their relationships in ways that were previously denied to them. However, rather than celebrating this moment and concluding the novel here, Henry reflects upon his friend’s celebration, lamenting:

Poor fellow! he little knew the unnatural feelings and course pursued his race by many Canadians...He little knew that while according to fundamental British Law and constitutional rights, all persons are equal in the realm, yet by a systematic course of policy and artifice, his race with few exceptions in some parts...is excluded from the enjoyment and practical exercise of every right, except mere suffrage-voting (*Blake* 152-3).

Rather than celebrating the more liberal policies of British law in Canada, Henry views this as more of a partial solution. For Henry, freedom in Canada, under Britain’s less-than-progressive race policies, is not ideal. Instead, this moment opens room for him to articulate a black

nationalist politics that require him to travel to Cuba and spread word of his revolution to the colonized Atlantic world.

“Part II,” then, seeks to resolve this ambivalent conclusion to “Part 1,” and opens with Henry’s arrival in Cuba. Although his mission is initially centered around finding his wife, the novel demonstrates how *Blake* works to reach beyond this sentimental family reunification story in order to represent an international revolution. While, on the one hand, finding his wife remains the impetus for his journey to Cuba, on the other, Henry’s ability to arrive in Cuba at all is a product of the revolutionary speculative genre *Blake* experiments with. Indeed, Henry makes the increased restrictions concerning the movement of free black people between the United States and Cuba seem irrelevant as he finds passage as a servant aboard a ship leaving from New York to Cuba. Once in Cuba, Henry finds his wife quite easily, and the two reunite in a melodramatic scene. Henry barely recognizes Maggie because of the physical and emotional toll Cuban slavery has had on her, but when the two discover each other, Henry lays “her on the grass under the shade of a tree,” hastens “to the rippling stream nearby from which to get water to lave her brow and temples to relieve her of the temporary insanity,” and “when sitting over her in discharge of his duty of love and conjugal affection, he found a solace by the intrusion of tears which freely fell from his eyes” (*Blake* 181). While this reunification scene mirrors the domestic appeal to sentimental values so often mobilized in abolitionist literature, in *Blake* this event also serves other purposes.

For one, the novel marks this event, and the search leading up to it, as distinctly different from Henry’s ultimate goal of sparking international revolution. In the first few chapters that document Henry’s search for his wife in Cuba, he travels from plantation to plantation in order to seek information about his wife. Although he meets enslaved individuals whom he plans to

eventually recruit for the revolution, he notes that he will return to them after he addresses what he calls his “greatest domestic concern on earth” (*Blake* 172), namely, finding Maggie. While, as mentioned above, part of the critical work performed in *Blake* is that it exposes how domestic and foreign interests are not necessarily as different as believed to be by pro-slavery and anti-slavery Americans alike, here Delany works to unbind this relationship by acknowledging that this mission must necessarily remain separate from his revolution. The “greatest domestic concern on earth” is marked as a distinctly different concern from the “future movements” (*Blake* 172) for which he plans to recruit revolutionaries. While earlier in the novel he defines freedom and liberation in terms of the sanctity of the institution of marriage, here he explains that marriage is confined to a “domestic” definition of freedom, one that must be separate from the international revolution he plans to incite.

Reunited with his wife, Henry turns his focus toward the revolution, and in doing so the novel again opens up a critique of sentimentalism, and its representations of white women as effective agents of social change in the abolitionist cause. Shortly after finding Maggie, he departs on the slave ship headed for the coast of West Africa. The ship sails to the Gulf of Guinea to meet with a Portuguese slave trader, Ludo Draco, who lives on the coast with his wife and their two daughters, Angelina and Seraphina. Angelina, who has recently returned from studying at a convent in Lisbon, discovers, for the first time, that her father’s business is that of the illegal slave trade. Horrified to learn the source of her father’s wealth, she renounces her relationship to him, declaring that she cannot “obtain accomplishments at the price of blood” (*Blake* 215).³⁸ For a moment, *Blake* suggests that this white abolitionist might articulate the

³⁸ It should be noted that Ludo Draco is married to an African woman, and his daughters are described as “mulatto” (*Blake* 211-15). While in this context, the mixed-race identity of Seraphina and Angelina might seem to counter the point that Angelina serves as a mimetic representation of Evangeline, for Delany this mixed-race identity likely did not matter. Indeed, he believed that it was the task of Africans with unmixed blood to lead the race forward. In

relationship between economic resistance and the abolition of the slave trade. Angelina recognizes the “price of blood” that has afforded her the privilege to study in Europe, proposes to disavow her relationship to it, and travels to the holding cells on the coast to express her support for the captured Africans and the abolitionist cause. Yet, rather than successfully converting anyone, the melodramatic conversion yields no results as Angelina is depicted as satirically naïve. While the teenager was unaware up until this moment of her father’s business, *Blake* recalls that the trading post to which she travels has “for years...sent forth the world its thousands of victims- a place repulsively noted in the history of wrong- was a dismal nook in the northeastern extremity of the lagoon, extending quite into the bush, forming a cove of complete security and quiet” (*Blake* 216). Despite the gravity of this place, which has been already “noted” in history, and has sent “thousands” of captured Africans across the Atlantic into the depths of slavery, Angelina is ignorantly disoriented to learn about the slave trade, asking “what is this and where am I” (*Blake* 217). The captured slaves are represented as the bearers of the knowledge, telling her to “be patient, dear child- be patient, and you shall hear- as from the graves of our forefathers- of untold suffering from this spot” and they sing their story to her:

A place where demons daring land-

Fiends in bright noon day- and sit

A hellish conclave band to barter

The sons and daughters of our land away (*Blake* 217).

The information given to her from the enslaved people proves too much for Angelina to bear.

She screams ““May God protect me!,”” then immediately “sunk in a swoon” (*Blake* 217), coming

Condition he argued that “the elevation of the colored man can only be completed by the elevation of the pure descendants of Africa; because to deny his equality, is to deny in a like proportion, the equality of all those mixed with the African organization” (*Condition* 87).

down with a near fatal illness. Mimicking the young Eva's death scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Angelina lays in bed with her family beside her, awaiting her impending death.

Angelina's near-death experience is important when read in the context of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and when considering how Delany's black internationalism emerges in response to white sentimental abolitionist genres. In Stowe's novel, Eva passes away after receiving a promise from her father that he will free her beloved Tom. Although the promise is never fulfilled, we see Eva ascend to heaven after "a bright, glorious smile passed over her face, and she said, brokenly, - 'O! Love, - joy, - peace!' gave one sigh, and passed from death unto life!"³⁹ Scholars such as Tompkins have worked to recover this scene as one that affirms the power that womanhood and sentimentality might have in enacting social change. While some have argued that Eva's death is "awash with emotion but does nothing to remedy the evils it deploras," Tompkins suggests that "in the system of belief that undergirds Stowe's enterprise, dying is the supreme form of heroism. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, death is the equivalent not of defeat but of victory; it brings an access of power, not a loss of it" (Tompkins 136). Through Angelina's death, however, Delany rewrites Eva's story in order to mock an ideology that might celebrate her death as an act of noble morality. Unlike Eva who ascends to heaven, Angelina remains comatose long enough to hear her father promise that he will "never again...traffic in human beings." Rather than passing away heroically, however, Angelina immediately awakens after her father utters these words, becomes disoriented, and asks "what is the matter- is any one sick? Have I been dreaming, or what? I am well now!" (*Blake* 220). No longer possessing memory of the horrifying events she witnessed at the port, the novel suggests that with the erasure of her memory the illegal slave trade continues. Draco's promise becomes inconsequential, and the next

³⁹ Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. 1852, edited by Alfred Kazin. (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 294.

chapter, titled “Homeward Bound,” opens with “a favorable wind having risen” (*Blake* 220) and the slave ship departing back toward Cuba with a full cargo of newly captured Africans. As in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the final wish to see the father denounce his involvement in the slave trade does not come to fruition. In *Blake* Delany rewrites this scene to suggest that the belief that change might come through sentimentality is a farce. While Angelina and her family have a brief moment of moral awakening *Blake* refuses to see this through, again suggesting that the black internationalist revolution is the only viable solution to abolishing slavery.

IV. Conclusion

Because the final chapters that comprise *Blake* remain lost, it is impossible to know how Henry Blake’s revolution might have played out. The novel concludes on the night of a national fete in Cuba, with Henry having organized a large portion of the black Cuban elite to support his mission, and the white slave-owning class growing increasingly anxious about the whereabouts of both their slaves and of the free black population. Despite the fact that we cannot know if Henry’s revolution comes to fruition, this chapter argues that *Blake* performs important work in articulating what an early black internationalist literary genre might look like. Drawn from an understanding that literature held a powerful role in inciting social change, in *Blake* Delany produces a commentary on the literary conventions mobilized by the American abolitionist movement. Recognizing that both the realist and sentimental genres were bound to liberal nationalist ideologies, *Blake* produces its own formal understanding of abolition, one that looks beyond the confines of national reform in order to imagine an international revolution that incorporates not only people living in the United States, but those in the Caribbean and Africa as well. As the novel imagines revolution through this black speculative genre, it is able to account

for the intimate relationship between capitalism, imperialism, and racism. Rather than existing as an exclusively national concern, *Blake* understands that slavery in the United States is linked to larger, global formations of capitalism and imperialism, both of which are reliant upon racialized divisions of labor. By engaging in speculative fiction, Delany is able to create a mobile revolutionary who can imagine international revolution as a response and solution to both a racial slavery and imperialism.

Chapter 2

“Two Terrible and Discordant Sounds”: Genre, Empire, and the Masculine Black Nationalist Imagination of Sutton E. Griggs’s *Imperium in Imperio*

I. Introduction

In 1899, Sutton Griggs published, *Imperium in Imperio*, a novel that tells the story of the fictional Belton Piedmont and Bernard Belgrave’s schemes to establish Texas as an independent black state. Produced three years following the landmark decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* which declared that the racial policy of “separate but equal” did not violate the U.S. Constitution, Griggs’s first work of fiction reflects, in many ways, the frustration of seeing yet another blow and barrier put in place the fight for racial equality in the United States. As the decade of Reconstruction ended in 1877 following the formal withdrawal of federal troops from the South and, only twenty years later, gave way to this regressive policy, black nationalism, an ideology reflecting the “desire for independence” and the “the determination to demonstrate the ability of black people to establish a republican form of government,”¹ once again emerged as a popular political ideology for imagining freedom, equality, and self-autonomy. From Alexander Crummell’s *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses*, a text published in 1891, to Henry McNeal Turner’s writings in the African American newspaper *The Voice of Missions*, black nationalism at this moment took an explicitly emigrationist turn, with some of its key figures advocating for African American expatriation to West Africa (Moses 29).

Because *Imperium in Imperio* tells the story of a black separatist state in Texas, scholars of black nationalism have positioned the novel in this black nationalist tradition. In the novel

¹ Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. “Introduction.” *Classical Black Nationalism from the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey*, edited by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-43, 2; hereafter cited parenthetically.

Griggs gives a biographical account of both Belton and Bernard's lives and the experiences with racial violence and discrimination that ultimately lead them to abandon the United States in order to found a secret black state in Texas. Through their experiences the novel shows the multifarious ways that African Americans were excluded from political and social life in the early years of Jim Crow segregation. Yet, true to the black nationalist ideology circulating at this moment, no longer convinced of the possibility of reforming these policies, the protagonists of the novel reject the hope of achieving freedom within the United States and instead provide an alternative, separatist solution to these problems. This chapter contributes to these conversations about both Griggs and late-nineteenth century black nationalism by considering the ways that literary form and genre enable Griggs to produce this imagination. While Crummell and Turner have been credited as predecessors to the Pan-Africanist thought that would emerge as a definitive ideology in the early part of the following century, they relied primarily on news articles, public speeches, and sermons to advocate their positions. Engaging in speculative fiction to imagine *what* freedom might look like, as one of the few fictional works representing black nationalism in the last few years of the nineteenth century, Griggs's *Imperium* provides important insight as to how freedom was both resistant towards, and articulated to, mainstream U.S. imperialist nationalisms.

Yet, at the same time that *Imperium* provides a radical vision of what freedom might look like, as the novel tells the story of Belton's and Bernard's conversions from liberal integrationists to black nationalist separatists the novel shows the ways that political ideologies differ amongst black nationalists looking for solutions to the race problem in the United States. In doing so, it simultaneously provides a warning about the consequences that come from leaving these differences unresolved. Published only four years after Booker T. Washington's controversial

“Atlanta Exposition Address,” in which Washington infamously advised African Americans about the importance of “of cultivating friendly relations with the southern white man,”² a speech which would later lead Du Bois to accuse Washington of putting the burden of social change on African Americans themselves,³ the ideological debates about how the Imperium should relate to the larger U.S. body are framed precisely in this “accommodationist vs. separatist” perspective. Indeed, only days before the Imperium decides to reveal itself to the United States as an organized force prepared to wreak “vengeance for our multiple wrongs,” Belton decides he can no longer commit to the Imperium’s decision to wage a violent war against the United States.⁴ The concluding pages of the novel, then, tell about a series of betrayals which lead to Belton’s political execution and, ultimately, to the betrayal of the Imperium to the U.S. government and its subsequent dissolution.

While this book stages the failure of the Imperium in terms of differing, unresolvable conflicts regarding what form black nationalist strategy should take at this time, this chapter is invested in considering what the novel reveals about the ways freedom is imagined within the Imperium. While Belton and Bernard ultimately disagree about how the Imperium should assert its military power, both of the novel’s male revolutionaries remain indebted to liberal nationalist ideologies in certain ways. In order to investigate how this contributes to the novel’s failed black nationalist state, I turn to analyze the different genres it engages with as it tells the story of the rise and fall of the Imperium. I argue that the trouble the novel encounters as it tries to tell this story relates to its indebtedness to, and entrapment within, romance literary genres that remain

² Washington, Booker T. “The Atlanta Exposition Address” (1895), in *Up From Slavery*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 217-32, 219.

³ See Du Bois, W.E.B. “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” (1903), in *The Souls of Black Folk*. (New York: Dover, 1994), 25-35, 35.

⁴ Griggs, Sutton. *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of the Negro Race Problem (A Novel)* (1899). (Middlesex: The Echo Library, 2006), 97; hereafter cited parenthetically.

undetachable from bourgeois nationalist culture. For example, the primary ways that the novel demonstrates this tension is through its representations of women and their roles in, as well as their absence from, the novel's final vision of the state. While the genres the novel uses demand that African American women serve as the symbol through which the male revolutionaries come to understand the impossibility for achieving freedom within the United States, the novel is simultaneously incapable of considering a nationalism that reconsiders their role in the nation outside of a heteropatriarchal public/private binary.

Thus, at the same time that *Imperium* imagines a revolutionary space free from U.S. racial violence, it reproduces gendered hierarchies embedded in these nationalist ideologies and structures. Just as American nationalism has long been critiqued for the ways that gendered difference and hierarchies have maintained the division between public and private and foreign and domestic ways of life, black nationalism has received criticism for the ways it has reproduced these constructions.⁵ Turning to an examination as to *how* these writers imagined these spaces is important because it reveals the underlying ideologies that have long been critiqued in black nationalist writing and practices of imagination. While, on the one end, black nationalist literature has been celebrated for the ways that it mobilizes different literary genres in order to imagine freedom outside of U.S. racial nationalist frameworks, *Imperium in Imperio* shows the ways that this literature struggles from fully separating itself from these nationalist

⁵ In her extended study of masculinity and black nationalism in Caribbean male intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century, Michelle Stephens notes the ways that "black global consciousness...develops in tandem with the discourses of both imperial civilization and the modern nation-state" and that "the inescapable hybridity of imperial history is revealed in black global stories and world histories that embody black political desires in specifically gendered and sexualized constructions of race." Stephens, Michelle. *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 8. For more on black nationalism and masculinity see Carby, Hazel. *Race Men*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), hereafter cited parenthetically. Gillman, Susan and Alys Eve Weinbaum. *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality and W.E.B. Du Bois*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

literary forms.⁶ I argue that as Griggs tells the story of Belton's founding of the Imperium, he engages in genres typically used in both fictional representations of national origin stories and in literature often attributed with codifying nationalist sensibilities. Drawing on scholarship on the relationship between liberal nationalism and literary genre from scholars such as Lisa Lowe, Lauren Berlant, Toni Morrison, and Amy Kaplan, I argue that the novel experiences tension as it looks to imagine a revolutionary space on the one hand, and one that remains indebted to nationalist structures on the other.

As Belton's Imperium, or nation within a nation, emerges following a series of encounters in the South that allude to real historical instances of racial violence that occurred at the end of the century, the novel is also important to this dissertation because of the ways it positions the founding and collapse of the black state within the context of late-nineteenth century U.S. foreign relations. As the novel concludes and the Imperium is about to reveal itself to the United States, Belton, Bernard, and the other foundering members engage in debate about the Imperium's relationship to the impending revolution in Cuba. In the process of doing so, the novel relies upon an articulation of the relationship between the Imperium and U.S. national culture as something exclusively bound up in US. domestic concerns. This chapter argues that, by failing to understand the relationship between the African American male protagonists' racial emasculation, and the United States' imperial projects abroad, the novel remains incapable of resolving the conflict that led to the establishment of the Imperium in the first place. This is best seen through the ways the novel's failure to incorporate women into its nationalist vision. This

⁶ In thinking about the "praise" that black nationalist literature has received, I am referring to conversations occurring in black science fiction studies which largely celebrate black nationalist writers, including Griggs, for mobilizing forms of speculative fiction in order to imagine radically transformed, revolutionary worlds. See, for example, Bould, Mark. "Revolutionary African-American SF before Black Power SF," *Extrapolation* 51.1 (2010): 53-81; Tal, Kali. "That Just Kills Me: Black Near-Future Fiction," *Social Text* 20.2 (2002): 65-91; Veselá, Paula. "Neither Black Nor White: The Critical Utopias of Sutton E. Griggs. and George S. Schuyler," *Science Fiction Studies* 38.2 (2011): 270-86.

chapter argues that the troubles encountered by the *Imperium* stem from a simultaneous misunderstanding of the relationships among the gendered dimensions of U.S. nationalism, U.S. imperialism, and the domestic/foreign and private/public binaries both aimed to uphold.

II. The Gendered Revisionist Romance of *Imperium in Imperio*

In situating *Imperium in Imperio* as a black nationalist text, this chapter is invested in scholarship that considers the relationship between liberal nationalism and national literature. As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, black nationalism, like most nationalisms, developed with and alongside of a national literature.⁷ And for Griggs specifically, literature played a key role in constructing a black nationalist ideology that would promote racial progress and uplift. After encountering difficulty finding a Southern press that would publish *Imperium*, Griggs went on to found two publishing houses committed to publishing the work of African Americans. His commitment to African American print culture earned him a great deal of notoriety in the black community, and when recruiting delegates for the Niagara Movement, Griggs was among those whose presence was requested by W.E.B. Du Bois. According to Griggs's biographer Finnie Coleman, Du Bois viewed Griggs as part of the "Black literati" and as exemplary of what he, in his early career, praised as the "talented tenth."⁸ Although Griggs's publishing houses often struggled financially and were, for the most part, unsuccessful, his commitment to literature and his desire to cultivate a black reading public through the publication of these texts spoke to the same forms of nationalism he represents in *Imperium*. Indeed, in the *Imperium*'s final and official declaration about the need for a black state, Bernard cites education as a central concern.

⁷ See the "Introduction" to this dissertation.

⁸ Coleman, Finnie. *Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle Against White Supremacy*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 18; hereafter cited parenthetically.

Bernard identifies a problem in the fact that “[the white race] has absolute charge of the education of our children,” because they attempt to “muzzle the mouths of negro teachers” (92). The novel suggests that African Americans need to reclaim education as a project taken up by black people themselves, and implicit in this demand is the need for a body of literature and history that tells the story of their particular relationship to the United States, a call which *Imperium* addresses across its twenty chapters.

Within the black nationalist literary tradition that both Griggs and *Imperium* participate in, certain genres emerged as effective ways to envision what freedom might look like. While, as mentioned above, scholars have often celebrated the ways that black nationalist writers have used experimental genres such as speculative fiction to imagine worlds that exist outside of U.S. national frameworks, this section connects Griggs’s failure to break from these dominant nationalist genres as related to the eventual collapse of their otherwise revolutionary state. Trapped within the formal conventions of the nationalist literary body, the novel remains incapable of seeing the ways that race and gender exist as part and parcel of the same liberal nationalist system that has imparted racial violence upon non-white subjects from the moment of Europe’s “discovery” of the New World, and through the subsequent settler colonial projects taken up by various powers in the Americas. Through its reliance on these genres, the novel subsequently reinscribes the heteropatriarchal construction of the nation it looks to critique.

The novel opens with an account of Belton and Bernard’s childhood in the small town of Winchester, Virginia. The first chapter, titled “A Small Beginning,” provides a description of Belton’s humble beginnings, showing him living in a “low and squatty” single-room house with his mother and four siblings. His mother is depicted as a “poor, ignorant negro woman” who nevertheless works hard as a housekeeper for a white family nearby in order to provide for her

family and to send her children to school (6). Bernard, albeit not quite as poor, attends the same grade school as Belton, and grows up in a home with a single, mixed-raced mother. As the novel traces the two boys' experiences from their childhood to political leadership, *Imperium* adheres to the conventions of the autobiographical narrative by invoking the "rags to riches" model of storytelling commonly affiliated with these origin stories of New World liberal democracy. In her study on autobiography and its relationship to New World liberal individualism in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe observes how the genre was used to describe male political leaders' "achievement of liberty through ethical education and civilization" in order to provide evidence of "the imperatives and privileges of liberal subjects."⁹ Although *Imperium* tells a fictional account of the founding of a black nationalist state, the novel draws on literary forms much in the way that Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, two texts examined closely by Lowe, do. Significantly, the disciplines that Belton and Bernard excel in at school are rooted in Western civilization and democratic principles. The two boys become fascinated by the "spirit" (17) of the American revolutionary period and go "in search of everything that would throw light on this epoch" (16). As Lowe observes in relation to Franklin's *Autobiography*, "the narrative of the singular man embodied the values of hard work, moderation, sobriety, self-improvement, and civic responsibility, as he participated in the rebellion of the American colonies, the Constitutional Convention, and the writing of the Declaration of Independence" (51). Similarly, in his *Narrative*, Douglass documents the shift in not only his physical and material conditions as a slave, but in his "spirit" as he moves from Colonel Lloyd's plantation to Baltimore where his new mistress teaches him to read and write.¹⁰

⁹ Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 46-7; hereafter cited parenthetically.

¹⁰ Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass*. 1845, edited by John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 30.

Like the commentary on education and hard work provided in these early “American” autobiographies, in *Imperium* these early school days provide the two boys with the education that the genre has historically venerated as exemplary of the narratives behind liberal individualism and democratic principles.

Yet as it draws on these genre tropes *Imperium* also differs from these early American autobiographies in notable ways. By providing a fictional account about the founding of a fictional state, *Imperium* also engages with tropes of the national romance genre. In *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* Lauren Berlant describes the American romance as a “fantasy of the citizen to be empowered by a collective activity and identification that is also realized and preserved by a politically legitimate nation-state.”¹¹ Using Nathaniel Hawthorne’s literature as exemplary of the ways that fictional genres produce this national imagination, she argues that these national fantasies reveal the ways that men sought to find “a foundational place from which to live in the modern nation” (3). Similarly, in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* Toni Morrison argues that these romances came to exemplify the “clean slate” opportunistic outlook that distinguished the possibilities embodied in the new American nation from the uncompromising social order of the Old World. The American romance, according to Morrison, reflects the American man’s hope that “with luck and endurance one could discover freedom; find a way to make God’s law manifest; or end up rich as a prince.”¹² And, although writing about the Latin American literary context, Doris Sommer defines the late nineteenth-century romance as a “cross between our contemporary use of the word as a love story and a nineteenth-century use that distinguished the genre as more

¹¹ Berlant, Lauren. *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 21; hereafter cited parenthetically.

¹² Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 34; hereafter cited parenthetically.

boldly allegorical than the novel.”¹³ Sommer’s definition is particularly important because of the ways that it addresses the genre’s dual concern with the “love story” and national allegory. As shown below, this chapter argues that *Imperium* reflects this “cross between” genres in ways that force the novel to reproduce the gendered elements of mainstream U.S. nationalism as it tells the story of the founding of black nationalist state.

By tracing the two boys’ evolution from students in the humble Southern schoolroom to political agents who look to radically transform their social conditions, *Imperium*’s narrative reads like a national romance as it tells a story of “being outcast, of failing” and of “powerlessness” (Morrison 36-7). Yet, unlike the novels discussed by Morrison, Berlant, and Sommer, rather than providing an uncritical veneration of these American ideals as the romance often did, *Imperium* explores the American romance from the perspective of two protagonists who are marginalized within these national structures. Thus, the same education that allows Belton and Bernard to exalt American individualism and industrialism also teaches them that these principles exist as a privilege for a select group of people, a privilege which, in the United States, is predetermined by race. Indeed, the text shows several barriers and obstacles that stand in the way of the two young boys as they work to achieve this notion of the “American dream.” From the first day Belton enters school, he experiences violent forms of racist verbal abuse from his teacher, Mr. Leonard. As Mr. Leonard sees Mrs. Piedmont approach the school with Belton he mutters ““another black nigger brat for me to teach”” (8) and continues to spew racist slurs at him throughout his time in the school. Although Bernard does not experience the same forms of racism at the hands of Mr. Leonard, and in fact becomes the teacher’s pet because Mr. Leonard is enchanted by his mixed-race mother, these experiences in school showcase how U.S. institutions

¹³ Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5.

have predetermined who succeeds, and who fails, based on race. And, by juxtaposing the fascination with American values that Belton and Bernard develop at school with the racism that Belton experiences here, *Imperium* shows the ways that racism remains a contradiction at the heart of American values and practices.

As the two students graduate from grade school, they move on to establish political careers of their own and the novel continues to use their experiences to highlight the contradictions between their celebration of American democracy on the one hand, and the racism they experience on the other. In her discussion of Douglass's *Narrative*, Lowe observes that autobiographical genres such as Douglass's contain "important digressions and interruptions that mark the limits of the genre for containing and resolving the contradictions of colonial slavery" (48). These digressions highlight how the liberal privileges often garnered through hard work are not possible given liberal democracy's inherent relationship to racial capitalism. While Franklin's *Autobiography* is able to tell a story of the "accomplishment of exemplary freedom of person and nation through industry, moral regeneration, and civic duty" the slave narrative "is marked, again and again, by the limits to [the enslaved writer's] attainment of freedom" (51). In many ways, *Imperium* engages in similar critical practices that look to expose the ways that "American freedom" was not a universal principle experienced by all Americans. Although educated in, and fascinated with, Enlightenment theories and histories rooted in the Age of Revolution, Belton soon learns that he is excluded from experiencing these American values. Upon graduating grade school he leaves home to attend the fictional Stowe University where he witnesses firsthand the contradictions behind the celebrated American ideal of universal equality, and it is here that he comes into the racial consciousness that sparks his career of activism. Learning that the faculty at his university eat at segregated lunch tables, he organizes the students

in a protest to demand equality for all teachers at the school, and succeeds in desegregating the faculty cafeteria. As Belton uses the education he has received to highlight the contradictions inherent to American democracy, *Imperium* revises the genres of both the autobiography and the romance in order to produce a more critical examination of dominant narratives of U.S. history that frame the nation as a place of universal upward mobility.

Yet, even as it works to expose the contradictions of these narratives, *Imperium* differs from Douglass's autobiography, and the romances discussed, by Berlant, Morrison, and Sommer in important ways. Rather than simply exposing the contradictions of American liberal democracy, *Imperium in Imperio* proposes a new nation or, literally, an "empire within an empire" as the solution to the problems it sees with American democratic principles. As it does so, the novel fails to link these forms of racial injustice to the forms of gendered exclusion that are part and parcel of the patriarchal structure of the nation that enables racial stratification in the first place. Indeed, throughout the text race persistently supersedes issues of gendered violence, and women serve as merely plot points that enable the male protagonists to move their dreams of a black state forward. This is first seen in Belton's rise to political fame at Stowe University. As he works to organize the students to protest the university's faculty stance on segregation, the protest is organized in ways that both require, but simultaneously subsume, the female participants. Although initially mobilizing the male students, Belton recognizes the need for female participation and the novel states that the conditions for the rebellion are not completed until the "rebellion was organized among the girls and their signatures secured" (28). In many ways, including the women in the protest makes sense, given that, at Stowe, the female students outnumber the men two to one. Yet, at the same time, their involvement remains both segregated from, and secondary to, the rebellion which is explicitly led by Belton and which consists

primarily of his male colleagues. It is only through a friend who has a sister in the school that he arranges for the women to organize amongst themselves, and in distancing the relationship between the men and the women at the school the text decentralizes and subsumes the work they perform. What comes to be called “Belton’s Rebellion” ends successfully, and the African American teacher is allowed to sit with the white teachers. Yet, as the story of Belton’s university activism concludes, the female students disappear from the protest narrative and the novel claims that “the men who engineered and participated in these rebellions were the future leaders of their race” (29). From this incipient moment in Belton’s political career, the novel demonstrates a tension as it works to articulate a revolution along both racial and gendered lines.

After Belton graduates from Stowe, he moves to Richmond and finds employment at an African American school. Here, he meets Antoinette Nermal who is also a teacher at the school, and for the first time his political activism becomes articulated to his romantic interests. Committed now to establishing a comfortable domestic life with Antoinette, he looks for supplementary work that will provide him with the financial resources he deems necessary to respectably propose marriage. Still committed to using his education to improve the lives of African Americans living in the United States, he embarks on an effort to establish the first African American printing press in Richmond. Viewing this as an opportunity to serve both as a financial enterprise and as a platform for spreading knowledge about issues concerning his race, through this press Belton looks to merge his public and private lives, using the press as a public means to support his home life and relationship with Antoinette. However, after anonymously publishing an article exposing the common practices of voter fraud and disenfranchisement, his work “created a great stir in political circles” (55) and eventually the politicians whom he critiques in the article trace the writing back to Belton and order the school board to fire him

from his position. Belton's firing shows the ways that he is unable to simultaneously earn a living to support his family and contribute to meaningful political change. And, after losing this position, Belton makes one final attempt to support his family through political work and again the text uses this an opportunity to show the ways that U.S. racism prevents African American men from maintaining a balanced public and private life. Belton joins a political campaign for a Republican candidate, and, once the candidate is elected, Belton is offered a position in his government as recognition for his hard work. However, a year later he is fired when he speaks out against a racist colleague. The text narrates that "the proud, brilliant Belton, the husband of a woman whom he fairly worshipped" is unable to earn a "livelihood for her" (56), again framing his failed political career as simultaneously having serious consequences on his domestic life.

Imperium suggests that it is these very experiences that lead Belton and Bernard to eventually unite to found the Imperium. Although Bernard is not born into the same levels of poverty as Belton mostly due to his mixed-race status and because, as we find out later, his father is a wealthy white man, Bernard's failure to live up to bourgeois constructions of masculinity and domesticity allows Griggs to critique the ways that the romance of America is predicated on racial status. Because Bernard has lighter skin, his experiences with the racist Mr. Leonard are drastically different from Belton's. Fascinated and "petrified with astonishment" (9) over Mrs. Belgrave's beauty, beauty which is described as related to her mixed-race ancestry,¹⁴ Mr. Leonard quickly establishes Bernard as the "teacher's pet" (16) and becomes obsessed with seeing that Belton fails and Bernard succeeds. He repeatedly humiliates Belton in public and provides Bernard with extra help that he denies to Belton. Yet, although Bernard receives better

¹⁴ Mrs. Belgrave is described as "a mulatto woman, tall and graceful. Her hair was raven black and was combed away from as beautiful a forehead as nature could chisel. Her eyes were a brown hazel, large and intelligent, tinged with a slight look of melancholy. Her complexion was a rich olive, and seemed especially adapted to her face, that revealed not a flaw" (9).

treatment from Mr. Leonard as a child, later the novel suggests that racism in the United States is too far reaching to escape even the relatively privileged Bernard. So while the juxtaposition between the two boys' experiences show how class difference and racial identity lead to different treatment from white racists in certain contexts, the novel proceeds to show how these differences become irrelevant. Eventually, both of their experiences lead the two men to create the Imperium as a place where African Americans of different class statuses turn to resolve the threats towards their masculinity that they encounter in the United States.

Significantly, as with Belton, Bernard's decision to abandon the United States also occurs around the site of domesticity. Although the narrative of Belton's life is centered throughout the novel, Bernard's story unfolds simultaneously. And while, as mentioned above, Bernard has a relatively easier time reaching financial stability because of his mixed-race identity and his white father, *Imperium* uses Bernard's story to show the ways that racism transcends class and similarly prevents Bernard from establishing a stable home life. The novel does this by first acknowledging the advantages offered to Bernard, and then suggesting that these advantages hold little weight in a racist national structure like the United States. Unlike Belton, who attends a black university, Bernard attends Harvard law school and quickly rises to the top of his class. Although unaware of his paternal lineage in his early life, while at Harvard Bernard learns that his father is a successful white politician who wants to help him establish a law practice in Norfolk, Virginia. Returning to Virginia with the support of this white father, Bernard is afforded financial advantages that are denied to Belton. He quickly becomes a socialite and enters into the upper-middle class of African Americans living in Virginia. Like Belton, he has plans to "conquer the social world and secure its support" (43), and hopes to complement this entrance into the political domain by establishing a comfortable home life. After joining a reading group

comprised of African Americans of his class, he is introduced to Viola Martin whom he decides to marry.

Although, unlike Belton, Bernard does not encounter financial trouble as he looks to marry Viola, other problems related to race relations in the United States cause his marriage to fail. As with Belton the text situates these problems around the emasculation of the African American man and the ways that racism in the United States denies them the ability to establish a family. Although, as the “most noted negro of his day” (70), Bernard deems himself worthy of proposing to a woman of Viola’s social status, Viola responds to Bernard’s proposal in unexpected and melodramatic ways. Initially, she lets out “a piercing scream” (71) and asks Bernard to return to her house a day later so that she can explain her concerns to him. However, upon returning, Bernard finds Viola dead in her bedroom with a suicide note by her side. In her letter she explains that she has recently read a book titled *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination* and that from this book she has learned that “the intermingling of the races was slowly but surely exterminating the race” (75). Rather than marrying a mixed-race man and producing mixed-race children, she decides to kill herself because her love for Bernard is so strong that she cannot live in this world without him as her husband. Viola’s suicide is significant because it shows the ways that racist ideology has been internalized by African Americans themselves. Based on J.H. Van Evrie’s 1868 pro-slavery book of the same title, a book which argues that “even when both white and negro become so debauched, degraded, and sinful as to equalize and harmonize together...their progeny become sterile, diseased, rotten, and within a certain time, utterly perish from the earth,”¹⁵ Viola’s inability to see the racism inherent to Van Evrie’s arguments are framed as having serious stakes in terms of Bernard’s political life.

¹⁵ Van Evrie, John H. *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination; or, Negroes a Subordinate Race, and (So-Called) Slavery Its Normal Condition*. (New York: Van Evrie, Horton & Co., 1868), vii.

By preventing him from establishing the public persona he needs to succeed as a politician, Bernard's first experience as a victim of U.S. racism shows the ways this ideology permeates throughout American society. Through juxtaposing the structural inequalities that Belton faces with the philosophical problems that prevent Bernard from succeeding, *Imperium* reveals American racism to be so embedded in American culture that it is impossible for an African American man to rise to power.

The solutions that both Belton and Bernard come to as they grow increasingly disillusioned further reveal the ways that their definitions of freedom and liberty are bound to their ability, or inability, to establish domestic home life with the United States. For Belton, this resolution comes after he finally abandons his hope to work in politics. While in many ways his failure to obtain and maintain employment relate to structural racism in the late-nineteenth century Jim-Crow South, *Imperium* also reveals Belton's own ideologies as grounded in, yet unselfconscious of, the patriarchal constructions that produce these conditions. Indeed, Belton himself has specific idea about the types of employment that will allow him to create the type of family life he desires. As he begins to explore new avenues for employment, his own class privileges emerge in ways that limit his options as he claims that, as an educated man, he would be "looked upon as an eternal disgrace to the race" (56) if he were to accept a job that did not value his education. At the same time that his status as an educated African American man makes him undesirable for employment in a public, professional field such as teaching or journalism, the prestige that comes with his education makes him too proud to accept a job that he might realistically be able to obtain.

Belton's solution to this problem reveals his inability to dismantle the bound ideologies of race, class, and gender, and their articulation in U.S. public life. No longer convinced that he

can find employment that he deems respectable for a man of his educated status, Belton decides to cross dress and masquerade as a female nurse. In contrast to the difficulties he encounters finding employment as a man, Belton finds work as a “female” relatively easily and accepts a position as a domestic worker in the homes of several affluent white Richmond families. While Belton’s experiences cross-dressing provide a humorous burlesque of the ways that labor, class, and domesticity operate in different ways, with different opportunities, for Americans based on their race, at the same time it highlights the masculinist constructions that Belton abides to. In her work on the history of labor and contracts in the period marking the transition from slavery to freedom, Amy Dru Stanley argues that domesticity, or “home life,” became constructed as the antithesis of slavery in the post-bellum years. The primary ways that home life became established as such were through emergent reifications of the “contract” that enabled both labor and social contracts to emerge “as a worldview” that “idealized ownership of self and voluntary exchange between individuals who were formally equal and free.” While “slave emancipation ended the contradictory coexistence of freedom and slavery in the American public,” in the second half of the nineteenth century formal “freedom” became defined as the “antithesis of slavery” through the formerly enslaved person’s ability to engage in labor and marriage in formal ways recognized by law.¹⁶ As freedom became defined through these practices, practices whose roots were grounded in liberal Enlightenment philosophy, the ability to establish a private home life, one “untouched by the market,” emerged as the truest expression of this freedom (Stanley 173). The ways these philosophical concerns manifested themselves in domestic life were through ideologies that viewed the home as a space whose “neatness symbolized the rights and duties of freedom, its chaos the legacy of slavery- a difference defined by women’s place within”

¹⁶ Stanley, Amy Dru. *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), x; hereafter cited parenthetically.

(Stanley 139). Viewed in light of these socio-cultural trends, Belton's obsession with providing for his family simultaneously shows the ways he ascribes to these ideals at the same time that his difficulty finding employment as a man proves the progress narrative marking the transition from slavery to freedom to be a myth. By showing the ways that the structural racism embedded in American public life forecloses Belton from supporting his family, *Imperium* serves as a critique of the myth of post-Emancipation "equality."

In his work on Griggs, Moses observes that Belton's "extreme reactions to the external factors that prevent him from performing bourgeois masculinity demonstrate his full acceptance of "Victorian *ideals* of Anglo-Saxon manhood and womanhood" (184). Although the text in part exposes the ways that U.S. political culture precludes African Americans from achieving these ideals, his inability to consider the possibility that Antoinette might work in these positions, positions traditionally held for female laborers, does more than merely uphold these Victorian values of separate public and private spheres. For one, it exposes the masculinist construction of "nationalism" embedded within Belton's nationalist ideology. *Imperium's* inability to recognize Antoinette as a political agent in her own right reveals the ways that, as the novel expresses these "Victorian values," it simultaneously produces an ahistorical construction of African American female activism. As historian Kate Dossett notes in her study on African American women's participation in, and contributions to, black nationalist movements from the late nineteenth- to early twentieth-centuries, at this time African American women were engaging in political activism invested in denouncing the Victorian cult of true womanhood and in exposing the ways these values were only attainable for white women. Although their participation has been historically erased from traditional narratives of these movements, Dossett's work on The National Association for Colored Women (NACW), an organization founded in 1896 by female

activists including Harriet Tubman, Frances Harper, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell, shows how at this moment women's club movements "moved increasingly toward formal political organizing for black women, and away from reform activities, such as social welfare and school building, that could legitimately be seen as extensions of their motherhood roles."¹⁷ As a woman "famed throughout the city for her beauty, intelligence... virtue" and "intellectuality" (Griggs 49), Antoinette would likely have been among the class of women who spearheaded this club movement. Since the work taken up by these late nineteenth-century club women, according to Dossett, shows how they were able to "shape [black nationalism] within a feminist framework" (2), Belton's inability to imagine women as part of his movement makes their erasure from the text even more noticeable. Significantly, by having Belton cross dress in order to provide for his family then, the text erases these histories of female labor and activism.

Beyond disclosing Belton's masculinist perspective about the gendered dimensions of late-nineteenth century black nationalist race activism, Belton's masquerade also reveals the paradox inherent to a black nationalist imagination that fails to consider the interrelated ways racialized and gendered subjugation operate in the United States. At the same time that his work as a female erases these histories, it also suggests that this type of female labor is required in order for change to occur. While working as a domestic laborer, Belton is able to come into contact with prestigious white families in Virginia in ways that he was unable to as a man, and in doing so he learns information that proves central to ensuring his plans to establish the Imperium succeed. In the house he works in he spends time eavesdropping on his male employers and engages in conversations with his employer's family members in order to assess their thoughts on the mental and moral capacity of African Americans. As he does so, he is surprised to learn:

¹⁷ Dossett, Kate. *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009), 17; hereafter cited parenthetically.

That the white man was utterly ignorant of the nature of the Negro to-day with whom he has to deal. And more than that, he was not bothering his brain thinking about the Negro. He felt that the Negro was easily ruled and was not an object for serious thought. The barbers, the nurses, cooks and washerwomen, the police column of the newspapers, comic stories and minstrels were the sources through which the white people gained their conception of the Negro. But the real controlling power of the race that was shaping its life and thought and preparing the race for action, was unnoticed and in fact unseen by them (58).

Imperium suggests that, because white Southerner's knowledge of the race comes exclusively from their interactions with domestic workers, and because they have no interaction with educated men like Belton, they "never dreamed of this powerful inner circle that was gradually but persistently working its way every direction" (58). What Belton learns about the ignorance of these white men teaches him that organizing an Imperium, and maintaining its secrecy, might possibly be a reality. However, because he was only able to learn this information because his masquerade gave him access to this social world typically reserved for African American female domestic workers, *Imperium* simultaneously shows how "female" labor is necessary for mass, organized resistance.

Furthermore, while working as a woman for this white family, Belton steps in on behalf of the women of his race in another problematic way. After learning that upper-class white people remain ignorant about African Americans' ability to organize, he also discovers that the young men in the families he works for have a low opinion of the "virtue of colored women" (58). The novel suggests that, to Belton, this trait is important, as he uses it to characterize Antoinette in the previous chapter, describing her as a woman "famed throughout the city for her

beauty, intelligence, and virtue” (49). So, in addition to using this position to provide for his family, Belton comes to view his employment as an opportunity to “exalt” the women of his race, proving to the white men that their stereotypes do not reflect “reality.” These men begin to court Belton, yet Belton persistently refuses their offers and speaks about “virtue and integrity” so frequently that he is nicknamed “the virtuous prude” (58). His presumption that he can singly “exalt” the negative stereotypes attributed to African American women by crossdressing and performing female chastity speak to Hazel Carby’s critique of the ways Du Bois participates in a Victorian gendered framework that fails to “imagine black women as intellectuals and race leaders” (10). Given that, as Finnie Coleman has shown, Du Bois and Griggs had a close working relationship at this time, this may come as unsurprising. In 1909 Du Bois in fact recruited Griggs to serve as a delegate for the Niagara Movement, an organization that itself expressed ambivalence about how to incorporate women and which did not invite them to participate in its original iteration (Coleman 18). Through cross dressing, then, *Imperium* is able to avert the question about whether or not to include women in the black nationalist project, as Belton performs their work for them.

And, as mentioned above, African American women themselves were organizing to combat the very stereotype that Belton himself seeks to disprove. Under the leadership of Mary Church Terrell, one of the top priorities of the NACW was to expose the myth of the unvirtuous African American woman. By drawing historical connections between the social constructions that organized black/white relations, these female activists made known how African American femininity was threatened and violated by juridical circumstances that made it impossible for them to live up to the nineteenth century morality codes set for white women.¹⁸ Along with his

¹⁸ See Feimster, Crystal. *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Race and Lynching*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 115.

paternalist imperative to care for Antoinette by obtaining stable employment, then, in his masquerade Belton speaks for the women who were actively fighting against these very stereotypes. So, while Belton's inability to consider women as active political agents might seem typical, his decision to cross dress reveals a paradox in this ideology as it provides an opportunity to incorporate them at the same time that it subsumes their participation.

Belton's masquerade concludes when the "advances" made by the white male employers extend too far. As Belton repeatedly denies their sexual advances, the men begin to "doubt his sex" and in an effort "to satisfy themselves at all hazards...they resorted to the bold and daring plan of kidnapping and overpower him" (58). Following this "eventful night," after this "Belton did no more nursing. But fortunately they did not recognize who he was" (58). This crossdressing scene thus abruptly concludes with a brief allusion to the sexual violence committed against African American female domestic workers both during and after slavery. Yet, because it is Belton performing this role, the novel is able to evade sustained discussion about it. For a novel that, across its twenty chapters, makes repeated references to political and social acts of violence taken up within African American activist circles at this time, the erasure of this experience is significant given that, in the first two decades marking both the formal end of Reconstruction and the institution of federal Jim Crow laws, activism around sexual violence became increasingly linked to anti-racist work. For example, Ida B. Wells writes in her 1895 *Red Record*:

Not only is it true that many of the alleged cases of rape against the Negro are like the foregoing, but the same crime committed by white men against Negro women and girls, is never punished by mob or the law. A leading journal in South Carolina openly said some months ago that 'it is not the same thing for a white man to assault a colored

woman as for a colored man to assault a white woman, because the colored woman had no finer feelings nor virtue to be outraged!’ Yet colored women have always had far more reason to complain of white men in this respect than ever white women have had of Negroes.¹⁹

Here, Wells articulates the relationship between racism and gendered forms of sexual violence in ways that harken to Griggs’s attempts in *Imperium*. Calling attention to the ways that white racists suggest that the “colored” woman’s lack of “virtue” supposedly warrants, invites, or justifies the quotidian sexual violence experienced in the context of domestic labor, Wells positions the sexual violence they experience within the same systems of power that justify the lynching of black men accused of similar gendered and sexualized crimes. By having Belton perform this role, *Imperium* is further able to articulate its origin story of the black nationalist state in Texas as a masculinist project concerned with gendered manifestations of national identity.

While Belton’s brief employment as a female domestic worker ends “fortunately” (58) because his would-be assailants discover his gender, are no longer interested in him, and he is able to evade sexual assault, the novel frames the time spent away from his wife, Antoinette, as still having serious and negative consequences. After Belton’s return, Antoinette gives birth to a white child. Despite the experience he has had immediately prior to this scene with his white male employer’s aggressive advances, Belton immediately assumes that his wife was “tempted to ruin” because of his “failure to properly support her” (59) and he subsequently leaves her to travel to Texas and establish the Imperium. Rather than linking the birth of Antoinette’s white child to the violences that he himself experienced while performing female labor himself,

¹⁹ Wells, Ida B. “A Red Record” 1895, in *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, edited by Jacqueline Jones Royster. (New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 73-157, 127.

Imperium once again neglects the intersectional forms of oppression particular to African American women in the Jim Crow South.²⁰

Imperium frames Belton's departure from Antoinette, and the domestic life that her character symbolizes, as the event that enables him to commit fully to the Imperium and to the forms of racial activism affiliated with it. As he leaves Virginia, he "tenderly...laid the image of Antoinette to rest in a grave at the very center of his heart" and, in doing so, "found himself better prepared than ever to give his life wholly to the righting of the wrongs of his people" (59). With Antoinette metaphorically dead to Belton, he can now move on to fulfill his political mission. In many ways, through Belton's experiences, the novel shows how structural racism in the United States forecloses African Americans from establishing a family life, one with clearly marked differences between the public and domestic spheres. In doing so, the novel's exposure of these structural barriers allows the novel to critique what Doris Sommer observes as the national romance's tendency to strive "toward social convenient marriages" that are "grounded in natural heterosexual love" (6). Indeed, because of the types of labor that Belton feels compelled to perform, his marriage fails. Belton and Antoinette's "heterosexual love" can no longer serve as the symbol of the nation as the conditions that both force Belton to perform female labor and that cause his marriage to fail show that the hard work and the ideologies of individual meritocracy that Lowe observes as celebrated elements of the American autobiography do not work in this particular historical context.

²⁰ In the final pages of the novel, Belton travels back to Virginia to visit Antoinette before his execution. Although his death is already imminent at this point, upon returning he learns that the child aged he grew darker, becoming "Antoinette's color, retaining Belton's features" (108). Although the novel attempts to reclaim Antoinette's "virtue" in these final pages, the novel further suggests that the founding of the Imperium is dependent upon her failed relationship with Belton. Indeed, without her supposed or assumed unfaithfulness, Belton would not have left Virginia, convinced that there was no place for an educated, middle-class American male in the United States.

Yet, despite the novel's exposure of these structural inequalities that complicate both the biographical story of liberal individualism and the romance of the nation, the novel still finds ways to venerate the very systems that it acknowledges to be the problem. In the next section I turn to the text's representations of empire and imperialism in order to decipher how its inability to fully reject heteropatriarchal ideologies affiliated with national formations comes through its failure to disaggregate U.S. domestic policies with its foreign relations. Turning to an analysis of the imperial context in which Griggs writes, I show how, through the ways the novel stages the debates about racism at home in the context of the impending U.S. war with Spain, the novel fails to produce a black nationalist perspective accountable to the ways that U.S. empire was linked to global forms of capital reliant upon the exploitation of racialized bodies.

III. Nationalism, Empire, and the Black Revolutionary State

As discussed above, the biographical accounts of Belton and Bernard's lives, and their failed heterosexual domestic romances, allow the novel to explain the conditions that lead to the founding of the Imperium. By showing the ways that African Americans were barred from participating in the domestic institutions that defined a particularly American form of liberal democracy, the novel simultaneously shows the embedded racism of these institutions and reinscribes the gendered hierarchies that exist within them. In this section I turn to the ways this gendered ideology manifests itself as Belton, Bernard, and the other founding fathers work to negotiate the Imperium's relationship to the United States. As an "imperium in imperio," or an "empire within an empire," the black nationalist state that the revolutionaries establish in Texas has an ambivalent relationship to U.S. politics and culture. Rather than existing as a fully separatist state in the ways that the imagined worlds in the other texts examined in this

dissertation do, the proposed Imperium operates within frameworks already established by the U.S. Constitution. Significantly, as the members of the Imperium engage in debates about how to express either their allegiance to, or abandonment of, the United States, questions about whether or not to support the United States' imperial endeavors in Cuba emerge as the central point of contestation. This section argues that the text's representations of the debates concerning Cuba show the limits of a black nationalist ideology that fails to consider the relationship between nationalism and imperial expansion. Because both Belton and Bernard maintain their preoccupation with their failed domestic romances even after abandoning the United States, they are unable to produce a critique that considers the relationship between domestic racism and imperial expansion.

Following both Belton and Bernard's final recognition that they will be unable to establish a domestic life for their wives and families in Virginia, they move to Texas and begin to draft the political agenda of the Imperium. While the novel now discloses that Belton has been secretly organizing the Imperium since his days at Stowe University, Bernard has been unaware of it until he is recruited by Belton. As the Imperium and its mission are revealed to Bernard upon his arrival, Belton explains to Bernard the expected relationship between the Imperium and the United States government more broadly. Significantly, Belton explains that the Imperium is not separate from, but operates within, the political frameworks offered by the U.S. Constitution. Rather than forging their own independent government, Belton informs Bernard that "there is one serious flaw in the Constitution of the United States," and that the Imperium plans to exploit this flaw in order to serve the needs of African Americans. According to Belton, this flaw or "defect" "is the relation of the General Government to the individual state." He explains:

The General Government says to the citizen: ‘I am your sovereign. You are my citizen and not the citizen of only one state. If I call on you to defend my sovereignty, you must do so even if you have to fight against your own state. But while I am your supreme earthly sovereign I am powerless to protect you against crimes, injustices, outrages against you. Your state may disenfranchise you with or without law, may bog you; but my hands are so tied that I can’t help you at all, although I shall force you to defend my sovereignty with your lives. If you are beset by the Ku Klux Klan, White Cappers, Bulldozers, Lynchers, do not turn your dying eyes on me for I am unable to help you’ (79).

Framing the root of the government’s failures to protect African Americans from racial violence as a matter of state’s rights, Belton’s solution is to establish his own black state which, unlike the Southern states, will center African Americans’ safety and interests.

Because the Imperium does not exist as its own nation and, rather, is a state *within* the United States, Belton suggests that it must maintain its loyalty to the United States in rather conservative ways. Significantly, as the members of the Imperium discuss their state’s political relationship to the United States more broadly, debates as to whether or not the Imperium should support U.S. imperial efforts emerge as a central point of contestation. As the time draws near toward the moment when the Imperium plans to reveal itself to the U.S. public, Bernard, who has by now accepted the position of president of the Imperium, delivers a messages that explains “two terrible and discordant sounds have burst forth upon the erstwhile quieter air and now fill your bosom with turbulent emotions” (89). The two “sounds” referenced by Bernard include the sinking of an American naval ship in Havana, and the murder of a black postmaster in South Carolina. These two episodes are, importantly, based on two historical events, both of which

occurred in 1898. The first event referenced in Bernard's speech is the sinking of the USS *Maine*, a U.S. Navy ship stationed in Cuba during the Cuban Revolution. Following the explosion of the ship, the United States formally entered the Cuban War of Independence in support of the Cubans. This event also marked the inauguration of the Spanish-American War which would soon extend into the Pacific as the United States sought to also acquire the Philippines from Spain. The second event referenced is the murder of Postmaster Frazier Baker in South Carolina. After being appointed to his position by President McKinley in 1897, white racists protested his appointment, and in 1898 he was lynched and his house was burned down. In the novel Baker is renamed "Postmaster Cook," and Belton informs Bernard that he was a member of the Imperium while he was alive. The provisional government keeps his heart, which was retrieved from his burning house, in a casket that sits on the seat he once occupied in Congress as a symbol of one of the Imperium's fallen members.

According to Bernard, these events present a dilemma for the Imperium, as its members must now urgently decide "what shall be our attitude, immediate and future, to this Anglo-Saxon race, which calls upon us to defend the fatherland and at the same moment treats us in a manner to make us execrate it" (89). The debates that ensue eventually lead to the demise of the Imperium, as one betrayal after another leads to its secrecy being exposed to the U.S. government before the Imperium is able to take action. Unable to come to an agreement as to which side to take, Belton eventually dissents from the predominant decision to declare war with the United States. Born from his love for the "Union," "the South" and his "love of country" which "is one of the deepest passions in the human bosom" (107), he chooses execution over what he believes to be treason against the United States. Following his execution, the Imperium plans to wage war against the United States and align with its foreign enemies, until Berl Trout,

whose testimony bookends the novel, reveals the Imperium's plans to the U.S. government and the conspiracy crumbles.

The fact that the Imperium's demise centers around debates about whether or not to support the United States in its imperial endeavors in Cuba is significant because of the ways that it represents the ambiguities and contradictions inherent to the Imperium's understanding of "home" versus "abroad," and "nationalism" versus "separatism." In *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, Amy Kaplan argues that from the mid- to late-nineteenth century, "domestic metaphors of national identity [were] intimately intertwined with renderings of the foreign and the alien, and that the notions of the domestic and the foreign mutually constitute one another in an imperial context."²¹ Referring to how, during the Spanish-American War and following the annexation of Puerto Rico, the acquisition of new colonies threatened the "coherence of America as a nation" in ways that "risked absorbing aliens in the domestic sphere" and that "the resulting racial and cultural intermixing threatened ultimately to make the United States internally foreign to itself" (6), new forms of American exceptionalism emerged. American culture became defined through its response to the "threats of hybridity" (7) that came with the acquisition of new lands and the United States' aggression abroad was represented in mainstream political culture as "a defensive protection of the home in view of the peril of America becoming foreign or unrecognizable to itself" (11).

Significantly, for Kaplan, the romance genre experienced a revival precisely in the late nineteenth-century context of the Spanish-American War, reemerging in the form of the "historical romance" in order to mediate these anxieties. Thus, at this moment both nationalism and nationalist forms of masculinity were "revitalized by imperial conquest," and these imperial

²¹ Kaplan, Amy. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 4; hereafter cited parenthetically.

romances helped to rearticulate the relationship between American masculinity, imperial endeavors, and gendered constructions of the “nation” (95). As Kaplan observes, these historical romances worked “to merge the narratives of liberation and domination, to narrate the new empire as consistent with the history of the republic” and “to map overseas colonies as contiguous to continental expansion” (94). While the first part of *Imperium*, as mentioned above, exposes the structural barriers that prevent African Americans from achieving American versions of domestic life through a critique of the romance genre (albeit in ways that fail to recognize the relationship between racial and gendered violence within the United States), as the novel’s protagonists turn to consider whether or not they should support U.S. endeavors abroad, the novel dissociates U.S. domestic and foreign policy in problematic ways. While its adherence to the romance in the first part of the novel precludes it from binding its critique of American universal freedom to the gendered dimensions of U.S. racism, through its failure to link racism at home with imperialism abroad, the novel concludes with an ambivalent account that undermines its commentary on the severity of racism in the United States in the first place.

The fact that Bernard describes the events occurring simultaneously at home and abroad as “discordant” is significant because it shows *Imperium*’s inability to disarticulate its understanding of domesticity from larger, more global processes of racial violence. While, as shown in the previous chapter, Martin Delany’s black internationalism emerged from his skepticism over earlier U.S. intervention in Cuba in the years before Emancipation, and, as I will show in the following chapter, Pauline Hopkins’s emergent internationalism derived from her concern about what President Roosevelt’s imperial policies in the Philippines meant for issues concerning race at home in the first decade of Jim Crow, *Imperium* fails to merge its critique of U.S. domestic and foreign policy in similar ways. Rather than viewing U.S. intervention in Cuba

as a racist imperial endeavor of conquest, Bernard and Belton mistakenly believe that the United States looks to intervene on behalf of the Cuban revolutionaries, and because of this they remain at an impasse. The novel states that “in proportion as the Cubans drew near to their freedom, the fever of hope correspondingly rose in the veins of the Imperium” (87). Believing that by intervening in the situation in Cuba the United States intends to simultaneously “avenge the death of American seaman and to carry the cup of liberty to a people perishing for its healing draught” (89), the final debate that leads to Belton’s execution simultaneously results in the collapse of the Imperium.

And, as it does so, the novel continues to reproduce the masculinist savior narrative affiliated with both the earlier forms of the national romance origin story and with Kaplan’s late nineteenth-century “historical romance.” Significantly, as this disagreement unfolds, women again emerge as the symbol of the nation, performing the role of the “damsel in distress for the hero to rescue and as the eyes of the world for which masculinity is performed” (Kaplan 93). In order to appeal to the sentiment of his all-male congress and to encourage them to support the Imperium’s militaristic war against the United States, women appear in the novel for the first time since it relocates from Virginia to the Imperium in Texas. As Bernard takes the podium to give a speech addressing the violent murder of Postmaster Cook, he brings fifty women on stage, each one representing the wife of a man who had been lynched that year. Using these women to appeal to the sentimentality, and masculinity, of the male members of the Imperium, and to convince them that the time has come for war, he calls Mrs. Cook, the wife of the murdered postmaster, and her children up to the platform to tell their story. Their tale about the death of their husband and father conjures deep feelings amongst the men of the Imperium, and they are left sobbing “like babes” with “their hearts swelled, their bosoms heaved, their breath...quick

with choking passion” (97). And, following this performance, Bernard returns on stage and declares: “the history of our treatment by the Anglo-Saxon race is but the history of oppression, our patient endurance of evil has not served to decrease this cruelty, but seems rather to increase it” (97). While the Congress unanimously confirms these wrongs as valid reasons for waging war, the presence of these women continues to serve as mere symbolic representation of the threats to domesticity brought on by U.S. racism. Having garnered the consensus needed to wage war against the United States, the Imperium’s goals once again become articulated to the failed national romance at home. Now compelled to support Bernard’s plan for war, the leaders of the Imperium again demand the stakes of U.S. racism center around, and exist upon, the failed romance narrative.

Just as Bernard remains committed to expressing his manhood, and the threats to it, in ways that disable him from seeing a solution outside of U.S. nationalist frameworks, Belton’s decision to abandon the Imperium remains bound to the same domestic romance plot. Although this decision may seem to represent a radically different political ideology from Bernard’s, in many ways it is reliant upon the same gendered constructions of the nation as Bernard’s radical separatism. In a somewhat unexpected transformation from black nationalist activist to Washington-esque accommodationism, Belton explains to Bernard that he is abandoning the imperium because:

Candidly...I love the Union and I love the South. Soaked as Old Glory is with my people’s tears and stained as it is with their warm blood, I could die as my forefathers did, fighting for its honor and asking no greater boon than Old Glory for my shroud and native soil for my grave. This may appear strange, but love of country is one of the deepest passions in the human bosom, and men in all ages have been known to give their

lives for the land which they had known nothing save cruel and oppression. I shall never give up my fight for freedom, but I shall never prove false to the flag (107).

Although, coming from Belton, this new affinity with the United States seems like a radical break from the criticism he provides throughout the novel, *Imperium* uses this decision as an opportunity to once again frame the Imperium around the failed domestic plot. As mentioned above, in the days before his execution, Belton returns to Virginia to see Antoinette one last time. Upon his return we learn that after birthing a white baby, Antoinette was shunned by the community and deemed a social pariah. However, as the child grew up and his skin grew darker, he became a mirror image of Belton and Antoinette was again welcomed back into the community. Belton returns to Richmond in time to see Antoinette honored by “every social organization” with “society rushing to her” (109) to apologize and return to her her virtuous reputation. As the novel tells of Belton’s return, the melodrama of their encounter again harkens back to the failed national romance. Indeed, upon seeing his son, Griggs writes:

Belton was now recalled to life. He again loved the world. The cup of his joy was full. He was proud of his beautiful, noble wife, proud of his promising son. For days he was lost in contemplation of his new found happiness. But at last, a frightful picture arose before him. He remembered that he was doomed to die, and the day of his death came galloping on at a rapid pace (109).

Although Belton’s return to Antoinette and the information he learns while visiting her might provide the novel with the opportunity to critique the ideologies behind the assumptions he had initially made about her, it instead uses this as another moment to reflect upon the ways that racism in the United States is articulated to the failed domestic site. Emotionally torn between his belief that “duty to country” came “above everything else” and the sight of seeing Antoinette “so

happy” that “she freely forgave the world for all the wrongs that it had perpetrated upon her”(110) the novel again frames the stakes of Belton’s dilemma as related to his inability to have both a political and domestic life.

IV. Conclusion

As Belton returns to the Imperium to face his impending execution, the novel’s national romance concludes in failure. Narrated by Berl Trout, the man we learn eventually betrays Bernard’s scheme to wage war on the United States, the concluding chapter states that with his death “the spirit of conservatism in the Negro race, fell with him.” He is described as part of an older generation, “the last of that peculiar type of Negro heroes that could so fondly kiss the smiting hand.” Framing Bernard as representing a more radical, separatist ideology, the novel is still ambivalent about how we should treat his oppositional politics. As Bernard stands over Belton’s grave, laughing “a fearful, wicked laugh” like a “maniac” (111), he appears to be driven by a thirst for revenge as he says:

‘Float on proud flag, while yet you may. Rejoice, oh! ye Anglo-Saxons, yet a little while. Make my father ashamed to own me, his lawful son; call me a bastard child; look upon my pure mother as a harlot; laugh at Viola in the grave of a self-murderer; exhume Belton’s body if you like and tear your flag from around him to keep him from polluting it! Yes, stuff your vile stomachs full of these horrors. You shall be richer food for the buzzards to whom I have solemnly vowed to give your flesh’ (111).

Focused purely on seeking revenge against the United States, the novel ends without a resolution to the problems it has traced and sought to resolve throughout. Although the novel, and Griggs himself, have been situated within a longer legacy of black nationalism in the United States, the

conclusion to the novel provides an ambivalent commentary as to both the possibilities and limits of this type of racial nationalism

This chapter has shown how the novel's ambivalence culminates in a misunderstanding as to the ways that U.S. imperial endeavors are articulated to domestic race policy and ideology. By failing to understand racism as a global concern linked to global processes of racial capitalism, the two founders of the Imperium are divided as to which of the two "discordant" events they should support. In the following chapter I turn to Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood* and examine how black nationalism of this era might engage and experiment with literary genres that encourage its writers to link their critiques of U.S. race relations to global struggles against European and U.S. imperialism. While *Imperium in Imperio* remains reliant upon genres affiliated with national origin stories, *Of One Blood* rejects these genres and engages with more experimental forms in order to imagine new possibilities for freedom.

Chapter 3

“Your Wife and Not Your Wife”: African American Women and The Imperial Romance of Pauline Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*

I. Introduction

From 1900-1904, *The Colored American Magazine* flourished as the most widely-read African American newspaper in the first decade of the new century. With nearly 20,000 readers reached through its circulation on a monthly basis, the magazine provided African American intellectuals with a medium through which to both circulate news about the grim state of African American civil rights in the first decade following the “separate but equal” ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, as well as a space for cultivating and producing an African American artistic and literary culture.¹ At the forefront of the successful magazine was novelist and essayist Pauline Hopkins, who served as literary editor from 1903 to 1904 and was the magazine’s most prolific writer. Through her biographical profiles, political commentaries, and serialized fiction, Hopkins’s work in *The Colored American Magazine* helped to earn the magazine international recognition. With offices and agents stationed not only in the United States, but also in the West Indies and Liberia, *The Colored American Magazine*’s goals of reaching both African Americans and people of African descent in the U.S. colonies, represented early forms of the internationalist sentiment that would come to define radical leftist factions of black rights movements in the years following the first World War (Dworkin xxiii).

This chapter examines Hopkins’s novel *Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self*, which was published serially in the magazine between November 1902 and January 1903, and which

¹ Dworkin, Ira. “Introduction,” in *Daughter of the Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), xix-xliv, xx; hereafter cited parenthetically.

expresses an articulation of the internationalist turn taken by the magazine in these years. In this novel Hopkins tells the story of a young Harvard Medical School student, Reuel Briggs, who is passing as white. An otherwise quiet and withdrawn student, antisocial and distant from his peers because he fears that growing too close to them will eventually lead to the exposure of his racial identity, Reuel one night lets his guard down at a performance of the Fisk Jubilee Singers when he becomes enamored with Dianthe Lusk, the star of the performance. Inspired by Dianthe to emerge from his social isolation, Reuel begins courting her after she unexpectedly ends up staying in Cambridge following a train crash that leaves her in a state of amnesia and in need of medical attention. Jealous of Reuel's budding relationship with Dianthe however, Aubrey Livingston, Reuel's supposed friend and colleague who has secretly known about Reuel's racial background, attempts to sabotage Reuel's career by informing all but one of Reuel's potential employers about his racial identity. Leaving Reuel with only one option for employment, an option that requires him to travel to East Africa to participate in an archaeological dig, Aubrey hopes that, with Reuel out of the country, he will be able to steal Dianthe from him and claim her as his own.

This chapter argues that by sending Reuel to Africa, *Of One Blood* provides a critique of the limited opportunities left to educated African American men in the United States at the turn of the century. In doing so, it expresses an emergent black internationalism, one that would come to shape black politics both in the United States and abroad throughout the first half of the twentieth century. As the first decade of Federal Jim Crow regulation was marked by increased lynching and mass voter disenfranchisement, the public and professional outlook for African Americans living in the United States looked especially grim. By presenting Reuel's trip to Africa as the only option for his employment, the novel suggests that African Americans must

look abroad to find both opportunity and solidarity. And, true to the emergent goals of black internationalism which were, namely, to forge solidarities amongst people of color globally, on his trip abroad Reuel uncovers a secret, thriving kingdom of Africans who have been isolated from the modern world and contemporary imperial violence. Not only are these Africans welcoming to Reuel, but they also claim that he is the descendent of their king and, because of his lineage, they declare him royalty and present him with a virgin African queen, Candace, as his new wife. So, as he leaves the United States because he is unable to find employment and establish a domestic life with Dianthe within the racist systems that govern U.S. political and domestic life, his journey abroad resolves this problem as he learns of a black kingdom that is not only welcoming to him, but that also crowns him as royalty and that conveniently provides him with a queen.

As the chapter examines the ways that Reuel's journey allows the novel to articulate this early form of black internationalism, it simultaneously considers how it remains indebted to earlier ideologies concerning racial uplift. As shown in the previous chapter, black nationalism was often indebted to U.S. nationalist political ideology in ways that undermined its revolutionary potential by articulating these imaginations to heteropatriarchal forms of nationalism. Despite *Of One Blood's* rejection of the United States as a space where freedom might be found, the novel still remains reliant upon national institutions in ways similar to the black nationalist state represented in *Imperium in Imperio*. The primary way that *Of One Blood* participates in this heteropatriarchal form of nationalism is by situating Reuel's impetus for finding employment as a solution to the marital problems he experiences at home. By framing the stakes of Reuel's expedition as one concerned with the exposing how the United

States' heteropatriarchal institutions were unavailable to African American men, *Of One Blood* falls into the trap of reifying these nationalist systems rather than effectively dismantling them.

By tracing Pauline Hopkins's emergent internationalism as expressed in *Of One Blood*, and by marking the problems she encounters as she works to articulate it, this chapter argues that Hopkins's experimentation with different genres reveals the formal limits offered to black nationalist writers engaging in literary forms of black nationalism. Unlike *Imperium in Imperio*, which the previous chapter has shown failed to break from masculinist nationalist genres of writing, in *Of One Blood* Hopkins engages with multiple genres as she works to envision reedom for her male protagonist. By departing from such genres as the national romance, Hopkins is able to imagine a world where Africans, and people from across the diaspora, can rise as the cultural and intellectual leaders of the world.

Yet, as *Of One Blood* traces Reuel's journey from social despair and isolation in the United States to wealth and royalty in Africa, it simultaneously forecloses the possibility for his marriage to Dianthe to occur. This chapter examines the romantic relationships represented in *Of One Blood* in order to investigate the contentious relationship between domesticity and black internationalism. At the same time that, by sending Reuel to Africa, Hopkins critiques dominant U.S. racial ideology and its relationship to U.S. imperialism, *Of One Blood* also reveals the ways that her internationalist ideals were very much bound to bourgeois nationalist understandings of the domestic sphere. As such, *Of One Blood* provides a productive lens through which to view how these ideologies of the domestic and international became articulated to one another at a critical moment in the history of U.S. imperialism. Considering how the text's internationalism fails at the site of the romance and family opens up room for a deeper investigation into the well-known relationship between gender and nation.

II. Turn of the Century Black Internationalism

In this section I read *Of One Blood* as an early black internationalist text and situate it amidst the political context that led to the eventual collapse of *The Colored American Magazine* in November 1909. I argue that the drama surrounding the folding of the magazine is symbolic of the shift in political ideology amongst African Americans at this moment. Following the first decade of Jim Crow segregation, a decade which witnessed a sharp increase in lynchings and mob violence, African American intellectuals began to increasingly reject the accommodationism affiliated with Booker T. Washington and the older generation of African American activists. This shift away from accommodationism toward more radical political imaginings also marked the emergence of the “New Negro,” a political term officially coined and defined in Alain Locke’s 1925 *The New Negro*, and a figure who would emerge as an effective political actor on the international anti-imperial stage.² As Reuel travels to Telassar and “discovers” the kingdom of Africans living amidst advanced technology and material wealth, *Of One Blood* provides a vision of what peoples of African descent might accomplish in the absence of U.S. and European imperial culture, and imagines the possibilities that might emerge when these people are able to unite around this glory.

To begin, I situate *Of One Blood* in the specific historical moment in which it was published in *The Colored American Magazine*. While Locke’s *The New Negro* would not be published until two decades after the collapse of the magazine, several political events, both domestic and foreign, marked this moment as pivotal in the histories of both U.S. race policy at

² See Edwards, Brent Hayes. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1-3.

home and U.S. imperial policy abroad. A year prior to the publication of the novel's first installment in the magazine, the United States itself was in a critical political shift following Theodore Roosevelt's inauguration as president after the assassination of William McKinley in September 1901. One month following his inauguration, Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to dine with him at the White House, and, in an event which *The New York Times* would come to call "The Dinner Incident," Roosevelt's gesture was celebrated by black and white race activists as "publicly and officially reaffirming the equal rights of American citizenship." Southern democrats, on the other hand, deplored the event and Georgia Governor Allen D. Candler went so far as to claim that "no self-respecting man can ally himself with the president after what has occurred."³

Booker T. Washington's relationship to Theodore Roosevelt is important to this chapter because of Washington's contentious relationship to both Pauline Hopkins and to *The Colored American Magazine*. As the magazine encountered financial trouble early in its formative years, it became vulnerable to Washington's "Tuskegee Machine" which was, at the time, notorious for the financial influence it held over turn-of-the-century African American newspapers.⁴ In 1904, Washington eventually purchased the magazine and it subsequently suffered from a major restructuring. During this period it began to promote Washington's political agendas and demoted Hopkins from the position of editor due to political differences held between the two. Significantly, the political positions on which Hopkins and Washington most differed centered around their opinions of Roosevelt. While Roosevelt was largely welcomed into the presidency

³ "Special to *The New York Times*: Southern Democrats Berate the President." *The New York Times* (Oct. 19, 1901), accessed June 30, 2016, *ProQuest*.

⁴ See Du Bois, W.E.B. *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* 1940 (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 76. Here, Du Bois criticizes Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama for its alignment with rich white donors, many of whom financially assisted Washington in his takeover of several African American newspapers around this time.

by race activists, both black and white, Hopkins was deeply skeptical as to how he could support racial justice initiatives at home given his stance on foreign policy abroad. In her editorials Hopkins warned the readers of *The Colored American Magazine* about the “falseness of friendship” from supposed allies.⁵ And, in a letter to William Monroe Trotter, Hopkins’s close friend and a vocal opponent of Washington, she acknowledged the hostility she received from Washington over her decision to run a profile on Filipino revolutionary José Rizal. According to Hopkins, Washington and his “cronies,” who then had financial control of the paper, condemned her writing because it subversively “reflected upon President Roosevelt’s Philippine policy.”⁶

Throughout her writing in the *Magazine* in the years and months before Washington’s takeover, Hopkins published several non-fiction series that reflected her emergent internationalist approach to resolving the conditions of African Americans living in the United States. In a series titled “Famous Men of the Negro Race” published between November 1900 and October 1901 Hopkins profiled several notable African American male politicians and activists, including Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Blanche Bruce, the first African American to serve a full term as U.S. senator. The opening profile in this series, however, was on Toussaint L’Ouverture, a decision which demonstrates the ways that Hopkins was thinking about both the strife and triumphs of African Americans within larger, more global contexts. In this essay, Hopkins makes explicit moves to link both the victories and adversities faced by Haiti with the condition of peoples of African descent living in the United States. Published a decade before Woodrow Wilson’s 1914 invasion of the island nation, an event which

⁵ Allen, Sarah A. “Latest Phases of the Race Problem in America.” 1903. *Daughter of the Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*, ed. by Ira Dworkin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 217-25, 220. Pauline Hopkins frequently wrote under the pseudonym “Sarah A. Allen.”

⁶ Hopkins, Pauline. “Letter to William Monroe Trotter, April 16, 1905.” 1905. *Daughter of The Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*, ed. by Ira Dworkin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 238-48, 244

would mark the beginning of two decades of formal U.S. occupation, in this essay Hopkins writes “let us know fear for the future of Hayti or for the future of the whole race; the same God rules today who ruled in ages past. As a race we shall be preserved, although annihilation seems very near.”⁷ And, although in this series she also published a profile on Booker T. Washington, her framing of his contributions to their cause were significantly more ambivalent. Here, she concludes her essay by stating:

when the happenings of the Twentieth Century have become matters of history, Dr. Washington’s motives will be open to as many constructions and discussions as are those of Napoleon today, or of other men of extraordinary ability, whether for good or evil, who have had like phenomenal careers.⁸

By likening Washington to Napoleon, she suggests that the verdict on his efforts were still up for debate, and that they would continue to be so in the future, providing a much more ambivalent account of his contributions than those she attributes to L’Ouverture, the celebrated Haitian revolutionary. Under her leadership, the magazine also invited writing from journalists living outside of the United States, with South African journalist and co-founder of the ANC Allan Kirkland Soga publishing a piece titled “Ethiopians of the Twentieth Century.” This essay looked to inform the magazine’s readers about the conditions of Africans under British colonial rule, and ran concurrently with an installment of *Of One Blood*.

And, following her firing from *The Colored American Magazine*, Hopkins continued to produce editorials that drew connections amongst the anti-imperial struggles being fought by people of color throughout the world. In a series published in the Atlanta-based *Voice of the*

⁷ “Touissant L’Ouverture.” 1901. *Daughter of the Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*, ed. by Ira Dworkin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 11-22, 22.

⁸ Hopkins, Pauline. “Booker T. Washington.” 1901. *Daughter of The Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*, ed. Ira Dworkin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 103-10, 110.

Negro called “The Dark Races of the Twentieth Century” which, although critiqued for its anthropological and paternalist reports on Asian cultures, Hopkins demonstrated attempts to forge connections amongst different groups of racially oppressed peoples globally. In a reflection on the peoples of “Oceanica,” for example, she calls attention to the United States’ recent acquisition of the Hawaiian islands, noting that, although “the people have adopted the Christian religion and civilized customs,” “a melancholy interest is felt in these people because of their misfortunes and the prevalence of that dread disease leprosy among them.”⁹ Referencing the unfavorable consequences of the U.S. conquest of Hawaii which brought disease to the people of the island kingdom, Hopkins provides a counter-argument to those who might claim acquisition of the land to be a form of benevolent imperialism.

And, in “A Primer of Facts Pertaining to the Early Greatness of the African Race and the Possibility of Restoration by its Descendants- With Epilogue,” a pamphlet self-published in the same year as “The Dark Races of the World,” Hopkins answers the question “Can all races have sprung from the same parent stock?” by stating that “as was the case in Noah’s family,” “it is possible for persons of three distinct complexions... Yellow, Black and White- to be born of the same father and mother of one race and color.”¹⁰ Here, Hopkins produces a counter-discourse to scientific racism that argues certain races are biologically superior to others. Although this essay expresses a form of Ethiopianism that situates Africa as the center of modern civilization, by arguing that all races stem from a single origin she also begs the question as to how peoples of different races might unite in a world being divided by imperial powers.

⁹ “Oceanica.” 1905. *Daughter of The Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*, ed. Ira Dworkin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 301-11, 310.

¹⁰ “A Primer of Facts.” 1905, *Daughter of The Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*, ed. Ira Dworkin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 335-52, 336.

Of One Blood similarly participates in a political project invested in forging connections amongst people threatened by U.S. and European imperialism through the ways it looks abroad to resolve the problems facing African Americans at home. As it does so, it marks a distinctive break from earlier forms of African American literature that sought to resolve these issues within nationalist frameworks. Throughout the nineteenth century, African American writers often used literature to expose the ways that African Americans were systemically excluded from political institutions that defined American freedom and citizenship and, in her literature, Hopkins was very much a part of this tradition. Thus, the decision to resolve the novel's conflict by sending Reuel to East Africa, rather than resolving it within the United States, is notable. Indeed, for Hopkins, the proposed resolution in *Of One Blood* differs from some of her earlier novels in significant ways. For example, in her earliest and most well-known novel *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1901), Hopkins tells the story of an African American family living in Boston during the Reconstruction era. This novel tells the story of a near-failed marriage, in which, much like in *Of One Blood*, a supposed white friend turned villain, John Langley, sabotages the African American male protagonist, Will, by uncovering scandalous facts about his fiancée's family's history. After conducting research, Langley learns that Will's betrothed, Sappho, has an illegitimate child whom she birthed while she was enslaved decades before. Langley subsequently blackmails Sappho who flees Boston in shame, leaving Will and his family distraught and confused by her disappearance. However, the problem resolves itself when Will, after several years of searching, finds her living in Louisiana and adopts Sappho's son as his own. Although the novel shows the ways that both histories of racial violence, and their persistence into the present, affect the familial structures of African Americans at the turn of the century, the novel suggests that that with a compassionate

understanding as to how racial disparities have marked African American familial life as different from those of white families, the African American family can flourish.¹¹

And, in *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-2) which, like *Of One Blood*, was published serially in *The Colored American Magazine*, Hopkins tells a more tragic story of the legacy of slavery and its effects on the African American family. Like *Contending Forces* and *Of One Blood*, *Hagar's Daughter* tells the story of a marriage sabotaged by a white villain who exposes the racial identity of the novel's female protagonist who is passing as white. However, unlike *Contending Forces*, the novel's male protagonist is less sympathetic, and, in time that lapses as he decides what to do with the information he has learned about his future wife's racial background, she has fallen ill and passed away. Unlike *Contending Forces*, then, *Hagar's Daughter* ends a tragedy, and Hopkins offers a critique as to the ways that racism forecloses African American participation in various American institutions such as marriage.¹²

Published only one year after *Hagar's Daughter*, *Of One Blood* presents an even less optimistic argument about the possibility for African Americans to obtain freedom within the United States. Yet, rather than resolving the problem by finding a solution that allows the two protagonists to become married and remain in the country, in this novel *Of One Blood* sends its male protagonist abroad in order to resolve the marriage plot. As Reuel deliberates on whether or not to take this position in East Africa, he looks around his apartment and asks himself "if he could remain and see his wife amid such surroundings." Recognizing, much like Belton Piedmont in *Imperium in Imperio*, that the poverty he is conscripted to in the United States is not

¹¹ Hopkins, Pauline. *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*. 1900. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹² Hopkins, Pauline. *Hagar's Daughter A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice*. 1901-2. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

suitable for establishing the type of middle-class domestic life with Dianthe that he desires, he frames his problem as positioning him in an impossible binary: “if he remained at home, they could not marry, therefore separation; if he went abroad, marriage and separation.”¹³ Deciding that “if they were doomed to separate, of two evils why not choose the least? The African Position would at least bind them irrevocably together” (*Of One Blood* 60), Reuel decides upon “the least” of two evils and accepts the position on the expedition. Again, by framing Reuel’s dilemma in this way, *Of One Blood* suggests that the institutional practices that bar African Americans from participating in U.S. liberal practices cannot be resolved, and as such Reuel resolves to leave the country.

The fact that Reuel cannot achieve the standard of political and domestic life that he desires in the United States enables him to leave the country, travel abroad, and serendipitously stumble upon the city of Telassar. In his study on black internationalism of the interwar period, Brent Hayes Edwards notes how “by organizing around a common ‘elsewhere,’ a shared logic of collaboration and coordination at a level beyond particular nation-states,” “two or more differently positioned populations attempt to counter a transnational ‘system of domination’” (23). This chapter reads Reuel’s decision to travel to Africa as producing the same critique of U.S. political life that black internationalist movements emerging a decade later were centered around. Like Du Bois, who Edwards argues expressed early forms of this sentiment in 1900 when, speaking to members of the Pan-African Conference congregating in Paris, he framed his now infamous quote regarding “the problem of the twentieth century” in global terms by marking the ways that “differences of race” served as the premise for “denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern

¹³ Hopkins, Pauline. *Of One Blood*. 1902-3. (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 60; hereafter cited parenthetically.

civilisation” (1), Reuel’s travels to Africa allow him to forge the types of connections that people were beginning to think about through such organizing as that seen at the Pan-African Conference.

Indeed, in Telassar Reuel finds not only these “opportunities and privileges of modern civilisation,” but discovers that people of African descent can have access to these privileges outside of their relationships with dominant Western powers. During Reuel’s first tour of the city he expresses awe at the ancient city’s magnificence and splendor. Reuel describes the city’s “ancient luxury” (115), abundant “fertile fields” (118), and its “delicate” architecture (120). He learns that the inhabitants of Telassar believe that the “modern world is yet in its infancy” (119) and they express surprise that, in Reuel’s country, “the Ethiopian...is counted less than other mortals” (129). Isolated from the racial violence of modernity, the representations of Telassarian glory and sophistication work to both counter the racist discourse used to justify the subjection of African Americans in the United States, and as evidence of the superiority of their culture when left untouched by slavery and imperialism. And, not only do these representations suggest that, in the absence of U.S. racial violence, African Americans might flourish, Reuel’s reunification with his African lineage is framed as being mutually beneficial to the Telassarians despite the fact that they have always flourished in and through their isolation. With the return of Reuel, its lost king, contemporary Telassar now contains the cohesion it needs to confront the further “advance of mighty nations penetrating the dark, mysterious forests of his native land” (193). Thus, with the return of their lost ancestor and king, Telassar is prepared to use its wealth to fight imperialism on the continent.

Hopkins’s decision to set the location of Telassar in East Africa, deep below the pyramids, makes sense given the types of a black nationalism circulating at the turn of the

century. In particular, *Of One Blood*'s invocation of ancient Egypt positions the novel within a longer Ethiopianist tradition. As a spiritual, political, and cultural movement, Ethiopianism emerged in its first manifestation during the slave trade and peaked in popularity in the nineteenth century with the publication of texts such as Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein's 1742 dissertation "Political-Theological Dissertation Examining the Question: Is Slavery Compatible with Christian Freedom or Not?" and Olaudah Equiano's 1782 *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written By Himself*. Based on an interpretation of Psalm 68:31 which prophesizes that "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God," the Ethiopian premise takes up this psalm and interprets it to mean that human civilization originated in Africa, and that people of African descent across the diaspora will once again rise as leaders in global intellectual culture. As Hopkins takes up the Ethiopianist tradition through her representations of Telassar, she revises it from its earlier manifestations in order to express an early form of internationalism.

Hopkins's adaption of the tradition in *Of One Blood* is significant given that, since its emergence as an African diasporic political philosophy, Ethiopianism has not always been affiliated with internationalist movements such as the ones examined in this dissertation. Because of both its theological relationship to Judeo-Christian history, and because its influence on global black thought is thought to span, evolve, and adapt to particular political circumstances over the course of an entire century, Ethiopianism as a political and religious ideology has not been monolithic. Instead, it has a long, complex, and evolving history. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, for example, dates the earliest manifestations of this black nationalist ideology to seventeenth century writers Jacobus Capitein and Olaudah Equiano.¹⁴ Kidnapped from their respective homes

¹⁴ Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 26.

in West Africa and sold into slavery in the eighteenth century, both men eventually obtained freedom and returned to Africa as Christian missionaries. Significantly, and primarily because of, their relationship to Christian civilizing missions, neither of these figures are traditionally considered to be “radical” abolitionists. Capitein was himself a defendant of slavery and, in one of his more well-known writings, infamously argued that slavery was compatible with Christianity if it served the purpose of Christianizing otherwise “heathen” peoples.¹⁵ And Equiano, although reclaimed in contemporary African American literary studies for the ways that his narrative shows the subversive literary techniques that ex-slave narrators engaged with in order to criticize the systems of power under which they wrote, Equiano still expressed sympathy for his enslavers, particularly through their efforts to Christianize Africa and Africans.¹⁶ Thus these early moments in the Ethiopianist tradition were very much articulated to narratives produced in the tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Christian civilizing missions.

In the nineteenth century, however, Ethiopianism become more explicitly linked to revolutionary black nationalist movements. Directly referencing the psalm in his 1829 “Appeal,” David Walker, whose work, according to Sterling Stuckey, “contains the most all-embracing black nationalist formulations to appear in the United States during the nineteenth century,”¹⁷ famously asserted in a footnote to the preamble of his pamphlet:

¹⁵ Capitein, Jacobus Elisa Johannes. “Political-Theological Dissertation Examining the Question: Is Slavery Compatible with Christian Freedom or Not?,” in *The Agony of Asar: A Thesis on Slavery by the Former Slave*, trans. by Grant Parker (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), 79-159.

¹⁶ See, for example Kazanjian, David. *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); hereafter cited parenthetically. Here Kazanjian argues that although Equiano has been criticized for the ways he seems to uncritically engage in mercantilist exchange with his enslavers, his account actually reveals the ways that early capitalism emerges in the context of racial differentiation and a nationalism that is “irreducibly bound to, and consistent with, racial and national codification” (57). Similarly, in *The Intimacies of Four Continents* Lisa Lowe argues that Equiano’s writing engages with dominant genres used to narrate the liberal subject’s emergence into manhood and that, in doing so, it produces a “structural paradox” that shows how “the narrative of the self-taught former slave is marked, again and again, by the limits of his attainment of freedom.” Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 50-1.

¹⁷ Stuckey, Sterling. *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 9.

Let them remember, that though our cruel oppressors and murderers, may (if possible) treat us more cruel, as Pharaoh did the children of Israel, yet the God of Ethiopians, has pleased to hear our moans in consequence of oppression; and the day of our redemption from abject wretchedness draweth near, when we shall be enabled, in the most extended sense of the word, to stretch forth our hands to the Lord of our God.¹⁸

Unlike Capitein's and Equiano's invocation of the Christian tradition, Walker's conjuring of Judeo-Christian history is not used as an apology for slavery, but rather it is used to construct a counter religious historiography that prophesizes about the impending rise of African peoples. The ways in which his "Appeal" challenged Eurocentric histories of the origins of civilization would serve as a basis for theories of African civilization endorsed by later Ethiopianists, including that used by Hopkins in *Of One Blood*.

Of One Blood occurs late in the traditional historiography of the Ethiopianist tradition and, because of this, it reflects the specific political concerns facing Hopkins and other African Americans as they worked to determine their relationship the United States after a series of devastating political blows in the half-century following Emancipation. Indeed, following the failed Reconstruction projects of the middle of the century, Ethiopianism was taken up in much less theological, theoretical contexts as it worked to express itself through various emigrationist movements. No longer a spiritual invocation designed to conjure up a sense of racial pride amongst peoples persistently demoralized through their enslaved condition, in the second half of the century African Americans began using it as a philosophy to support their arguments for expatriating African Americans to live and work in West Africa. In 1876, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner was appointed vice-president of the American Colonization Society (ACS), and under his

¹⁸ Walker, David. *David Walker's Appeal To the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America*. 1829. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

leadership the Society's mission statement was revised to serve new purposes. Although, as noted in this dissertation's first chapter, in the first half of the century the ACS had been accused by black and white abolitionists alike for attempting to rid the United States of its race problem rather than confronting the structural embeddedness of racism within U.S. culture, in the second half of the century the Society underwent a radical transformation and its previous white leadership was replaced with black nationalist leaders such as Turner. Under Turner's leadership for example, the ACS revised its mission to adopt a more black nationalist platform, viewing the creation of a "UNITED STATES OF AFRICA" as the ultimate goal of emigration. At the same time, however, he was still in conversation with earlier Ethiopianists through the ways that he invoked the Bible and Christian spirituality to explain the conditions which would lead African Americans to flourish in Africa. According to Turner, "Providence" would call African Americans back to Africa as soon as they learned "the doctrines of Christianity and the elements of civil government." And, as was typical of black nationalism of this era, it also linked the creation of this new nation to the recovery of black masculinity, claiming "nothing less than nationality will bring large prosperity and acknowledged manhood to us as a people."¹⁹

Like Hopkins's work in both *The Colored American Magazine* and the *Voice of the Negro*, at the turn of the century Turner's Ethiopianism became articulated to his critiques of both U.S. domestic and foreign policy. In an 1896 editorial published in the African Methodist Episcopal Church's journal, *The Voice of Missions*, Turner warned his readers about the United States' attempts to garner African American support for the war in Cuba. Although mainstream political propaganda highlighted the fact that the Cuban rebels who the Americans were supporting were "principally Negroes," Turner argued that U.S. efforts in Cuba were not actually

¹⁹ Turner, Henry McNeal. "Critique of the Atlanta Compromise" 1875, in *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner*, ed. by Edwin S. Redkey (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 42, 42-4.

concerned with liberating black Cubans from Spanish rule. “If the United States saw nothing in the Cuban rebels but aid for the Cuban Negros,” he claimed, “everybody with any sense would know at once that this country would be but little concerned.”²⁰ Similarly, in an editorial from October 1900, Turner accused President McKinley’s decision to wage war in the Philippines of being “the crime of the century” and condemned African Americans who seemingly supported the war by enlisting in the U.S. military. In this piece he declared: “I boil over with disgust when I remember that colored men from this country that I am personally acquainted with are there fighting to subjugate a people of their own color and bring them to such a degraded state. I can scarcely keep from saying that I hope the Filipinos will wipe such soldiers from the face of the earth.”²¹ In this way, critiques of the American imperial context were merged with earlier forms of Ethiopianist sentiment in order to provide the context for the internationalist movements that would come to shape twentieth-century black radical movements.

And, like Turner and his work in *The Voice of Missions*, under the leadership of Hopkins *The Colored American Magazine* looked to revise earlier forms of Ethiopianism to meet the specific demands of African Americans at the turn of the century in ways that showed its understanding of the link that connected struggles against racism at home with anti-imperialist movements abroad. In *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, Hazel Carby situates Hopkins’s career with *The Colored American Magazine* within the context of popular literary magazine culture, calling it a product of the “magazine ‘revolution’” that began to take shape in the 1880s. By the time *The Colored American Magazine* came onto the literary scene in 1901, literary magazines were already a popular medium for

²⁰ Turner, Henry McNeal. “The Quarrel with Spain” 1896-8, in *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner*, ed. by Edwin S. Redkey (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1971), 173, 172-5.

²¹ Turner, Henry McNeal. “The Philippine Insurrection” 1900, in *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner*, ed. by Edwin S. Redkey (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1971), 186-7.

circulating information related to Southern violence and other violent attacks on African American freedom. And, although not new to this specific moment in history, Carby notes the significance of the fact that this revolution occurred in a moment when African American literacy was steadily rising. At the time of its first publication, an estimated fifty-five percent of African Americans were literate, most of whom were living in urban areas. *The Colored American Magazine* sought to maximize its circulation and reach this audience by stationing headquarters in several urban areas, both North and South, including Baltimore, New York, Chicago, Nashville, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and St. Paul.²² However, unlike some of its earlier predecessors, and significant to this chapter, Carby observes how over the four years period in which the magazine was most successful it adopted an internationalist scope, reaching readers and seeking contributions from people in China, Hawaii, the Philippines, the Caribbean, and Africa, all places significantly impacted by U.S. and European imperialism (126).

The fact that *The Colored American Magazine* both embraced and projected this simultaneously national and international scope is significant to the argument of this chapter because it shows Hopkins's impulse to cultivate a diasporic solidarity through the circulation of printed newspapers. Just as Benedict Anderson observes how print capitalism enabled the consolidation of nationalisms within the emergent nation states of the nineteenth century, *The Colored American Magazine* used its circulation to generate international solidarity amongst those peoples affected by U.S. and European imperial expansion.²³ And, with its peak publishing years occurring at the turn of the century, the magazine's international turn coincides with a critical moment in African American history, one that represents an emergent internationalism

²² Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 124; hereafter cited parenthetically.

²³ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso, 1983).

that would come to shape African American politics throughout the rest of the century. Significantly, this particular moment also coincided with the European “scramble for Africa” which resulted in the division of most of the continent by European imperial powers. However, Ethiopia’s victory in the Italian invasion of 1896 set the stage for Ethiopianism to reemerge in the context of turn-of-the-century colonization. In its 1900 edition *The Colored American Magazine* celebrated Ethiopia’s anti-colonial victories, showcasing a profile on Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II. Written by contributing writer S.E.F.C.C. Hamedoe, this biographical piece opened with an Ethiopianist religious invocation, referring to the Emperor as a “descendent from Solomon, King of Israel and the celebrated Queen of Sheba.” Yet, Hamedoe soon moves on to celebrate how this until recently “little known” emperor “astounded” the world through his defeat of “one of the first powers of the world by killing and capturing an entire army, and dictating its own terms of peace.”²⁴ Linking Ethiopia’s theological spiritual destiny to contemporary anti-colonial resistance, the magazine’s Ethiopianism expressed itself as one retheorized in the context of late nineteenth-century imperialism.

Of One Blood invokes both these revisionist accounts of Christian history and emergent anti-imperialist solidarity movements as it explains the hidden history of Telassar. When Reuel first arrives in the underground kingdom, he is informed by the Telassarian leaders that although “Ethiopia’s arrogance and pride have been humbled in the dust” those living in Telassar are hopeful that “Ethiopia should stretch forth her hand unto Eternal Goodness, and that then her glory should again dazzle the world” (115). Invoking the Biblical psalm from which Ethiopianism derives, during Reuel’s first tour of the city he expresses awe at the ancient city’s

²⁴ Hamedoe, S.E.F.C.C. “Menelik, Emperor of Abssynia.” *The Colored American Magazine* v. 1-2 (1900), accessed January 25, 2017, *Pro Quest*.

magnificence and splendor. He describes the city's "ancient luxury" (115), abundant "fertile fields" (118), and its "delicate" architecture (120). In ways that reflect the pan-African pride generated from Ethiopianist spirituality, he learns that the inhabitants of Telassar believe that "the modern world is yet in its infancy" (119) and they express surprise upon learning that, in Reuel's country, "the Ethiopian...is counted less than other mortals" (129). The representations of Telassarian glory and sophistication work to both counter the racist discourse used to justify the subjection of African Americans in the United States, and as evidence of the superiority of their culture when left untouched by slavery and imperialism.

And as the novel concludes with Reuel having accepted his position on the Telassarian throne, it mediates its celebration of the ancient kingdom's wealth and glory through the context of turn of the century imperialism. The concluding pages tell us that, as king, Reuel intends to use his knowledge of the contemporary world in order to educate his people about "modern culture" (193). In many ways, these concluding paragraphs frame Reuel as the Christian savior delivering modern knowledge to an uncivilized people much in the same way that earlier Ethiopianism has been criticized for. However, the novel suggests that by merging its ancient glory with the modern knowledge gifted by Reuel, Telassar might emerge as a powerful anti-imperial force. The novel concludes with a prophetic warning that although "his days glide peacefully by in good works...he views, too, with serious apprehension, the advance of mighty nations penetrating the dark, mysterious forests of his native land.. 'Where will it stop?' he sadly questions. 'What will the end be?'" (193). And although these concluding paragraphs might read like a grim prophesy of a dark, impending future (indeed, as I discuss in the following chapter, Italy would invade Ethiopia three decades later), with Reuel on the throne there is hope that Telassar will no longer be oblivious to the reality of racism and imperialism in the modern

world. And so, like the other novels examined in this dissertation, *Of One Blood* emerges from a twofold understanding about the relationship between U.S. race policy and U.S. imperial expansion.

III. Genre and Inter/Nationalist Tension

Yet, as *Of One Blood* provides a critical stance on U.S. imperial projects, and as it begins to bind its critique of American domestic race policy to these colonizing missions abroad, the novel remains unable to resolve one of the core plot points of the story. While, as mentioned above, Reuel must travel to East Africa in order to earn the financial stability needed to marry Dianthe, the discoveries he makes while abroad preclude him from completing the mission that he had initially set out to complete. His discovery of Telassar, and his coronation as king, require him to also accept a new wife, a woman named Candace, who has been sitting on the throne and awaiting his return. Subsequently, as he does so, the novel resolves the situation back in the United States by telling the story of Dianthe's tragic death an event which, once Reuel learns of it, allows him to accept this position and leave the troubles he encountered back at home in the past.

In this section I read the events that permit the novel to conclude with Reuel permanently living in Telassar as demonstrating an ambivalence about the conditions under which this early form of internationalism might occur. I examine the different genres that the novel engages with as it tells the story of Reuel's journey from Cambridge to Telassar and argue that the several shifts in genre that occur throughout the novel show the ways that the novel attempts to break from the conventional nationalist genres being taken up in American culture, yet struggles to do so. As the novel tells the story of Reuel's failed romantic relationship in the United States, his

journey to Africa attempts to resolve the problems of the national romance and, as he does so, the genre also shifts as the novel begins to engage with the imperial romance. However, as it does so, it also requires the death of Dianthe, the person who served as the catalyst for Reuel's mission in the first place.

Much like Sutton Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio*, the beginning of *Of One Blood* reads as a critical revision of the national romance. As Reuel both courts Dianthe and stresses over how to find employment to support her and their future family together, Reuel looks to carve out a middle-class lifestyle for himself in the United States. Doing so through "'natural' heterosexual love"²⁵ and motivated by his fears of "being outcast, of failing," and of "powerlessness,"²⁶ *Of One Blood*'s discussion of Reuel's attempts to attain social mobility highlight the ways that he struggles to achieve these ideals because of his race. However, while Griggs's novel traces the course of Belton Piedmont's and Bernard Belgrave's lives in order to show how structural racism in the United States prevents them from achieving the ultimate goal of this genre, *Of One Blood*'s plot charts differently in significant ways. As shown in the previous chapter, *Imperium in Imperio* marks the liberal subject's emergence into national subjecthood through the "clean slate" opportunistic outlook that marked the American journey into manhood as distinct from the rigid, aristocratic means of inheritance affiliated with the Old World (Morrison 34). At the beginning of the story Belton and Bernard are young boys who are hopeful that through hard work and education they can enter into the public domain of U.S. politics and achieve what Doris Sommer calls the "socially convenient marriages" (12) characteristic of the national romance genre. Rather than tracing Reuel's journey from childhood, however, the novel opens with Reuel

²⁵ Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991), 12; hereafter cited parenthetically.

²⁶ Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 36-7; hereafter cited parenthetically.

in medical school, already anxiously working hard to both succeed as a doctor, and to conceal his racial identity. Tormented by this double life he is forced to lead in order to receive his degree, and troubled by the financial challenges he encounters as a student at Harvard, in the opening scene Reuel contemplates suicide and is described as a “reticent man who knew how to suffer in silence” (1). By contrasting Reuel’s stress, anxiety, and solitude with the boisterousness of his supposed friend Aubrey, *Of One Blood* both shows the ways that success is marked by the historical advantages one inherits from both their race and family. For example, Aubrey, who is the descendent of Southern aristocracy, mocks Reuel’s solitary lifestyle and claims to be more concerned with “the ladies” than by “books nor weeping over ways and means.” Directly acknowledging his inherited privilege, Aubrey admits that he is more carefree about his studies because “[his] forefathers, forbid that [he] should ever have to work!” (7). Through this comparison *Of One Blood* is, from the onset, critiquing the structural racism that marks Reuel’s national romance as determinant upon different terms from Aubrey’s.

The ways that the novel critiques the national romance from its early pages is further exemplified by the fact that it eventually requires Reuel to leave the United States in order to achieve this romance. While, as mentioned above, Hopkins’s decision to send Reuel to Africa both reflects and produces emergent forms of internationalism particular to African American political thought in the years following both the Federal regulation of Jim Crow legislation and turn of the century U.S. imperial policy, this move is also significant when read in the context of popular forms of the genre being circulated at this time. Indeed, Hopkins herself mobilized some of these traditional genre conventions in her earlier novels, and her departure from them in *Of One Blood* is significant for the ways it enables her to articulate the internationalist vision of the novel that has been examined above. For example, while her first novel, *Contending Forces: A*

Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South, exposes the difficulties that African Americans face as they work to participate in American liberal institutions, the self-described “romance” is resolved when the novel’s male protagonist demonstrates that, with a compassionate understanding of what makes this romance uniquely “illustrative” of “Negro life North and South,” the romance can end successfully with marriage in the United States.²⁷

And, while in *Hagar’s Daughter* Hopkins presents a less optimistic vision as to how the romance can be completed given the material realities of racism in the United States, the novel still relies on the genre in order to make its point. Unlike the male protagonist in *Contending Forces*, *Hagar’s Daughter’s* male protagonist is horrified to learn about that his fiancé, Jewell, is mixed-race and the descendent of Southern slaves. Taking time to consider if he can still marry her now that he is privy to this information, he ultimately decides that his love transcends his racial prejudice. However, by the time he comes to this realization, Jewell has already passed away. The novel concludes by framing this failed romance plot as a critique of the relationship between racism and freedom. Hopkins writes: “the holy institution of marriage ignored the life of the slave, bred indifference in the masters to the enormity of illicit connections, with the result that the sacred family relation is weakened and finally ignored in many cases” (284). As the legacy of slavery still “weakens” the family twenty years after Emancipation, the novel suggests that the “result” of slavery’s violence persists beyond its formal abolition. The stakes of slavery’s

²⁷ It should also be noted that, as Susan Gillman has observed, although the romance is successful in *Contending Forces*, it concludes with the family travelling to England, leaving the U.S. rather than remaining within its borders. Gillman, Susan. *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 43; hereafter cited parenthetically. And for more on the ways that African American writers mobilized popular literary genre conventions in order to expose how African Americans were systemically excluded from U.S. liberal institutions see: Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); duCille, Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Tate, Claudia. *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine’s Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

legacy throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, then, rest in the consequences it has on the black family and the novel's failed marriage shows how racial prejudice comes between a man and woman who would have otherwise married and started a family.

Hopkins's reliance on these genres in her earlier work has indeed been criticized by literary scholars. Her adherence to bourgeois literary conventions through her adaptation of the national romance genre in *Contending Forces* and its appeal to genteel, Victorian ideals and morality, has drawn criticism from scholars such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Houston Baker, and Kevin Gaines. Baker, for example, criticizes Hopkins for privileging mixed-race characters for their light skin, and accuses Hopkins of succumbing to "white, patriarchal hegemony" in doing so.²⁸ When speaking of *Of One Blood*, Gaines argues that the novel was a "product of its time" (11), and although he does not place blame on Hopkins for some of the arguably conservative elements contained in her fiction, he criticizes *Of One Blood* for the ways it maintains racial hierarchies through its patriarchal understanding of "civilization."²⁹

However, by sending Reuel to Africa, *Of One Blood* does not merely use the genre conventions of the national romance to expose how African Americans were excluded from U.S. institutional practices. Rather, as it shows the ways that the experiences of educated African American men living in the United States exceed do not fit squarely within the limits of the genre, she abandons the nation altogether. Scholars of speculative fiction have marked the novel's break from the conventions of the national romance as indicative of its engagements with early forms of this genre. In his study on revolutionary African American science fiction and of

²⁸ Gaines, Kevin. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 25; hereafter cited parenthetically. See also Baker, Houston. *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 25; Brooks, Gwendolyn. "Afterword," in *Contending Forces*, ed. by Matthew Bruccoli (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 403-9.

²⁹ "Black Americans' Racial Uplift Ideology as 'Civilizing Mission,'" in *Cultures of United States Imperialism* ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 435, 433-55.

Of One Blood in particular, Mark Bould argues that “its narrative excess,” which comes partially through the seemingly outrageous plot twists and the “too many too-convenient visions” that help Reuel discover his ancient, royal, family history, destabilizes several conventional literary genres and in doing so “opens up the prospect of a radically re-ordered future.”³⁰ Indeed, even before Reuel’s departure to Africa, the novel breaks from some of the more conventional tropes of the national romance through its engagement with speculative sciences as Reuel is framed as a master of “*mysticism*,” or the “‘absurdities’ of supernatural phenomena” (2). Through his skill in these speculative sciences, he is able to bring Dianthe back from the dead following her train accident. Likewise, Telassar is also represented as advanced in these mystical technologies, and upon Reuel’s arrival there we learn that the kingdom has developed technology that allows people to see, in real-time, events occurring throughout the world. By showing the ways that both Reuel and the people of Telassar are able to develop science in ways unimaginable in their contemporary world, *Of One Blood* breaks from the sentimental conventions of the romance genre as it engages in with early forms of science fiction to show that Africans, and people of African descent, are capable of developing these scientific technologies.

Similarly, Susan Gillman contextualizes Reuel’s journey from the United States to Africa within a Benjaminian framework that shows how the novel breaks from the temporality of national time. While national time is often marked as singular in the romance genre, she argues that Hopkins’s Ethiopianist invocation of a mythical African past allows the text to “stop time, exposing, in a single instant, the image in and by which the past lives on in the present” (44). By conceiving of a complex and layered history of African civilization, one that precedes, coexists with, and enables a promising future for peoples of African descent, Hopkins generates a

³⁰ Bould, Mark. “Revolutionary African-American SF before Black Power SF,” *Extrapolation* 51.1 (2010): 53-81, 61.

“counterconception of time that can accommodate the disjunctions and eruptions of the race history” (45). Hopkins’s alternative temporality, Gillman contends, is significant for the ways it both rejects and revises racist narratives of progress circulating within popular American scientific discourse at this time, narratives of progress that were also demanded by the national romance genre.

And, Yogita Goyal examines the relationship between time and Hopkins’s diasporic imagination, highlighting how Reul’s mystical connection to Africa creates a transhistorical account of the black Atlantic. Focusing on how the novel employs the conventions of two theoretically contesting genres, national realism and the diasporic romance, Goyal argues that *Of One Blood* be read as part of a “black Atlantic canon” of literature that takes up “the conceptual core of the idea of diaspora: the loss of home, the meaning of memory, and the struggle to find a useable past.”³¹ According to Goyal, the black Atlantic genre allows writers like Hopkins to imagine a utopian space beyond the nation at the same time that the utopia’s implied wholeness collapses any temporal or historical differences amongst people of the diaspora. Because “nation time links past, present, and future in a march towards progress,” while “diaspora time emphasizes the breaks and discontinuities in such a movement,” Hopkins’s turn towards Africa challenges popular American progress narratives by suggesting that “barbarians can become civilized not by developing along the lines of supposedly advanced races but by recovering a primal knowledge of their own racial history” (47).

At the same time, however, Goyal’s praises do not come without critique as she observes that the novel’s representations of Africa preclude it from finding an alternative system fully liberated from U.S. racial nationalism. As the novel celebrates Africa’s ancient history and

³¹ Goyal, Yogita. *Romance, Diaspora and Black Atlantic Literature*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8; hereafter cited parenthetically.

claims that this history holds the secret needed to counter false narratives of American progress, it simultaneously reproduces essentialist arguments about African peoples. Goyal notes how, in the novel, Africa is not represented as “a viable alternative to America,” but rather serves the purpose of revealing a “deep-rooted primitive self-buried within African-Americans.” As such, rather than producing a notion of diaspora rooted in difference and hybridity, “diaspora emerges as sameness” and Africa comes to connote “an inheritance of biological qualities, defined in the language of blood, and subject to imperial tropes of discovery and conquest” (57). In this way, her novel falls short of providing a complete break from the nationalist narratives it seeks to either escape or rewrite. Rather than providing a coherent and cohesive temporal alternative to white nationalist constructions of the nation then, the value of *Of One Blood* comes through the ways it teaches us about how romanticized notions of racial hybridity have been historically linked to racial essentialist arguments.

This section focuses on what Goyal terms the “imperial tropes of discovery and conquest” (57) in the novel in order to argue that as Reuel abandons the United States, and as the novel shifts away from the national romance genre, it engages in another literary genre gaining popularity at this time: the imperial romance. I argue that *Of One Blood*'s shift in genre and turn to the imperial romance is significant because at the same time that the novel breaks from the national romance and shows the limits offered by “American” forms of freedom, it simultaneously reinscribes masculinist notions of national identity. In making these arguments I draw from Amy Kaplan's study of the historical romance. Like the imperial romance, Kaplan observes how the genre of the historical romance emerged at this moment in ways that allowed American writers and readers to “combat imagined threats to masculinity on the home front as well as abroad, and they contribute to refiguring the relation between manhood and nationhood

in a changing international context.”³² As U.S. imperial endeavors and the acquisition of new territories in the Caribbean and Pacific brought new, foreign people into the U.S. domestic sphere, these historical romances, which Kaplan observes “were the major bestsellers on the earliest published lists from 1895-1902,” often told stories that worked “to merge the narratives of liberation and domination, to narrate the new empire as consistent with the history of the republic” and “to map overseas colonies as contiguous to continental expansion” (94). Serving a dual purpose of justifying what President McKinley referred to as the U.S. imperial policy of “benevolent assimilation,”³³ and of codifying American masculinity as a specifically white masculinity defined in contrast to that of the racialized “other” who resided in the U.S. colonies, these genres took the place of the earlier national romances in order to mediate this relationship within the historical context specific to this moment in U.S. imperial history.

The genre’s relationship to this imperial history is significant given Hopkins’s critiques of turn of the century imperialism, as mentioned above. While Hopkins was critical of U.S. imperial policies in the Philippines, by engaging with this genre she reproduces the same imperialist rhetoric being taken up by both McKinley and Roosevelt. In her book *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Gail Bederman provides a cultural history of the emergence of certain forms of masculinity in the context of different U.S. imperial contexts on the North American continent, in the Caribbean, and in the Pacific. Providing a reading of Roosevelt’s 1901 speech “National Duties,” in which Roosevelt argues that “exactly as each man, while doing first his duty to his wife and children

³² Kaplan, Amy. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 95; hereafter cited parenthetically.

³³ McKinley, William. “The Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation” 1898, last modified (n.d) <https://kahimyang.com/kauswagan/articles/1379/today-in-philippine-history-december-21-1898-president-mckinley-issued-the-benevolent-assimilation-proclamation>, accessed 14 May 2019.

within his home, must yet, if he hopes to amount to much, strive mightily in the world outside his home, so our nation, while first of all seeing to its own domestic well-being, must not shrink from playing its part among the great nations without,” Bederman argues that, in the context of U.S. empire, masculinity became redefined in ways that meant that “laboring only for his hearth and nation was not enough to a real man. Virile manhood also required the manly American nation to take up imperialistic labors outside its borders, just as manhood demanded individual men to labor outside the home.”³⁴ While, as Bederman rightfully notes, Roosevelt’s definitions of masculinity, and the types of men who were expected to perform this nationalist spectacle, were decidedly marked in racial terms, *Of One Blood* still reinscribes elements of this ideology through the ways it frames Reuel’s “discovery” of, and eventual coronation in, Telassar.

Similarly, while Mark Bould’s celebration of the revolutionary potential of the speculative forms that Hopkins engages with in *Of One Blood* positions the novel within a longer history of what he calls “revolutionary African American SF,” science fiction as a genre was also intimately related to imperial culture at the turn of the century. In his study of the relationship between science fiction and British imperial history, John Rieder argues that the scientific discourses framing the historical moment in which science fiction was popularized were largely concerned with “evolutionary theory and anthropology” in ways that harkened back to the racist projects of social Darwinism. He argues that

the work of interpreting the relation of colonialism and science fiction really gets under way, then, by attempting to decipher the fiction’s often distorted and topsy-turvy references to colonialism. Only then can one properly ask how early science fiction lives and breathes in the atmosphere of colonial history and its discourses, how it reflects or

³⁴ Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 188, hereafter cited parenthetically.

contributes to ideological production of ideas about the shape of history, and how it might, in varying degrees, enact a struggle over humankind's ability to reshape it.³⁵

While the novel concludes with the premonition about the continuous invasion of imperial powers on the African continent that I have noted above, as Reuel embarks on his trip to Africa, the novel remains uncritical of the scientific and anthropological mission that brings him there in the first place. As Reuel first steps foot on the continent, he describes the land in Orientalist terms noting that although the "cities of the Orient seen at a distance" evoke a sense of "eternal enchantment..., set foot within them" and "the illusion vanishes and disgust seizes you. Like beautiful bodies they have the appearance of life, but within the worm of decay and death eats ceaselessly" (*Of One Blood* 77). Similarly, the city of Tripoli is described as:

the capital of a truly barbaric state, virgin of improvements, with just enough dilapidated abandon, dirt and picturesqueness to make the delight of the arts. Arabs were everywhere; veiled women looked at the Christians with melting eyes about their wrappings. Mohammedanism, already twelve centuries old, has, after a period of inactivity, awakened anew in Africa, and is rapidly spreading. Very unlike the Christians, the faithful of today are the same fervid Faithful of Omar and Mohammed. Incredulity, indifference, so widely spread among other sects are unknown to them (*Of One Blood* 79).

Represented as a barbaric place, physically, morally, and religiously, the novel participates in a colonial narrative of the continent that Rieder observes as typical of the science fiction genre. And, although the novel attempts to reclaim the glory of the continent's past through Reuel's "discovery" of Telassar, it still reaffirms this colonial narrative in two significant ways. First, by

³⁵ Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 3.

describing the contemporary continent as a place of death and decay, it suggests that the Africa of Reuel's own historical moment is regressing backwards while the Western world moves forward in scientific discovery. And secondly, although Telassar is represented as scientifically and socially advanced in ways that the Western world is not, by sending Reuel there to take the throne and return Telassar to its ancient glory the novel reproduces colonial narratives by suggesting that the kingdom's redemption is contingent upon the arrival of this American national.

By engaging with both these historical romance and science fiction genres, *Of One Blood* reproduces masculinist forms of nationalism in ways similar to that seen in *Imperium in Imperio*. As Kaplan notes, the genre conventions of the historical romance worked to reaffirm American, white masculinity as the epitome of chivalry and heroism. In these novels the "woman serves both as the damsel in distress for the hero to rescue and as the eyes of the world for which masculinity is performed" (93). In the novel Dianthe initially serves the role of symbolic femininity that enables Reuel to critique the ways that U.S. racism forecloses the African American male from performing this role. As mentioned above, Reuel first comes into contact with Dianthe when a train crash unexpectedly leaves her in Cambridge in a coma. Although Aubrey initially deems her condition so poor that he warns Reuel "your science won't save her. The poor girl is already cold and stiff" (*Of One Blood* 27), Reuel steps up to the task and uses his innovative research, which uses a combination of biological and "mystical" sciences, to nurse her back to life. Dianthe awakens through periodic trance-like states during which she begs Reuel "Oh! Dearest friend! hasten to cure me of my sufferings. Did you nor promise at that last meeting? You said to me, 'You are in trouble and I can help you'" (*Of One Blood* 39-40). Before

Reuel's departure, then, the novel uses this doctor/patient relationship between Dianthe and Reuel in order to represent Dianthe as the helpless mistress reliant upon Reuel to save her life.

And while, as mentioned above, the novel argues that his failure to perform this role of masculine hero occurs because of racism in the United States, his adventures abroad continue to frame his romantic crisis in masculinist terms dictated by the conventions of both the national and imperial romances. Although the novel, on the one hand, invokes Ethiopianist political and spiritual frameworks in order to reclaim African history as one worthy of celebration, the ways it does so simultaneously reify masculinity as the medium through which this celebration can and must occur. While the historical romances that Kaplan studies, such as Rebecca Harding Davis's *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897) and Edwin Caskoden's *When Knighthood was in Flower* (1898) mediate society's anxieties through narratives that tell of male heroes' past victories over "barbarian" others, Reuel's "discovery" of Telassar serves a similar purpose. For one, the novel suggests that Reuel is only motivated to enter Telassar after he believes that his domestic romance to have failed. Before he wanders off-site from the dig he has been hired to work on, he comes to believe that Dianthe has passed away in his absence. Having received no response to the letters he has sent her because, as we learn later, Aubrey has intervened and prevented them from being delivered, he only then feels ready to embark on the voyage into Telassar. He decides that, without Dianthe, he had no reason to live and "he would lose himself in the pyramid" (*Of One Blood* 110). Only after he thinks his marriage can no longer occur, then, does Reuel wander away from his colleagues and stumble upon Telassar. This journey into Telassar is then framed in the context of his failed romance, and the emasculation that comes through his inability to fulfill this romance in the United States.

And, as the novel charts Reuel's initial entry into Telassar, he presents the kingdom as a mystical place, one that would be upon first contact, feared, again harkening back to the colonialist rhetoric of the imperial or historical romance. As Reuel first enters the pyramids under which Telassar lies, the novel states "the American man is familiar with many things because of the range of his experience, and Reuel Briggs was devoid of fear, but in that moment he tasted the agony of pure, physical terror" (*Of One Blood* 112). At this moment Reuel is framed as an "American," marking him as distinct and separate from those in Telassar. This marking of him as an "American" allows him to enter the pyramid as an explorer embarking into a unknown world, much like the masculinist tropes used to narrate the American man's journey into unchartered imperial territory. And, in contrast to the way that the novel shows him unable fulfill this masculine role within the United States, in Telassar Reuel is welcomed and treated, literally, like a king. He is told that the people of Telassar believe he "shall restore to the Ethiopian race its ancient glory" (*Of One Blood* 114), and this allows Reuel to twice emerge as a savior. The first, of Dianthe earlier in the story, and the second of an entire hidden kingdom once he "discovers" Telassar. Both the mysteries and the backwardness of the kingdom, then, are situated in ways that allow Reuel to emerge as the American hero, an adventurer who braves the unknown in order to discover the secret that will allow him to reclaim the masculinity that he lost due to racism in the United States.

Conveniently, as Reuel spends time in Telassar he learns about their ancient traditions, one of which physically marks him as their king.³⁶ With this discovery, a new romantic opportunity opens itself to him as he learns that the people of Telassar are ruled by a virgin female monarch named Candace who sits on the throne for fifteen years awaiting the arrival of

³⁶ Reuel is identified as their king via a birthmark in the shape of a lotus lily which serves as a symbol for Telassarian royalty.

this king. If the king does not arrive within this period, a new virgin queen becomes “Candace” and the waiting continues. Shortly after learning about his role as king, Reuel meets the current “Candace.” Enchanted by her beauty, and believing that, with Dianthe gone, “the world outside held nothing dear to [him],” he immediately agrees to “fulfill [his] destiny” (*Of One Blood* 138-9), marry her, and assume his position on the throne. As Reuel accepts that his romance in the United States has failed then, the conditions of the imperial romance allow him to reclaim the masculinity lost by offering a solution through his discovery of the ancient kingdom.

Two months pass as Reuel takes time to acquaint himself with the culture of Telassar, but he soon learns that Dianthe is still alive and living with Aubrey at his family’s plantation in Maryland. He also learns about Aubrey’s schemes to send him to Africa so that he can steal Dianthe from him. Upon learning this information, Reuel plans to return to the United States to rescue her. At this point, the novel’s celebratory Ethiopianist revision of the imperial romance takes a dark turn as it shifts settings from the glorious Telassar to a decaying Southern plantation with a landscape “as still as death” (*Of One Blood* 189).³⁷ Before leaving to rescue Dianthe from Aubrey, however, the leaders of Telassar inform Reuel of information that ultimately causes his marriage with Dianthe to fail. Reuel, Aubrey, and Dianthe, are all three are half-brothers and sisters, children of Mira, a slave on Aubrey’s father’s plantation. Although Aubrey was raised as his father’s legitimate child, his lotus lily birthmark confirms that, despite what he previously knew about his ancestry, he is also Mira’s child. Reuel now knows that his marriage is illegitimate, since his newly discovered familial relationship to Dianthe makes her now “[his] wife, and yet not [his] wife” (*Of One Blood* 163). As both his sister and his romantic interest, the novel suggests that Dianthe, the novel’s African American female protagonist, cannot fully fulfill

³⁷ As Goyal has observed, at this moment the text begins to resemble the Gothic. See *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (27).

her role as the African American male's romantic interest. Thus, his relationship with Dianthe is doomed to failure. Nevertheless, he returns to Maryland with hopes of rescuing her from Aubrey.

The events that unfold on his visit to Maryland are what ultimately permit Reuel to permanently relocate to Telassar and fulfill the novel's Ethiopianist prophecy. By the time he arrives at the plantation, he finds Dianthe already dead, poisoned by Aubrey in retaliation for failing to be a subservient wife. A few days later, Aubrey himself dies by suicide, after being ordered by a Telassarian mystic who has accompanied Reuel back to the United States, to commit "death by thine own hand" (*Of One Blood* 192). With the deaths of Dianthe and Aubrey, the U.S. race melodrama concludes, and Reuel returns to Telassar to unite with Candace and assume the throne.³⁸ It is only after both Aubrey and Dianthe die, however, that he is able to fulfill the Ethiopianist prophecy, and thus the novel suggests that internationalism must come at the expense of the domestic romance.

In order to fully make its internationalist turn then, the text requires the failed marriage between Reuel and Dianthe. However, the internationalism projected in this Ethiopianist text provides Reuel with an option that remains impossible in any of Hopkins's domestic fiction. In the domestic novels, the heterosexual love stories at the center of the novels' romances remain focused on a clearly defined relationship between a single man and a single woman. The romance either succeeds, as in the case of *Contending Forces*, or comes close to succeeding, as in the case of *Hagar's Daughter*. Regardless of the marriage's success or failure, though, through the marriage plot Hopkins is able to articulate a critique of the relationship between

³⁸ For more on the "race melodrama" see Susan Gillman's *Blood Talk*. Here Gillman argues that African American writers, including Griggs and Hopkins, use the race melodrama "to historicize race consciousness itself and, thus, to reveal the ideological and geopolitical contours of racial thinking" (8). In doing so they revise "the melodramatic mode" so that it "becomes relational rather than divided and divisive, imagining a range of crosscutting, contradictory alliances and conflicts across groups variously defined, not only by race, gender, and nation, but also by competing political, economic, and sociocultural identities and differences" (6).

racism and the domestic sphere in the United States. However, as her imagination turns towards the international, Hopkins finds a different type of a solution to the failed domestic marriage. *Of One Blood*'s internationalism allows for an alternative possibility, and Reuel is able to complete the marital goal of the romance. It comes, however, at the expense of the novel's African American female characters.

V. Conclusion

Through Dianthe's tragic death and Reuel's subsequent, permanent relocation to Telessar, *Of One Blood* exposes how U.S. racism prohibits African Americans from participating in U.S. liberal institutions. By centralizing the marriage plot, much as she does in all of her novels, Hopkins shows how access to these institutions remains necessarily different for African American women than it does for those who are white. Decades after slavery, and in the wake of Jim Crow, the sexual violence central to the institution was still a part of everyday life, and its legacy could be seen in the complicated family webs that nearly destroy her novel's romance plots. In this way, Hopkins provides a feminist revision of the romance novel, one which remains attentive to the ways race in the United States is still articulated by and through the idealized constructions of the "family."

Significantly, however, as *Of One Blood*'s national romance fails, another succeeds. Reuel marries Candace, a virgin whose position in the underground city has protected her purity and "made her the embodiment of all chastity" (*Of One Blood* 137). With Dianthe gone, Reuel can now permanently relocate to Telessar and marry his virgin queen who, because of Telessar's isolation from the modern world, is untouched by the horrors typical of the gendered characteristics associated with U.S. racial violence. After Dianthe's death, the legacy of slavery

can now be relegated to the past, and Hopkins's internationalist utopia can move forward into the future, closer to achieving its goal of producing "a dynasty of dark-skinned rulers, whose destiny should be to restore the prestige of its ancient people" (*Of One Blood* 139).

However as she abandons the hope of finding this freedom within the United States, the alternative she proposes does not map out easily. Her speculations about searching for and finding freedom outside of U.S. borders requires a reevaluation of the role of gender in this new internationalist world order. While gender, race, and nation are clearly articulated to one another in her domestic fiction, her internationalist novel dismantles these articulations, sacrificing the critique of gender that remains so central to her domestic fiction. This happens, I argue, because of the centrality of marriage to her definition of freedom. Despite her efforts to liberate Reuel from the discrimination he experiences in the United States, in this international context marriage still remains the site through which his freedom is defined. The novel's inability to unbind its definition of freedom from its articulation to marriage is what causes the domestic romance to fail, revealing the limits of an internationalism that remains bound to the bourgeois national systems it looks to liberate itself from. The novel's failure to incorporate Dianthe into Reuel's internationalist utopia serves as evidence for this. Although Hopkins's work traditionally highlights the violences particular to African American women's experiences in the United States, *Of One Blood's* internationalism requires an erasure of this history. As such, the narrative allows for Dianthe's death, and it is at this moment that the internationalist utopia is able to succeed.

At the same time that the novel fails to incorporate African American women into its utopian future, however, it does important work in its investigation of black internationalism as an alternative, resistant force working against U.S. racial nationalism. And while, as mentioned

above, many twentieth century black internationalists failed to account for gender in their radical speculations at all, Hopkins's use of the romance genre allows her to expose the gendered particularities of U.S. racial violence at the same time that she imagines international solidarities. Considering this in the context of the threat she posed to Booker T. Washington, and the connection between domestic racism and U.S. imperialism of which she was keenly aware, *Of One Blood* becomes a critical site for investigating the relationships among gender, empire, and radical internationalism.

Chapter 4

Black International Anti-Fascism: Imperialism, Genre, and Romance in George Schuyler's *Black Empire*

I. Introduction

In the ninth installment of *Black Empire* (1936-1938),¹ upon the request of his editor W.G. Nunn, George Schuyler introduces his readers to the character of Patricia Givens.² Referred to throughout the remainder of the text by her nickname “Pat,” she enters the story at a moment when the novel’s male protagonist, Carl Slater, is feeling overwhelmed by the mission he has been unwillingly recruited to serve. Up until her appearance, Carl has doubts about both the methods and goals of the Black Internationale, a secret organization lead by the sinister Dr. Henry Belsidus. The Internationale’s audacious use of violence, and its ambitious political goal of reclaiming Africa from European imperial forces, both frightens and confuses Carl, who, as far as the reader knows, has little personal experience with racism in the United States. Yet, following Pat’s entry into the story, Carl’s relationship to the Internationale is transformed. With the prospect of a romantic relationship with Pat eclipsing his seeming ambivalence towards the organization’s political mission, Carl remains invested in the movement, eventually serving as a principal figure in its successful war against Europe.

¹ *Black Empire* was published in sixty-two installments in the *Pittsburgh Courier* between November 1936 and April 1938. The first thirty-three installments were published under the title of “The Black Internationale: Story of Black Genius Against the World,” and the final twenty-nine were published under the title “Black Empire: An Imaginative Story of a Great New Civilization in Modern Africa.” The two stories were published together in book form for the first time by Robert Hill and Kent Rasmussen in 1991 under the title of *Black Empire*.

² In their afterword to *Black Empire*, Hill and Rasmussen note that after the publication of the story’s eighth installment Nunn wrote to Schuyler: “Incidentally, your story ‘The Black Internationale’ is going over mighty big. If you will just go along now and inject the woman angle, I think it will be one of the best serials we have ever run.” In the next installment, Patricia Givens appears and the romance between her and Carl, which is the focus of the second part of this chapter, begins. Hill, Robert A. and R. Kent Rasmussen. “Afterword” in *Black Empire*, edited by Robert A. Hill and R. Kent Rasmussen (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 159-310, 268; hereafter cited parenthetically.

In this chapter I examine the role of Pat, the female revolutionary figure in George Schuyler's *Black Empire*. Unlike Carl, Pat is represented as a committed member of the movement, willing to both risk her own life and kill enemies in battle in order to see the successful rise of the Internationale. In ways unique for black nationalist literature of the early twentieth century, Pat holds a traditionally masculine role. She flies a bomber jet and oversees the Internationale's secret operational sites in both United States and in Liberia. While Carl is represented as the hopeless romantic in their relationship, Pat consistently puts her romantic life on hold, arguing that "romance can wait" until the revolution has been completed and European powers have been removed from the African continent.³ In what might seem to be a reversal of gender roles typical for a traditional romance story, Pat's bravery and fearlessness serve as an inspiration to the otherwise ambivalent Carl. As such, I argue that Schuyler's representations of Pat are central to considering the relationship between black internationalism and gender.

Yet, despite these unconventional representations of Pat, *Black Empire* in many ways reads like a typical black internationalist text. Indeed, at the time of its publication, many of the revolutionary ideas depicted in the story were amongst the most popular articulations of radical internationalism mobilized by African American intellectuals at the time. In particular, the rise of interwar fascism sparked a new wave of international radicalism specific to this historical moment, one that *Black Empire* openly engages with. While, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Italian military's failed invasion of Ethiopia in 1896 produced a new form of international Pan-Africanist sentiment in the form of Ethiopianism, Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 sparked another wave of international solidarity. This solidarity emerged from the belief that peoples of the African diaspora had the responsibility to assist the independent

³ Schuyler, George S. *Black Empire*, 1935-6, ed. by Robert A. Hill and R. Kent Rasmussen (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 56; hereafter cited parenthetically.

nation in its resistance against European invasion. This ambitious call to support Ethiopia held even more weight given that, in 1935, Ethiopia was still the only nation on the continent to have successfully thwarted imperial invasions during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This reinvigorated affiliation with Ethiopia manifested through the creation of multiple organizations across the United States and United Kingdom that looked to provide financial and military support to the Ethiopian army. Across Western and Southern Africa, port workers refused to work on Italian ships, and in the British Caribbean West Indian intellectuals pressured the British government to provide support for Ethiopia.⁴ While in *Black Empire* Italy remains merely one of the Black Internationale's many European targets, a point which I will return to later, the Internationale's intentions of waging biological warfare throughout the Italian peninsula would have undoubtedly resonated with members of these various movements.

Yet, until recently, *Black Empire* has received little scholarly attention. This, I suggest, is partially because of the figure of Schuyler himself. Over the course of his career Schuyler's political affiliations spanned the realm from radical socialist to staunch conservative. While as a young man he served as the educational director for the Socialist Party in his hometown of Syracuse, by the 1960s Schuyler was an active Cold War Era conservative, writing for the right-wing newspaper the *Manchester Union Leader* and running as a congressional candidate for the Conservative Party of New York in 1964. And while it was not uncommon for interwar leftists to shift dramatically toward the right following the end of the Second World War, it was not necessarily a conclusive, given fact either. For example, W.E.B. Du Bois, whose lifetime spanned roughly the same stretch and period as Schuyler's, died a Pan-Africanist hero in Ghana in 1963 after the United States first revoked and then later refused to renew his passport.

⁴ Robinson, Cedric "The African diaspora and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis," *Race & Class* 20.2 (1985), 51-65; hereafter cited parenthetically.

Schuyler, however, seemed to spark controversy throughout his career, despite the political party he chose to align himself with at any given time. In 1964, Schuyler was made infamous for his scathing critiques of Martin Luther King Jr., only one month before King received the Nobel Peace Prize. In this particular instance, he accused King of being “some sable Typhoid Mary infecting the mentally disturbed with perversion of Christian doctrine and grabbing fat lecture fees from the shallow-pated.”⁵ While these critiques came during the era of Schuyler’s conservative affiliation, he still found himself wrapped up in controversies regarding race and politics earlier in his life, even during moments when he was more affiliated with the political left. In 1926, for example, at the beginning of his prolific career with the African American newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier*, he published an article in *The Nation* titled “The Negro-Art Hokum” in which he argued that the idea of “Negro art” was a fiction and absurdity created by “eager Apostles from Greenwich Village, Harlem, and the environs...whose hobby is taking races, nations, and movements under their wing.” In this article Schuyler criticized the capitalist nature of literature marketing at the same time that he argued the idea of a distinct African American literature supported the platforms of “Negrophobists” who were desperate to prove that there were ““fundamental, eternal, and inescapable differences”” between the races.⁶ Written only one year after the publication of Alain Locke’s anthology *The New Negro*, the text often credited with spearheading the Harlem Renaissance, Schuyler’s critique of the relationship between art and race framed him as an enemy of Harlem Renaissance writers extending from Du Bois to Langston Hughes. Indeed, this article drew a response one week later from Hughes who

⁵ Quoted in Ferguson, Jeffrey B. *The Sage of Sugar Hill: George S. Schuyler and the Harlem Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 3; hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁶ Schuyler, George S. “The Negro-Art Hokum,” *The Nation*, 122 (June 16 1926): 662-3. Accessed June 24 2019. *Proquest*.

accused Schuyler of irresponsibly discrediting the harsh circumstances that lead to the production of a distinctly African American art form.⁷

This chapter argues that, given the volatility and inconsistency of Schuyler's own political beliefs and affiliations, to rationalize his absence from conversations on black internationalism on the basis of his politics alone is insufficient. On the contrary, I suggest that his political iconoclasm positions him as a pivotal figure when interrogating black internationalism in the interwar period. In arguing for an examination of the revolutionary politics of *Black Empire*, I call for a historicization of black nationalist thought that speaks to the revisionist work done by historians such as Nikhil Pal Singh and Robin D.G. Kelley. Singh, for example, warns against the tendency of liberal historians to pigeonhole black nationalist thinkers into categories that envision an ideological split between the terms liberal/integrationist and radical/separatist/blackist. He suggests that this categorization elides the difficulties that black freedom struggles have encountered as they look to "separate liberal demands for tolerance and individual rights from group demands for recognition and social equalization."⁸ Similarly, Kelley argues that scholars who dismiss those dreaming of an African homeland of being either "impractical" or overly romantic lose valuable insight into the radical ways that freedom has been imagined throughout African American history.⁹ While Schuyler's romanticization of an African homeland is, as I discuss below, somewhat more vexed than that of his contemporaries, both Schuyler's fiction and nonfictional writing, as well as his biography, reveal the ways in which he was committed to racial liberation, albeit in comparatively unconventional ways. In

⁷ Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation*, 122 (June 23, 1926): 692–4. Accessed June 24 2017. *Proquest*.

⁸ Singh, Nikhil Pal. *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 46.

⁹ Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 16.

light of the arguments put forth by these historians, I argue that Schuyler's controversial political career positions him as an integral figure to investigations of black internationalism precisely because he was disconnected from more mainstream nationalist groups and the ideologies inevitably attached to them.

In this chapter I investigate what *Black Empire* reveals about a racial internationalism that emerged in a period where the imminent possibility of a Second World War held a particular set of stakes within the African American community. To readers of the *Pittsburgh Courier* these stakes were both material and ideological. On the one hand, the outbreak of World War II produced anxieties about the fascist invasion of Eastern Africa. Circulating alongside of these anxieties, however, were ideological dreams about the dissolution of U.S. and European empires. Indeed, the outbreak of war might also lead to a crisis amongst Western nations that would lead to decolonization throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. As these thinkers worked to articulate an internationalist politics that spoke to the condition of the African continent and African peoples across the diaspora more specifically, they developed their own forms of leftist politics that diverged from some of the interracial internationalisms that were consolidated in the previous decade. In thinking about black internationalism of the 1930s as both diverging from and reformulating the leftist politics to which it had been previously in conversation with, I suggest a reexamination of Schuyler's work under a rubric of what I term "black internationalist anti-fascism." This term, I argue, does the work of theorizing how black internationalism in this moment worked to articulate a relationship between capitalism, fascism, and global black liberation. Examining *Black Empire* historically within this context helps to uncover the complexities of black internationalist thought at this time.

Rather than dismissing *Black Empire* on the basis of its politics alone, then, I take an approach that interprets the contradictory politics of the text as indicative of the formal limits inherent to expressing a radical, racial internationalism. Returning to an examination of Pat, this chapter argues that *Black Empire* reveals the ways that this black internationalist anti-fascism requires a politics of gender in order to fully express itself. At the same time that Schuyler articulates liberalism, capitalism, and fascism as racial projects that are equally complicit with Western modernity and the liberal political philosophies contained within its ideology, the text also reveals how this revolutionary imagination can only be articulated through a heterosexual romance plot. This romance necessarily subverts the otherwise radical political agendas put forth through the text's representations of revolution. In this chapter I trace the multiple genre shifts made across the text's sixty-four installments in order to show the ways the revolution remains dependent on this romance. I argue that an investigation into the text's engagement and play with genre reveals the formal limits of articulating this radical internationalism.

II. *Black Empire* and Black Interwar Anti-fascism

Black Empire tells the story of the Black Internationale through the perspective of Carl Slater, an otherwise politically ambivalent reporter working for the fictional newspaper the *Harlem Blade*. The story opens with Carl stepping into a bar for a drink after a long day of work, and it is here that he first sees Dr. Henry Belsidus. Belsidus attracts Carl's attention mainly because of the woman he is with, a woman whom, because she is white and apparently upper class, Carl describes as "like dozens one sees in the better parts of New York City but seldom see in Harlem" (*Black Empire* 3). Once Belsidus leaves the bar, Carl follows them and subsequently witnesses Belsidus murder his female companion in a dark doorway. In a moment of panic, Carl

shouts out to Belsidus to stop, and is then kidnapped and forced to serve as Secretary for the Black Internationale.

A broad summary of the Internationale's political project shows how *Black Empire* reflects the complexities of Pan-Africanist sentiment circulating in the interwar period. Belsidus's goal of creating a "Negro nation, all-powerful, dictating to the white world" (15) perhaps most notably resonates with Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association's (UNIA) ambitious plans for African Americans to settle Liberia as a Pan-Africanist utopia.¹⁰ Along with these shared theoretical and organizational goals, Belsidus's methodology also mirrors Garvey's through his use of spectacular political rallies. Garvey's infamous thirty-day-long convention, which he held at Madison Square Garden in 1920 and which hosted peoples of African descent from throughout the world, involved him wearing "cap and gown of purple, green and gold," being addressed by convention delegates as "Your Majesty," and receiving applause so energetic that "five minutes passed before he could raise his voice" over the crowd.¹¹ Although on a significantly smaller scale,¹² Belsidus holds a similar, and just as opulent, Pan-Africanist conference. The fictional Internationale's meeting is hosted in a ballroom with "a long, wide table covered with green baize cloth," at the head of which stood "a great, black, high-backed chair, elaborately carved and seemingly laid with silver" (28). Before Belsidus enters the room the lights are turned off, a gong sounds three times, and the lights come on with Belsidus "garbed as ever, in faultless and appropriate attire" sitting on his throne. And, much like descriptions used to describe Garvey's performativity, upon reflecting on

¹⁰ Hill and Rasmussen also note the ways that Belsidus serves as an exaggeration of Garvey, taking his plans one step further by completing Garvey's unfulfilled promises to pay off Liberia's debt to the Firestone Company ("Afterword" 277).

¹¹ "Cheering Negroes Hail Black Nation." *The New York Times*, (August 3, 1920). Accessed June 24 2017. *Proquest*.

¹² Garvey hosted 400,000,000 delegates, Belsidus only 50.

Belsidus's tactics Carl describes the "characteristic Belsidus gesture" as a "stunt of excellent theater" (*Black Empire* 140). Both the ritualistic and performative elements of Belsidus's Internationale speak to that which Garvey was best known and critiqued for.

Yet, at the same time, *Black Empire's* critiques of European imperialism reflect theories of internationalism held by some of Garvey's most well-known political rivals in the Pan-Africanist community. Indeed, Garvey's vision of creating an "African empire that would both mimic and rival European imperialism" was counterintuitive to the theoretical approaches posited by many radical leftist groups that were developing at this time.¹³ Among these groups there were several, and certain claims made, and practices advocated, by Belsidus allude to ideas characteristic of a number of them. In terms of its secrecy and militaristic nature, the Internationale models the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), a radical leftist secret organization founded by a group of African Americans and West Indians living in Harlem. Like the ABB, the Internationale is invested in keeping its operations covert, and it utilizes secret radio programs, airports, and agents organized by its white recruits in order to do so. As Cedric Robinson observes, the ABB and the UNIA were at odds with one another for much of their existence, with the ABB working alongside of the CPUSA to overthrow Garvey.¹⁴

Thematically, *Black Empire's* internationalism also speaks to Du Bois's *Dark Princess*, a novel which several scholars have noted reflects the politics put forth in Lenin's "Black Belt Thesis."¹⁵ In this 1920 proposal Lenin argued that the African American struggle in the United

¹³ See Goyal, Yogita. *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2; hereafter cited parenthetically.

¹⁴ See Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1983). The UNIA and AAB disagreed primarily around the AAB's "dependence and domination by the CPUSA." Eventually, according to Robinson, the AAB was absorbed into the CPUSA.; hereafter cited parenthetically (215-7).

¹⁵ For more on Garvey and Du Bois, see Lewis, David Levering. *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2009), 416-29. Here Lewis documents Garvey's volatile relationship with black communists in the

States constituted its own national struggle, and as such their fight should be taken up by global communist organizations working in solidarity. Like *Dark Princess*'s international organization *Black Empire*'s Internationale brings together delegates from various colonized spaces in Africa and the Caribbean. While the racial and geopolitical makeup of Belsidus's meeting resembles that of the Pan-African Congresses, a series of conferences hosted in Europe and the United States between 1919 and 1944,¹⁶ Belsidus's plan to create a "great Negro nation" (*Black Empire* 15) speaks to the self-determination arguments made by the "Black Belt Thesis."

And, while Schuyler's references to Garvey are somewhat satirical, his engagement with Communist International (Comintern) ideology appears to be more earnest. For one *Black Empire*'s references to communism are used to expose the inconsistencies inherent to imperialist logic, and the joke consistently comes at the expense of what he calls "the white world" (*Black Empire* 127). As the Internationale initiates its plan to incite war amongst the European nations, it sinks a British ship in Italian waters, leaving the Italians with no one to blame but "Communist sabotage." Rather than pinning this act to a specific group either within or outside of a particular communist organization, the Italians blame it on an abstract "communism," in turn leaving the British and French to believe that Italy is the guilty party (*Black Empire* 127). Through the workings of the Internationale, then, Europe finds itself on the brink of a World War under false

United States from 1918 to Garvey's arrest in 1922. For more on Du Bois, *Dark Princess*, and the Black Belt Thesis, see Weinbaum, Alys Eve. *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). 209; hereafter cited parenthetically. Gilroy, Paul *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. (New York: Verso, 1993), 144. Here, Gilroy argues that *Dark Princess* "anticipates and affirms a global political relationship" and that it articulates a global politics that links "anti-colonial politics and the development of African-American" political culture.

¹⁶ For more on the Pan-African Congresses see Lewis, pages 411-450. Lewis examines Du Bois's role as a primary organizer of the Congresses. Convening for the first time in 1919, the initial goal of the Congress was to place demands on the League of Nations regarding African decolonization, and its ideology was explicitly anti-communist. Torn by disagreements amongst members across national lines, the Pan-African Congresses failed, in the end, to produce an aggressive decolonization plan. As Lewis argues, in the end, the Congresses proposals were viewed as conciliatory and "watered down."

notions as to who the true enemy is. Furthermore, despite Schuyler's "sardonic" representation of Belsidus, he still recognizes that European anti-communism stems mostly from racism and bigotry within capitalist countries, rather than from actual communist practice. Belsidus argues that it is "anti-Semitism," "anti-Catholicism," and a more general "strong feeling against aliens" that has led to this surge in "anti-Communist propaganda" (*Black Empire* 78). Although the Internationale does not take these specific causes up in its own project, Belsidus theorizes anti-communist rhetoric as a tool used by imperialist nations to divide those living in its margins. In these ways, *Black Empire* participates in a critique of what Yogita Goyal calls Garvey's vision of creating an "African empire that would both mimic and rival European imperialism" (2).

Yet, despite the clear connections between *Black Empire* and the Comintern's internationalist race projects of the 1920s, the particular challenges facing leftist political groups in the 1930s greatly shape the representations of European imperialism, and resistance to it, in the text. While *Dark Princess* was published in the same year that the Third International adopted its Black Belt Thesis, *Black Empire*'s first installment came in the *Pittsburgh Courier* in November 1936, just one year after the Comintern's seventh, and final, congress. As Cedric Robinson observes, at this moment black activists began to question the Comintern's commitment to its racial projects after it disbanded the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers in 1933, and after it was revealed that the Soviet Union had made trade agreements with Italy during the Italo-Ethiopian War (*Black Marxism* 261). And, in a decisive blow to the anti-imperialist initiatives that had gained credence during the previous decade, following 1935 the Comintern put its critiques of race and imperialism on hold as its attention shifted towards organizing the popular front against fascism. I argue that the relationship between the Comintern and black internationalist organizing is important for precisely these

reasons, as it shows how black internationalist efforts of the interwar period emerged explicitly in the context of the collapse of the Comintern.

For black internationalist leftists, the centrality of race to the Comintern's ambitious projects was not always as self-evident as its 1928 adoption of the Black Belt Thesis might make it seem. As Robin Kelley argues in *Freedom Dreams*, the incorporation of racial politics into the Comintern came largely through the demands of its black members. For example, the ABB as a group, and Claude McKay as an individual, all worked to place pressure on the Comintern, encouraging the organization to articulate an internationalist communism that fully understood the deeply racist origins of global capitalism. According to Kelley, it was only after the successful rise of these African Americans within the Comintern that the CPUSA themselves finally endorsed the Black Belt Thesis (*Freedom Dreams* 47). Schuyler's own personal critiques of organized communist groups in the 1930s, and his suspicion of the veracity of their commitment to combatting racism, thus reflect a skepticism that had already begun to divide different communist parties along the question of race. Schuyler's most straightforward critique came, perhaps, through his attack on the CPUSA following its controversial intervention into the Scottsboro Trial, an Alabama Supreme Court case in which nine African American men were wrongly accused of raping two white women. In the wake of the crisis Schuyler accused the CPUSA of "making the race relations in Alabama worse by preying upon ignorant Negroes" after they intervened on the side of the defense. Schuyler berated the Communist Party for claiming that the NAACP's response to the Scottsboro accusations were insufficient, arguing that these critiques misrepresented the NAACP and thus played "into the hands of capitalists by [using] tactics that inflame the white workers against the black."¹⁷ For Schuyler, then, as for

¹⁷ Schuyler, George S. "Views and Reviews." *The Pittsburgh Courier*, (January 16 1932). Accessed June 29 2017. Proquest.

other African Americans groups and individuals committed to racial justice projects, the 1930s augured in a period of distrust regarding the relationship between communism and black liberation movements

Thus, when, with the rise of European fascism, various national leftist groups merged with more centrist-leaning ones in order to organize the Popular Front against fascism, this was no surprise for skeptics such as Schuyler who had already been doubtful of both the CPUSA's and the Comintern's commitments to centralizing issues concerning racial self-determination in their anti-capitalist projects. By positioning Schuyler's 1932 critiques of the Communist Party within a longer history of black diasporic critique of international communism, I situate Schuyler at the center of debates that have long interrogated the relationship between the Communist Party and the rise of the Popular Front. Michael Denning and Bill Mullen, for example, have done important work to show how radicalisms emerging from many of the communist movements of the 1920s shaped Popular Front politics that were consolidated in the mid-1930s. Michael Denning describes the Popular Front as a "radical social-democratic movement forged around anti-fascism, anti-lynching, and the industrial unionism of the CIO [Committee for Industrial Organizations]." ¹⁸ Bill Mullen complicates this romantic conception of a fully integrated and universal Popular Front politics by showing how the Chicago Popular Front's "radical" politics were shaped by and through the pressure placed on the movement by its African American communist members. Bringing to the Popular Front a racial politics that reflected the material realities of life under Jim Crow violence, Mullen argues that African American participation in

¹⁸ Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997), xviii.

the movement was not merely part of a universal, anti-fascist political force, but rather African Americans themselves held integral roles in radicalizing the movement.¹⁹

Robin Kelley complicates these ideas further by showing how African American involvement in interwar communist movements not only influenced the politics of the CPUSA, but in fact undermined the universalizing goals of communist politics. Kelley argues:

the Communists' position on the 'Negro Question'...and its own interpretation of 'proletarian realism' unintentionally created an opening for African Americans to articulate nationalist ideologies in spite of the Party's formal opposition to 'Negro nationalism.' In other words, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, black nationalism(s)-especially as expressed in culture- had much more in common with American communism than most scholars have admitted.²⁰

By noting the ways that black nationalism and communism became “unintentionally” aligned with one another, Kelley highlights how black nationalisms were often antithetical to interwar radicalism, not only in the context of the Popular Front, but earlier during the Comintern period as well. Histories of black nationalism such as Kelley's show how the material realities of race relations in the United States had always created both racial nationalisms and internationalisms that exposed the limits of communist politics as a universal ideology. Indeed, rather than being shaped or molded by the Communist Party, “African Americans who joined the Party...were as much the creation of American communism as of black nationalism; as much the product of African American vernacular cultures and radical traditions as of Euro-American radical

¹⁹ Mullen, Bill. *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); hereafter cited parenthetically.

²⁰ Kelley, Robin. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 105; hereafter cited parenthetically.

thought” (*Race Rebels* 105). It is within these complex articulations of race and international radicalism that I situate Schuyler’s critiques of both international communism and liberal anti-fascism.

I coin the term “black internationalist anti-fascism” in order to define this space in between leftist politics and racial nationalist projects particular to the specific historical and political crisis surrounding Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia. This term helps illuminate the ways that the collapse of the Comintern brought to the surface forms of racial nationalism that had already developed both outside of and against the paradigms offered by 1920s leftist politics. In developing this term I pull from Cedric Robinson’s 1983 essay “Fascism and the Intersections of Capitalism, Racialism, and Historical Consciousness.” Here Robinson examines how the rise of Italian fascism incited what he calls “a premature anti-fascism” amongst the black American masses. By exposing the ways that Western capitalist regimes financially supported fascist governments beginning with the rise of Mussolini, Robinson disrupts myths typically disseminated in progressive narratives of history, myths that view twentieth century fascism as an aberration to capitalist modernity.²¹ If, as he argues in *Black Marxism*, capitalism is defined as a social relation that has always both relied on racial differentiation and been articulated to racial exploitation, then fascism exists as just another moment or movement in the longer history of capitalism. By showing the material gains that prominent figures ranging from bank mogul J.P. Morgan, to political and social reformer Franklin Delano Roosevelt, reaped from supporting fascism politically, culturally, and economically in its early stages following the rise of Mussolini, Robinson interrogates ideology that assumes fascism has always been viewed as evil by mainstream bourgeois society. For African Americans, however, the rise of fascist Italy held a

²¹ Robinson, Cedric. “Fascism and the Intersections of Capitalism, Racialism, and Historical Consciousness” *Humanities in Society* 6 (Autumn 1983), 325-491; hereafter cited parenthetically.

significantly different meaning. In these communities Mussolini's targeting of Ethiopia as a site for imperial conquest had always marked Italy, and fascism, as the enemy ("Fascism and the Intersections of Capitalism, Racialism, and Historical Consciousness" 325). For African Americans, then, this meant that anti-fascism, anti-racism, and anti-capitalism were always necessarily linked.

Italian aggression in Ethiopia also created new symbolic meaning surrounding the continent across otherwise dissident diasporic political groups. This was true for Schuyler as well, and his support for Ethiopia was arguably more noticeable given his notoriety as a critic of nearly all factions of early twentieth century racial nationalist and internationalist thought. As Robert Hill notes, in this moment both his fiction and his non-fiction articulated forms of racial nationalism that he had previously been notorious for criticizing.²² Between 1933 and 1939 Schuyler published a series of novellas in the *Courier* that treated Africa in ways that deviated from the typical treatment of the continent in Harlem Renaissance literature of the 1920s. In these stories Schuyler represents Africa more as an "agent of change" rather than as simply a symbol of ancient glory ("Introduction" 6), a trope typical of Ethiopianist literature from the turn of the century. In his *Courier* editorials he praised the African American community's political and economic mobilization for Ethiopia, claiming that it "delights the heart" to see them mobilizing as such.²³ He also advocated for financial support to Ethiopia and viewed "the defeat of Ethiopia and its consequent, dismemberment" as "a very damaging blow to the prestige and aspirations of colored people everywhere."²⁴ For Schuyler, the rise of fascism was also linked to

²² Hill, Robert. "Introduction" in *Ethiopian Stories*, edited by Robert A. Hill (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 14, 1-40; hereafter cited parenthetically

²³ Schuyler, George S. "Views and Reviews." *The Pittsburgh Courier*, (June 20 1936). Accessed June 29 2017. *Proquest*.

²⁴ Schuyler, George S. "Views and Reviews." *The Pittsburgh Courier*, (February 29, 1936). Accessed June 29 2017.

longer histories of racial capitalism in the U.S., stretching back to slavery. In a 1936 essay titled “It Has Happened Here,” Schuyler claims that “the simple truth of the matter is that we already have fascism here and have had it for some time, if by fascism one means dictatorial rule in the interest of a privileged class, regimentation, persecution of racial minorities and radicals, etc.”²⁵ For Schuyler then, the Italo-Ethiopian crisis thus served as both an opportunity to garner diasporic mobilization in support of the nation, as well as moment for re-interrogating longer histories of U.S. race and class relations.

Black Empire in particular generates its anti-fascism by exposing the ways that Europe’s seemingly diverse political powers remain united around their imperial projects. Indeed, the very invocation of the Communist International through the name of Belsidus’s organization, the “Black Internationale,” embodies the racial consciousness of the time by positioning “black” politics as central to its internationalism. Produced in the context of an emergent anti-fascist consciousness across the black diaspora, Schuyler’s critique of Europe in *Black Empire* is indicative of a historical consciousness that articulates the relationships among imperialism, capitalism, and fascism in ways that highlight the limits of interwar communism as embodied in the creation of the Popular Front. This particular historical moment allowed Schuyler to interpret fascism as a political formation that included all nations with colonial interests in Africa.

Black Empire reaches this understanding of “black international anti-fascism” partially by representing Europe as a unified enemy in the fight for African self-autonomy, and, as such, it becomes difficult to distinguish one European power from the other. For example, although at one point the British are framed as “an even worse enemy of black people” (*Black Empire* 120), the text does little to confirm what is exceptional about British imperialism. Indeed, later Carl

²⁵ Quoted in Hill’s Introduction to *Ethiopian Stories*, 38.

asks: “how much less than that could we accomplish against Britain combined with the rest of the white world?” (*Black Empire* 179), implying that Europe might unite to fight the newly established African empire, creating an even more powerful enemy. As such, ultimately the Internationale’s goal is for all of “Europe to [meet] its death bed” (*Black Empire* 138), and this includes the fall of French, British, and Italian. True to this claim, in the Internationale’s final push to remove imperial forces from the continent during the counter-resistance narrated in the second story, France and Italy seem to be, in fact, allied. Schuyler marks the nearing end of the war at the moment when, “at both [Tunis and Tripoli], several Italian and French warships and transports have been sunk” (*Black Empire* 255). As the war concludes, all national or political distinctions between the two European nations becomes completely obscured.²⁶

These nations, whose relationship in mainstream histories of the Second World War is typically narrated as that of “enemies,” become allied in *Black Empire* because of their mutual imperial interests in Africa. In the Internationale’s final attempt to push Europe off of the continent Belsidus announces that “only Ethiopia, Eritrea, and French, British and Italian Somaliland remained” (*Black Empire* 130), calling attention to the investments that all three of these nations had in the region. Hill and Rasmussen have argued that several of the text’s inconsistencies, which include changes between various places, names, and locations across the two novella’s installments, derive from the unpolished nature of the serial form’s week-by-week production. I argue, however, that these very inconsistencies allow Schuyler to erase any political distinctions that might exist between Europe and the different national formations contained within it.²⁷ The fluidity with which he moves in between his claims about various European

²⁶ Britain is only absent from the war at this point in the story because the Internationale has already defeated them on their own turf after releasing virus-infected rats over London.

²⁷ In their editorial statement to the 1991 edition of *Black Empire*, Hill and Rasmussen acknowledge the ways things such as dialect, spelling, and location shift and remain inconsistent across the text’s sixty-four installments. While

powers suggests that the particular distinctions amongst European political formations becomes erased in the contest of their mutual imperialist interest in Africa. By framing the success of the Internationale as coterminous with removal of all European forces from the continent, the text eliminates national difference in order to frame the two competing forces as a united “Africa” versus a united “Europe.”

Furthermore, *Black Empire* frames the connections between U.S. and European imperialist interests as related to their capitalist investments on the continent. As such, it organizes the Internationale’s resistance around creating an economically self-sufficient African empire. In the Internationale’s initial congress at the beginning of the first story, Belsidus asks the various Internationale delegates: ““Why was Africa subjugated? Why were India and Malaysia subjugated? Why do the dark peoples in South America the West Indies and the United States remain in bondage?” He answers his own question with the assertion that “first, there was a lack of knowledge of the resources of the white man and of how to properly organize and exploit our own resources” (*Black Empire* 34). Creating an entirely economically independent Africa, then, remains central to the Internationale’s plans for claiming dominance over Europe. The Internationale looks to both reclaim its resources and to then use these resources in ways that exceed the West’s capabilities. In perhaps its most intricately detailed description of the Internationale’s operations, Pat takes Carl on a tour of the organization’s farms and shows him the scientific developments they have made in harvesting food, steam, and electricity. They have designed a “liquid chemical food” for plants that leaves “not a thing...to chance,” ensuring that

some of these differences are more trivial than others, such as the spelling of the character Martha Gaskins’s last name (which varies between “Gaskin” and “Gaskins”), others hold more importance precisely for the ways they reveal how little significance Schuyler placed on differentiating between certain people and locations. For example, in between the first and second book, the Internationale’s capital moves from Nigeria to Liberia, suggesting that the precise location of the capital is less important than the fact that the capital is on the African continent. Hill, Robert A. and R. Kent Rasmussen. “Editorial Statement” in *Black Empire*, edited by Robert A. Hill (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 1991): xvii-xx.

“there is no plant disease, no poor distribution of food elements, no excess or lack of light” (*Black Empire* 49). With these products, the Internationale prepares to wage covert economic warfare against Europe by creating commodities that “white people can’t equal” (*Black Empire* 49). The Internationale’s focus on both establishing a self-sufficient economy and on infiltrating Western economies shows what Schuyler presumed to be the relationship between economic exploitation and the subjugation of black people.

As discussed above, during a time of rising doubt concerning the relationship between liberal and leftist political economies, anti-imperial struggle, and the rise of the far right, Schuyler suggests that the differences typically thought to separate the Allied powers from their enemies in the Second World War might not be all that pronounced. As such, *Black Empire* creates an emergent interpretation of the political and economic factors that distinguish one side from the other. For the Internationale, the particularities of European governmentality become insignificant in light of their mutual imperial interests on the continent, allowing *Black Empire* to articulate a form of anti-fascism that situates anti-imperialism at the core of its political project.

III. The Romance Plot and International Revolution

At the same time that *Black Empire* articulates this emergent radical racial and economic politics, there are several inconsistencies present in the text that subvert the radical representations of anti-fascist, anti-imperial struggles shown in the story. As mentioned above, Schuyler has always held a contradictory and multifaceted position within African American literary studies, and literary critics’ thoughts on *Black Empire* have not escaped the range of accusations that Schuyler himself faced. In claiming that *Black Empire* represents an emergent radical politics, I deviate from scholars who treat the text as no less controversial than the

contentious political debates and affiliations that have marked his career as problematic and/or conservative. Perhaps most bluntly, Mark Thompson argues that *Black Empire* itself contains a “fascist aesthetics” as “Belsidus fights fascism with fascism itself...by replacing one fascist dictatorship with another.”²⁸ Yogita Goyal’s critiques are slightly less scathing. She concedes that Belsidus’s internationalist vision is complicated and highlights how it resonates with theories from across the interwar internationalist spectrum, at times resonating with Garvey, and at others mirroring Garvey’s well-known critics, including Du Bois. Yet, she still warns against the inclination to celebrate Schuyler as a “closeted radical”.²⁹ Belsidus, she argues, is a colonizer, not a liberator (“Black Nationalist Hokum” 26). Indeed, despite the critiques of European imperialism that Belsidus provides through his representations of revolution, the Internationale’s methods and strategies do contain harsh and, at times, malicious schemes. Belsidus treats execution casually. In the first installment, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, we see him strangle a woman after she fails to complete a mission assigned to her, and throughout the story Belsidus executes both black and white members of the Internationale when he suspects them to be traitors.

However, such arguments, particularly Thompson’s, run the risk of reproducing the type of critique warned about at the beginning of this chapter. Instead of dismissing *Black Empire* for the imperialist sentiments it reproduces, I suggest instead that by situating the text historically, both within the interwar political climate as well as within the African American literary tradition, we can better see how *Black Empire* was deeply invested in upending the racialized order of the world. For one, to suggest that Britain was just as much a threat as fascist Italy

²⁸ Thompson, Mark Christian. *Black Fascisms: African American Literature and Culture Between the Wars* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

²⁹ Goyal, Yogita. “Black Nationalist Hokum: George Schuyler’s Transnational Critique,” *African American Review* 47.1 (Spring 2014), 21-36, 23; hereafter cited parenthetically.

would undoubtedly irk, if not down-right offend, Roosevelt-era democrats who at the time were working to negotiate their relationships with their allies on the continent by balancing both their support and their fear of fascism with their isolationist politics. And, along with the historical context under which the text was produced, I also argue that a study of the text's formal representations of revolution show how the text expresses an emergent radical politics. Reading the text's exploration of genre helps to show how it was on the verge of providing a revolutionary aesthetics, yet it also reveals the ways in which it was limited by the forms available to it. As such, focusing on the text's engagement with multiple literary genres opens room for an investigation into the formal limits that the text encounters as it tries to tell the story of the creation of a unified African nation.

As mentioned above, part of the text's disjointedness relates to the week-to-week production of the serial publication and to the fact that Schuyler was not necessarily thinking about the story's plot development more than a week out from its publication. Rather than discrediting the text for these reasons, however, I suggest that a study of the text's engagement with genre has much to offer attempts at interrogating both the conflicting plot points and politics contained within the text. Rather than dismissing the text's discontinuities as a byproduct of the clumsy nature of serialized story-telling, I argue that investigating the multiple genres that the text experiments with reveals the ways that it simultaneously tries to express the emergent politics delineated in the above section, yet runs into difficulty as it tries to find the genre for doing so. Considering Schuyler's work through the lens of genre makes sense given his record of critiquing the broadly defined genre of African American literature, a category gaining more credence and popularity beginning a decade before Schuyler's *Black Empire*. In the "Negro-Art Hokum" Schuyler interrogated the idea that a particular group of people might have a distinct or

innate artistic form belonging to them. Likewise with *Black No More*, the novel for which he is best known, Schuyler wrote the first African American satirical novel, a form of writing which deviated from the conventional realist narrative often expected from literature written by African Americans.³⁰ As Darryl Dickson-Carr notes, satire in African American literature has typically been “the primary tool of the iconoclast” who was willing “to provide the critiques of his or her community that might otherwise be elided” (Dickson-Carr 18), a thus unsurprising form for the misanthropic Schuyler to be drawn towards. Yet these engagements with alternative genres were not always smooth. Across its sixty-four installments Schuyler’s ambitious story of the Black Internationale’s plans to instigate an international revolution against European imperial powers in Africa often shifts abruptly in both content and form as it moves between different genre conventions. In this section I trace the moments where the text’s genre conventions shift, and argue that these clumsy transitions show how *Black Empire* struggles to extend beyond the limits offered through the formal constraints of literary narrative.

Black Empire opens as a detective fiction story. In the first scene Carl enters a Harlem bar, exhausted from a long day of work at the newspaper, looking to grab a drink before heading home to catch some sleep. In the story’s opening pages, the only given information that might mark Carl as African American at this point is his location in Harlem and his observation that the woman Belsidus enters the bar with is white. In a notable break from his earlier novel *Black No More*, in which the protagonist Max Disher is described in the novel’s first paragraph as having “Negroid features” which “had a slightly satantic cast,”³¹ Carl is not described in racial terms, nor does racism in the United States seem to affect his daily life. While Max Disher is rejected in

³⁰ Dickson-Carr, Darryl. *African American Satires: The Sacredly Profane Novel*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 57; hereafter cited parenthetically.

³¹ Schuyler, George. *Black No More*, 1931 (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2011), 1; hereafter cited parenthetically.

the first chapter of *Black No More* and is deeply insulted when she tells him “I never dance with niggers” (*Black No More* 5), we do not see Carl as a victim of racism in the opening pages of the story, nor do we see any acts of racism toward a black character throughout the rest of the story. As Nick Aaron Ford and H.L. Fagget have argued, black magazine writing in the interwar period often allowed African American writers to experiment with different genres, and for presenting “Negro characters outside the familiar stereotypes.” These stories, they argue, “portray [African Americans] in their normal activities as American citizens, neither as paragons of virtue nor as personifications of ignorance, laziness, stupidity, and vice.”³² And, as Bill Mullen shows in his study of Carl Murphy, the African American editor of the Baltimore based *Afro-American* newspaper, short fiction often served as “a balm for black readers beset with daily struggles the ‘news’ sections couldn’t help but remind them of” (Mullen 129). Along with his deployment of satire then, Schuyler’s experimentation with atypical genres is unsurprising given both his criticisms of the increasing desire to categorize writing by black Americans under the rubric of “African American literature,” as well as in light of his scathing attacks on the racial nationalism associated with the popular “race men” of the day.

Among the experimental genres that Schuyler engages with in *Black Empire*, detective fiction in particular holds an important place in American literature more broadly. In his study of the genre Michael Denning considers its development across the nineteenth century, observing how the detective’s role as “the professional outsider” allows for this character to move fluidly across both social and ethnic groups, adopting various disguises to conceal his identity and to effectively perform his work.³³ Schuyler’s decision to have his protagonist enter the story as this

³² quoted in Bill Mullen’s *Popular Fronts*, 129.

³³ Denning, Michael. *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso, 1998), 145.

detective figure is notable considering the surge in racially conscious writing emerging at this time. As Schuyler was writing towards the end of what would come to be considered the “Harlem Renaissance,” a period often defined by a heightened attentiveness to the representations of racialized subjects in literature produced by black writers, it is noteworthy that *Black Empire* uses none of the typical literary racial markers as he introduces Carl, nor does he frame him as a victim of racism. As such, Schuyler’s use of the detective fiction genre conventions allows him to create a protagonist seemingly unconcerned with, or ambivalent towards, racism. This produces a distance between Carl and the Black Internationale, an organization which he only discovers through his position as an investigative reporter.

Significantly, Carl’s more distanced position as a reporter advances the plot, and it is through his reporting that we learn about the details of Belsidus’s plans. Most of the detail we learn about the characters in this first part of the story comes in the form of a “Question and Answer” between Belsidus and Carl, with Carl consistently incredulous when learning about the extreme measures that Belsidus is willing to take in order to ensure the success of the Internationale. Furthermore, after his kidnapping Carl initially pushes back against the doctor after he realizes that Belsidus assumes his participation, reminding him that “I haven’t said yet that I want to have anything to do with this” (*Black Empire* 11). Carl is also both overwhelmed by Belsidus’s ambitious mission and scared of his methods, claiming to be horrified by his seemingly casual threats of murder. Carl is forced to participate in the Internationale under the threat of death, and while he eventually becomes more convinced by Belsidus and his schemes, admitting that his “respect for the bloodthirsty, fanatical revolutionist grew,” he still fears that he would have no way of escaping should he “sometime want to get away” (18). Schuyler’s adherence to the conventions of popular detective fiction allow Carl to maintain this outsider

perspective on the Internationale for the first nine installments. While Carl's hesitancy to comply with Belsidus comes partially as a response to Belsidus's extreme measures, this hesitancy also allows him to be characterized as someone concerned neither with racial liberation nor with the radical internationalist project into which he is unwillingly recruited.

However, Carl's investments in the Internationale shift with Pat's introduction into the story. Significantly, this happens at a moment when the text's genre conventions also abruptly transition from detective fiction to an international romance. While *Black Empire's* anti-fascist critique of Western capitalism both enables and requires an international imagination, the ways that the story is forced to negotiate genre as it does so provide critical insight into how speculations about the international are formally bound to the national romance. In approaching *Black Empire's* negotiation of its internationalist politics through a study of the romance genre I draw from Michelle Stephens's *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*. While Stephens does not address Schuyler specifically, she does important work in considering how black internationalism in the early twentieth century "shadows" the colonial and imperial histories that precede it. Viewing the colony as a site that represents the cultural and political hybridity that has so often been a product of empire, Stephens investigates the masculinist international imagination of Caribbean male intellectuals in order to argue that "blackness...as much as any other racialized consciousness during this period, was an imaginary burdened by the national" systems they looked to resist.³⁴

For Stephens, and, I argue, for *Black Empire*, this political hybridity and its conceptualization of the national as a "burden" become exposed most clearly through the male

³⁴ Stephens, Michelle. *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.

figures' international imaginations and the gender politics through which these imaginations are mediated. As the Caribbean male intellectuals who Stephens investigates throughout her book tell "black global stories and world histories that embody black political desires in specifically gendered and sexualized constructions of the race" (Stephens 8), Schuyler's reliance on certain genre forms expose the limits of his own ability to imagine a revolutionary space divorced from the national boundaries he looks to escape. As Pat is introduced to the story, Carl's distanced and more critical position shifts and he becomes invested in the Internationale's mission principally through his infatuation with Pat. He falls in love with her at first sight and is "aquiver with excitement" when he learns that she will be his tour guide as the two travel together from New York to Mississippi to learn about the Internationale's various operations. Now, expressing more excitement than concern, Carl's questions turn towards Pat and away from the inner workings of Belsidus's organization. Carl wonders: "Who was she? What was her background? What interest did she have in this bloody movement? What was she to Belsidus?" (*Black Empire* 41).

With Pat's entry into the story Carl's fears of Belsidus are replaced with his desire to see the Internationale succeed so that he and Pat can marry and start a family.³⁵ After touring the Internationale's air hangars in Westchester County with her, he confesses that he is "more interested in the girl than [he] was in the hangars" (*Black Empire* 42), and after spending a day on the organization's liquid chemical farm he admits that he "lay awake for a long time thinking about Dr. Belsidus and the Black Internationale, about the brilliant colored men and women he had assembled about him, about his spy system, his criminal acts, his fanatical plans for an international race war. But chiefly I thought about Pat. And with her face before me I fell asleep"

³⁵ While, as mentioned in the chapter's opening, Pat's appearance came at the suggestion of Schuyler's editor, I argue that Nunn's request shows how both the audience and editors alike recognized the centrality of the romance to the novel, and Schuyler himself seemingly agreed. Further, I suggest that it also shows the ways that the story would be illegible without the heterosexual romance story attached to it.

(*Black Empire* 51). No longer the skeptical, moralistic reporter who unequivocally objects to Belsidus's use of "cold-blooded murder" (*Black Empire* 11), Carl's dreams of marrying Pat enable him to commit himself as an active member of the Internationale.

From her first entrance into the story Pat defers Carl's attempts to court her and these deferrals in turn keep Carl interested in the Internationale. After Carl initially confesses his love to Pat she responds by stating "we mustn't speak of such things. There's too much to be done" (*Black Empire* 51-2). While Pat's statement does not necessarily imply hope for their future relationship, Carl interprets this as meaning that there is a "possibility of her reciprocating [his] feelings" once the revolution is completed, and as such is kept invested in the Internationale's mission (*Black Empire* 52). The following day Carl reminds Pat about her feelings for him, and she again defers by telling him "there's too much to be done, and such a short time in which to do it. Romance can wait. Forget about it." When Carl interrogates her further and asks "do you love anyone?" Pat "smiled mysteriously" and admits "maybe" (*Black Empire* 56). Again, it is both the demureness with which she responds and his hope for a future relationship with her that motivate Carl to stay involved.

While Carl's overly persistent attempts to court Pat might seem aggressive in ways that mirror contemporary critiques concerning toxic masculinity, it is also worth noting the somewhat transgressive ways in which Pat herself is represented in these early moments of the Internationale's development. Indeed, from her entry into the story, Pat is represented as a militaristic revolutionary, a type of femininity that was undoubtedly unique for literary representations of women in black internationalist movements at this time. Although the conclusion of the first World War ushered in an era that redefined American middle-class women's relationships to culture and politics, until recently the historical contributions of black

women to racial liberation movements have also been relatively understudied. In the last two decades literary scholars have done important work to show how both black nationalist and internationalist literature operated in ways that often either erased women's participation in movements and/or revealed these movements' reproductions of patriarchal understandings of masculinity.³⁶ In light of these critiques, Schuyler's decision to highlight Pat's central role in the Internationale's operations might be read as revolutionary. Indeed, Pat flies a bomber jet and is adept at problem-solving and evaluating strategies related to battle and war. Through these representations of Pat's military might, and through her repeated rejections of Carl's romantic passes, Pat becomes viewed as the model of a loyal and active member of the revolutionary movement.

Yet, despite these seemingly radical representations of Pat, the text's shift into the genre of romance precludes the possibility for her radicalness to fully materialize. While Pat's allure keeps Carl invested in the Internationale, the Internationale's success becomes entirely predicated upon their relationship. The ways in which their relationship becomes bound to the Internationale's mission opens room for a productive discussion into the relationship between genre, gender, and internationalism. In drawing these connections, I pull from theories of the "romance" that consider the genre within longer histories of the African American literary tradition. Scholars of African American literary studies have long examined the hybrid forms that African American literature takes as it works to both resist the conventions expected of it and as writers begin to deprivilege the value held in "reality imitated in the text." As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has observed, at the turn of the century African American writers began to

³⁶ See, for example, Edwards's work on Paulette Nardal in the Francophone diasporic context in *The Practice of Diaspora*, Stephens's *Black Empire*, and Susan Kay Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum's collection on Du Bois in *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

disrupt the expectations that African American writing must realistically reflect the harsh conditions under which it was produced. As such, they began to experiment with different genre forms. The rhetorical decisions they made through their deployment of genre techniques held less appeal to white liberal benefactors who still expected black literary production to serve as an “implicit testimony to [the writer’s] humanity.” Through the work of “formal revision,” or the search for a “third term” that explained the space between “a profoundly lyrical, densely metaphorical, quasi-musical, privileged black oral tradition on the one hand, and a received but not yet fully appropriated standard English literary tradition on the other,” genre experimentation held an important role in black literary written expression at this particular moment in African American literary history.³⁷ While *Black Empire* might not represent these “profoundly lyrical” elements that Gates discusses through his study of writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, the text still rebukes the formal call for the types of realist literature that had been expected of African American literary production in earlier moments.³⁸

In her work on transnational black literature from the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries, Yogita Goyal builds on Paul Gilroy’s formulation of the “black Atlantic” in order to argue for literature that speculates about transnational solidarity across the African diaspora to be

³⁷ For more on this, see: Gates Jr., Henry Louis Gates. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); hereafter cited parenthetically. In this foundational work Gates traces the debates that shaped representations of African Americans in literature beginning with literature produced by enslaved subjects in the eighteenth century. Up through the end of the Civil War, he argues, the assumed function of African American literary production was to imitate reality, and, as such, black writers wrote “almost exclusively about their social and political condition as black people in a society in which race was, at best, problematical” (186-9). Around the turn of the century, however, this assumed function became debated as African American writers began to consider the role of human experiences that extended beyond the material conditions of racism in the United States.

³⁸ It should also be noted that *Black Empire* is frequently brought into conversations about African American literary form through conversations concerning African American science fiction. For more on this see: Bould, Mark “Revolutionary African-American SF before Black Power SF,” *Extrapolation* 51.1 (2010).

categorized under the rubric of “black Atlantic literature.”³⁹ For Goyal, this term does the work of explaining the formal tension between realism and romance that emerges as black thinkers from the United States and Caribbean begin to speculate about diaspora and internationalism in the context of both the European imperial conquest of Africa, as well as in light of the historic diasporic participation in African resistance during this moment. The tension inherent to this distinct literary form, according to Goyal, centers around the dual struggle of, on the one hand, the impulse to express “political ambition” in realist ways, and on the other, the desire to represent the “wild fantasy” of the romance of diaspora (*Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* 7). For Goyal, this “wild fantasy” embodies itself through representations of racially inverted political orders, as well as through spectacular performances of race, such as those most commonly affiliated with Garvey. Similarly, Sonnet Retman investigates a hybrid genre of documentary and satire that emerged in African American writing during the Great Depression. According to Retman, this hybrid form allowed African American writers to concede to Depression-era expectations that African Americans be represented as “a pastoral resource integral to the nation’s healing and crucial to the brokering of new deals.” At the same time, however, Retman notes how the same writers of these documentary genres began experimenting with satire in order to protest these very demands. As such, by using a hybrid form that included both documentary and satire, African American writers could address the call of white liberal advocates of New Deal policy at the same time that they used satire to critique the political grounds that lead to the very existence of these expectations.⁴⁰

³⁹ In *The Black Atlantic* Paul Gilroy defines “the black Atlantic” as a cultural formation that “can be defined, one level, through the desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” (19).

⁴⁰ Retman, Sonnet. *Real Folks: Race and Genre in the Great Depression* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). 2; hereafter cited parenthetically.

In my study of Schuyler's *Black Empire* these discussions of genre hybridity in the context of the interwar period are important for understanding the formal limits Schuyler encounters as he works to represent his politics of "black international anti-fascism." As mentioned above, *Black Empire* engages with several genres, shifting abruptly amongst them at various moments in the Internationale's development. Not merely a dual hybrid form of realism and romance as in the case of Goyal's "black Atlantic literature," Schuyler instead writes across multiple genres, and, as I show below, breaks from the realist form altogether. This allows him to represent a complex vision of the political crisis affiliated with the rise of fascism, the invasion of Africa by European imperial forces, and the simultaneous mobilization of the Popular Front. In *Black Empire* the complex representations of diasporic resistance also complicate the often romanticized versions of transnational or international solidarity that Goyal discusses in "black Atlantic literature." For example, by opening as a detective fiction story, Belsidus is, early on, represented as a villain, rather than as a hero of African decolonization. He is described as "sardonic" eight times throughout the entire text,⁴¹ and even after Carl has bought into and committed himself fully to the movement, Belsidus is still characterized as the "sinister, suave, inscrutable black man who had once ministered to New York's...white aristocracy" (*Black Empire* 145). Unlike Garvey, who, according to Goyal, was able to "infuse a realist sense of injustice with the fantasy of a grander destiny," a skill which in turn permitted him to coalesce in popular memory as the "race's prophet" (*Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* 3), Belsidus has little redeeming qualities, and his methods remain a source of criticism throughout the text.

⁴¹ See pages 9, 11, 12, 16, 24, 77.

These pseudo-satirical representations of Belsidus are linked to Schuyler's impetus to criticize the expectations that African American struggle be represented through realist tropes. Just as Retman argues that Schuyler's rejection of urban protest realism emerges through the form of satire in *Black No More*, I argue that the hybridity of *Black Empire* at specific moments of genre transition in the text shows the ways he resists this call to engage with realism. As mentioned above, although *Black Empire* tells the story of a massive black resistance movement against the white nations of the world, we receive little information as to Belsidus's, or Carl's, motivations for inciting and/or participating in the revolution. Neither character speaks specifically about their own experiences with racism or racial injustice at any moment throughout the text, a literary choice noteworthy when considering how realism often asked writers to represent the "heavy burden of veracity" (Retman 39). However, at the same time this rejection of realism does not mean that certain plot elements did not reflect real ambitions for African decolonization. For example, although Belsidus is represented as murderous villain, his desire to remove European forces from the continent would not be outlandish in the context of the diasporic solidarity produced surrounding the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. These extreme representations of Belsidus, then, leave a reader wondering if the text is simply a "cynical joke" played upon them ("Afterword" 260) because of how it forces them to sympathize with some elements of Belsidus's plan, or if, through its rejection of certain realist elements, it is a more earnest critique of white liberalism and/or African dictatorship.

The tension that is generated as the text struggles to find the form through which to represent the revolution expresses itself most concretely at the moments of formal transition in the text. For example, while Carl is still learning about the Internationale, he expresses hesitancy and fear about their ambitions, as noted above. After he has been committed to the mission for

some time, however, and after the text adopts the formal elements of the international romance, a topic which I discuss in more detail below, he speaks of the Internationale's feats with more equivocation. Schuyler opens the first installment of the second part of the story with Carl deliberating on the Internationale's recent success in removing Europe from the continent. Carl reflects:

starting with a handful of loyal, brilliant Negroes, he had carefully built up the greatest revolutionary organization the world had ever seen: an organization so ruthless in attaining its objectives that even I, Carl Slater, who, as the doctor's secretary, knew more about this ruthlessness than anyone except the doctor...sometimes even I shivered at the memory of the past (*Black Empire* 145).

In this brief passage alone, Carl vacillates as he wants to celebrate the radical, "brilliant" potential of the Internationale at the same time that he feels he must criticize Belsidus's methodology. Unwilling to dismiss his earlier misgivings about Belsidus's "ruthlessness," as well his own "memory of the past," *Black Empire* remains unable to commit to the genre of realism, the genre of romance, or black internationalism. And, by rejecting realism in this way, the text shows how the formal tensions inherent to representations of the international are not merely limited to the strain between romance and realism.

These multiple genre shifts taken throughout the text also reveal the ways in which Schuyler struggled to represent the romance of diaspora alongside of his radical political agenda. In many ways Carl's role as the "professional outsider" allows Schuyler to maintain a political ambivalence towards the Internationale's operations, enabling him to reject the romance of the text. For example, at the convention that Belsidus holds early on in the text's first story, we learn

of the Internationale's operations through Carl, who maintains a distanced ambivalence towards its methods and inner workings. His observations are purely descriptive:

I turned to study the strange group of Negroes Belsidus had summoned from the ends of the earth and who now sat around chatting in strongly accented English. Some were tall, hawkfaced and reddish brown. Others were short, stocky and black as midnight. Some were brawny, others were slight and scholarly in appearance. While a few showed little trace of racial admixture, others were obviously possessed of some Caucasian or Mongolian ancestry (*Black Empire* 27).

This stands in sharp contrast to Du Bois's *Dark Princess*, where, similarly, early on in the story, the novel's protagonist Matthew Townsend finds himself unexpectedly at a meeting of delegates representing various nations of the "darker world." Not quite as ambivalent about the meeting as Carl is, Matthew reflects, while sitting in this room next to the princess and the delegates working for her, that he "for the first time since he had left New York...felt himself a man, one of those who could help build a world and guide it."⁴² Although this claim is partially tied up in his admiration for the princess in ways that, on the surface, might resemble Carl's infatuation with Pat, unlike Carl, Matthew's relationship to this experience is bound to his previous, emasculating experience with racism. This allows for a more spiritual, romanced interpretation of diaspora than that afforded to Carl in his initial introduction to international revolutionary organizing.

Yet, although *Black Empire*'s representations of political internationalism work against these romanticized versions of diaspora, the text deploys other elements of the international romance, ones which manifest themselves in problematic ways. I argue that this comes through

⁴² Du Bois. W.E.B. *Dark Princess*. 1928. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995), 18; hereafter cited parenthetically.

most clearly in the text's representations of Pat, who enters the story as the romanticized foil to Belsidus. As noted, Pat's entry into the story comes at a moment when the text makes an abrupt genre shift away from detective fiction and as it begins to play, albeit perhaps self-consciously and critically, with the conventions of the international romance. As such, her romantic relationship with Carl propels the story forward, allowing the romance of the international to become mediated through her romantic relationship with Carl. While Schuyler avoids romanticizing Belsidus in the ways delineated above, it is precisely the very ways in which Pat contrasts the Internationale's leader that makes her appealing to Carl. Upon meeting her, Carl admits that "it was this contrast between her and the sinister physician that so startled me" (*Black Empire* 40), and his infatuation with her eventually allows their relationship to serve as a symbol for the success of the revolution in ways that undermine her characterization as a radical female revolutionary.

Perhaps most notably, *Black Empire's* dependence on the romance genre is revealed with the conclusion of the first book. After months of unsuccessfully courting Pat, "The Black Internationale" ends with the defeat of Europe and the coterminous unification of Pat and Carl as a romantic, married couple. As the newly betrothed stand together listening to Belsidus's victory speech in the Internationale's capital in Kakata, Liberia, Carl tells us:

Pat was almost overcome with emotion. She squeezed my hand tightly and dabbed at the tears on her cheeks. Then she leaned toward me with that softness of the eternal feminine in her brown eyes. I wanted to kiss those pointing lips right there before a thousand pairs of eyes, but I contented myself with one whispered word: 'Tomorrow.' She smiled and whispered back: 'Yes, love. Tomorrow we, like Africa, shall be united, after so long. United forever' (*Black Empire* 142).

In this moment the completed romance between Pat and Carl comes to serve as a metaphor for the success of the Internationale and the defeat of the capitalist Western powers. It is only after the African continent “united” that Pat and Carl may unite in matrimony. With the Internationale’s mission accomplished, Pat’s professional role as the committed revolutionary no longer prohibits her from acting upon her romantic feelings. In this way, *Black Empire*’s problematic invocation of the international romance is similar to Alys Weinbaum’s critique of the genre in *Dark Princess*. Here, Weinbaum argues that Du Bois’s articulation of an international solidarity amongst the “darker races” of the world must come through the romance between Princess Kautilya and Matthew. Because Matthew’s “internationalist consciousness is bound up with his love for the princess and the movement in which she was involved,” the romance between the African American Matthew Townsend and the Indian Princess Kautilya serves as a “useful political tool, as a propagandistic narrative that inextricably binds the fight to end white world domination through international anti-colonial alliance with a globe straddling love affair” (202). Like the self-described “romance” of *Dark Princess*, and despite its rejections of the formal restrictions of the genre, *Black Empire* begrudgingly relies on the love story in order to articulate a successful international revolution.

However, while the first book concludes with the reunification of Africa and concurrent marriage of Carl and Pat, Schuyler’s story of the Black Internationale does not end here. Three months after the final installment of “The Black Internationale” appeared in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Schuyler reopened the world of Belsidus, Carl, Pat, and the Internationale with a sequel titled “Black Empire: An Imaginative Story of a Great New Civilization in Modern Africa.” Although it is unclear what motivated the production of this second story, in the absence of further evidence it is likely that reader interest inspired the *Courier* to ask Schuyler to continue

writing. In support of this speculation, the sequel picks up where the first story left off in a way that disrupts the relative stability with which the first story concluded. This suggests that Schuyler himself did not expect to continue the story when he concluded “The Black Internationale.” The narrative appears to self-consciously justify its own existence as Carl opens the new story by expressing doubts as to the permanence of the organization’s success. Carl reflects and asks: “The European nations, whose colonies we had taken in the recent short campaign of blood and terror, were now locked in a fight to the death which our agents had instigated. But how long would that war last? And when it was over, would the victors ignore Africa? Would they let us go ahead and grow powerful before they attacked us?” (*Black Empire* 146). The second story begins with this premonition and with these anxieties, and “Black Empire” proceeds to narrate the events related to Europe’s reentry into the continent, and the Internationale’s subsequent counter-resistance.

In support of the arguments delineated above, with the new invasion of the continent the international revolution again becomes dependent upon Pat and Carl’s relationship. In these ways, unlike *Dark Princess*, the serial form of *Black Empire* allows the story to reveal even further the ways in which black internationalism is bound to the romance genre and the patriarchal ideology that remains inherent to it. Because Schuyler did not expect to continue with the story, considering the second story in the context of the first shows how dependent the international imagination is upon romance. In order for Carl, Pat, and the Internationale’s adventure to continue, the otherwise completed marriage must become dismantled and thrown into uncertainty. While the first installment of the second story attempts to pick up where the first concluded, with Pat and Carl on their honeymoon in the Liberian mountains, their

relationship's stability is again disrupted as war once again breaks out and demands that Carl and Pat put their romance on hold in order to fight with the counter-resistance.

Similar to the first story, with the second outbreak of war Pat and Carl's relationship becomes marked as synonymous with the success of the revolution. Their honeymoon is interrupted when Belsidus prematurely calls them back to fight, giving Carl a "sinking feeling" (*Black Empire* 161), a notable reaction when placed in comparison with the devoted revolutionary Pat who unflinchingly assures Belsidus "we'll come right now...if you want us" (*Black Empire* 162). And, throughout the second story, their relationship continues to be interrupted by the military operations of the Internationale. For example, as the Internationale's counter-resistance begins to make its decisive second victory over Europe, Carl finds himself "torn between two desires." The first desire, staying behind with Pat while she prepares the Internationale's pilots for their final battle against Italy, France, and England from their house. And, the second desire, to travel with Belsidus to the frontlines of the Internationale's final offensive push. While the framing of this decision as a "decision" at all shows how Carl has developed some political agency over the course of the two stories, this agency is quickly denied when "Dr. Belsidus decided the question for [him]" (*Black Empire* 254). Carl's brief assertion of his political will as something separate from his relationship with Pat lasts only a brief moment as he again finds himself at the will of Belsidus, and the story of the Internationale becomes rearticulated to Pat and Carl's romantic relationship.

Fortunately for both Carl and for the Internationale's success, Pat ends up accompanying Carl, Belsidus, and other key Internationale leaders to the front lines of battle. They arrive in Benghazi just in time to witness Mussolini's air force be defeated, and to receive news that all remaining French and Italian warships and air fleets had been destroyed by Internationale pursuit

planes in Tripoli and Tunis. Following this decisive victory, like the first story, the second concludes with a victory speech by Belsidus and the indication that now Pat and Carl can be reunited as a romantic couple. As Belsidus delivers his concluding words to his subjects living within the now reunified African empire, Pat “gently squeezed” Carl’s hand, “communicating some of her intense feeling” (*Black Empire* 258). Thus, even as the text struggles to break from the romance narrative through the shifts in genre that occur throughout, in the end the success of the Internationale becomes bound to the relationship between Pat and Carl. In this way the novel suggests that the romance of the Internationale must be mediated through the heteropatriarchal international romance narrative.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, I argue that a reading of *Black Empire* that considers the historical, political, and economic relationships between diasporic resistance to imperialism and the rise of fascism shows how the text was on the brink of articulating a radical, internationalist politics. I call this particular political articulation “black international anti-fascism.” By arguing that capitalist interests in Africa link together both fascist and liberal democratic European nations, *Black Empire* articulates an emergent anti-fascism that positions anti-imperialism at the center of its radical political agenda. At a moment when the growing fear of the far right inspired many leftists to collaborate with more centrist-leaning political groups, the text’s expression of “black international anti-fascism” shows how anti-racism can remain at the core of leftist politics, even in the face of seemingly aberrant political crises such as the rise of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s.

Yet at the same time, *Black Empire* also provides an important interrogation into the formal limits available for expressing this radical politics. Returning to the question of the gendered black revolutionary figure with which I opened this chapter, I argue that investigating the relationship between genre and politics reveals how this “black international anti-fascism” can only emerge through a politics of romance that reinscribes heteropatriarchal expectations. Thus, while *Black Empire* does important work in exposing the connections among racism, imperialism, and capitalist political formations, it also shows the regressive politics that emerge when an anti-imperialist anti-fascism fails to incorporate a critique of romance into its radical political ideology.

Coda

“*Black Panther* and Afrofuturist Revisionist Origin Stories”

Marvel’s record-breaking 2018 film *Black Panther*, directed by Ryan Coogler, opens with an origin story about the birth of a resource-rich kingdom in Africa called Wakanda. This origin story is told by the character N’Jobu to his young son Erik Killmonger, who, because they are currently living in Oakland, has never himself stepped foot on Wakandan soil. While several of the films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (M.C.U.)¹ of which *Black Panther* is a part begin in a similar fashion, *Black Panther*’s origin story is unique for two important reasons. First, compared to other Marvel films, *Black Panther*’s origin story is larger in scope, extending back before humans evolved on the planet. As N’Jobu tells Killmonger the story of their ancestral home, he gives a history that dates back “millions of years.” He explains that after a meteorite made of vibranium, a fictional element which is considered to be “the strongest substance in the [Marvel Cinematic] universe,” hit the African continent, five different tribes settled the region and used the strength of this element to conjure a leader with “superhuman strength, speed and instincts.” This natural phenomenon has left the continent of Africa in possession of the most powerful substance in the world, making Wakanda the site of “technology more advanced than any other in the nation.”² By situating the history of this secret kingdom within a longer global history, *Black Panther*’s origin is much larger in scope.

¹ The Marvel Cinematic University refers to a series of films, television series, and comic books inaugurated with the 2008 release of the film *Ironman*. These different stories are comprised of one or more superheroes who have appeared in Marvel comic books since the 1950s, and the M.C.U. narrates their stories as overlapping. In other words, what occurs in one film, television series, or comic book has stakes in other films, television series, and comic books within the M.C.U.

² *Black Panther*, directed by Ryan Coogler (Burbank: Marvel Studios, 2018); hereafter cited parenthetically.

At the same time, this origin story is important because it orients Africa, and Wakanda more specifically, as a site of technological wealth unrivaled in the world. As N'Jobu narrates this story, he tells the history of an entire kingdom that has been kept "safe" due to its isolationist politics. N'Jobu tells the young Killmonger that, when the vibranium hit, it established the region as a place wealthy in resources, and that this has permitted a secret kingdom of African people to rise to world greatness. This creation story, then, explains the existence of a prosperous nation of Africans living on the African continent, a nation that has remained untouched by the violence of modern history. In this way, the origin story narrated by N'Jobu revises traditional historiographies of world civilization that have represented Africa thrown into disarray following centuries of both U.S. and European slavery and colonization, and therefore a regressive place of decay that has been incapable of keeping with the forward progress of modern civilization.

This dissertation concludes with a reading of *Black Panther* because of the ways that the film uses speculative fiction in order to express its black nationalist vision. Just as the texts examined in the previous four chapters were all produced in moments of heightened racial tension both in the United States and across the globe, the film was released one year following Donald Trump's presidential inauguration. As the first African American president's term ended with the rise of a far-right regime with unapologetic white nationalist ties, the success of a film that featured an almost entirely black cast, and which shows a nation of Africans participating in their own nationalist rituals and celebrations, was indeed worthy of celebration. And, as shown in the previous chapters, as a representation of an African nation possessing technology far superior to that possessed by any other throughout the world, the film engages in forms of

scientific speculation that, as Britt Rusert notes in her discussion of Martin Delany's *Blake, or, the Huts of America*, allows the film to "imagine a new science and a new world."³

Yet, while the texts examined in the previous four chapters work to imagine utopian worlds (albeit, as the previous analysis shows, not without presenting their own emergent problems), *Black Panther* tells a slightly different story. Despite the celebratory representations of black culture for which *Black Panther* has rightly been praised, Wakandan politics themselves are problematized in the narrative by multiple characters through their differing political ideologies. These political ideologies are historicized in the film, allowing *Black Panther* to provide insight into the complex ways that diaspora is conceptualized in the present moment. To conclude the dissertation, I contextualize the film within the longer history of African American speculative fiction analyzed thus far. I analyze it in order to consider the ways that it revises earlier speculative texts that represent a black nationalist vision struggling with the gendered dimensions of nationalist rhetoric.

The ways that the film differs from the texts examined in the previous chapters can be seen in the film's opening scene. Unlike these nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts, with the exception of George Schuyler's *Black Empire*, this scene does not show an act of racism towards one of the film's protagonists, nor, despite the ways that the film has been celebrated for its representations of a strong African nation, does it provide the viewer with an image of Wakandan glory. Rather, it shows the ways that Wakandan politics have historically existed as a site of contestation. This opening scene is set in 1992 Oakland, a city at the time ravaged by poverty and crime at the height of the War on Drugs, a political campaign that had notoriously damaging effects on urban areas such as Oakland from the 1980s through the mid-1990s. The

³ Rusert, Britt. *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 153.

inner-city violence sprouting from these post-Civil Rights policies is invoked in the scene immediately after N'Jobu tells his son the origin story of Wakanda. In this scene, N'Jobu is killed by his brother, the then King T'Chaka, after being accused of conspiring with a white villain named Ulysses Klaue to steal a quarter ton of vibranium and sell it for profit. The following scene suggests that this conflict exists into the present day, as it shows N'Jobu's son, the now-grown Killmonger, devising his own plans to avenge his father's death. Throughout the course of the film and until his death at the film's end, Killmonger fights to reestablish his claim to Wakandan descent, operating under a political platform grounded in the belief that Wakanda should use its vibranium to liberate the "two billion people all over the world that look like us" but whose "lives are a lot harder" (*Black Panther*). This conflict between T'Challa and Killmonger regarding whether or not to keep Wakanda isolated, or to use its resources to help other black people throughout the globe, constitutes the primary conflict throughout the film, begging questions about the relationships, and the loyalty to those relationships, that black people throughout the diaspora ought to have for one another.

Through the rivalry between Killmonger and T'Challa, *Black Panther* complicates the traditional genre conventions of both a Marvel superhero film and of a black nationalist speculative text, where there are distinct divides between superhero and villain, and where these divides usually occur across racial lines. By showing Killmonger as a villain who, in an unusual twist, is just as, if not more, concerned with seeing black people flourish in the wealth they have both created and developed, viewers are rightly left to wonder which side they should take. Grounded in an origin story which, because of its rootedness in fictional history and its concern with how this history affects not only the future, but, perhaps even more urgently, the present, *Black Panther* is able to tell a story that is at once both ancient and modern, in some ways

unaffected and yet not altogether immune to the aftereffects of centuries of slavery and imperialism.

From the beginning, the film continuously shows the ways that the past, present, and future coexist in the contemporary moment. For example, following his coronation early in the film, T'Challa embarks on a ritualistic journey into the ancestral world. As he enters this realm, he sees a vision of his father's death and learns that T'Chaka has died in a terrorist attack at a U.N. building. As T'Challa watches his father blown to pieces when the building explodes, the film shows a vision reminiscent of representations of post-9/11 global terrorism, and, as such, T'Challa's journey into the land of the ancestors is initiated within a twenty-first century frame. Furthermore, the ancestral realm itself embodies the ancient and future simultaneously. The ancestral realm is represented as having a landscape that looks like a savannah, but there is an otherworldly purple glow in the sky. There are panthers in the trees, and one of these panthers becomes enveloped in a glowing purple orb of light and shape-shifts into T'Chaka, who appears before T'Challa wearing a patterned African tunic. Similarly, the scene following this one shows T'Challa and his love interest Nakia walking through what appears to be a traditional Wakandan marketplace. This scene depicts Wakandans dressed in tunics and headwraps that harken back to more traditional styles of African dress at the same time that it shows young hipsters donned in fedoras using holographic smart phones that appear out of their wrists, and people with large, colorful jewelry, invoking trends typically affiliated with science fiction and people living in other universes and/or planets. Similarly, the marketplace scene shows woven baskets sold on the streets as futuristic off-track monorail trains simultaneously whiz by overhead. Blending a fantasy image of futurity with traditional African clothing and goods, the scene suggests that elements of the traditional past coexist with both a twenty-first century present and a

technologically advanced futurity. In representing the present moment this way, *Black Panther* avoids romanticizing either the past or the future, a trope that is typical of black nationalist literature.

As *Black Panther* presents this complex image of diaspora in the present moment, it most notably undercuts some of the problematic gendered representations of the nation that have arisen as African American writers have envisioned utopia. Indeed, while *Black Panther* tells the story of a patrilineal kingdom it in many ways reflects the patriarchal ideology of the nation so commonly affiliated with black nationalist literature. However the film has, rightly, been celebrated for its representations of black women. One of the primary ways that the film reaches beyond the earlier black nationalist texts is through its engagements with Afrofuturist tropes. The term, coined by Mark Dery, refers to a literary and cultural movement often cited as beginning in the post-Civil Rights era.⁴ While the genre builds upon a longer tradition of African American speculative fiction, it more decisively mobilizes technology as it searches for alternative methods and mediums for imagining black modernity. As Alondra Nelson has argued, with the rise of the technology that emerged in the post-Civil Rights era, Afrofuturist texts contest the “myth of black disingenuity with technology” and address the ways that histories of technology have failed to “account for the centrality of black people’s labor in modernization and industrialization as well as the historical truths of black participation in technological development.”⁵ By engaging in Afrofuturist imaginative practices, literature in this tradition uses science fiction to revise history in order to imagine a future based on alternative narratives of modernity. These narratives do not represent Africa and peoples of African descent as mere victims of colonization

⁴ Dery, Mark. “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 92.4 (2000): 735-44.

⁵ Nelson, Alondra. “Introduction: Future Texts,” *Social Text*, 71 20.2, (2002): 1-15, 6; hereafter cited parenthetically.

and slavery, but instead they imagine futures where these histories pose little hindrance to their achievement of both technological and cultural superiority. Importantly, this movement differs from earlier African American speculative fiction through the ways that it has been more inclusive of African American female artists, and for how the literature breaks from some of the earlier nationalist traditions in order to give African American women central roles in their stories.

As a literary aesthetic, Afrofuturism builds upon a variety of cultural practices in order to envision a future culture that explores the “interior dynamics of the black community” (Nelson 8-9) and that serves as a “critical perspective that opens up inquiry into the many overlaps between technoculture and black diasporic histories...to find models of expression that transform spaces of alienation into novel forms of creative potential” (Nelson 2). *Black Panther* embodies a variety of these traits that make up the Afrofuturist tradition, both in terms of its narrative and visual representations. As already noted, the plot of *Black Panther* engages in these practices through the ways that it revises dominant stories of both colonization and scientific innovation that have narrated Africa as either a victim of dominant imperial powers, or as a regressive culture that has failed to keep up with modern innovation. And, significantly, in the film, all of these pillars that characterize the Afrofuturist aesthetic also position women at the center of the narrative plot points that many have noted makes the film worthy of celebration.⁶ For example, T’Challa is surrounded by a group of female body guards, the Dora Milaje, whose outward

⁶ In an article published in the *Boston Review* philosopher Christopher Lebron notes that the women of *Black Panther* are the film’s “brightest spot” and “ethical center,” and, in a *Hollywood Reporter* article, Salamishah Tillet argues that “the movie ponders and plays with the intersections of race and gender equality by providing one of the most nuanced and multilayered representation of black women in all of the Marvel universe.” See Lebron, Christopher. “‘Black Panther’ Is Not the Movie We Deserve,” (*Boston Review*: February 17, 2018), accessed February 20 2019. Tillet, Salamishah. “‘Black Panther’: Why Not Queen Shuri?” (*The Hollywood Reporter*: February 19 2018), accessed February 20, 2019.

appearance and skill both draw on Afrofuturist tropes in order to counter normative representations of female figures in black nationalist literature. Harkening simultaneously to a past, present, and future in which femininity might be defined differently than in mainstream society, the Dora Milaje have shaved heads, wear body armor, and are represented as the military strength behind the powerful nation. Their uniforms invoke a longer tradition of world military history, simultaneously referencing Greek and Roman mythology, African traditional practices, and gesturing to a future where non-normative femininity might be the norm. They wear plated armor that mimics that worn in premodern Western cultures along with traditional Southern African neck rings, and, as costume designer Ruth Carter notes, the patterns and colors used in their costumes were inspired by traditional clothing worn by various tribes across the continent.⁷ Yet, as mentioned above, their physical appearance, along with their position as female military officials, very much situates them within futuristic utopian dreams about a nationalism that exists alongside of liberatory gender politics.

In terms of their role as bodyguards for both T'Challa and the kingdom of Wakanda, the Dora Milaje are also represented as powerful political actors who do not merely answer to their king, but whose political agency and skill ultimately exceed his. In an early scene of the film when they accompany T'Challa on a mission to South Korea, both their stamina and skills exceed his and enable them to ensure that their mission is fulfilled. When chasing the villain, Ulysses Klaue, the women find that they are ahead of T'Challa and ask "do we just leave him?" they conclude that "he'll catch up," and they proceed to carry out the mission ahead of him (*Black Panther*). When T'Challa finally does begin to catch up with the women, his swiftness and ability are not credited as his own. Rather, they come through his sister Shuri, the scientist at

⁷ "'Black Panther' Costume Designer Draws on 'The Sacred Geometry of Africa,'" produced by Mallory Yu, (*NPR*, February 16, 2018), accessed May 16, 2019.

the heart of Wakanda's technological innovations. Having developed the technology to virtually operate machinery across vast expanses of space, she drives the car that T'Challa uses, despite her location in Wakanda and T'Challa's location in South Korea. And, throughout the film, Shuri is consistently represented as the person at the center of Wakanda's technological power, begging the question, as literary scholar Salamishah Tillet has rightly asked, "Why Not Queen Shuri?" (Tillet).

And, just as these women provide the physical and intellectual backbone for the things that make Wakanda exceed on an international level, they also provide the moral grounding through which T'Challa is able to institute productive change. The framework for their integrity is consistently grounded in contemporary, twenty-first century world events and problems, suggesting that they provide the central link between the past, present, and future- the link will enable Wakanda to continue to flourish. For example, in the beginning of the film, as the setting shifts from 1992 Oakland to the contemporary moment, the first action scene opens in media res with T'Challa learning of his ex-girlfriend Nakia's efforts to assist a group of women from a Boko-Haram style kidnapping occurring in Africa, but outside of Wakanda. As T'Challa travels to retrieve Nakia so that he can tell her the news of his father's passing, the film for the first time shows the relationship between T'Challa and the powerful women who surround him. T'Challa consults with a member of the Dora Milaje, General Okoye, about how to retrieve Nakia from the dangerous situation she has intentionally put herself in. While Okoye offers to assist him on the mission, T'Challa tells her "no need, Okoye. I can handle this alone" and Okoye replies with a skeptical "Hmmm," rolls her eyes, and warns him: "just don't freeze" (*Black Panther*), implying that T'Challa will be too enraptured by his love for Nakia to successfully rescue her. As T'Challa embarks on his first mission, then, the film sets up his relationship to the women

around him as not one that exists within the binary of a traditional king/servant or prince/princess relationship, but rather one where T'Challa's romantic tendencies are criticized and mocked by the women around him as they fight to defend not only Wakanda, but other black people suffering throughout the world.

Black Panther continues to represent the relationship between T'Challa and the Wakandan women in similar ways. Once T'Challa descends into the rural location where Nakia is working to save the kidnapped women, he intervenes in the mission. Yet, rather than expressing relief that the king has come to save her, Nakia is irritated by his presence and worries that it will interrupt her plan. What seemed to be an otherwise organized mission before T'Challa's arrival soon breaks out into violence once he attempts to intervene. In this scene, T'Challa is represented as naively unaware of the situation, trying to kill all of the men involved in the kidnapping. Nakia, however, prevents him from attacking one of the men and scolds him, telling him: "this one's just a boy. He got kidnapped as well" (*Black Panther*). And, finally, in the scene's climactic moment, one of the terrorists points his gun at Nakia, threatening that if T'Challa moves to attack him he will shoot her. However, before T'Challa has a chance to decide his next move, Okoye, whom he had previously told not to accompany him on the mission, enters from behind and strikes the assailant, concluding the scene. Thus, rather than showing the superhero fight to save his love interest, this opening action scene shows the ways in which T'Challa's authority is trumped by the women who surround him. And, significantly, this happens in the context of Nakia and T'Challa's differing political philosophies. While Nakia is busy rescuing, as Killmonger states it, "those who look like us" but "whose lives are a lot harder," T'Challa is more concerned with bringing her back home for his ritualistic coronation ceremony (*Black Panther*).

T'Challa's interactions with women remain similar throughout the film and are important for the ways that they force him to reckon with the present moment. For example, the trope of T'Challa "freezing," or being so overcome by his admiration for Nakia that he is an ineffective leader, continues as T'Challa enters Wakanda for the first time in the film. This scene provides a similar representation as to the relationships among leadership, gender, and political ideology. As T'Challa and Okoye return to Wakanda with Nakia in order for T'Challa to undergo the coronation ceremony, the film shows T'Challa being welcomed home by his mother Ramonda and his younger sister Shuri. Similar to how Okoye had appeared to tease T'Challa in the previous scene concerning his romantic relationship with Nakia, the first thing Shuri asks Okoye is "did he freeze?" to which Okoye answers: "like an antelope in headlights." The two women proceed to share a laugh over both T'Challa's performance and his infatuation with Nakia. As Okoye leaves to prepare for T'Challa's coronation ceremony, T'Challa attempts to romanticize the ceremony that is about to happen, telling Shuri: "so surprised my little sister came to see me off before our big day." Shuri replies mockingly, "you wish! I'm here for the EMP beads. I've developed an update." T'Challa, confused as to why the update is needed given that the technology had recently worked "perfectly to him," Shuri expresses frustration and says "how many times do I have to teach you? Just because something works doesn't mean it cannot be improved" (*Black Panther*). Again, T'Challa's attempts to romanticize Wakanda and its traditions are deemed unproductive by the Wakandan women who choose to focus on how they can use scientific development to advocate for others who are suffering in the present moment.

Furthermore, when compared to the film's female characters, the male characters are consistently represented as obsessively invested in maintaining tradition in ways that appear to have little stakes in either Wakanda's present or future. As T'Challa coronation ceremony

begins, the ceremonial leader asks if anyone in attendance would like to challenge T'Challa's claim to the throne through a ritual battle. In this scene, M'Baku of the Jabari tribe steps up to challenge T'Challa on the grounds that his "technological advancements have been overseen by a child. Who scoffs at tradition!" (*Black Panther*). Here, referencing Shuri and the authority she holds over Wakanda's technological developments, M'Baku suggests that T'Challa's relationship to the Wakandan women will make him an ineffective leader. While, in many ways, the battle scene that evolves from this challenge might seem to showcase Wakandan masculinity as the two fight shirtless, exchange blows, and grunt loudly throughout the scene, this event has no further consequence in the plot of the film. In fact, towards the end of the film, this rivalry is deemed as at best, petty, and at worst, irrelevant, when leading up to the final action scene M'Baku puts aside his differences in order to revive T'Challa after he has been defeated in battle by Killmonger. M'Baku then unites with T'Challa to defend Wakanda alongside of Nakia and the Dora Milaje.

And while Killmonger's rivalry with T'Challa might lead the film to be read as a masculinist battle for a patrilineal throne, Killmonger represents an opposing political ideology to T'Challa in complicated and important ways. As mentioned above, Killmonger's frustration with Wakanda's isolationism seems more aligned with Nakia's political philosophy than with a person on a mission to kill the film's supposed hero. However, unlike Nakia, Killmonger is ineffectual at using Wakandan resources to solve the problems he sees with the world. Indeed, the first thing he does after assuming the throne, is travel back to the ancestral world to see his father. Overwhelmed by this experience, when he returns he orders the Wakandans to burn the heart-shaped herb that gives the king his strength and power. The keeper of the herbs informs him that "we cannot do that. It is our tradition..." and Killmonger violently grabs her by the neck

and explains to her “when I tell you to do something, I mean that shit” (*Black Panther*). The scene concludes with Killmonger dramatically standing amongst the flowers as they are ignited into flames. Although Killmonger claims to be invested in using Wakanda’s resources to help people across the diaspora, he is unable to incorporate their traditions into his present mission.

As the film concludes, Nakia again emerges as the one who initiates the move to mobilize Wakandan resources in order to help people of African descent throughout the world. In the scene following Killmonger’s death, T’Challa and Nakia return to the marketplace where Nakia had earlier expressed her concerns about Wakanda’s isolationism. Referring back to this earlier moment in the film, in this scene T’Challa recalls their earlier conversation and tells Nakia “I think I know a way you can still fulfill your calling.” The film then concludes back in Oakland with T’Challa showing Shuri the building where T’Chaka killed N’Jobu. The building has a city-issued “condemned” sign across its front side and Shuri, in a nod to the present-day gentrification of the city of Oakland, assumes that the building is being torn down. Instead, T’Challa informs her that he has purchased all of the buildings on the block in order to create the “Wakandan International Outreach Center.” He explains the services that will be offered in the center and, much like the Black Panther Party’s community survival programs established in the same city in 1969, T’Challa’s community initiatives include a “social outreach” program which will be led by Nakia, and a “science and information exchange” which will be led by Shuri (*Black Panther*). With this conclusion, the film suggests that, under the influence and leadership of the Wakandan women, Wakanda is able to mobilize its past glory in ways that help those suffering in the present. Together, Wakandans and peoples of African descent living outside of Wakanda, will share in a fully liberated utopian future.

In the title of her *Hollywood Reporter* article, Salamishah Tillet rightly asks the question “Why Not Queen Shuri?” While both Shuri and Nakia undoubtedly emerge from the film as the politically and morally strongest characters, by centering the story around T’Challa the film does important work in revising the traditional black nationalist narrative as it is told through the speculative genre. Indeed, it is through these female characters’ criticisms of T’Challa that the film breaks from the problematic trends historically affiliated with this type of literature. By showing the ways that the female characters are able to bring their critiques of both the past and the future into a critical interrogation of the present, *Black Panther* explores a utopian black nationalist world where key players do not merely romanticize about the future possibility of black self-autonomy, but where they are able to engage with the history of the already-existing nation.

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