

STRANGERS FROM WITHIN, STRANGERS FROM WITHOUT:  
NEGOTIATIONS AND USES OF SPACE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND IMMIGRANT  
LITERATURES  
AND CULTURES, 1900S-1950S

BY

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## ABSTRACT

On June 24, 1916, the *New Republic* published an editorial that began: "The average Pole or Italian arriving at Ellis Island does not realize that he is the deadly foe of the native Negro . . . It is a silent conflict on a gigantic scale." While this statement illustrates only a limited view of the cross-cultural encounters that it describes, it is based on historical facts that anchor my dissertation which explores the relationship between cultural constructions of space and literary visions of ethnicity and Americanness in fiction. My parallel readings of African American and immigrant novels show that the disciplinary boundaries which are often drawn between African American literature and white ethnic literatures can be imaginatively negotiated by examining the construction of space and place in black and white-ethnic writing. I argue that both black and immigrant literature of the time casts the relationship between ethnic/racial subjects and spaces as a challenge to the contemporary definition of American identity. My dissertation offers an approach to ethnic literatures that seeks parallels and dialogues among ethnic groups and their literary representations, while simultaneously acknowledging the historically nonnegotiable differences. I turn to geocriticism as my analytical tool, thus focusing on literary spatiality as the key to these cross-ethnic negotiations.

**DEDICATION**

For Babcia Krysia,  
who taught me the value of a good story.

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## **Introduction: Spatializing African American and White Ethnic Literatures**

*Our lives have been transformed by the struggle of the margins to come into representation.*  
Stuart Hall “The Local and the Global”

*The words are maps.*  
Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck”

This dissertation stems from two originally separate interests that have organically come to bear on each other, eventually to become parts of a single inquiry. The first composite part of this project has its origins in comparative ethnic studies, and more specifically in my study of African American and white ethnic literatures and cultures of the first half of the twentieth century, at which I have arrived through readings in literature—mostly social realist fiction—and in history. The historical fact of the northern American cities and towns in the first few decades of the twentieth century being the scene of an unprecedented influx of southern and eastern Europeans (so called “new immigrants”) and African Americans led me to read black and new immigrant works in a parallel and complementary fashion. The second intellectual pursuit that has informed this dissertation started as a non-academic interest in the concepts of place, space, and belonging –and has its roots in my own journeys across both geographical and socio-educational space.

Later, those interests in literary ethnicities and spatiality became one when, after years of reading and writing about African American and immigrant literatures and cultures, I made a discovery that now seems all too obvious; I came to realize that the single most common word I used to describe the subject of my study, “marginalized,” was more than just a metaphor. After all, both white immigrants and black migrants, as new arrivals in the spaces of the American North, contested and negotiated their place in the new setting, confronting one another in the

competitive struggle for jobs and housing, and learning how to handle those cross-ethnic relations within the larger context of white, native-born Americans' prejudices. For all, the stakes involved securing both the material space where they built new lives for themselves, and the right to claim a symbolic place in American culture and in the nation. The spatial dimension of marginality, once it occurred to me, became the lens through which I read literary and cultural records of African American and new immigrant experience. I have come to recognize that while literary scholars make frequent use of spatial metaphors such as marginality, relatively few focus on the negotiation of space as a social, political, and cultural process. In the context of ethnic literature, space is more than just a metaphor; it can be theorized as a medium between the ethnic subject and his/her racial and national identity. In the hands of immigrant and African American writers, space becomes a tool to represent both the symbolic and the literal struggle of people to secure their turf and assert their identities.

A conventional understanding of new scholarly ideas and approaches rests in the concept of a departure from the previous ones, implying that innovation involves at least a partial rejection of the past. This dissertation, however, follows a different trajectory of novelty. My project celebrates and relies on scholarships and knowledges coming from a number of diverse academic traditions in order to bring them, to use a spatial metaphor, to the same playing field. One such tradition is formed by American studies' explorations of the intersections of race, ethnicity, and class in American literature, culture, and history. Comparative ethnic studies is another interdisciplinary tradition that frames much of my analysis. Finally, I invite different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives on place and space into this project, drawing not only on geographic, philosophical, sociological, and historical approaches to spatiality, but also on the

recent emergence of the fields of geohumanities and geocriticism. Thus, an attempt at producing the *new* out of the mixture of the *old* guides the present study.

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to reveal the tension in black and immigrant literatures between material places, on the one hand, and space and place-practices,<sup>1</sup> as constructs that participate in shaping ideas and identities, on the other. Inherent in this tension is the understanding that physical places embody ideas and that material places and practices related to them can transform the world of ideas. I argue that we can effectively examine the literary portrayals of early twentieth-century new immigrant and black lives, which, as I reveal, bear striking similarities but also sometimes subtle yet always telling differences, if we read them spatially. Geo-notions are so crucial to such analyses, I argue, because racial and ethnic ideas in the United States have been shaped to a large degree by spatial arrangements, divisions, and exclusions. Moreover, the narratives discussed in the following pages can themselves be conceived of as narrative topographies or, to use Robert Tally's phrase, "literary cartographies." Tally argues that "literary works serve a cartographic function by creating a figurative or allegorical representation of a social space" (Tally, "On Literary"). I understand the novelists' acts of drawing such literary cartographies as claims to belonging, claims to ethnic others' place within America's social and literal landscape.

Tally's geocritical work, including his elaboration of Fredric Jameson's notion of "cognitive mapping," which I discuss in the second chapter, is symptomatic of the proliferation of scholarship that has responded to the phenomenon of the "spatial turn" in the humanities and the interpretive social sciences. In the last few years, apart from Tally's many essays on literary spatiality and his recent volume, *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2011), the interest in geo-critical readings has resulted in a

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow the notion of "place-practices" from Douglas Richardson et al..

mushrooming of publications ranging across the disciplines, including *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2009), *Geohumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place* (2011), and *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities* (2011). Given this widespread academic interest, Jameson's contention that we “are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time” (Jameson, *Political* 120) rings truer now than ever. But I show in this study, with the last chapter illustrating the point most prominently, that the usefulness of the spatial models of analysis lies, among other things, in their ability also to bear on the reading of received historical narratives. My analysis of literary works of fiction reveals their intervention in the past through imaginings of ethnic spaces for representational purposes.

In exploring these realist novels, I follow the spatial turn's multidisciplinary character by not only drawing on various theories and intellectual approaches to space and social practices but also by unearthing the layers of cultural meaning buried in the novels' less obviously “spatial” practices and themes. For example, in the first chapter, I “spatialize” the concept of citizenship and in the third chapter I explore spatiality's relation to jazz. Such critical maneuvers show the potential of a geocritical reading to reveal new meanings. Thus, the spatial turn, in which this dissertation participates, provides a potent instrument of knowledge production, including knowledge that engagement with literary representations can produce.

I invite a reading of my dissertation as simultaneously a story and a map—or, better yet—as a journey where spaces—both real and fictional—compound a Memory Palace of ethnic experience. By describing my analysis as a method of loci composed of places that are literary—conjured in the minds of novelists—and those that are physical, some represented in texts ranging from newspaper reportage to photographs and others visited by me personally, such

as Chicago's ethnic neighborhoods and burial sites—I underscore cultural studies' role in the carving out of space for those ethnic narrative voices in American cultural memory. An imaginative act of journeying through the spaces hidden in the novels' pages—real places that they describe and unreal places that they conjure—puts flesh on the era's experience of black and immigrant social agents, thus historicizing and politicizing that experience.

Question of politics cannot be set aside when examining the work of any of the ethnic writers I discuss. They were all considered leftists, many of them were active members of progressive and radical movements of their times, and quite a few of them actually knew one another from such contexts as shared commitment to the cultural front and work for the Works Project Administration. Each of the authors whose fiction I analyze saw her or his writing as an expression of challenge to contemporary social norms and the systems of racist and capitalist power structures. Their depictions of places occupied by blacks and white ethnics, as well as of the place-practices performed by those social agents, show those writers' heightened awareness of the inseparability of space, race, and politics. The special brand of proletarian radicalism that characterizes the Depression-era social realist literature as well as the fiction inspired by that tradition published in later years has helped me narrow the scope of my analysis to novels written in the thirties, forties, and fifties, with the notable exception of Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, which I use to a somewhat different end than I do the other books.

But the prevalence of social and political concern in the literature of that period and genre is only one of the two major reasons why I chose to focus on fiction. Another and equally important reason is that a story as a form lends itself well to descriptions of space, including our use of such elements of fiction as point of view, figurative language, and spatio-temporal plot “in how we see, understand, and construct place” (Luria 67). Barbara Eckstein discusses spatial

descriptions' use of the narrative form from the perspective of that form's capacity to restrict or enable place-shaping. Eckstein discusses the fictions of realism from the point of view of the crisis of representation and sees them as equally limiting in their capacity for creating spaces as geographical descriptions, and thus she proposes experimental narrative forms as a solution (Luria 67-68). But the realist narratives I analyze here use a plethora of impressionistic, surrealist, and improvisational elements that provide an arena for a spatial literary feast.

Regardless of her theory of the particular literary genre, Eckstein's optimism about the potential of literature to “widen our perspective on place and make us more responsive to it” (Luria 68) opens up a possibility of productive cross-fertilization of spatial studies and literary studies. There is a lot to be gained for both sides. As my own analysis in this dissertation proves, the wide range of scholarship on space and place is an invaluable resource for a scholar interested in literary representations of social operations. On the other hand, it is not inconceivable to think of the limitless variants and possibilities of fictive worlds suggesting new, yet unexplored avenues for scholars of spatiality.

While the works of fiction I examine in the chapters that follow were written in the thirties or later, as the title of the dissertation indicates, the period I am interested in starts at the twentieth century's turn. In fact, two of the novels in the first chapter are set in that earlier part of the century, and many non-fictional texts that contribute to my analysis come before 1930. For the sake of generic unity represented by the naturalistic proletarianism of the books I discuss, I forgo a close analysis of the fascinating fictional representations of black and immigrant spaces in the period before the thirties. But my analyses of the later texts are infused with qualities that I have learned to detect and appreciate in ethnic fiction thanks to the novels of the century's earlier decades. In fact, my readings of spatiality's relation to race and ethnicity in the later novels

could not have arrived at the conclusions that the various chapters draw without a confrontation with the earlier fiction.

Among the influences on my understanding of African American and immigrant cultures and literatures, two spatio-social tropes have affected the readings in the chapters to follow. Although my dissertation does not directly address the literary and cultural revolution of the Harlem Renaissance or the ethnic modernism and realism of the 1920s, my project has been deeply impacted by the heritage of both traditions. The symbolic meaning of the black community/space, which Harlem embodies, in African American culture, as well as the value of the American Dream's narrative for European immigrants, shape the texts I analyze in this dissertation time and time again. One cannot talk about African American space or address the place of white ethnics in American society without, more or less explicitly, evoking—or at the very least recognizing—the heritage of Harlem and the ethos of the ascension myth.

The echoing presence of these two spatio-social narratives—of Harlem as a black mecca and the immigrant “from rags to riches” mythology—has influenced my interpretation of the novels. In order to illustrate these earlier narratives' accompanying presence as I explored the naturalistic darkness of the later literary decades, I summon two figures that guided my analysis to now guide my readers through this project. I propose two characters from ethnic novels of the twenties, Claude McKay's Jake of *Home to Harlem* (1928) and Anzia Yezierska's Sonya of *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), as symbolic “guides” into my reading. This is not to say these novels or characters are the topic of my analysis. Rather, Sonya and Jake serve as silent—though not silenced—intertexts for the fictions to come. These two figures represent Yezierska's romantic vision of a white ethnic's creative climbing up the social ladder, as well as McKay's

self-affirming image of a vibrant black community. The heritage of their hopeful visions seeps through the cracks of the generally much gloomier narratives of the thirties, forties, and fifties.

I argue that, despite the somber tone of most of the books I read in the dissertation, I see hope underwriting almost all of them. Familiarity with the literary traditions represented by Yeziarska's and McKay's novels has facilitated the locating of that hope. For, despite being far from naive, these writers' stories of New York's Harlem and Lower East Side hold a promise of possibility. That promise has McKay's Jake long for Harlem's sensual pleasures and familiar aesthetics despite the poverty and violence that it is also home to. For the idealistic Sonya, Yeziarska's Jewish slum turns out to be the springboard to self-discovery, followed by the fulfillment of her desire to “make something of myself” (Yeziarska 159). As I move through the spaces of the black and immigrant novels' steel mills, crowded tenement apartments, tough streets, prison cells, brothels, and other unlikely sites of hope—the transgressive potential of many of these spaces and the practices they house, theorized among others by Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, comes to the fore as I tap into the black and immigrant literature's traditions of affirmation of identity in these novels of the 1920s.

The perspective in each chapter of this dissertation encompasses a sphere of social and spatial relations that, while different from the other chapters' scope, partially overlaps with some of the other sections' focus. Like a camera lens, the readings assume varying perspectives in different chapters, at times “zooming in” on the most intimate of spaces and relationships, such as home lives of families, at other times providing a panoramic view of the city or the neighborhood and its lonely inhabitants, and then coming back to a close-up of those lonely strangers finding comfort in one another's company while listening to jazz in a speakeasy, and

still at other times displaying an aerial view, symbolic of how ethnic presence in America is irreducible to any one spatial or social context.

In Chapter One, I read two 1941 social realist novels' rendition of blacks' and white ethnics' migrant experiences in the early twentieth century. I argue that William Attaway's tale of the Great Migration and Thomas Bell's familial saga of Slovak immigration—which both converge in Pennsylvania's steel mill towns—can be read as proletarian narratives of struggle for citizenship and inclusion. In both novels, the characters find themselves excluded from many aspects of political and economic civic participation. In the face of this discriminatory treatment by the government and the economic capital, they make the most of their social sphere. Thus, I read their practices in communal and familial spaces as acts of citizenship. In the second chapter, I move to consider the social and spatial entrapments of second-generation urban ethnics in Nelson Algren's *Never Come Morning* and Willard Motley's *Knock on Any Door*. I read the two novels' main characters' negotiations of their place in the geographic space and racial social hierarchy as “bodily mappings.” I do so by borrowing Fredric Jameson's idea of cognitive mapping and adjusting that notion to the corporeal quality of the characters' practices. I also suggest that a complementary reading of the two texts reveals insights about various ethnic groups' positionality in mainstream society. While Algren's book emphasizes the white ethnic character's aspirations to whiteness (via the figure of the Great White Hope), Motley underscores the parallels between immigrants' and blacks' social situatedness by infusing his Italian American character with cultural markers of blackness (via the figure of the “bad man”). Chapter Three continues to explore ethnic literature's treatment of marginal spaces. With two African American texts as examples—Billie Holiday's autobiography and Ann Petry's *The Street*—I illustrate a peculiar jazz-like improvisation that the black authors use in their representations of

abject places as sites of possibility. I also introduce a third—a narrative by Benjamin Appel that focuses on a Polish American character. Despite the “illicit” spaces and African American music in all three books, the improvisatory impulse is absent from the white ethnic narrative. I read that crucial difference through the lens of differences in the social standing of white ethnics and blacks as the twentieth century was nearing the end of its first half.

I close with a chapter examining ethnic literature's role in ethnics' claims to Americanness. In other words, I pose ethnic writing as a tactic of carving out room for ethnic others within the American experience. I bring together Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Louis Adamic's *Grandsons* in order to consider the ethnic negotiation of American cultural, literary, and historic spaces. In the person and story of Peter Gale, one of three grandsons of a Slovenian immigrant, Adamic creates an ethnic equivalent of Fitzgerald's alienated, spiritually hollow individual, and the unfulfilled American Dream. Although the two novels' narrative styles and main characters resemble one another, Adamic's novel offers new and surprising ways of understanding what could be called "American angst," anchoring it in the repressed history of immigrant contribution to the American nation, its ethnic labor struggles, and the sacrifices borne by migrants.

Beyond its argument, this dissertation is also an attempt at coming to terms with the contradictory attitudes of resentment and marvel experienced by one “stranger from without” towards American social, material, and institutional spaces. My own dealings with those spaces, the protection and rejections they have offered, as well as the promises they have put forward and those promises' deferral that they have ensured—all that has contributed to the reading of both despair and hope in the analysis to follow. But beyond my own experience of spatiality in America which has, after all, been mediated through the security of my educational capital and

lack of visible ethnic difference, I have seen the spatial negotiations of the “strangers from within,” like so many of America's incarcerated African American “native sons.” Some of the ideas presented in this project were born in my discussions of the novels with those imprisoned men, pointing to the bitter irony we faced at the end of such sessions as I carried their insights beyond the barbed wire, into “the real world”—to capitalize on them in my dissertation—and as they walked back to their bars and walls. These real spaces and boundaries are reminders that the words on those novels' pages are maps not only to the fictional pasts but also to the present moment.

There is a story circulating in my family of an ancestor, my father's great-grandfather, who sometime in the twentieth century's first decade sold part of the little land he owned and, leaving his wife and children behind, went to America. In my grandmother's voice, it was a story of a reckless man—irresponsible and uncaring—for as far as she knew, her grandfather emigrated out of curiosity and a sense of adventure. After five years, he returned with the same suitcase he took on his way out as his only possession. As an over ninety-year-old man, he told my father, a first-grader then, of the exciting things he had seen and lived during his trip, including going on a raft down an enormous river.

Given his class status in Poland and the records of most Polish immigrants' lives in the United States at the time, it is doubtful any of the old man's stories were true. But that is secondary. What matters is that the awe over the possibilities within America's spaces that rang in those stories sounds a lot like the will to hope I see underlying the ethnic narratives I analyze in this project. And it is not all that different from the familial stories of migration North that some of my students at the prison told of their parents and grandparents. Thus, in the space of the story, as I show later, there is room for maneuver—room to shape the bounds of who we are.

## Chapter I: Migrant Practices as Insurgent Citizenship

### in Thomas Bell's *Out of This Furnace* and William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge*

When J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur famously answered his own question “What is an American?” in his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, what emerged was a picture of an apparent Eden and its happy residents. In this idealized America, Crevecoeur envisions a “good citizen” (49) of the land of plenty beholding “these extended shores” (48) with a sense of “national pride” (48). This imagined beholder's “heartfelt pleasure” (49) comes not only from the infrastructural achievements of his new home, “fair cities, substantial villages, . . . an immense country filled with decent houses, good roads, orchards, meadows, and bridges” (48-49), but also from America's egalitarian practices. American “modern society,” Crevecoeur writes, “is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess everything, and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings” (49). “We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed” (50); thus, “[h]ere man is free as he ought to be” (50). All kinds of people enjoy this freedom; Crevecoeur seems awed by what he sees as America's radical inclusion of various peoples into one nation—“that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country” (54). Thus, the question “What is an American?” casts American citizenship as a notion organically related to such ideals as freedom, equality and diversity.

But, as the conclusion of the letter indicates, all that America has to offer will only be accessible to those who fulfill certain conditions. The letter ends with a promise that Crevecoeur imagines the American nation giving to its new citizens. Born a Frenchman and later naturalized as an American citizen, Crevecoeur—having proven himself as a successful and prosperous farmer in his adopted country—implies someone resembling himself as the recipient of American rights and privileges: a worker. “If thou wilt work,” America assures, “be honest,

sober, and industrious” (90), “I have bread for you,” as well as “ease and independence” (90). “I shall endow thee beside with the immunities of a freeman” (91). Besides the obvious reverence for the Protestant virtues of hard work and frugality that the Catholic-born Crèvecoeur had acquired by the time he wrote these words, what is striking about his notion of American citizenship is its relation to the spirit of capitalism. By rendering the promise of the American Dream in the language of exchange—“If you wilt work,” “I shall endow thee”—Crèvecoeur's definition of Americanism suggests that participation in American citizenship may be conceived of as a form of capital. One earns the right to citizenship with hard work and “honesty,” and—in return—citizenship then opens the door to the limitless possibilities of “this great American asylum” (52).

But of all the qualities that Crèvecoeur ascribes to American citizenship: civil liberty, social equality, diversity, as well as rights and privileges in exchange for hard work, none proved to apply to all groups of aspirants to the status of full citizens—both in Crèvecoeur's time and later. Among the times and places that render Crèvecoeur's vision of America's ideals far removed from America's reality are the early twentieth-century industrial towns and cities that became destinations for millions of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe and for black migrants from the southern states. Foreign and black workers came en masse to the urban factories as well as steel and coal towns looking for privileges, rights, and opportunities like those described by Crèvecoeur. What they found, however, was much different. The disillusionments met by the migrants in those industrial spaces are the subject of two social realist novels published in 1941, Thomas Bell's *Out of This Furnace* and William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge*. Like Crèvecoeur, Bell and Attaway foreground labor in the titles and contents of their books, but the optimistic implication of industriousness leading to prosperity in

the French-American writer's *Letters* are replaced by the naturalistic visions of struggle against capitalism and racism in the other two books. Bell's and Attaway's radical novels expose the fundamental paradox of the American democratic project by revealing parallels between early twentieth-century American industrial capitalism and the systems of European feudalism and American slavery. They show that the freedom, social equality, and rewards of labor praised by such optimistic interpreters of the American national experiment as Crèvecoeur are myths of grandeur unreflective of the American reality.

My twofold argument in this chapter starts by underscoring the fascinating relationship the two books reveal among capitalism, citizenship, and race. Through a mixture of naturalism and lyricism, Bell and Attaway create a sense of their characters' exclusion from the economic and political spheres of American freedom, as well as from mainstream society. The difficult negotiations of living conditions by the writers' working-class black and immigrant characters reveal citizenship—understood both in a legal/institutional sense and as cultural practices/belonging—to be an instrument facilitating capitalism's abuse of labor. As in Crèvecoeur, we may understand citizenship to function here as a form of capital. But in the place of the prosperous farmer's paeans to America's social equality and diversity, Bell and Attaway highlight ethnicity and race as the bases of their characters' exclusion from the capital of full citizenship, in turn leading to their exploitation by the industrial machine. The two writers' naturalist imagery and lyrical prose not only traps the readers in the characters' realistically portrayed oppressive physical environment but also forces the audience to explore the spaces of the characters' psyches and emotions.

Nevertheless, as the second part of my argument shows—one that I close this chapter with—Bell's and Attaway's purpose seems to be just as much to *humanize* their characters as it is

to show the *dehumanizing* forces they struggle against. By drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of various forms of capital, I argue that to the exclusion from the capital embodied in full citizenship, Bell's and Attaway's migrants respond with practices in other spheres of their lives—practices that articulate a new understanding of American belonging. By prominently featuring their characters' engagement with their cultural and social capital, the two writers show that the Slovak immigrants and the black Americans of their narratives take up civic participation on a variety of social levels, including familial and communal relations. The ethnic laborers also counter the exclusion from economic and political agency by affirming their humanity through individual and collective acts of self-expression that underscore their right to have rights.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the theme of the characters' relation to organized labor in both novels implies the political potential of their everyday personal lives, which, as the novels show, serve as the real basis for struggle against capitalism and its racist exclusions.

This chapter gives me the opportunity to initiate a multifaceted discussion that—in many different forms—echoes in the remainder of the dissertation. It is a discussion of literary ethnicities' engagement with the seemingly contradictory themes of oppression and hope, as well as the discourses of spatiality and place-practices. Chronologically and spatially, Bell's and Attaway's books' plots offer convenient points of departure for exploring blacks' and white ethnics' spatial negotiations in the realist fiction published between 1930s and 1950s. The foreign and black migrants' entry into twentieth-century industrial America in the two novels outlines the spatial and social horizons—of community, residential geography, labor, social mobility—that I then recognize in the fictions depicting the next stages of this journey through American spaces in other chapters. Here, as in other sections of the study, what is of utmost importance is

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow the phrase “the right to have rights” from Hannah Arendt’s study of Nazism and Stalinism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

the question of which American places—and which spheres of American experience—are available to those who do not fit into the mainstream definition of “an American.”

In their portrayals of racial prejudice as the obstacle to American belonging and capital, the two novels point to a crucial paradox underlying the foundations of the nation that Crevecoeur serenaded. But even the author of *Letters* himself inadvertently revealed cracks in the fabric of American egalitarianism and ethnic multitude that he wove. As many scholars have noted, including literary critic Marcus Klein and historian Eric Foner, Crevecoeur's proclamation of America's diverse ethnic make-up collapses onto itself given the writer's narrow list of nationalities he sees as candidates for American citizenship. The “American farmer” first singlehandedly denies the possibility of participation in American citizenship to most of the world's population, stating that an American “is either an European, or the descendant of an European” (54). The group of the privileged gets even more modest as he further limits the list of participants in this new national enterprise to exclusively western and northern Europeans: “a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes” (51). Although one of Crevecoeur's letters discusses the problem of slavery and bemoans the fate of “those showers of sweat and of tears which from the bodies of Africans, daily drop, and moisten the ground they till” (225), its author sees no contradiction in such expressions of sympathy and his denial of American civic rights to people of African descent. All in all, “What Is an American?” shows that America's promise of protection and fulfillment voiced in Crevecoeur's conclusion will only be given to the select few, regardless of how “honest” and “industrious” the othered peoples prove themselves.

In their novels, Bell and Attaway point to a tension between their characters' belief in their rights to citizenship and their labor's rewards—and their awareness that those rights are

beyond their reach. In *Out of This Furnace*, a partially autobiographic three-generational saga of Slovak immigrants' lives in Pennsylvania's steel towns, Bell embodies his most poignant points about the contradictions of immigrant laborers' sacrifices and their disenfranchisement in Mike Dobrejcak, a character the author based on his own father. Mike, who immigrated to the United States as a ten-year old boy in 1889 and started working in Braddock's blast furnaces a year later, initially appears hopeful about the possibility of achieving the American Dream through his civic engagement and hard work in the mill. Later, as a grown-up, determined to fulfill all the necessary formal requirements for naturalization, he studies English and proudly tells his future father-in-law: "I'm going to be a citizen soon. I'm going to have the right to vote in a few years" (Bell 66). Yet the lessons from industrial capitalism and American nativism in the years to follow teach him that his formal citizenship is of a lesser kind. Several chapters later, the readers may find it hard to recognize Mike in the disillusioned character whose lost hope leads him to reflect: "There's good in all of us that would make our lives happier and the world a better place for everybody. But it's never asked for. We're only Hunkies" (196).

Similarly, Attaway has his African American characters reveal the juxtaposition between their claims to the seemingly obvious rights and the reality of those rights' inaccessibility. *Blood on the Forge* follows the three Moss brothers on their migration from their sharecropping life in Kentucky to the same Pennsylvanian county where Bell's Slovaks settle. Of the three brothers, the middle one, Melody, is the main teller and interpreter of their experience. This, Attaway articulates the paradox of African American second-class citizenship most vividly through Melody's character. While philosophizing about the racial and class divisions in sharecropping, Melody says to his older brother in Part One of the novel: "Mat, I got a big feelin' like the ground don't belong to the white boss—not to nobody" (22). The implications of Melody's reflection are

broader, however, than the farming context may suggest. “Ground” here becomes a metaphor for certain rights and liberties that—as Melody implies—should be universal. He sees education as one of those fundamental human and citizen rights as well, when he says: “Man had oughta know book learnin'--” (23). Yet, as his next reflection indicates, Melody is aware of the hierarchies that bar him from many of such seemingly obvious rights. Pondering the life he has had in contrast to the life he would have wished for, he says: “wish I'd 'a' had a chance to sit at a schoolhouse like white kids—all the year round” (23). Melody's comment is profound.

Twentieth-century scholarship in citizenship and cultural capital makes clear that this Melody's desire for schooling has deep civic implications. Ralf Dahrendorf's inclusion of “equality of educational opportunity” among “basic right[s] of every citizen,” given education's role as “both a prerequisite and a dimension of full social and political participation” (682), helps shed light on the broad horizon of Melody's wish. His desire for education also suggests a yearning for full citizenship. Aware of his positionality's limitations, he laconically voices the obvious reason for his lack of access to such rights: “Guess I oughta been white” (23).

The novels' characters learn that capitalism and racism—with the two intertwined and in each other's service—create a vicious circle: the characters' race and ethnicity exclude them from full citizenship, causing them frequently to become the unprotected scapegoats of the ruthless steel industry, which in turn leaves them unable to accumulate economic capital and join the middle-class with its dimension of citizenship rights. But Bell and Attaway reveal multiple ways that their Slovak and African American migrants strive to confirm their human and civic rights through their cultural and social capital, thus suggesting a broader definition of citizenship.

Reflecting on the term “citizenship” in 1922, Roscoe Lewis Ashley, the author of high school textbooks in civics and history, saw “no reason” “why it may not be used in connection

with membership in any group that is civic in character,” including the family and the community (4). “*Citizenship is membership*” (3), Ashley postulated in *The Practice of Citizenship in Home, School, Business and Community*. Writing in the midst of an era when panic over immigration and race produced numerous pamphlets, books, and documents defining the bounds of American national identity—frequently by racializing it—Ashley, perhaps unintentionally, opened a possibility of allowing the excluded groups' participation as citizens on the basis of this broad definition of “citizenship as membership.” Moreover, Ashley's use of the word “practice” in his title, as well as his insistence on various membership practices throughout the volume, suggest that citizenship is about what one *does*—not what one *is*. Bell's and Attaway's books shed light on the social practices of the excluded that express such broad understanding of citizenship—and thus dismiss the nativist views about certain groups' lack of readiness or fitness to participate in the American national project. Furthermore, the novels' emphasis on the characters' affirmations of their humanity, as well as individual and collective self-expression, suggests a radical-for-its-time view of citizenship as the right to self-cultivation or, to use Dahrendorf's words decades later, as “not a goal in itself but a means toward enlarging the life chances of men” (701).

### **Introducing the Ethnic Proletarian “Cast”: Bell, Attaway, and Their Tales of Migration**

Whereas multiple parallels exist between the lives of Bell's and Attaway's migrant families, including the novels' common setting in Allegheny County's steel mills in Pennsylvania, the paths that led the two writers to creating those worlds were very different. For Thomas Bell, born Thomas Belejčak in 1903 in Braddock, Pennsylvania, the story of his own immigrant Slovak family laid the foundation for his narrative. His father immigrated to the United States as a fifteen-year old boy and his mother was born in Pennsylvania to immigrants

from Slovakia. Thomas lost both his parents early to tuberculosis; his father passed away on the boy's eleventh birthday and his mother's death followed five years later (Barkan 34-35). A difficult youth awaited Thomas, who quit school around the age of fifteen and spent the following years laboring first at a glass factory and then in the local steel mill. In 1922, he moved to New York City where he supported his dream to become a writer with a variety of jobs such as a mechanic and a bookstore clerk. He published his first novel, *The Breed of Basil*, in 1930. Two years later, he married Marie Benedetti, an Italian who had lived in the United States since she was two (Barkan 35). After 1933, he was able to turn to writing full time while his wife became the main financial supporter of their household (35). He published five novels and several short stories, with much of his writing focusing on the subject matter he knew best: the lives of ordinary working people.

The radically political and psychologically stirring *Out of This Furnace* received positive reviews at the time of its publication in 1941. But the book would then go out of print, and its author, who died of cancer in 1961, would not live to see his masterpiece's resurrection brought about by an American scholar of working-class literature and culture, David Demarest, in 1976. Not much is known about Bell's life and career, but whatever information is available is there thanks to Demarest's efforts. Two years after the book's reappearance, a theater troupe in Pittsburgh called The Iron Clad Agreement dramatized the novel (Pitz). In 2008, another theater project in Pittsburgh introduced a new generation of viewers to Bell's story. In 1990, Demarest also produced a short documentary that walks viewers through the spaces and lives that inspired Bell's book. Perhaps most importantly, his insistence on bringing this proletarian ethnic narrative out of the shadows led to its becoming standard reading in many literature classrooms in Pennsylvania and a common source for working-class and ethnic studies scholars and students

across the country.

William Attaway's journey to the authorship of his proletarian novel about Pennsylvanian steel workers differed strikingly from Bell's. He was born in 1911 in Mississippi to middle-class African American parents. His father was a respected physician, entrepreneur, and community leader (Yarborough 30). Around 1918, the family relocated to Chicago—a move that according to his father was necessary to protect his children from a false self-image that southern racism was likely to instill in them (30-31). In Chicago, William's father opened a medical practice and William's mother started working as a school teacher (31). The family quickly established itself as a socially active part of Chicago's growing black bourgeoisie. As members of the African American middle-class, William's parents hoped to see their son pursue a career fitting his class position, but he “was pulled in other directions” (Yarborough 31). “[H]e was fascinated with machines” (31), a proclivity that may have brought about an early glance at the daily lives of the working class. Choosing his own interests over his parents' ambition, he attended a technical high school to become a mechanic. At school, young Attaway also harbored a passion for another subject—literature—which suggested a possible career for him when he discovered that the author of a poem he had read in an English class, Langston Hughes, was black.

After his father died suddenly in 1929, William dropped out of school and went hoboing around the country (Yarborough 32). He returned to Chicago in 1932, graduated from high school, and followed in his two sisters' footsteps by entering the University of Illinois (32). But he felt constricted by the schedules and coursework requirements, feeling that they got in the way of his creative writing. He quit college in the spring of 1933 and set off yet again to travel the country (32). This experience familiarized him with the life of physical labor, as he took on seasonal jobs including agricultural work in the West and the Midwest (32). He finally returned

to Illinois, re-enrolled at the university in Urbana-Champaign, and graduated in 1936 with a degree in pre-law, a major he chose simply because the class schedule allowed him to stay up late and write at night (32).

Like Bell, Attaway moved to New York City in hopes of developing a writing career. He made the move in 1936, following his sister, Ruth, who was establishing herself there as an actress (34). Attaway supported himself with a variety of jobs, including labor organizing in Harlem, and worked on his first novel, *Let Me Breathe Thunder*, which was released in 1939. By the time *Blood on the Forge* was published in 1941, “Attaway has established himself as a notable figure on the African American cultural landscape in New York City. He was a part of a remarkable cohort of black artists, musicians, and authors (the “306 Group”) who met regularly at 306 West 141<sup>st</sup> Street in Harlem” (Yarborough 38). According to the author himself, *Blood*, which received excellent reviews for its realism, was partially inspired by his first-hand experience with work in steel mills in various locations, including South Chicago, Youngstown, Pittsburgh, and Gary (40). The novel's political content points to Attaway's leftist views. Although sources vary on whether or not he was a member of the Communist Party, he definitely was a fellow traveler. The leftist circles he was a part of notably included Richard Wright whose friendship and literary example count among Attaway's important influences.

Attaway enlisted in the military in 1942 and served until the end of the war. After the war, his career began steering away from fiction writing and towards writing for television, radio, and film. He also composed many songs, including well-known tunes sung by Harry Belafonte who was his close friend. In 1962, Attaway married Frances Settele, a white New Yorker with whom he had been in a relationship for over twenty years. The couple did not marry earlier for fear of backlash to their interracial marriage. They had two children, William and

Noelle, and the whole family moved to Barbados in 1966 where they remained for about a decade (Yarborough 47). After returning to the United States, Attaway spent the last years of his life in California where he died in 1986 and where his children still live.

The two writers' disparate experiences nevertheless allowed them to arrive at a similar world view with respect to ethnicity and labor, a common ground that their respective novels reflect. While Bell's political radicalism stemmed from his childhood among steel workers struggling for unionization, Attaway deliberately sought out situations and places that would infuse his life with working-class experience, despite his middle-class background. The immigrant history of his own family and neighbors taught Bell that ethnicity and socio-economic status were inseparable means of poor foreigners' oppression. On the other hand, Attaway's family's migration North was an early lesson for the future writer in the status of African Americans in the United States, regardless of their class. Altogether, whatever the circumstances that fostered Bell's and Attaway's anti-racist, anti-capitalist views, they certainly led them in a similar direction. Moreover, even if the two never crossed paths in New York, where they lived at the same time, their paths converged in the pages of their social realist novels.

*Out of This Furnace* tells a story of three generations of immigrant Slovak families—the Krachas and the Dobrejcaks. The saga begins in the mid-1880s with Djuro Kracha's arrival from the old country and his travel on foot from New York's Ellis Island to Pennsylvania. Like most members of the Slovak community in Braddock, he gets a job in the steel mill; after settling down, he sends for his wife, Elena, to join him. Later, Kracha's naive attempt at business ownership, as well as his extramarital affair and uncaring approach to his family, lead to his downfall. Kracha and Elena's oldest daughter, Mary, and her husband, Mike Dobrejcak—a steel worker, both based roughly on Bell's parents—represent the second generation. As Demerest

notes in the Afterword to the 1976 edition, the part of the novel devoted to the Dobrejcaks differs strikingly from the style Bell uses in the account of Kracha's life. Kracha's section “is held together by a summarizing narrative voice, the author's own commentary on the problem Kracha encounters” (Demarest 422). As a result, Kracha emerges as “a man more acted upon than acting” (422). In Mike and Mary's section, on the other hand, the narrator's commentary increasingly gives way to long scenes where the characters' own reflections on their lives create a sense of intimacy and warmth (422). Despite the inhuman conditions of Mike's work that lead to his death, as well as the couple's struggle to support themselves and their four children, the emphasis on the interpersonal bonds in this section portrays the characters with agency absent from Kracha's experience. The section devoted to the third generation returns to the “reportage” style of narration and focuses on the life of Mike and Mary's oldest son, Johnny Dobrejcak, known as Dobie. As the representative of the American generation of his family, Dobie's vision of his life's possibilities is not as affected by the ethnicity-related obstacles as his parents' was. He is the one who actively participates in and gets to see the fruit of the steel industry's unionization. For the purposes of this chapter, the middle part of the novel—focusing on Mike's life and the years immediately after his death—presents the most compelling ground for analysis. Its rich narrative style, focus on the thematic intersections of ethnicity and capitalism, as well as its time frame's overlap with Attaway's novel, make it the preferable vantage point for reading the novel's representation of migrant practices.

Although formally *Blood on the Forge* comprises five parts, the plot revolves around three major sections, each centered in a different locale. In contrast to Bell's novel, the time of the plot spans only several months in the lives of its African American characters, half-brothers Big Mat, Chinatown, and Melody Moss. The novel opens in 1919 in Kentucky, four weeks after

the death of the men's mother in the field where the sharecropping family labors. Early on the brothers are each identified by specific skills and passions early on: Melody is a musician, religious beliefs and a hot temper characterize Big Mat, and Chinatown is sensual and carefree. After the oldest of the brothers, Mat, attacks and possibly kills the riding boss for his racist words about Mat's dead mother, the brothers decide to take the offer of a white man who promises them a job in the North. They depart that same night, leaving behind their farming lives and—having learned the train only transports men—Big Mat's wife, Hattie. The short second part of the novel presents the crucial transition of the brothers from the rural South by rendering their train ride to the North in Middle Passage imagery.

The rest of the novel pictures the Mosses' experience in the mill town where they live in a bunkhouse with the other laborers and work unbearably long shifts. Apart from struggling with the unfamiliar industrial setting, as well as the unsafe and exhausting work, Mat, Melody, and Chinatown also face the hostility of Eastern European workers who see them as potential scabs. While foregrounding the company's manipulation of the workers by pitching various ethnic groups against one another, this section also sheds light on the laborers' shared hardships and interracial friendships. All workers also share leisure activities such as dog fights, gambling, and visits to brothels. On one such visit, Melody meets Anna, a young Mexican woman. He becomes infatuated with the girl, but soon after Anna's interest in Big Mat leads to Melody's jealousy and a rift between the brothers. Mat gradually abandons his earlier plan to bring Hattie to the North and sets up house with Anna.

Meanwhile the lack of safety measures at the steel mill results in an accident in which many die and Chinatown loses his eyes. Melody also falls victim to the mill; his “guitar picking” hand gets smashed. Mat's attempt at building a new home with Anna fails. The novel gradually

shows the men's plans and identities unraveling against the background of capitalist exploitation. Additionally, as the inhumane conditions push the foreign workers to plans of a strike, the racial tensions grow in the town. The brothers and other African American workers do not join the union, as they do not see the correlation between organized labor's goals and their own. The sheriff recruits Big Mat to help fight the strikers, and Mat, craving a sense of empowerment within his increasingly powerless circumstances, takes on the task. In the midst of raiding the union headquarters, Mat is attacked by an Eastern European member of the union and killed. The novel ends with Melody and Chinatown leaving the nightmare of the steel town on another train—this time going to the city, Pittsburgh, with hopes of finding a better future.

The themes of race, ethnicity, and labor that occupy the central stage in both these novels may be productively explored, as I argue, from the perspective of blacks' and new immigrants' incomplete participation in American citizenship. A discussion of the formal and informal ways that those groups were barred from full-citizenship will clarify the vicious circle of political disenfranchisement, social exclusion from the mainstream, and economic discrimination that people like the Mosses and the Dobrejcaks would find themselves in. Such entrapment, I then show, leaves the sphere of communal and familial relations as well as the sphere of creative expression as the only—yet potent—areas for the marginalized to exercise their role as citizens.

### **The Devil's Triangle: Race, Capital, and Citizenship**

The status of blacks and new immigrants in relation to American citizenship at the turn of the twentieth century lacks a clear-cut definition, for it relied on a mixture of legal, scientific, and cultural factors that specified individuals' fitness for—and thus right to—freedom. Initially, the right to define the bounds of citizenship were left up to the different states. But while the original Constitution did not specify who had the right to be a citizen, the Naturalization Act of

1790 provided the first legislative definition of American citizenship, restricting it to “free white persons” (Foner 39), a phrase that in practical terms translated into “free white men,” given that women, regardless of race or color, were not considered citizens. While, formally, changes introduced in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution after the Civil War, as well as in the Naturalization Act of 1870, dramatically transformed the legal status of African Americans by offering them formal citizenship and naturalization rights, access to both formal and informal citizenship remained highly restricted—in a variety of legislative, political, and social ways. Some groups would have to wait even longer to gain the formal right to be citizens to; people of Asian origin, for example, did not gain that right until 1940s.

The position of many eastern and southern European immigrants who arrived at the American shore between 1880s and 1924—when the Johnson-Reed Act made it impossible or nearly impossible for many to enter—vis-à-vis the struggle for citizenship presents a complex issue. Eric Foner notes that the supposed openness to admitting “free white persons” into the community of citizens was actually of little use to a long list of social groups that were denied entry to the United States in the last decades of the nineteenth century. “Beginning with prostitutes, convicted felons, lunatics, polygamists, and persons likely to become a 'public charge,' the list of excluded classes would be expanded in the twentieth century to include, among others, anarchists, Communists, homosexuals, and the illiterate” (Foner 39). Thus, before one could even begin the five-year period of residence required of applicants for citizenship (Buel 23), one first had to get through the exclusionary selection process on Ellis Island. Amy Fairchild's study of the bases for rejection of newly arrived immigrants as established by the racialized contemporary medical and scientific theories addresses one important aspect of that process. Fairchild explains that people of lower socio-economic classes, represented

disproportionately by southern and eastern Europeans, often failed to pass the scrutiny of the medical board as their appearance alone was interpreted as reflective of their “natural sphere” (Fairchild 124--125). Visible poverty, combined with the inability to communicate in English, often became evidence of feeble-mindedness or other conditions that would categorize one as a future unwanted burden for the country—a “public charge.”

Early twentieth-century sociologist and political activist Kate Holladay Claghorn, who wrote many works on immigration, race, and social class, saw the troubling character of the criteria used in determining immigrants' eligibility for entry and future citizenship. “Many of the provisions for exclusion are . . . vague” (311), Claghorn wrote assertively in 1923, at the height of anti-immigrant paranoia. She touches on yet another ambiguously formulated basis for barred entry to the country by asking “what is an 'anarchist'?--and points out that anarchism remains “absolutely undefined” (311). The section of her *Immigrant's Day in Court* devoted to “Cases of Denaturalization” includes stories of foreigners who either were—or were accused of being—socialists, wobblies, and anarchists (320-322). Most importantly, Claghorn points out that “[t]he citizenship granted to the alien is, in fact, something different from the citizenship enjoyed by the native born” for two reasons: the conditions a foreigner must meet to become a citizen, such as “good moral character” as well as the rejection of certain political affiliations and polygamy, are never required of native-born citizens (318-320). Moreover, a naturalized alien may lose the right to citizenship (319). Thus, Claghorn shows that an immigrant's status as a citizen—as a priori different—is in jeopardy of being seen as inferior.

Claghorn's empathy for the immigrants was less common at the time than the sentiments in the *Manual of the United States: For the Information of Immigrants and Foreigners* (1924), whose instructions about “how to become a patriotic citizen” (Buel 5) show a complete lack of

understanding of most new immigrants' lives. Presenting Americanization and citizenship as concomitant circumstances of gaining a sense of self-worth and respect from others (14), the guide gives “advice” that would prove useless to many. Apart from advising the immigrants, many of whom worked ten- to fourteen-hour shifts in inhumane conditions and lived in overcrowded tenements located in polluted towns or filthy urban neighborhoods, to “[k]eep your room clean and tidy” and “[h]ave plenty of fresh air in your room” (92), the guide also warns that “[t]o secure your final papers you must be able to speak English” and “write your name” (24). The irony of this advice being given *in English* was lost on the author. And yet, despite the instructions' non-applicability to many immigrants, the booklet states that “America *expects*” [my emphasis] those foreigners who enter the United States “to become naturalized citizens, to be *Americans*” (14).

The restrictions and expectations placed on immigrants show the baffling status of foreign migrants in relation to citizenship. The simultaneous defense against the unwanted “wave” of immigrants and the attempts to mold them into “patriotic citizens” is embodied, as James Barrett and David Roediger suggest, in the figure of Theodore Roosevelt who warned against “the imminent swamping of the 'old stock' racial elements” and yet was also “the optimistic Americanizer” (Barrett and Roediger 10). Yet Roosevelt is not one of the symbols of good citizenship that Mike Dobrejcak's learns about in his Americanization class in *Out of This Furnace*. A scene that depicts the school for foreigners uses ironic realism to show that the school's presentation of American ideals of freedom and equal opportunity relies on one of the most effective methods of inventing a mythology: a nostalgia for a distant heroic past.

The scene opens with a telling conceptualization of the class within the immigrant workers' lives: “The twelve-hour turn left even the very young with little energy to do more than

lean against a bar, or sleep, but when an English class for foreigners was started in the schoolhouse on Eleventh Street, Mike attended more faithfully than most” (Bell 120). The passage starts, then, by putting the scene that follows in the proper perspective. Its first sentence reminds the readers not to lose sight of the fact that the foreign workers flocking the English classes in the evenings—with hopes of acquiring the linguistic tool that may make their and their families' lives less challenging—are those same people who just hours earlier felt themselves reduced to “flesh and blood” (48) as they faced yet another day of exhausting toil. The readers are invited to read the scene of Americanizing education all the while remembering the lyrical, sorrowful naturalism of the earlier images of the workers' lives, such as this: “When human flesh and blood could stand no more it got up at five in the morning as usual and put on its work clothes and went into the mill; and when the whistle blew it came home” (48). The scarcity of punctuation separating various actions here, along with the references to the human agents as “it,” generate an image of automatons set to follow a routine for eternity. With Mike entering school, we, as readers, are now to imagine what it would be like for those exhausted shadows of men to collect the energy and optimism necessary to learn the language, history, and culture of the country that has turned them into an “it.”

But—amazingly--Mike does. While at school, he not only “learned to read and write English,” but is also “exposed to those figures and folk tales of American history—Plymouth Rock, the Boston Tea Party and Gettysburg; George Washington and Abraham Lincoln—which his teachers assumed were most potently Americanizing” (120). Here the narrator's tone gradually infuses with cynicism. To Mike and other foreigners American history offers a narrative with no room for them. The Anglo-Saxon ring of the “Founding Fathers” names, as well as Plymouth Rock's and the Boston Tea Party's reflections of Crèvecoeur's vision, pose

America as mythically grand and desirable, on the one hand, and on the other, something unattainable to the Slovak workers. The passage continues with the description of a slice of local Pennsylvanian history the class teaches to its students. Mike learns about a British General, George Braddock, whose name the town bears, and who—together with George Washington “was involved somehow” (120) in events in the area. “What the fighting was about Mike had no idea” (120), the narrator states, aiming the mocking tone at the school's framing of this educational experience. But while the two generals' role in the events “was never made clear” (120), what the lesson explains how “a horde of Indians, ignorant savages . . . disregarded the rules of civilized warfare by ambushing General Braddock's troops” (120). Thus, of the entirety of the French and Indian Wars, the one message that Mike and other immigrants are asked to take with them is a racist portrayal of American Indians' and their responsibility for Braddock's death.

The scene comes to its ironic culmination when the narrator comments on Mike's thoughts about the difference between the “American” Washington's and the “British” Braddock's military tactics; “George Washington was so obviously right that perceiving it made Mike feel himself already half an American” (120). It is useful to imagine this moment as a frozen vignette symbolizing Mike's hopeful attempt at becoming American and then juxtapose it with a scene mentioned earlier in this chapter, which takes place a few years later, when Mike bitterly comments on his and other Slovaks' status in America: “We're only Hunkies” (196). The contrast between these two scenes embodies the paradoxical position of Eastern Europeans at the time—expected to become American while constantly reminded of their otherness and unassimilability. In the latter scene, the third-person narrator steps back and gives the stage to Mike's moving monologue:

Once I had an idea, I thought to myself: If we were to sing some of our songs and

explain what they were about—would it surprise them to learn that we sang about such things and had such feelings? If we told them how we lived in the old country, how we worked the land, the crops we grew, . . . our holidays and festivals—would they realize that even though we spoke different languages we were still men like themselves, with the same troubles, the same hopes and dreams? I hoped that we might learn to respect one another, that we might even become friends. (196)

The style of Mike's eulogy to the “idea” of America that he “once had” contrasts sharply with the sarcasm of the Americanization scene. Handed the narrative voice, Mike strips the representation of his failed hopes of rhetorical irony, and what is left—is bare sorrow.

In this emotional self-exposure, Mike lets himself wonder if the Slovaks' perceived “otherness” could be revealed as a mirage if the interaction with America's more privileged groups could take place on Slovak cultural turf. If Slovaks could display the depth of their traditions and tell their tales in the language of their own, Mike asks, is it possible that their humanity would register with those who otherwise see their customs and language as alien intrusions. Mike expresses hope in the universal human emotions having the power to transcend differences. His vision of Slovak songs bridging the divide between the immigrants and America's more privileged groups brings to mind a scene in Attaway's novel where Melody recognizes the familiarity of feeling in Ukrainian workers' “wailing” songs (98), though he does not understand their “gobbler talk” (44). “Words didn't count when the music had a tongue” (98). But between Melody and the Ukrainians, the shared toil in the lower strata of the racial hierarchy helps create a common tongue. There is no such connection between Mike and the people who call the shots. Thus, Mike has given up hope of such understanding ever coming to fruition: “I

used to have such ideas, make such great plans. No more” (197). His lyrical monologue leads to a pessimistic conclusion that as a new immigrant he must remain forever trapped between the desire for belonging and rejection—and America's expectation of him to act like a citizen, while he is perpetually denied full citizenship.

As fundamentally unfair as the multiple axes of exclusions that eastern and southern Europeans faced in their access to citizenship were, the rules of immigrant entry and naturalization—their vague definition notwithstanding—served as formal justifications of some of those prejudices. By contrast, it may have appeared that African Americans' rights with respect to citizenship should not have been questioned at the turn of the century, given their thorough documentation. And yet, a textbook titled *American Citizenship Practice* published in 1924 lists among “Groups That Do Not Fit” (Harman, Wrench, and Tucker 65) not only the Chinese and Japanese (67), who at the time were legally barred from citizenship, and “Italian, Hungarian, Jewish, [and] Polish” foreigners “who speak languages less easily understood by English-speaking people” and whose “standards of civilization are considerably different” than those of the earlier immigrants from northern Europe (66)—but also “the negro” (68-69). This apparent contradiction comes from the fact that, as Mark Weiner notes, group inclusion involves two different conceptions of citizenship (Weiner 7). While “[t]he first, explicitly legal, often coincides with the idea of civil or political rights” (7), “[t]he second notion of group citizenship is a cultural one” (8). “For a group to enjoy full citizenship in a cultural sense, the civic majority must recognize that the group 'belongs'” (8). Weiner relates the two distinct notions of citizenship to W.E.B. Du Bois's famous observation of African Americans' “double consciousness”—the state of being simultaneously American and black—and thus being on the inside and the outside of citizenship at the same time (8). Weiner examines the symbolic value of legal trials that have

affected the citizenship status of blacks; he chooses to think of those trials as “rituals of citizenship.”

Undeniably, the legacy of slavery has affected African Americans' access to full citizenship. At the turn of the twentieth century, the emancipation of slaves and the granting of citizenship rights to blacks were still relatively recent social and legal changes that had many, like the authors of the above-cited textbook, give in to nostalgia about the time when “the problem” of blacks' demanding equality “was solved by keeping the black man in slavery” (Harman, Wrench, and Tucker 68). As Foner argues, slavery had tremendous consequences for the notion of citizenship in the United States in the decades to come, as it “helped to shape the identity, the sense of self, of all Americans. Constituting the most impenetrable boundary of citizenship, slavery rendered blacks all but invisible to those imagining the American community” (38). As may be expected, this perceived invisibility of African Americans' in the arena of civic participation by those who drew the lines of civic inclusion and ostracism did not simply go away overnight with the passing of the Amendments and the Naturalization Act of 1870.

Factors similar to those that barred many foreigners from entering the country became obstacles for African Americans seeking cultural citizenship. Given the notion that to belong in—or “fit”—the community of citizens one had to be capable of fostering the ideal of freedom and thus have qualities such as “self-control, rational forethought, and devotion to the larger community” (Foner 40), the contemporary discourses of social Darwinism and scientific racism rendered blacks as the least likely group to achieve equal footing. Since “the ability or inability of various peoples to participate in American democracy” could be explained by presumed inborn traits of different “races” (Foner 131), African Americans' position on the bottom of the

racial taxonomy defined them as one of the “groups that do not fit” despite their legal status as citizens.

In the South, the legal and social acceptance of Jim Crow meant not only a sense of exclusion from the larger society for blacks but also often severe consequences, including death, resulting from social acceptance of lynching and the lack of legal protection for African Americans. Lynching and a fear of all-white juries both emerge as problems in Attaway's novel. Mat's confrontation with the riding boss sets the Moss brothers off on a journey South because the consequences of hitting or killing a white man for an African American would be dire, regardless of what ignited the attack. The brothers' memories of “young Charley,” a victim of lynching, also haunt them, making them count the considerably lesser odds of lynching in the North among the few blessings they find there. But whether in the extreme form of racialized murder or in the form of subtler but painful exclusions, blacks were made to understand that the deeply rooted perception of them as an antithesis of WASP-derived Americanness trumped the documents that granted them citizen rights. If, as Stuart Hall and David Held write, citizenship should be assessed “on the basis of liberties and rights which are tangible, capable of being enjoyed, in both the state and civil society” (178), then American citizenship of the time is a deeply flawed notion, because “[i]f it is not given concrete and practical content, liberty as an abstract principle can scarcely be said to have any very profound consequences for everyday life” (Hall and Held 178).

African Americans' and new immigrants' lack of access to full citizenship rendered them subject to abuse in a variety of contexts, one of the most important being the labor market, given that most blacks and white ethnics belonged to the working class. Given the relation between citizenship and the discrimination that black and immigrant workers faced in the labor market, it

is useful to follow Harald Bauder in conceiving of citizenship “as a form of capital in the sense intended by Bourdieu. It is a strategically deployed category that can be exchanged with other forms of capital and serves the aim of accumulation and reproduction” (321). Such an understanding of citizenship helps conceptualize the workers' entrapment: the lack of full citizenship renders one unable to access other forms of capital, such as education or property. The characters in Bell's and Attaway's novels are very much aware of those links among full citizenship, capital, and the abuses they suffer. For example, just as Melody reflects on his inability to exchange capital for education in the example cited earlier, one of Bell's Slovak immigrants, Kracha's friend, Dubik, draws a connection between property and capitalist exploitation when he daydreams about a “small house with a piece of good ground around it, a few chickens, pigs, maybe a horse and a cow. Then you could tell the mill to go to hell” (Bell 33). Moreover, as some of Bell's characters exemplify—such as Mike who becomes a citizen—and as Attaway's African American characters make transparent, it is not just formal citizenship that can be thought of as capital. Being barred from informal citizenship, understood as “membership in a national community related to practices of identity and belonging” (Bauder 323), can also lock workers “in positions in which they are vulnerable and contribute disproportionately to the economies of industrialized countries” (Bauder 327).

Thinking of citizenship as a form of capital is useful, above all, because it appears that that is precisely what the industrial bosses the early twentieth century saw it as. Seeing southern and eastern Europeans as lacking the capital of civic rights allowed their employers to imagine themselves as the only ones in possession of agency. The era's industrial capitalist arena was a stage of a drama orchestrated by the employers who—aware of their workers' vulnerability—pitched different racial groups against one another to enhance the system's efficiency. A racist

cartoon published in *Puck* magazine (See the link: <http://museum.msu.edu/sites/default/files/images/TheAntiChineseWall.jpg>) on March 29, 1882 illustrates the ironies in the competition of various racial minorities for social status and citizenship—and that competition's relation to labor. Titled “The Anti-Chinese Wall: The American Wall Goes Up as the Chinese Original Goes Down,” the cartoon depicts presumably European immigrant workers and one black laborer building a wall intended to keep Chinese immigration out of the United States. The bricks they are using are labeled with words like “un-American,” “law against race,” and “competition.” Intent on differentiating themselves from the group that the cartoon casts as the ultimate other—the Chinese (who were barred from citizenship)—as well as unwilling to welcome another group of competitors to the job market, the immigrant and black workers in the picture toil in fervor—although their labor, while benefiting capital, helps maintain exclusionary provisions that make them second-class citizens. Although the cartoon's date of publication may indicate that the white ethnics it portrays are Irish workers rather than Eastern or Southern Europeans, and although my analysis in this chapter and the dissertation in general does not extend to Asian immigrants, the drawing still represents the paradox that management set up for various marginalized racial groups in the workplace.

Although the cartoon's nativist logic, which held blacks and immigrants to be intellectually inferior, implies the black man is oblivious to the irony of his participation in creating a “law against race” symbolized by the brick he is carrying, and that the European immigrants are ignorant of the implications of their labeling the Chinese as “un-American,” the lack of alternatives, rather than naiveté, characterized different ethnic groups' competitive and frequently bitter relations in the labor market. As historians Barrett and Roediger explain,

interethnic dynamics of labor were created on the one hand by the “knowledge that black workers were especially vulnerable competitors who fared far less well in the labor market than any other native-born American group” (18)—which sent a message to immigrants that the worst thing that could happen to one in America was to be black. On the other hand, the bad relations among various groups were exacerbated by the bosses' manipulation of the immigrant fear of being treated like blacks whereby “management created an economics of racial inbetween-ness which taught new immigrants the importance of racial hierarchy while leaving open their place in that hierarchy” (Barrett and Roediger 15).

To be sure, Bell's narrator makes it clear that the new immigrants' journey to “cashing in” on their inbetweenness was not easy; describing Braddock's mill around 1900, the narrator bitterly reflects: “Of the two thousand or so men working in the mill a good half were Slovaks or other non-English-speaking foreigners, and of that half not one had a skilled job. Departmental heads did their own hiring, and, whether American, English or Irish, tended to favor their own kind” (119). According to a historian, almost two decades later, in 1919—the year of the famous Steel Strike depicted in Bell's and Attaway's novels—the hierarchy was still very much in place. Among the fifty-four different “races” and nationalities employed by Homestead Works of Carnegie Steel, most workers belonged to three major groups: at the top of the hierarchy were the decreasing numbers of old-stock Americans and the descendants of Germans, the Irish, English, Scots, and Welsh—called by others “Johnny Bulls”; the middle was occupied by new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe; finally, at the bottom were the black migrants from the South (B. Nelson 145). Bell's Slovaks and Attaway's Slavs, were far from that stratification's top, but their position was better than the one occupied by the Moss brothers. Moreover, as shown by diachronic comparative studies of the position in the labor market of

blacks and new immigrants by scholars such as Peter Gottlieb, John Bodnar, and—more recently—Bruce Nelson, while unskilled white ethnic workers eventually achieved a measure of upward mobility, such gains were more difficult for African Americans. The hierarchical arrangement of labor, modeled after the nativist logic of the time, often caused workers from different racial and ethnic groups to see one another as a threat, as the tensions in Attaway's novels reveal. But Attaway also points out the possibility of workers' uniting against the stratification they did not choose to be a part of.

### **Community, Culture, and Other Types of Capital**

Apart from the two novels' common themes of labor and ethnicity, what emerges as a key element in both books is the role of communal ties. In this chapter's last part, I locate civic insurgency in immigrants' and blacks' communal practices and personal relations, underscoring the role of the private sites, such as the home and the village. But first it is crucial to establish the centrality of the community to the academic discourse concerning early twentieth-century new immigrant and African American cultures. Scholars in a wide range of humanities and social sciences have discussed the sense of self-worth and belonging offered by ethnic communities to their members from a variety of perspectives. Two pairs of studies are particularly valuable to contextualizing Bell's and Attaway's engagements with the theme, each pair including one analysis from the early twentieth century, and one from the century's latter part. A look at eastern European immigrant communities may be illuminated by sociologist Florian Znaniecki's foundational study around 1920 of Polish peasants in the United States, as well as later historian James Barrett's historical study of community in Chicago's meat-packing town at the turn of the twentieth century. We gain insight into African American communities through Janet Andrews Cromwell's 1934 graduate thesis in sociology at the University of Illinois, which examines

Urbana-Champaign's contemporary black community, as well as by Toni Morrison's analysis of the relation between African American communal values and literature.

The consistent conclusion emerging from the first volume of Znaniecki's extensive study is the centrality of "primary-group organization" to Polish immigrants' lives in early twentieth century. He comments on the lack of understanding of the immigrant social organization that American social workers and institutions displayed in their approach to Poles in the United States (48-49). "The whole misunderstanding," Znaniecki explains, "comes from the lack of realization that the Polish immigrants here . . . constitute vague and changing but as yet, in some measure, real communities, and that these communities have brought from the old country several social institutions, among which the most important is the family institution" (49). Although, according to Znaniecki, such social structures gradually dissolve as a result of confrontation with a new environment, such changes take time (49); thus, most Polish immigrant communities operate, to a varying extent, according to their traditional values of family and community life. For example, as Znaniecki writes, traditionally, for the Polish peasants, "all the attitudes of social pride are primarily familial and only secondarily individual" (96). He cites many examples, including hundreds of letters, showing seemingly personal decisions of immigrant individuals dictated by the opinion or common good of a collective. A similar communal authority underlies many of Bell's characters' choices. For example, Mike's decision about his marriage is to a large degree mediated by the advice and opinion of the woman in whose house he is a boarder, Dorta. Such primacy of familial and communal concerns over an individual's will seems at odd with American individualism and thus shows the social and cultural idiosyncrasy of ethnic immigrant enclaves.

Barrett's study helps understand the social mechanism of ethnic community. Unlike

Znaniiecki's frequently essentializing distinction between the “savage” and “civilized” lives (18)—with the study, despite its groundbreaking empiricism, displaying the stereotyping typical of its era—Barrett's history of the eastern European workers in Chicago's stockyards portrays the immigrant communities without the primitivist gaze. Moreover, it allows us to perceive immigrants' prioritizing of the family and community not simply as a ‘primitive’ tradition but as manifestations of social agency. Although Barrett draws a distinction between the correlations of labor and community as it appears in “towns and small cities dominated by a single industry”—like Bell's Braddock—and “the big-city neighborhood[s] and the large mass-production factory” (3)—the main subject of Barrett's analysis—I propose that, for the purposes of this reading, his conclusions concerning the “problem of human motivation and behavior” (6) apply to the community in *Out of This Furnace*. Barrett sees packinghouse laborers' practices in the workplace and their unionization efforts as intimately related to the workers' concern about their families and communities (7). Although much of his analysis aims to highlight interethnic alliances within the multicultural population of Packingtown—a topic largely absent from Bell's Slovak-centered novel—Barrett's argument about the centrality of the workers' communal and familial lives makes his study a useful tool for considering Bell's community and families. Using Upton Sinclair's famous novel about Chicago's stockyards, *The Jungle* (1906), as a fictional parallel to his historical journey through “the killing floors and canning rooms, the saloons and tenements of Packingtown” (1), Barrett points out the novel's failure to highlight “human agency” as a key element of the proletarian world Sinclair describes (9). Although the historian highlights the crucial difference in the degree of control that employers would exercise over a thoroughly monitored company town like Braddock—as opposed to a less controllable network of neighborhoods in a large city (65)—I see B Bell's Slovak workers as social agents who in

many respects resemble those Barrett discusses.

As in Barrett's *Packingtown*, in Braddock the industry encroached on the lives of its residents with pollution, overcrowding, and sickness. But Barrett argues—and *Out of This Furnace* confirms—that even a detailed description of the physical squalidness and material destitution of the workers' environment is not enough “to tell us what it was like to live” (Barrett 65) in those working-class towns and neighborhoods. Barrett calls for “a more intimate look at *Packingtown*” (65), and Bell's novel does the same for Braddock's semi-fictional First Ward. The historian writes of the correlation between such objective factors as environmental pollution and economic conditions and people's actual lives. The world of Bell's fiction does not allow the readers to ignore that correlation. Barrett's references to the smell exuded by the yards and poisoning the air and those who breathe it (67), mirror Bell's images of “the mill's smoke [that] hung low” and “the air [that] was like fog” (188). This imagery, far from an uninvolved third-person narrator's description of the objective physical setting, comments on the psychologically and socially oppressive circumstances it accompanies. In the previous paragraph, we learn of the steel company's implied threat to employees who refuse to vote Republican in the presidential election of 1913. Mike's support for the Socialist, Eugene Debs, makes him realize that publicizing his radical leaning would be “suicidal” (189). Thus, the smoke hanging over “the iron buildings” (188) evokes the stifling atmosphere of the company's control over the immigrants as much as it describes the filthy air. Similarly, Bell's novel draws attention to the practice of taking in boarders that Barrett mentions as a means of improving the households' economies—even at the cost of overpopulation (Barrett 72). One of the many passages in Bell's book concerned with the need to keep boarders shows Mike insisting on getting his and Mary's privacy back by giving the practice up—only to realize that “the boarders made their absence felt

on paydays” (178). The Dobrejcaks' dream of familial intimacy has to be mediated through the necessities of survival. Thus, family and community concerns emerge as cardinal aspects of immigrants' lives.

As *Blood on the Forge* shows, collective ideals and values also held paramount meaning to African American migrants. Data gathered by Cromwell's study of the black community of Urbana-Champaign in Illinois shows that daily lives of African Americans relied to a considerable degree on relations with friends and neighbors, as well as social gatherings in churches and social clubs. Spatially contained to a rectangular area in the north of the Twin Cities (29), black Americans' neighborhood became a sort of a small-town ghetto whose residents' low income as well as the town's whites' prejudice against them did not leave them many housing alternatives (32). The physical appearance of the neighborhood may lead one to think that little communal activity could take place in such poor material circumstances. Cromwell describes the surroundings as “unkempt” (30), with many houses “in need of paint and general repairs” (30). “In many of the yards, trash of all kinds may be found” (31) and many houses have no inside sanitation. “Because the children have little space in the yards in which to play, they are usually found playing in a vacant field or in the streets” (31). Overall, Cromwell's description of the neighborhood's objective physical features paints a depressing picture. What is more, given that out of one hundred informants of Cromwell's study, seventy eight were migrants from other states—mostly from the South (51)—one may picture a community of strangers, where disparate previous experiences would make establishing communal ties challenging.

But other data in Cromwell's study suggest that, despite the meager material means and most residents' origins in other towns and states, Urbana-Champaign's African Americans of the

era did, in fact, form a unified community capable of sustaining its residents' need for belonging and alternative forms of citizenship. It helped that most blacks interviewed had lived in the Twin Cities for several years prior to Cromwell's interviews (56). The types of businesses and social activities that Cromwell names as characteristic of the neighborhood illustrate the ways that economically downtrodden people improve the quality of their lives through participation in the collective. Although there is "no defined Negro business area," Cromwell reports "several grocery stores and barber shops" (32) as notable exceptions. While grocery stores satisfy a material necessity of life, the "several" barber shops point to another type of need in the community. Given the barber shop's role as a space of meaningful social gatherings and culturally sanctioned exchange in African American cultural practice, one can assume that the goal of having several such shops in a relatively small area goes beyond cutting hair and shaving beards. A similar function of social interaction and thus creating communal bonds characterizes neighborly visits, which Cromwell lists as the foremost form of social participation (80). The study found that for a decisive majority of the women she interviewed visiting families living in the same neighborhood was a common practice (80). The reason for the less frequent visits among men, Cromwell explains, is men's higher participation in the wage labor market and thus their higher chance of making friends with the people they work with, rather than with their neighbors (81). All in all, Cromwell's study allows for the conclusion to emerge communal bonds and personal interactions as the foremost characteristics of working-class African Americans' lives in the twentieth century's early decades.

Cromwell's study lists fascinating statistics and facts but it leaves many—perhaps too many—questions about the culture of black migrants to the north unanswered. One such question is: how did the process of communal consolidation take place? In her reflections on the urban in

African American literature, Toni Morrison expresses what may be interpreted as doubt about whether communal qualities can be truly recreated by blacks in the northern city. She locates what she sees as the idiosyncratic representation of city life in black fiction in the black writers' lack of connection to the urban culture. Morrison argues that “[c]ollectively they [blacks] have not contributed to the major decisions in founding or shaping the city” (37), and thus they do not conceive of themselves as “participants” in the city (37). The city—with the notable exception of early twentieth-century Harlem (38)—does not “belong” to them (37), a sentiment Morrison sees reflected in black fiction. Harlem's special character, she then writes, relied on its recreation of the “village quality” (38); although the physical environment was not built by blacks, the “relationships were clannish because there was joy and protection in the clan” (38). Thus, Morrison posits the “feeling for village values”—embodied in “the clan”—as one of the most prominent features of African American culture and literature (38).

Attaway's portrayal of the Moss brothers' migration from the farm in Kentucky, where they lived as a family with their mother, to the industrial northern town, where they find themselves alienated by the unionized Slavic workers' animosity, matches Morrison's claim about the yearning for “village values.” Yet neither Attaway nor Morrison suggests by any means that the rural South should inspire naive nostalgia. Morrison states clearly that “the country holds as many terrors for the Black American writer as the city does” (39). Part One of *Blood on the Forge* provides evidence of those horrors in the form of the injustices suffered by the black sharecropping family and the brothers' sudden, albeit painful, decision to flee the South. Memories of those terrors follow the men to Pennsylvania; later in the novel, Melody and Chinatown recall “young Charley ” from their hometown who got lynched “in broad daylight” because a white woman he passed in the street screamed (162). Neither Morrison's essay nor

Attaway's book sees the south—despite its “village values”—as a haven.

However, what Morrison does do is point to a gaping absence in black urban fiction: the absence of “[t]he advising, benevolent, protective, wise Black ancestor” (39). Such an ancestor, she argues, “is imagined as surviving in the village but not in the city” (39). Indeed, one can imagine how different the Moss brothers' experience in the north could be if such an ancestral figure's wisdom, value system, and leadership was available to them in their new lives. After all, the brothers find themselves in an environment with very limited communal resources—and thus with few opportunities for recreating the sense of belonging they once had as a unit. The potential candidates for fulfilling that role in the steel town are rendered ineligible for various reasons. One, an old, “crippled Negro called Smothers” (52), at first seems like a familiar voice of unity with nature to the Mosses, who share his perception of the industrial world as hellish. But Smothers is revealed to be a madman, his prophetic qualities undermined by the story of a mill accident that rendered him physically and mentally broken. Another potential figure around which to center a community, Zanski, an older Slav who befriends Melody—although of a different racial and cultural background than the Mosses—offers both fatherly advice and the authoritative experience expected from an ancestor. But once the plans for a strike divide the workers along racial lines, the Moss brothers and the Eastern European union man find themselves on opposite sides of a seemingly unbridgable chasm. In the remaining parts of this chapter I present my reading of the brothers' attempt at forging interpersonal bonds, but Attaway makes the difficulty of such efforts one of the novel's central themes.

Although Bell's and Attaway's characters face struggles in maintaining and sustaining their communal and familial ties, including economic hardships, uprooting from their previous homes and ways of life, deficits of time and energy, and other objective and subjective

difficulties, the novels' central plots revolve around the Mosses' and the Dobrejcaks' practices that are anchored in the community and family. With the physical and psychological impact of the mill as the ever-present context, the novels have both been rightly described as narratives of labor. But *Out of This Furnace* and *Blood on the Forge* are just as much about the characters' toil as they are about who the workers toil for—and they are about what keeps their lives outside of toil meaningful. And it is in the communities and relationships they establish—in other words, in the culture and social ties they build—that they counteract the exclusions from the larger American community of citizens and from equality in the labor market.

Even the authors of the 1924 *American Citizenship Practice*, who so categorically dismissed new immigrants' and blacks' belonging to the community of American citizens, saw the notion of citizenship as involving not only “political” and “economic” spheres, but also the “social” sphere, as their meticulous chart of “activities of the American citizen in practice” shows (Harman, Tucker, and Wrench 9). The inclusion of such units as family and community in the category of social organization implies that—even if the larger society rejects certain groups' civic participation—the marginalized retain a degree of agency in those spheres of their lives; thus, they may practice “being a citizen” without possessing full citizenship (Marty).

Such understanding of citizenship as communal membership brings me to draw on Pierre Bourdieu's distinctions among various kinds of capital. As I have shown earlier, immigrant and black laborers' restricted access to political and economic citizenship deprives them of traditionally understood forms of capital. However, as social agents who maintain various practices in their communal and familial spheres—and who express themselves in creative and idiosyncratic ways—they do, in fact, have what Bourdieu calls *social* and *cultural* capital. According to Bourdieu, “[s]ocial capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources

which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity” (51). Thus, Bell's and Attaway's characters' networks of support and reliance exemplify such capital. Cultural capital, Bourdieu explains, falls into three different subcategories: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized capital (47-51). The first two subcategories are particularly applicable to the circumstances of the two novels' characters. Bourdieu's embodied cultural capital refers to “long lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (48) which encompass both those qualities that individuals acquire consciously and those that they take on through socialization and without being aware of it. Linguistic capital falls into this subcategory, as does the knowledge of cultural traditions. The other type of cultural capital that the characters of the two books use is objectified capital which is in many ways related to embodied capital. It involves possession of physical objects—cultural goods—which can be used with the help of embodied capital (50). For examples, Melody's guitar may be seen as objectified cultural capital which he can use through his ability to produce music.

Given the nature of social capital and cultural capital, it is through various *practices* that the novels' African Americans and immigrants can use those kinds of capital and thus exercise their role as citizens. In explaining the recent understanding of culture in social sciences and humanities, Stuart Hall writes that it is defined “not so much as a set of *things* . . . as a process, a set of *practices*”(2). Through participating in cultural practices, Hall argues, we produce and assign meaning to objects and situations around us (2-3). Since meaning can be produced through personal and social exchanges (3) and in relation to emotions and attachments (2), that opens a range of possibilities—to those with little economic or political agency—to interpret and

shape their reality in the socio-cultural sphere of their lives.

### **Everyday Practices as “Rituals of Citizenship”**

I borrow the title phrase of this section, “rituals of citizenship,” from Mark S. Weiner's *Black Trials: Citizenship from the Beginnings of Slavery to the End of Caste*, where he uses it to designate the “deeply symbolic function” (14) of legal trials that have intervened in African Americans' civic exclusions. Weiner argues that rituals, which can be defined as “symbolic actions undertaken in relation to basic social values” (13), “work” because they bear the traits of a performance, they “transform their actors into representative figures whose actions embody general social meanings” (15). The phrase can help us conceptualize Bell's and Attaway's centralization of social spaces and cultural practices in their novels. The characters, who otherwise have little room for negotiating their civic rights, prove themselves as members of social units and active practitioners of culture, thus asserting their claim to belonging.

Bell, for example, underscores the Slovaks' participation in their community through rituals such as weddings, funerals, births, and baptisms. In other words, the Dobrejcaks and their neighbors realize themselves as citizens in the context of Bourdieu's “relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (51) which constitute their social capital. Additionally, by strategically paralleling communal occasions with events in the realms of labor struggle and national politics, Bell's novel implies a link between the immigrant community's practices and the ethnics' preparedness to partake in American citizenship.

Examples of familial and communal developments accompanied by more globally influential events include depictions of Mike and Mary's family alongside industrial affairs. For example, the narrator announces the couple's wedding by fusing this information with a comment about the company's building of two new blast furnaces. As the two events happen

simultaneously, and the music at the wedding is “drowned out by the riveter’s iron clamor” (138), the narration forces the readers to acknowledge the two as equally determining. The next chapter continues this parallelism by compressing the family’s and the mill’s expansions into one sentence: “The second furnace, *J*, was blown in in [sic] February of the new year; in March Mary gave birth to a seven-pound boy” (138). Later, the baby’s baptism is accompanied by an accident in the mill: “On its [the month’s] last day, the Tuesday after the christening, *I* Furnace slipped” killing nine (141). The narration continues portraying the boy’s childhood against the backdrop of labor: “Johnny started going to school that September. The first of the year the company raised the wages of unskilled labor to seventeen-and-a-half cents an hour and announced an accident and compensation plan” (161). Through these pairings of events, the novel suggests that the immigrants’ personal lives do not happen in isolation from the larger context of politics and the economy. The Slovaks follow events in those spheres and are ready to engage in them actively, if only, in Mike’s words, it was “asked for” (196).

The parallelism of the personal and the public events in the novel usually takes an understated, reportage-style form, as in the scene of the first time Mike becomes romantically interested in Mary—accompanied by a comment about the recent assassination attempt on the President’s life. Having “reported” earlier that “McKinley was shot in Buffalo” (125), the narrator thus introduces the scene: “while the country was waiting for McKinley to live or die, Mary came to see Dorta” [Mike’s landlady] (125). Two separate yet—I argue—related things are implied here. The first is the communal context in which Mike’s courting of Mary begins and will then continue. Having boarded in Dorta’s house for years, Mike thinks of her as his adoptive mother. The presumed value of having his and Mary’s relationship sanctioned by the symbolic matriarch is here represented by the facts that the romance begins under Dorta’s roof and then

develops with her support. It shows that Mike, while he is assertive and independent, by marrying for love and not out of customary expectations, is also part of a collective whose values he respects and shares and whose social capital he falls back on in decisive moments.

The figure of Dorta invites a short departure from the scene taking place in her kitchen, as it brings to light the role of women in Bell's book. It is, to a large extent, on their shoulders that the success of social capital as the community's means of sustenance rests. Throughout the novel, strong women of all three generations, represented by Dorta, Mary, and Dobie's wife Julie, play the roles of not only advisors and comforting partners to the men toiling at the mill, but also of immigrant Vestas, whose labor and care builds the single most satisfying sphere of the steel workers' lives: home. The value and strain of the women's home-shaping work find a blunt yet eloquent definition in the words of a doctor who visits Mary when she falls sick during her fourth pregnancy: "There aren't many men in that mill who work harder than their wives. Cooking, scrubbing, looking after children—that's hard work, make no mistake about it. No days off when the mill shuts down. And every year another baby" (175). The novel also invites a consideration of the material, psychological, and social implications of working-class women's lives outside their relations with men. Paradoxically, the people who help the male workers survive the hardships of the mill, at the same time suffer a disenfranchisement that renders them dependent on the men's paid work. Among other ways, Bell underscores the key role of social capital in the novel by showing the effects on women of a lack of familial support—most commonly provided by a husband. This emerges most dramatically when, after Mike's tragic death, Mary is left alone to fend for herself and their four children. At first overcome with grief so crippling that she finds no strength to carry on, she gets a warning from Dorta, who herself lost her husband decades earlier: "Widows are beggars and orphans are scum. Every day I learn

how true that is” (222). The older woman then tells Mary to “[l]earn to fight. . . . You have no husband to fight for you now so you’ve got to learn to do it yourself” (222). In this case, then, the friendship between the two women becomes the most valuable form of social capital. In this scene, as in many others, Bell seems to insist that through mutual support, mentorship, and love, his Slovak characters prove themselves responsible members of a civic group.

I now return to Dorta’s home, where Mike’s first loving glance at Mary is accompanied by political news. Signaling this other event in the scene points out how these Slovak characters—despite being pushed away from active participation in the nation’s major events, and despite their seemingly insular lives in the industrial town—stay interested in and see themselves as affected by the national news. And the news of McKinley’s assassination may have been especially momentous to eastern Europeans in the United States, given that McKinley’s assassin, Leon Czolgosz, was a son of Polish immigrants and a suspected anarchist. With the anti-anarchist paranoia that followed the Haymarket Massacre just fifteen years earlier still in the memories of many, and with radical politics figuring on the list of potential reasons to have one’s formal citizenship denied or revoked, McKinley’s last hours and Czolgosz’s trial and execution were certainly important events to follow. In mentioning the shooting—seemingly in passing—Bell hints at the weight that his characters ascribe both to their daily communal experience and to the life of larger society.

In *Blood on the Forge*, the everyday rituals expressing familial care and bonds also bespeak the characters’ qualities as citizens of a collectivity. After their mother’s death, among the Moss brothers it is Melody, the blues man of heightened sensitivity, that holds the family together through his special insight into each of his brothers’ psychology. He serves as the medium that filters the brothers’ fears and desires, such as Big Mat’s bottled-up pain about his

and Hattie's inability to have children, as well as Chinatown's denial about his visions of future material comfort being pipe dreams. Unlike the happy-go-lucky Chinatown, who cannot understand Big Mat's somber personality and is bewildered that “Big Mat ain't never laugh in his life” (107), “Melody, from his dream world, could read the wounds in Big Mat's eyes” (12). As the insightful reader and interpreter of his family's stories, “Melody alone knew him completely” (12). Despite a striking difference between Mat's and Chinatown's personalities, Melody somehow tunes into both his brothers' mental worlds. When, on the hellish train ride from Kentucky to the North, the darkness and exhaustion throw Chinatown into a state of panic, Melody soothes him. Chinatown, afraid to fall asleep for fear of the train's jerky motion causing his golden tooth—his only valuable possession—to fall out, he finds solace in Melody's reassuring presence. Although the “misery” of the journey in the crowded boxcar has Melody “feeling bad” himself (39), he “forgot himself, in trying to comfort his brother” (39). Melody, then, is this family's rituals' keeper—the one who channels the need for communal unity and in whom their social capital is concentrated.

Once they reach the North, the need for active effort to keep the family together soon becomes an urgent need as the bonds among the brothers are threatened by the hostile physical and social environment. “[T]ricked away from [their] poor, good-as-bad-ground-and bad-white-men-will-let-'em-be hills” (44) and thrown into “[t]his new place . . . full of hatreds they did not understand” (49), the Mosses struggles to uphold the values they have derived from their previous family life. Cynthia Hamilton comments on the “fragmentation of everyday life, the isolation of actions, and the disjointedness of behaviors” (147) that the characters face in the industrial setting; separated from a more holistic sense of belonging, they now have to “grasp 'meaning' in ordinary, day-to-day actions” (Hamilton 147). The relationship Stuart Hall draws

between the production of meaning and practice is particularly useful here. “Meaning,” Hall writes, is “produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural ‘things’; that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and in this way give them value or significance” (3-4). Given that, according to Hall, “cultural things” include not only objects but also events, emotions, and ideas (2-3), I suggest that one strategy that the Mosses, and more specifically Melody and Chinatown, adopt to derive meaningful sense of communal continuity is their extension of their storytelling game that they bring with them from their life in the South.

Dialogue and interaction—Attaway's methods of introducing the Moss family members at the beginning of the novel—allow the readers early on to understand the dynamics ruling this group of characters. Minimal intrusion of the narrator's descriptions in those opening scenes not only signals the relationships among the brothers but also stresses the role that personal relations, playful exchange, and affection disguised as benign bickering play in their everyday lives. One idiosyncratic form of verbal exchange that stands out in those first few pages of the book: “the wishing game” played by Melody and Chinatown. In his list of meaning-producing practices, Hall reserves a place for “narratives, stories—and fantasies” that people “weave” (4); I argue that the two brothers' game is such a cultural practice.

“[Y]ou know where I wish I was now?” (8), asks Melody of Chinatown, during an opening scene with the family at their home in Kentucky. But Melody's question does not really demand an answer from his brother. Instead, it is a signal for Chinatown to engage in a daydreaming back-and-forth with Melody, where Chica's role is to ask questions about Melody's imaginative wishful thinking. On Melody's signal, “Chinatown hunched forward in the dust. He liked the wishing game” (8). But the game has more than just entertainment value for the men; it

is also a method of keeping their brotherly ties intact through connecting them to their childhood, as “[t]hey had played it all their lives” (8). Further, it is their way of finding a common tactic to mentally escape the constraints of their position as black sharecroppers in the South ruled by the Jim Crow laws: “most times [they were] wishing they were at the grand places pictured in the old newspapers that livened the walls of the shack” (8). In the place they conjure, “Wish Town” (10), as Hattie sarcastically but aptly names their minds' destination, there are no limits to one's desires and capabilities, as Melody hints when China mars Melody's “wish” to play pool in Wish Town by pointing out Melody does not know how to play the game. “But I wish I can” (8), Melody responds, infusing the verb “wish” with a new meaning where the desire for something makes that something possible.

Melody and Chinatown's fantasies of journeying around Wish Town take place on the intersections of the social and the embodied cultural forms of capital. The two kinds of capital are intertwined and mutually-dependent here. The brothers' familial bond and shared memories create a space where each of them finds the other partner for such personal exposure of his daydreams which they mold into a tradition of sorts. At the same time, the exchange of imaginary plans—the sharing of that tradition—brings them even closer together. While their wishing game undoubtedly brings relief from the circumstances of their lives in the South, the comforting quality of the game is put to a test in the congested and alienating atmosphere of the steel town.

Blinded by an explosion at the mill and deprived of the ability to enjoy most of his usual leisure activities, Chinatown now stays at home and withers away. The last section of the book shows the great lengths that Melody goes to to restore the joy and energy that used to be his brother's most recognizable features. Melody's brotherly care for Chinatown in this part of the

book is especially touching because his attempts at cheering China force Melody to suppress his own identity crises and the pain that the disintegration of his family is causing him. A scene where Melody soothes Chinatown's despair by recalling their favorite game exemplifies it most vividly. Melody's cue—"you know where I wish I was at now?" (164)—immediately takes his brother away from his handicap and invites him to enter the world of fancy. The image of Wish Town that follows is one of the most poetic sections in the novel. Melody draws on his lyrical ability as a blues man to comfort his brother and—at the same time—to express the depth of his longing for a better life.

This time, despite Chinatown's familiar question, "Where at?" (164), Melody is reluctant to specify his Wish Town's location and he simply says, twice, "I wish I was long gone" (164). The narrator's interjection hints at a possible reason for Melody's hesitation to define where his imagination takes him: "Melody thought a little and let his thought ride him through the *endless spaces of his mind*" (164, my emphasis). The psychological, geographic, and economic entrapments of the steel town cause Melody to crave escape—for himself and his brothers—more than the red hills of Kentucky ever did. His mind, in contrast to the constrictions of their physical place, creates limitless spaces of possibility. Melody refuses to impose boundaries on that mental space, and thus refuses to define "where" his wish has taken him.

Instead, he offers a narrative of a wishful journey, a tale of adventure: "I'm ridin' high till I meets a hoop snake, rollin' along, rollin' along, with his tail gripped in his jaws. Boy, what a snake! solid round like a wagon wheel. He gain on me. I'm treadin' the air, but he ridin' the breeze. Then I curve on him till he rollin' round and round, scarfin' the ground, rollin' himself down. So when I push his head in the ground there ain't nothin' left but a crooked wild chinaberry tree" (165). The folklore-inspired, musical quality of this tale of struggle with "a

hoop snake,” which ends with Melody overcoming the danger, is a demiurgic act. With the help of his artful storytelling, Melody creates here a world that has both him and Chinatown temporarily undergo a complete transformation. Their altered states of mind produce an atmosphere resembling a spiritual ritual, with the two brothers engaging in an exchange resembling the traditional form of call-and-response (165).

The last part of Melody's tale reveals where he has been traveling. “I go look at all the farmers” (166), he says, revealing that his Wish town is a rural place, perhaps like the one they left months earlier. But this is Wish Town, after all, and Melody's imagination has the power to alter the actual southern reality. In his vision, the farmer are “all black. There ain't no white man in the land. Nobody gits crop-aliened. There ain't no ridin' boss” (166). Thus, in his storytelling fervor, Melody calls into being an alternative state. In this place, citizen rights that blacks were denied are truly respected and their economic security is ensured by their right to enjoy the fruits of their own labor.

Melody's efforts to restore normalcy to his family show his resilience in the face of a crisis and his desire for social harmony. But as much as Melody's concern for the family's well-being shows in his relation with China, the pain in the love triangle among him, Big Mat, and Anna makes his reaching out to Mat difficult. Ironically, the reason for the brotherly discord here is Mat's own attempt at recreating a family for himself in the North. The chasm that widens between Melody and Mat points not only to the negative effects of the industrial environment on the Moss family but also—and, I argue, more importantly—to the characters' very desire for meaningful familial and communal bonds and their relentless attempts to preserve as much of their social capital as possible.

Mat's episode of improvised homemaking episode with Anna serves another key function

in the novel. Attaway, like Bell, infuses his tale of steel with special attention to the women's position in this ruthless environment. According to Stacy Morgan's insightful analysis, Attaway's novel "seem[s] to insist that, although multiethnic industrial centers offer some relatively meager gains in standards of living and social status, migration fails to solve the basic needs of [his] . . . working class protagonists—such as family stability, rewarding and reasonably safe forms of labor, and a place for creative cultural expression" (712). But Attaway also draws attention to the special marginalization of women, especially immigrant women, whose "relationship to the larger society," as Foner points out, "was mediated through their relationships with men" (41). Anna, who escapes her family's extreme poverty in Mexico only to find herself a prostitute in the midst of steel town's grime, enters her relationship with Mat with hopes of elevating her social status. Ironically, Mat, whose dark complexion made him the target of vicious racism in the South, symbolizes to Anna her potential access to Americanness.

The novel hands the narrative voice over to Anna herself in the part that tells her story. The monologue's unadorned language, the simplicity of the sentence structures, and the use of the present tense give her speech qualities of matter-of-fact desperation and immediacy. She thus describes her life in Mexico with her parents, as well as her first confrontation with Americans and the effect it had on her:

All the time I am barefooted, and my mother and my old folks are barefooted. The peons are all barefooted and do not have white bread to eat. There are many cars pass with *Americanos*, and the cars stop sometimes, and the men have cameras and take pictures of the goats and peons. The women in the cars wear shoes with high heels. The *Americano* get many things for the women. And so I say that I will not marry with the fella who has no house and watches the neighbor's goats.

He cannot buy shoes with high heels. All the time I dream of high-heel shoes with bright stones in the heels that will make me like the *Americanos*, and nobody will take my picture along with the goats. (113-114)

Although at first Anna's desire for a man capable of lavishing comfort and expensive goods on her may seem like crude materialism, the symbolic use of the goats reveals a deeper layer of her seemingly shallow desires. By mentioning American tourists' exoticizing fascination with the goats *and* peons, Anna hints at the dehumanization of the poor Mexicans inherent in such a gaze. Anna's return to the image of the goats after she has outlined her plans hints at the limited choices she has in her exclusion from American citizenship and from economic capital, and points out that as a woman she has few chances of fighting these injustices outside of her relations with men. By stratifying the social world of the mill town even more with Anna's presence, the novel underscores the various levels of discrimination suffered by different social groups, underscoring that—while both are subjects of prejudice—a black man and an immigrant woman are in different positions in their relation to the state, society, and labor.

Mat and Anna's attempts at creating a home—although tainted by the systems of oppression that eventually lead to Mat's violent destruction of their bond—as well as Melody's tending to his brother, show that the characters, if given a chance, have both the desire and the ability to act as responsible and caring members of a collective. Morgan comments on the novel's role in dispelling stereotypes produced by contemporary theories of pathology that define migrant workers as sociologically unfit (715). The book counters such perception by representing the characters' lives through their own narration of their stories in dialogues and monologues. As Morgan points out, Attaway's focus on the material culture—which may include both Anna and Mat's home and Melody's guitar—also helps humanize them by allowing

a more intimate look at their lives (715).

In his call for more critical attention to material culture among scholars, John Kouwenhoven writes that “we have been so preoccupied with words that we have neglected things” (84). Given the economic scarcity of Bell's and Attaway's characters' lives—and thus the limited opportunities for accumulating objects—close attention to what they do acquire and keep may help us understand their systems of values. In other words, their objectified cultural capital serves as a window into what matters to them. For example, through most of Attaway's novel, Melody's guitar is a peculiar extension of the character's emotional life. It plays the role of its owner's companion in the hardships the brothers face. The novel frequently personifies the guitar, as when Melody feels “twisted inside” and in response “his guitar sang all the empty notes it had” (123). Another time, “Melody began to feel sad but he didn't want his guitar to do anything about it” (23). For as long as Melody sees his guitar as a relevant part of his and his brothers' lives—in its ability to give voice to their experiences and comfort them—he is almost inseparable from it. However, when at the end of the novel he and Chinatown leave the mill town for Boston, “[h]e had left his guitar behind” (234). This gesture of parting with an object that seemed so dear to him shows that possessions do not hold intrinsic value to these characters; they only become valuable through their connection to the values they reflect. Since the guitar's blues can no longer uphold its comforting value in the face of the overwhelming industrial damage in the characters' lives, it loses its salience.

Hall makes the relation between objects and values transparent when he writes:

It is by our use of things, and what we say, think, and feel about them—how we represent them—that we *give them a meaning*. In part, we give objects, people, and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation which we bring to them.

In part, we give things meaning by how we use them, or integrate them into our everyday practices. . . . In part, we give meaning by how we *represent* them—the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them. (3)

Hall's words may illuminate the purchases that Mike and Mary in *Out of This Furnace* make, which seem odd in the context of their otherwise modest standard of living. After the company's decision to raise the unskilled workers' wages, the Dobrejcaks decide to make that year's Christmas “more than ordinarily merry” and buy special gifts for everyone. While a Christmas tree and a tricycle for their son are not surprising choices of presents, and even the furs that Mary gets are easily rationalized purchases, the “combination bookcase and a desk” (152) that Mike buys for himself, given their pragmatic value, are simply unexpected items in the house of a laborer whose life leaves him no time to read and write. But Mike “had long wanted” (152) to own these things. He is so proud of his new possessions that “every visitor was taken into the bedroom and allowed to admire it [the bookcase] and to be impressed by Mike's collection of books, the great Bible and a dozen or so other volumes, most of which the secondhand dealer had thrown in while they were bargaining for the stove” (153). Mike's pride in owning these items indicates that he associates certain values with them—sees them as symbols.

Lizabeth Cohen's study of working-class material culture at the turn of the twentieth century brings our attention to “the home, the most private and independent world of the worker, in expressing the working-class family's social identity and interaction with middle-class culture” (752). Although Mike takes pride in his work, his reaction earlier in the novel to the house of a rich American family where Mary works as help (136) shows that middle-class life attracts him.

Moreover, as we learn in the novels' early stages, Mike's father was a well-respected man in his village who, "unlike the great majority," "could read and write" (35). It is not so much, then, that Mike sees value in these items per se; rather, items commonly used for activities requiring intellectual effort represent life with dignity to him—a life he used to daydream about with Mary years earlier. The furniture represents what the Dobrejcaks could become, if given a chance. Mike's perception of the desk and the bookshelf as symbols of his and his family's potential makes him particularly protective of the furniture. When Kracha is going to the desk to retrieve the alcohol Mike keeps inside, Mike tells him to "[b]e careful how you close that door. I don't want the glass broken" (156), and "the children were made to understand that breaking the curved glass would mean little less than the end of the world" (153). Mike is trying to preserve the idea of the possibility that his family, his children, may one day use these pieces for more than beverage storage and decoration. Mike feels attached to this objectified cultural capital because it allows him to hold onto the last scraps of hope about a future when these objects could be put to use. The presence of these objects—including the collection of books—in his family's house also bespeaks a rejection of the stereotype of a "dumb" "Hunky" (164). Thus, by seemingly caring for the things, Mike actually reveals how much he cares about his family.

### **Private Citizenship as a Revolutionary Force**

Bell's and Attaway's novels show that the everyday lives and relationships of people who have been rejected as citizens by law, the larger society, or the capitalist rules of the market are the arena of practices in which the excluded prove themselves valuable members of the community—and thus fit candidates for full citizenship. But the potential ascribed to the private sphere of the familial, communal, and individual lives of the characters reaches even farther. Both books show that their characters' daily practices and traditional ethics can form a basis for

political consciousness. Bell's and Attaway's characters' political consciousness is not a product of a dominant ideology. Rather, it is born out of the social sphere—the material and psychological struggles of the families and the communities.

Bell's characters' involvement in the labor cause stems from Mike's increasing disillusionment with the treatment that he, his family, and other Slovak families receive from the company. As the novel's parallelism of the Dobrejacks' lives with the events related to labor implies, no decision made by the company goes without its felt effects on the lives of the whole immigrant community. By depicting Mike's initial enthusiasm about citizenship and Americanization, and by then showing his evolution as an independent thinker and supporter of organized labor, the novel suggests that consciousness does not precede praxis, and that progressive politics is born at people's kitchen tables.

Although Attaway's characters' relation to organized labor is complicated by both the management's practice of using blacks as strikebreakers and the consequent hostility between union men and the Mosses, two episode point to the potential of a progressive political stance emerging from the brothers' values and daily lives. Although Melody does not join the union in preparation for the upcoming strike, he finds the role of informers for the company distasteful. When an old black laborer, Bo, tells Melody that the union suspects Bo is he employer's stool pigeon, Melody exclaims: “Damn! How come anybody think you do somethin' like that?” (175). Having found out later that the accusations were true, Melody is deeply disappointed. Big Mat, by contrast, joins the sheriff's forces to suppress the strike. But the novel makes it painfully clear that it is not politically regressive thinking that pushes Mat to this decision, but rather the sense of helplessness that he feels about his life—and a need for power. However, in his life's final moments, before a blow of a union worker's pickax reaches him, Mat has an epiphany. In the

midst of the chaos and violence of the raid, Mat realizes all of a sudden that the role he has been assigned in this performance is equivalent to the one played by the riding bosses in the South. Remembering the riding boss whom he beat before leaving Kentucky, he wonders: “Had that riding boss been as he was now?” (233). In this profound reflection, Mat uncovers the paradox of his participation in the company's cause and equates the union workers with the downtrodden black sharecroppers. Thus, at the end of his life, Mat discovers his political allies through the past experience of social injustice bestowed on him and his family. The novel's conclusion, then, conforms to what the narrator says about Mat and Melody earlier in the novel—that “[i]deas of union and nonunion could only confuse them until that time when their own personal experience would give them the feeling necessary for understanding” (182).

*Blood on the Forge* and *Out of This Furnace* uncover the way that new immigrants and blacks in early twentieth century relied on themselves to confirm their status as valuable members of society. The laws and regulations, as well as the world of capital—which the migrant workers helped build—were unreliable when it came to protecting the civic and human rights of these vulnerable groups. One possible conclusion to a parallel reading of the two books may be cynical pessimism about the possibility of eradicating the less noble tendencies in capitalist and racist notions of citizenship. That is, to be sure, a valid stance, given that even today citizenship continues to prove itself a deeply flawed category, one that welcomes contradictions. For example, the author of the idealistic call for universal citizen rights in 1958, Chief Justice Earl Warren, who preached that “[c]itizenship is man's basic right for it is nothing less than the right to have rights” (*Perez v. Brownell*), was also a central figure behind the Japanese internment camps (White 76). But in this chapter I have proposed to focus equally closely on the practices and spheres of new immigrant and African American characters' lives that contradict the once

common notions of their lack of civic sense. By performing their rituals of everyday life, they prove that “having citizenship”—a relationship of possession resembling objectified capital—is perhaps not necessary to “be a citizen.”

## Chapter II: Here Be Dragons: Corporeal Mapping in Nelson Algren's

### *Never Come Morning* and Willard Motley's *Knock on Any Door*

#### White Ethnics' Disorientation and Mapping

“Menace to the community,” “remorseless murderer,” “cowardly slayer,” “heartless” and “hardboiled” “slant-eyed killer,” as well as “tough guy.”<sup>3</sup> these are just some of the monikers the *Chicago Daily Tribune* put on a certain Bernard Sawicki from the time of his arrest in the summer of 1941 to the day of his execution six and a half months later. While no other paper in the country matched the *Tribune's* attention to Sawicki's case, the press all over the United States covered the trial and the electrocution of the nineteen-year old Polish Chicagoan who confessed to shooting and killing four people in the last days of June 1941. A St. Louis-based newspaper, the *Alton Evening Telegraph*, added “arrogant smart-aleck boy” and “a freak of environment” to the slue of epitaphs following Sawicki throughout the trial; other publications, from Pennsylvania to California, followed suit. For someone whose existence, if not for his crimes, would have gone unnoticed by both the institutions and the residents of Chicago—let alone the nation—Sawicki became the center of quite “a good show”--something he was quoted as hoping for on the day before the trial started (“Killer of Four Goes” 2).

The uproar surrounding this young offender in the several fateful months leading to his execution appears ironic to a visitor to Sawicki's burial site today. At Chicago's Catholic Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, where Sawicki's body was interned just hours after his death in the electric chair, all physical signs of the boy having ever existed seem to have been erased. In fact, one would be hard pressed to determine the exact location of his grave. Time has imprinted its mark on many of the cemetery's graves—leaving the less durable headstones worn, the names less

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<sup>3</sup> The quotations come from a number of issues of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* between July 1, 1941 and January 17, 1942.

legible, the crosses slightly crooked. But the seventy years since Sawicki's burial have little to do with the difficulty of locating his final resting place. There never was a stone, or a cross, or a name. Sawicki's grave was not marked by anything. The cemetery's records help one determine only the general area where the grave was dug—on the outskirts of the cemetery, by the fence.

Puzzlement best describes the response of someone trying to make sense of Sawicki's tragic life of slum poverty, second-generation ethnic alienation, and juvenile-prison style reform, vis-à-vis the attention he gained once framed within the catchy headlines of the press, and then the disappearance of his slightest trace. Two contemporary observers of Sawicki's rise to infamy out of his otherwise inconsequential life in the slums, and then his fall to the equally inconsequential death, were also puzzled. To writers Nelson Algren and Willard Motley, the sensational case that unfolded following Sawicki's arrest and that swallowed its main actor in a matter of months confirmed what each of them independently had already learned in his passionate engagement with Chicago's ethnic back alleys and their dwellers. The city's good citizens and institutions saw themselves in no relation to people like Sawicki. Despite being accomplices in producing America's Sawickis, as both Algren and Motley saw it, mainstream society—represented by Chicago's institutional structures and its middle class—accepted no responsibility for those outcasts' fate. Society raised them, and then erased them.

Analyzing novels written by Algren and Motley about the children of migrants in the urban setting, this chapter continues the larger story that Thomas Bell's and William Attaway's novels start. In fact, John Conder, in his analysis of Attaway's and Motley's novels, says that Motley's plot “pick up[s]” where *Blood on the Forge* “left off” (Conder 111), imagining the descendants of the Moss brothers in their northern urban setting. I see the two novels discussed in this chapter as literary attempts at giving the idiosyncratic complexities of second-generation

urban ethnics their due attention, while at the same time acknowledging their parents' heritage of migrant struggles.

In 1942 Algren published *Never Come Morning*. Five years later, Motley's *Knock on Any Door* appeared. Both writers pointed to Sawicki's case as one of the inspirations for their books and elements of the young Pole's story are, to varying degrees, detectable in both novels' plots and characterizations. Reading Algren's and Motley's books alongside the newspaper records and court archives of Sawicki's case allows us to see the two novels as attempts to make sense of the societal paradox in violent tragic rejects such as Sawicki. *Never Come Morning* and *Knock on Any Door*, then, become "literary cartographies" as explained by Robert Tally in his analogy between the narrative and a map that helps "organize the data of life into recognizable patterns" (Tally "Literary" 3). Further, both narratives explore material, geographic, and psychological entrapments in the lives of second generation white ethnics, and the characters' creative, albeit often violent and ultimately unsuccessful responses to the spatial and social boundaries imposed on them. In the process, I argue, the main character of each novel generates and follows what I call an *ethnomap* of spatial and social experience.

This chapter analyzes the practices that Algren's Bruno Bicek and Motley's Nick Romano engage in as a form of characters' "mapping" by drawing on Fredric Jameson's use of this term which he, in turn, derives from Kevin Lynch's analysis of urban space. However, attuned to the bodily dimensions of the entrapments Bruno and Nick face and the practices they respond with, I argue for "corporeal mapping" in the novels, rather than replicating Jameson's understanding of mapping as a "cognitive" process. I also define the specificity of the mapping as it appears in *Never Come Morning* and *Knock on Any Door* by engaging the notion of "ethnomapping," a term conventionally used to describe an ethnographic method in anthropological research. In the

participatory process of creating an ethnomap, local communities join the researchers to map places of important cultural value, often with the goal of defending the local people's claims and rights. I analyze Nick's and Bruno's responses to their spatio-social limitations as ways of drawing an alternative map of the city—reconfiguring the topography of Chicago according to the places and practices that they find vital to the performances of their ethnic and social identities.

Despite the two books' similarities—which did not escape contemporary editors' attention and may have actually contributed to Motley's difficulties with getting his novel published<sup>4</sup>—*Never Come Morning* and *Knock on Any Door* differ strikingly in form and content. Not the least of those differences lies in how each novel's main character sees his position in the social order of the city and society—and how he responds to it. In other words, the “map” that either Nick or Bruno drafts and follows has tremendous consequences for the plot and the style of each novel. In fact, the choice of mapping dictates what the novels become.

I argue that in his corporeal ethnomapping, each boy emulates a different racial figure, thus causing each novel to reveal different, though complementary, aspects of the paradoxical position of second generation white American ethnics in the first half of the twentieth century. While *Never Come Morning* overtly highlights its Polish American character's ambition to become the next Great White Hope of boxing, *Knock on Any Door* may be read as inscribing the African American figure of the “badman” into the Italian American character of Nick Romano. Each book sheds a different light on the experience of the white ethnic slum dweller, but reading the two novels in tandem brings an illuminating picture of the contradictions in the lives of eastern and southern European immigrants' children. The parallel analysis of Algren's and

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<sup>4</sup> The Willard Motley Collection at Northern Illinois University contains a large number of rejection letters that Motley received when trying to publish his novel. Among rejections of his other writings, there is one authored by Nelson Algren—at that time a co-editor of *Anvil* (Algren, Letter).

Motley's novels reveals the lives of those second-generation ethnics as trapped between seemingly achievable hopes of racial ascension and the hopelessness of fixed social taxonomies and spatial boundaries; between American and foreign; between the whiteness of the White Hope and the blackness of the badman.

An overview of the two books' plots can aid a closer inspection of the factors that impact the “map” each character chooses to follow. *Never Come Morning* tells the story of Bruno Bicek, a Polish immigrant mother's only surviving child, who lives in Chicago's Near Northwest Side Polish slum called the Triangle. The narrative relates events over the span of several months, and starts with Bicek not quite eighteen. Outlined by three avenues, Chicago, Ashland, and Milwaukee, the Triangle is the only place Bicek has ever known and the turf of a gang he belongs to. But his aspirations reach far beyond the confines of the neighborhood. Known for his left arm's amazing strength and dexterity, Bruno daydreams of a great athletic career. His dreams oscillate between a future as a baseball player and a boxer. Ultimately, Bruno decides he wants to become the next Great White Hope. The many nicknames he is known by in the gang—such as Lefty, Biceps, Lefthander, Powerhouse—signal his hopes of future success, but the morbid reality of his place both in the social hierarchy and the geography of Chicago mars his dreams. Bicek's entanglement in gang activity and power relations—both controlled by an old immigrant barber, Bonifacy—leads him to commit crimes including robberies and beatings. But the worst of his crimes take place when, failing to withstand the peer pressure of his fellow gang members, he allows them to rape his girlfriend, Steffi. Frustrated by his betrayal of the only person he loves, yet unwilling to show disloyalty to the gang, he releases his anger by confronting, and ultimately killing, the only non-Polish participant in the rape, a Greek man.

After these tragic events, the novel's plot reduces to the minimum, allowing the narrative

to evolve mostly as a sequence of surrealist journeys around the spaces and minds of the two characters. As a result of the damage to her psyche and social position by the rape, Steffi ends up working as a prostitute in a brothel controlled by Bonifacy. Bicek is arrested and imprisoned in a “juvie”--based on St. Charles, the facility where Sawicki was sent—for a shooting to which he confesses in order to protect his friend, Casey. These spaces of entrapment, the brothel and the prison, provide the stage for the novel's exploration of the characters' internal lives for which the limited plot serves as a catalyst. Algren's sobering insight into the struggle of the female character notwithstanding, the present analysis will focus on Bicek's psychological state revolving around his bodily attempts at a higher social status.

After his release, Bicek gets a job as a pimp for Bonifacy's brothel in hopes of quitting it as soon as he gets his big boxing break. Having received Steffi's forgiveness, he continues to hope for their happy future together. The last section of the novel describes a boxing bout between Bicek and an African American fighter, thus preparing the stage for Bruno's symbolic shot at the title of the White Hope. It is also the first fight Bicek has been able to book without the controlling involvement of the barber. He wins the match. Yet the real victory is not his for he leaves the ring just to be arrested for murdering the Greek man. In a chilling reference to Bernard Sawicki's famous words, Bicek closes the novel saying he never hoped to live until he was twenty-one.

Unlike Algren's novel, the plot of *Knock on Any Door* spans almost the entire life of its main character. It introduces an altar boy, Nick Romano, at seven years of age, as one of the children of an Italian immigrant couple that owns a small grocery store in Denver, Colorado. Marking a drastic change in the economic and social status of the family, the Great Depression causes their business to fail. After they move to the poor section of the city, Nick loses his

interest in school and church and becomes friends with other children of the dispossessed. As a result of these liaisons, he is wrongly accused of stealing a bicycle and is sent to a reform school for juvenile delinquents also, as in *Never Come Morning*, modeled after St. Charles. Once there, Nick witnesses and experiences multiple instances of cruelty and abuse of power on the part of the disciplinary staff, and develops a hatred of uniformed authorities and sympathy with the helpless and the struggling. Once released, he moves to Chicago where his family now lives—in a slum apartment on the South Side. Determined to stay in opposition to the power structures, Nick grows up surrounding himself with other poor boys of various ethnicities, engaging with them in crimes including robberies and mugging, and eventually prostituting himself. Nick's environment and the variety of relationships he develops with numerous other characters occasion narration that is rich in ethnographic detail. Often slipping into free indirect discourse that allows insight into Nick's perception, the narrator records the spaces and people in the boy's life with an almost photographic precision. And there is much to record, as Nick grows more and more adventurous and less and less respectful of any rules as the novel progresses. Through it all, he insists on projecting an image of toughness and hedonism he has developed for himself, adopting “Live fast, die young, and have a good looking corpse!” as his motto.

Similarly to Algren's book, *Knock on any Door*, while centered on its male character, introduces a female protagonist whose relation to Nick will affect his psychological development. Although a relentless seducer, Nick falls in love with and marries Emma, a daughter of a German immigrant widow. However, his street life drives Emma to depression and suicide. Like Bicek, Nick will be haunted by the crime against the woman he loved as his one truly regrettable act. The psychological price Nick pays for the damage he has caused Emma precedes the young man's downfall. In an act of built-up aggression against one hated police

officer, but also—symbolically—against all abusive authorities, he shoots and kills the policeman. The last fifth of the novel revolves around Nick's imprisonment and trial where he is defended by an impassioned public attorney, Andrew Morton, Motley's fictional depiction of Sawicki's lawyer, Morton Anderson. Apart from the defense's insistence on society's part in creating Nick's crime, this section of the book foregrounds the boy's attempts at upholding the guise of toughness, and the gradual cracking of that mask. The trial ends with a death sentence for Nick, and the novel closes with a disheartening description of the night of Nick's execution from various characters' perspectives, including his.

Despite the differences between the plots and the related formal differences, both novels share a basic focus: they center around characters who find their social and spatial situatedness profoundly disorienting. Geographically, they find themselves embedded in sections of Chicago deemed as slums; socially, they occupy the lower strata of the hierarchy based on their ethnic origin and poverty. Although they did not choose their place in either the topography of the city or the racial taxonomy of the United States, and even though they cope with their circumstances with tactics they have derived from the American myth of opportunity as well as from the surrounding culture of consumption, they are punished for their survival strategies. Their disorientation in the light of this paradox leads Nick and Bicek to alternative *modi operandi* to navigate the brutal spatial and social limitations of their lives.

I turn to Jameson's work for a theoretical model that brings transparency to the confusion of those characters' lives. However, if asked to address Nick's and Bicek's disorientation in relation to their experience, Jameson may say their predicament is not nearly as confusing as the experiences of postmodern global village's inhabitants today. He could point to the deeply befuddling social space of our time where we can no longer establish a correspondence between

our local experiences and the economic structures that govern those experiences. For Jameson, globalization and postmodern space call for a new aesthetic and political practice which would allow one to understand the contemporary confusing network of relations. Admitting that he has no clear vision of his theoretical proposal's practical application, Jameson nevertheless puts forward the idea of “cognitive mapping” (347).

Jameson weaves his notion of mapping out of two models: Kevin Lynch's 1960 study of urban space and Louis Althusser's definition of ideology. In *The Image of the City*, Lynch focuses on urban practitioners' use and perceptions of their physical environment. He considers the city's residents' “mental image of that city” and highlights in particular “the apparent clarity or 'legibility' of the cityscape” (Lynch 2). Lynch thus explains his textual metaphor: “Just as this printed page, if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols, so a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern” (3). Lynch presents topographic analyses of three cities: Boston, Los Angeles, and New Jersey City, using the cities' residents' ability to map their city from memory. From these analyses, and especially the one of New Jersey City whose scenery Lynch describes as lacking in character, indistinguishable, and chaotic (25-32), Jameson extracts the suggestion that will form the basis of his own social analysis: “that urban alienation is directly proportional to the mental unmapability of local cityscapes” (Jameson 353).

Jameson takes up Lynch's idea of mental mapping and applies it to the individual's relation to an entire social system rather than just a city. In doing so, Jameson relies on the correlation he sees between Lynch's reading of the urban experience as “the dialectic between the here and now of immediate perception and the imaginative and imaginary sense of the city as an absent totality” (Jameson 353) and Althusser's understanding of ideology as “the Imaginary

representation of the subject's relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence” (Althusser qtd, in Jameson 353). Lynch's conception is to Jameson a “spatial analogue” of Althusser's notion, since ideology as Althusser understands it “attempts . . . to map” (353) as a way of helping individuals find imaginary solutions to real problems. Jameson's idea of cognitive mapping, then, “involves an extrapolation of Lynch's spatial analysis to the realm of social structure” (353).

Although proposed in response to the transnational, global relations of the late twentieth century, Jameson's idea of mapping can serve as a useful tool in approaching the cityscape of Algren's and Motley's novels. Jameson sees mapping as a set of practices that facilitate individual subjects' reconceptualization of a meaningful relation between themselves and the social and spatial circumstances they are embedded in—and the need for such practices, after all, has characterized various eras of tumultuous social, economic, and political struggles. In fact, Jameson himself recognizes the model's usefulness for other contexts and illustrates it in his non-postmodern examples. Moreover, if the type of disorientation and confusion that Jameson identifies in the postmodern experience can be translated in terms of “shocks” delivered by the modern world that Walter Benjamin speaks of in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” one can see how the impact of the Depression and mass culture on those occupying society's lowest strata may be understood as similarly alienating and disorienting.

Benjamin's reflections on different types of experience are occasioned by Baudelaire's anxiety about his lyric verse being misunderstood by the contemporary readers. Benjamin writes that the diminishing reception of lyric poetry “may be due to a change in the structure of their [the readers'] experience” (158). Benjamin ascribes the “increasing atrophy of experience” in a mass society to the replacement of the older form of communicating experience through

narration—a story—by information.

One can see this replacement at work in Sawicki's case as it was produced by the press, with the "facts" generated by the media overshadowing the narrative of the boy's life and the resulting crime. Algren's and Motley's novels suggest that not only have the producers and consumers of information lost their ability to narrate experience as a coherent whole, but so have individual subjects; they have become incapable of seeing their own lives in terms of meaningful continuity. An analogy offered by Benjamin may be useful here to illustrate how his elaboration of experience can apply to the two novels' main characters. Benjamin compares the contemporary city's dwellers to Marx's factory workers. They are alienated—"sealed off"—from experience (178). Just as for the worker the repetitive set of activities at the conveyor belt has no meaning outside its material value and the wage it allows, so for the inhabitant of the city, and especially its margins, urban existence is a set of pushes and pulls one reacts to, a lesson in dodging or counter-reacting to shocks. Consciousness, Benjamin explains, defends itself against those shocks, and the more it does so, the fewer impressions of the surrounding reality enter the sphere of experience Benjamin calls *Erfahrung*. Instead, those impressions get stored, so to say, "in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life"—*Erlebnis* (165). The ethnic characters of the two novels have many such shocks to defend against. In Algren's and Motley's novels, the startling effect of the urban world stems from the characters' emplacement in the social hierarchies and from bearing the consequences of that positionality that one did not choose. With their ethnic social and cultural capital—to recall the categories explored in the last chapter—often manifested in bodily forms, the characters attempt to withstand those impacts and find their ways into another level of experience.

## **Chicago's Reality Meets Chicago's Fiction: Bernard Sawicki, Bruno Bicek, and Nick Romano**

Sawicki's story is worth relating here—not so much because of its reflection in the plots of Algren's and Motley's novels, for that is minimal, but rather as an illustration of the kinds of social and psychological phenomena that both writers addressed in these novels and elsewhere. It is also worth pointing out that the story of Bernard “Knifey” Sawicki, as he came to be known to followers of the contemporary press, can only be pieced together from the news reports that painted him as a “remorseless murderer” and from the archives of the court that sent him to the electric chair. Nevertheless, these fragmentary and frequently biased accounts provide insight into the urban struggles that Algren and Motley found so compelling.

According to the newspapers, Sawicki was found as a baby on the doorstep of his future Polish parents. In their testimonies for the defense in Bernard's trial, his mother, Anna, and his older brother, Henry, painted a picture of “Bernie” as a difficult child. According to them, the boy often fought with his peers, ran away from home (Kogan, “Killer” 16), “went around with bad boys” and “smoked and drank something terrible” (Kogan, “Grinning” 18). Henry euphemistically called his brother “peculiar” (Kogan, “Killer” 16); their mother, while on the witness stand, repeatedly exclaimed that Bernard was insane, recalling him having frequently talked to himself and “throwing things around” (Kogan, “Killer” 16). She even expressed regret for adopting him (Kogan, “Grinning” 18). The older brother also provided insight into what may have at least partially contributed to Bernard's aggression and departures from home, sometimes for months at a time: abuse from their stepfather, Anna Sawicki's second husband who had died five years before the trial. Immediately after Sawicki's arrest, Henry said to the press that as a child Bernard was regularly beaten by their heavy-drinking stepfather. “Maybe that's what the

trouble was,” he concluded (Kogan, “Grinning” 18).

Sawicki first stood before juvenile court on “charges of larceny and purse snatching” (“Parolee” 2). As punishment, he was placed on Henry Allain's farm, near Momence, Illinois. According to the press, Sawicki “burglarized” the farm and as a result was turned into authorities by Allain and sent to the Illinois State Training School for Boys in St. Charles, Illinois in July 1938 (“Parolee” 2). He was released on parole in July 1940, “his conduct being reported as excellent” (“Parolee” 2). Soon after, he violated his parole by leaving his family's place and was found to possess a gun (“Parolee” 2). The gun would later allow police to trace the killings in 1941 to Sawicki.

The four victims of Sawicki's shooting in the last weekend of that June were the farmer, Allain, whom Sawicki considered a “squealer” and the reason he was sent to St. Charles; two young men, one who resisted Sawicki's attempt to rob him in Sherman Park, and the other a fellow parolee from the reform school who refused to accompany him in a robbery; and a police officer who tried to intervene with the robbery in the park. In the trial, he was responding only to the charges of killing Officer Charles Speaker.

The press, and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in particular, were quick to respond to the sensational potential of the shootings. Almost from the moment of his arrest, Sawicki became the object of news that alternately packaged the story of his perceived depravity into catchy, epitaph-laden headlines or eyebrow- and hair-raising details. But the most consistent feature of most news reports concerning Sawicki's case was the emphasis on descriptions and assessment of the boy's *attitude*. The morning after the arrest, the *Tribune* launched their portrayal of the young offender with a first-page article featuring a shocking quotation: “If I get the chair it's O.K. with me. I never figured I'd get to be 21, anyway” (Kogan, “Grinning” 1). From the combination of

behavioral details, such as Sawicki's nonchalant gum chewing while describing his crimes and his dozing off during court sessions, to stories of his lighthearted approach to the lives he took as well as to his own, the image that emerged of Sawicki was that of a “tough guy”—an arrogant, and non-reformable wrong-doer with no intention of atonement.

The committed public attorney who became Sawicki's defender, Morton Anderson—keenly aware of the impact such a reputation was likely to have on the trial—petitioned for the postponement of the proceedings, arguing that “in view of the widespread and unfavorable publicity” Sawicki had received “it would be impossible for him to select and obtain for his trial a jury of unbiased, unprejudiced and fair-minded jurors” (United States v. Sawicki). Judge John Sbarbaro refused to grant this petition. The trial took place in September 1941, leading to the death sentence and ultimately to Sawicki's execution on January 17, 1942. On the day of his death, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* crowned their report of Sawicki's last hours with a photograph of him in the death cell, just hours before walking the green mile—playing cards with a guard and a fellow prisoner.

Neither *Never Come Morning* nor *Knock on Any Door* can be described as *based on* Sawicki's story. Both Algren and Motley developed the plots for their books a long time before Sawicki's story unfolded and arrived at an advanced stage in writing their novels before June 1941. As Motley's diary entry on the first day of 1941 indicates, he had been hard at work on the novel under its working title, *Leave Without Illusions*, having completed three chapters and “completely worked out” the whole plot—“to the last sentence,” as he wrote (Diaries 165). Some basic ideas for the novel date even earlier than that. At least part of Nick Romano's story expands on Motley's short story, “The Boy,” published in 1938. Algren's *Bicek* first saw the light of day in the form of a short story, too. Algren had begun working on the novel in 1940, with an initial

deadline from the publisher for May 1941. While Algren did not meet that deadline, he published an excerpt from the novel under the title 'Biceps' in the spring of 1941. With a six-month extension on the novel, Algren finished it a week after Sawicki's trial. Clearly, then, "Knifey" was hardly the two writers' main inspiration. But the incorporation of elements of Sawicki's story and image into both novels suggest that his person and case embody the key contradictions that both Algren and Motley tried to capture.

Algren's interest in the life of underdogs and immigrants, as well as the social injustices they are often subject to, went back to his youth. Already as a college student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he chose to devote both his academic attention and his free time to the struggles of society's outcasts. Despite many of his contemporaries' assumptions about his ethnic and socio-economic origins, Algren did not come from a poor Polish immigrant family. His paternal grandparents came from Sweden and Germany and his mother's parents were German Jews—a part of the Old Immigration—and very much concerned with distinguishing their family from the poor eastern European Jews who arrived later (Donohue 14). Although Algren's parents were not affluent, when asked the question whether they were poor, he answered: "Oh no, no. Only in the American sense. I mean I don't remember a time when we went hungry" (Donohue 16). Algren enrolled in college following his older sister's wish and relying on her financial support (Drew 24). Once in Urbana-Champaign, he found himself in the midst of sorority and fraternity life with which he felt nothing in common (Donohue 26), save for a job waiting tables at a fraternity house (31). Considering himself an "independent" and alienated from other students, he spent his time exploring both his newfound fascination with books and sociology—and the outskirts of town where the prostitutes worked and where crap games took place (27), thus trespassing the rigid moral guidelines imposed by the puritanical

Dean of Men and his campus surveillance system (27).

The time Algren spent in Urbana-Champaign was formative for his later choices as a writer in two major ways. On the one hand, he engrossed himself in the study of sociology, and particularly in the teachings of Donald R. Taft whose lectures he attended. One can easily see how Taft, the author of such works as *Criminology: An Attempt at a Synthetic Interpretation with a Cultural Emphasis* (1942) and “Does Immigration Increase Crime?” (1933), became one of the early idols for the man who would go on to write *Never Come Morning*. On the other hand, Algren combined his theoretical sociological education with trips not just to the peripheries of Urbana and Champaign, but also to the poor neighborhoods of Chicago, during his visits home (Drew 27). He observed the effects the early days of the Depression had on the most vulnerable, witnessing their daily lives in Chicago's pool halls, taverns, and tenement houses (Drew 27-29). As a reporter for the college newspaper, *The Daily Illini*, he also covered Urbana's and Champaign's jails and courts and spent countless hours recording the drama that played itself out in the police line-ups and the courtroom.

While those lessons learned during his college days formed a base for Algren's future writings, including *Never Come Morning*, his later years spent roaming around the country and in Chicago's Polish neighborhood provided him with opportunities for in-depth character and place studies that made their way into the novel. Previously an observer of others' problems with the law, he became much more familiar with the legal scene when—upon stealing a typewriter from an abandoned schoolhouse—he was arrested and jailed for five months in Alpine, Texas. The imprisonment itself as well as his fellow inmates' stories and personalities left a lasting imprint on Algren. Upon his release, he returned to Chicago and, in the mid-thirties, moved to the Near Northwest Side with his Polish wife, Amanda Kantowicz. The marriage wouldn't last,

but Algren’s fascination with and empathy towards the immigrant Polish community—which he was now experiencing first-hand on a daily basis—did. It is here that, living off WPA paychecks, he wrote his first novel, *Somebody in Boots* (1935) and later worked on *Never Come Morning*.

In the Preface to the 1962 edition of, *Never Come Morning*. Algren claims that his book is based “upon the lives of half a dozen men with whom the writer had grown up, as well as upon the newspaper reports of the trial of Bernard 'Knifey' Sawicki” (Algren, Preface xv). Unlike Motley, Algren did not leave behind a diary to guide future scholars through his daily expeditions to the alleys and taverns of the neighborhood that would inspire his novel. Outside of their fictional counterparts in the novel, the real people and places that Algren knew in the “Triangle”—as the area would be referred to in *Never Come Morning*.—can only be pieced together from dispersed comments by the writer in various interviews and essays. But there is one site that captures more pieces of Algren’s Polish world than other sources: Art Shay’s *Nelson Algren’s Chicago* (1988). Here, Shay, Algren’s friend and photographer, takes his audience on a journey that, years earlier, Algren took him on. The viewer encounters Algren in contexts that seem visually to reconstruct the scenes from *Never Come Morning* and the writer's other works. Many of the spaces seen in the photos inspired their fictional counterparts. Among them are a photo of Algren looking out the window of Bit of Poland, a Polish bar which features prominently in the novel; pictures of “carnival freaks” whose lives the writer sympathized with and—as I argue later—saw as parallel to the lives of poor immigrants; photos of the writer boxing and dining at a mission; photographs of men in police line-ups, a sad spectacle Algren spent days observing; and an image of a young man inside the solitary confinement cell at St. Charles, the reform school where Sawicki was held at and that served as the model for Bruno Bicek's prison. Shay's album, often featuring Algren in the frame with the rejects of the great

city, fills the gap between Algren's inspirations and the fictional worlds in his writing; one may even say it tells the story of Algren's many co-authors and their crueler-than-fiction lives.

Motley, like Algren, was not born into poverty. Unlike some other African American contemporaries, including Richard Wright, as a child he did not experience the extreme racism that most blacks at the time were subjected to. Perhaps his homosexuality became a source of his understanding for the marginalized before he became more exposed to those who were hated for their race or class. Raised in a relatively affluent family and an ethnically mixed Chicago middle-class neighborhood, where his own relatives were some of the only black people, Motley learned most of his lessons about the desperation of those on society's bottom later in life, when he chose to move to the slums. But before choosing Maxwell and Halstead Streets as the place of his apprenticeship in life and writing, Motley spent much of the thirties traveling the country looking for inspiration. Two events during those journeys are worth mentioning as candidates for provoking Motley's socially conscious writing. In 1936, he was arrested for an attempt to steal gas from someone else's car and spent a month in jail in Laramie, Wyoming. Although Motley's diary entries from the time reveal great naiveté in his assessment of the prison and differ markedly from his later treatment of incarceration in *Knock on Any Door*, such a brush with imprisonment certainly allowed him a better understanding of those who are subject to it. If not much else, the time he spent in jail taught him to look beyond the common perceptions about prisoners. From his cell, he wrote: "The inmates here are not without humor and friendliness, or any of the virtues of men of honor and respect" (Motley *Diaries* 107). On his travels he also met the first prototype of Nick Romano—a boy at a reformatory in Denver, Colorado. The young inmate, whom Motley befriended and even started referring to as his son (Diaries 160-161), would be immortalized in the novel's first few chapters portraying Nick's childhood and reform

school experience.

Like Algren, Motley wanted to be part of the world that he was drawn to as a writer. In 1938, he moved to Maxwell Street. A page from a 1942 article about Maxwell Street in the *Chicago Sun* that Motley tore out and kept shows just how important this location was to him. A pencil-drawn arrow connects one of the buildings in the article's photo to the scribbled words "My house." In this neighborhood in 1940 Motley would meet another boy, Mike, whose difficult life and troubles with the law inspired much of Nick Romano's story. Motley not only drew on Mike's experience to flesh out Nick, but also asked for the young man's help in revising the draft. The correspondence between Motley and the then imprisoned Mike in the early months of 1941 testifies to the writer's commitment to Mike's social world and to a realistic rendition of it. In a letter written on April 28, Motley asks for Mike's feedback on the attached chapter 8 of the novel; he also wants Mike's fellow prisoners to "criticise it." In a disheartening end to this participatory writing process, two days later, the Cook County Jail Warden sent Motley's letter and chapter back to their author with a note stating the package did not pass the jail's censors (Cook County Warden). Imaginably, incidents like this one fueled Motley's desire to drag the injustices of the institutional system out into daylight.

Motley's diaries show his engagement with the novel's material to be so strong that Nick became almost a friend of flesh and blood to him. Motley celebrated his fictional character's birthday with cake (Diaries 177) and wrote the final scenes of Nick's life "with tears in [his] eyes," feeling "as if one of my arms had been cut off" (Diaries 186). Nick gripped his mind so intensely that Motley became nearly obsessed with the character's and his family's predicament. The writer's notes on the novel include an actual Family Relocation Record form issued by Chicago's Housing Authority which Motley filled out with the Romano family's data. Clearly,

Motley's own life merged with the ones he created.

One of the most discussed aspects of Motley's rather neglected oeuvre is his choice of non-African American protagonists and communities as the center of his novels. In fact, scholars, including Motley's biographer Robert Fleming, have often categorized Motley's work as "raceless" writing. The present analysis not only challenges such views of Motley's writing but goes as far as to claim that his work, and *Knock on Any Door* in particular, makes a profound and complex intervention into the literary representations of race.

Fleming attempts to root what he sees as Motley's work's racelessness in the writer's childhood. Having summarized his early years in a non-black neighborhood, he then claims that when Motley, as a boy, decorated a scrapbook containing his writings and publications with a picture of Alexander Dumas that clearly showed his race, the gesture "foreshadowed his own later choice of 'raceless' subject matter" (Fleming 17). But quite to the contrary, race seems to be at the foreground of this symbolic choice as the young Motley was shedding light on a part of Dumas's identity that affected his whole life and career. While Dumas's most famous tragic hero, Edmond Dantès, was not black, one does not have to look further than to Fitzgerald's "great American novel" for examples of disguising race as other types of discrimination in a literary text. To be sure, Fleming acknowledges that "Motley relates racial prejudice to ethnic prejudice" (141-142), but in his discussion of Motley's engagement of white ethnic themes he relies heavily on what Adam Meyer refers to as a "simplistic view of ethnicity, one which makes a sharp distinction between two opposed groups: the minority (Black/Jewish/Hispanic/Native American/Asian/etc.) and the majority (White)" (21-22). Drawing on Meyer's argument, I suggest that Motley's work "necessitate[s] a new kind of inter-ethnic approach" (22).

But the present reading of Nick Romano's character and his ethnic neighborhood goes

further than just beyond the simplified model of ethnicity criticized by Meyer. What I suggest is that Motley, in creating Nick and his neighborhood, signifies on the racial characteristics of an African American cultural type—a “badman”—and Chicago's Side Side neighborhood, Bronzeville. Although only briefly, Dan Flory refers to the complexity of Motley's racial representation when he briefly mentions *Knock on Any Door* as an example of *black noir* literature despite its “apparent racelessness” (Flory 29). Nick certainly bears markers of Italian American identity, yet he also reveals striking parallels between the social and spatial position of blacks and white ethnics by channeling that African American figure. I argue that this inscription of blackness into the white ethnic experience marks Motley's radical intervention into the racial discourse.

The two writers' close and personal exploration of the lives that became their subject matter shows the great influence of the sociological theories of their time. But as Carla Cappetti's study of 1940s naturalism's mutually influential relationship with Chicago's School of Sociology points out, the novelists' rendition of the margins went where the sociological tools did not quite reach. While well-intentioned, studies by scholars such as Robert Park, Frederic Thrasher, and Ernest Burgess frequently slip into the familiar essentializing tone when characterizing the habits and practices of ethnic others and the poor. Cappetti's assessment of Algren's work can easily be applied to Motley's novel, when she writes that he “weave[s] into the text a critique of empirical sociology Chicago-style and of the stereotypes that that tradition ultimately fails to demolish” (180).

As far as Algren's and Motley's extreme submersion in the topic of their writing is concerned, one may view them as trend-setters for future ethnographic studies. James Spardley's method of participatory ethnography, considered revolutionary and exemplified in his 1970 study

of public drunkenness, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*, resembles in many ways the two writers' process of gathering material. Similarly, in the eighties, the environmental submersion in the world of Chicago's African American boxing scene that led the French sociologist, Loic Wacquant, to publish the fascinating 2004 study/diary, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*, seems to echo much of Algren's and Motley's experience to those familiar with the novelists' engagement with the spatial and social worlds of their future fictions. What *Never Come Morning* and *Knock on Any Door* achieve—in ways that, save for Wacquant's fascinating book, the sociologists never managed to—is make sense not only of their characters' entrapments but also of their unlikely visions of hope. Having lived by the side of Nick's and Bicek's prototypes, Algren and Motley understood how to infuse their dystopian worlds with seeds of possibility.

### **Urban Utopia and Carnival**

Barred from the type of experience envisioned in Benjamin's notion of *Erfahrung*, the young men at the centers of Algren's and Motley's novels come up with ways to access other dimensions of experience and to cope with their difficult circumstances. In other words, limited as their resources may be—and they are, I argue, tied to each boy's body and its practices—Bicek and Nick do not stop short of exploring the possible. In their bodily mappings, the main characters of the two novels act on a *utopian impulse* that Robert Tally discusses in association with Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping, and Jameson's work in general. Tally first recognizes the utopian underpinnings of much of the Frankfurt School's thought, underscoring its understanding of Utopia here: “Their work was *utopian* in a novel sense. For such critical theorists, Utopia was less an image of a perfect society than a tool used to assess critically the society in which they lived. This dimension of utopian thought has real value in a world in which

radical alternatives to the actual existing system seem inconceivable” (Tally “Radical” 110). He then points to Jameson's work as the legacy of utopian thought in its consistent concern with imagining alternatives to the status quo (113). This allows us to see how Jameson's writing has been “aimed precisely at understanding a world transformed, a world in which earlier categories no longer maintained their explanatory value” (110), and how it pays attention to Utopia as a critical tool—against the dismissal of utopian thought by postmodern and poststructuralist critics. Jameson's mapping, then, can be understood as part of a larger context of utopian thought that Jameson sees as a necessary component of all critical thought.

I suggest it is not coincidental that in the two novels the scenes in which the main characters begin to see themselves anew in relation to their social and spatial environment are set in the midst of a carnival—a site which symbolically embodies an alternative order, and thus a utopian vision. Jameson's theorization of utopian thought “as a critical negation of the actual as well as an exploration of the possible” (Tally “Radical” 113) may be applied to the carnival's overturning of the established order and hierarchies, as discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin. Carnival, with its challenging of authority structures by mocking or disregarding them, as well as by allowing the voices of those who are usually silenced to be heard in speech but also in irreverent laughter, allows those in the margins, if only briefly, to imagine the world and themselves transformed. However, despite the festive atmosphere conventionally associated with the carnivalesque, in incorporating the carnival scenes into their books, Algren and Motley choose to complicate those scenes with somber urban imagery. The resulting contrasts dissociate the boys' subsequent attempts to negotiate their identities from celebratory connotations that often accompany acts perceived as transgressive. This also allows the readers to understand the complex nature of the boys' mapping and foreshadows those mappings' failure.

Titled “The Trouble with Bicek,” the section of Algren's novel that features the carnival scene at first appears to bring relief from the previous chapter's revelations of the violence, deceptions, and calculations in Lefty's daily life in the Triangle. Having just witnessed Bruno's participation in a violent robbery and then his becoming a self-proclaimed president of the gang by cheating Casey out of his share in the leadership, the readers may see the opening of the carnival scene as alleviation of a mood that is too heavy for comfort. The scene takes place a week after Bicek claims the executive role in the newly renamed Baldhead True-American Social and Athletic Club, and finds him taking Steffi for a day at the Riverview Amusement Park.

The narrator announces Bicek strolling into the park “with two silver dollars in his pocket and his girl on his arm” (51) yet withholds the information about the impression the festivities leave on Lefty. Instead, the narration turns to Steffi's child-like joy, as seen through Bicek's eyes: “The gate had a million lights, and he sensed her excitement: each light was burning for Steffi R. tonight. Inside, people no better than herself were eating cotton candy, playing roulette wheels you couldn't lose on, and riding merry-go-round as big as all Eckert Park” (51). For Steffi, the carnival succeeds in disrupting the usual order of the social world as Bakhtin argues; she sees it as an elevation of those on society's margins, “people no better than herself,” to a standard of living normally unavailable to them—where one tastes sweetness, always wins, and enjoys carefree leisure. It is also the space of make-believe, of becoming someone else—or another version of oneself—as Steffi's nostalgic memory of visiting a carnival with her mother as a child shows: “[s]he gripped the boy's hand as she had gripped her mother's at the street carnival” and “she was going inside with Bunny and ride anything she liked, just as though both of them still had papas” (51). Despite Steffi's daily reminders of her father's death, including her mother's

struggle to support her children on her own and the community's habit of calling her Widow Rosentkowski, at the carnival she can enjoy a sanctioned moment of denial.

Once inside the park, Bicek and Steffi pass a side show advertised by its canvas front as “an assortment of freaks” (52). Here the narrator indirectly hints at Bruno's feelings about the surrounding carnival. Despite the barker's promise of the “[b]iggest woman in the Western Hemisphere” and “world's deadliest killahs” that he assures listeners are “alive” (52), inside the tent Bicek and Steffi find out that “[t]he fat lady had gone to supper” and the dangerous animal display is limited to a sick, motionless gila monster and a stuffed cobra (52)<sup>5</sup>. The taxidermic animal triggers Bicek to comment: “I wanna see somethin' alive” and urge Steffi to leave the freak show (52). As the next stop on their tour of the carnival reveals, Lefty's disappointment with the stuffed cobra is not a knee-jerk reaction and is a part of larger conflict that the carnival's scenery triggers in him.

His interest in the carnival restored temporarily by a chance to show off his prowess in the batting cage, Bicek wins a kewpie doll for Steffi. But the girl's joy at the rare moment of satisfying the hunger for “something of her own” (53) that the doll offers is short-lived. Before she can fully take in yet another unfamiliar privilege granted her by the topsy-turviness of the carnivalesque world—of owning something that is “all hers” (53)—Bruno rips off the doll's head and throws it away. In response to Steffi's tearful protest, he elaborates on his earlier desire for “somethin' alive” by saying: “I just don't like stuffed things no more, Steff. It's not you, it's stuffed things. Snakes 'n dummies 'n nothin' alive you can get your hands on 'n work on. Makes me feel like a dummy myself, playin' against dummy things all the time” (54-55). Steffi does not know that, while pitching for her, Bicek's mind drifted away from the carnival grounds, in a

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<sup>5</sup> As Dolores Haugh's photo-story on Riverview Park suggests, the paucity of the exhibit may be the result of the Depression that affected the Park. “[A]ttendance at the park decreased drastically” and its “employees worked at half salary” (Haugh 104).

daydream of fame and athletic victories, in which he was playing against best of players, not “dummy things.” While Steffi receives the trophy doll with “dancing eyes”(53), his own are still fixed on the vision in which he finally gets his hands on “somethin' alive.” In his imagination, he is “a man in the world of men” (54), playing “a hard-fought game,” “pouring sweat,” “aching in his great left arm every time he raised it” (54), and getting closer to his own version of Erfahrung with each moment of the struggle. Brought back to reality by Steffi's voice, he confronts the exact opposite of his vibrant vision: a lifeless dummy in his girlfriend's arms, held “like it was a real kid” (55). To Bicek, the doll symbolizes one more thing people like Steffi and him have to make do with in the absence of truly fulfilling experience. The seeming freedom offered by the carnival is just a temporary distraction from the status quo that placates the dispossessed just long enough to make them less angry about their misery.

The key moment in Bicek's analysis of the carnival's failure to produce a vision of alternative reality comes when the couple, having left the kewpie doll episode behind them, takes a ride on a Ferris wheel. This unusual vantage point allows Bicek to view the city lying beyond the carnival grounds in a drastically different way from the insight gained within the boundaries of the Triangle and in the tunnels under the El. What he sees completes his understanding of the carnival as a failed utopian project.

He forced himself to look: thousands of little people and hundreds of bright little stands, and over it all the coal-smoke pall of the river factories and railroad yards. He saw in that moment the whole dim-lit city on the last night of summer; the troubled streets that led to the abandoned beaches, the for-rent signs above overnight hotels and furnished basement rooms, moving trolleys and rising bridges: the cagework city, beneath a coalsmoke sky. (61-62)

The biggest attraction of the carnival, the Ferris wheel, reveals the carnival's biggest paradox—the limits and impermanence of the relief that it offers. Bakhtin's analysis of the festive season's excesses and hierarchical reversals relies precisely on the temporariness of the carnival and on its contrast against the usual order. The carnival must end and give way to the restoration of the status quo, just as the residents of the Near Northwest Side must leave the park and its “bright little stands” and return to their factories and basement rooms.

Unlike Certeau's “voyeur” on the 110<sup>th</sup> floor of the World Trade Center—I argue, against Robert Ward's reading of the scene—Bicek finds no “pleasure” in the totalizing act of “seeing the whole” (Certeau 92). In his analysis of the novel's spatiality, Ward is right when he says that Bicek is in a position that “allows one to read the world, from a distance” (62), but there is no God-like power or voyeuristic contentment in Bruno's vantage point. What Certeau sees as the God-like Icarus view of a celestial observer “can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below” because his elevation “puts him at a distance” (Certeau 92). But it is not so with Bicek. Although temporarily raised over the city, he has never left its Polish Triangle as his increasingly cynical reflections about the usefulness of the carnival to the residents of the slums indicate: “And there was neither cotton candy in the back of Bicek's Imperial Bakery nor a Ferris wheel above Rosentkowski's Polish Poolroom; neither lights nor confetti where the barber's women worked the barber's doors. There the days went by without color or light, nor any happy occurrence that you didn't drink yourself into” (62). Unlike at the carnival, where one can get a taste of winning by playing “roulette wheels you couldn't lose on” and a taste of ownership by winning a kewpie doll, outside the park, property and winning are not for those who live in brothels or roam the “troubled streets” in search of “for-rent signs.” And utopian leaps modeled after Icarus are for the naive.

The carnival represents naiveté to Bicek. Its falseness is the artifice reminiscent of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition with the first Ferris wheel and the marble-looking architectural wonders of the White City. But the buildings at Chicago's World's Fair were constructed out of non-permanent material and the symbols of progress most famously embodied by Ferris's structure also included one of the first electric chairs. Bicek, who will later close the novel by echoing Bernard Sawicki's famous words, "Knew I'd never get t'be twenty-one anyhow" (Algren, *Never* 284), senses that for people like himself or Steffi, death in an electric chair is a far more realistic scenario than enjoying the beauty and progress promised by the whiteness of the White City. For them, stuffed cobras must suffice. Other Polish characters in the novel, the ones that Bicek does not consider smart, may have bought this fake utopian vision, such as the police officer Abramovitz whose arm tattoo proudly displays: "*World's Columbian Exposition, 1893*" (114). But Bicek understands that the North Side attendees of the Riverview Amusement Park are not so much the *viewers* as they are the *subjects* of the "freak show" created by the space of the carnival. Algren's sympathy for people employed at carnivals supports the reading of a parallel representation of the dispossessed and the "freaky" in the novel.<sup>6</sup> Just as the ethnic and racial others at the 1893 Fair had to accept their place in the pecking order by being displayed in a separate section of the exposition, Midway Plaisance, so do the poor and the foreign of Bicek's city flock to their designated space of pleasure, the carnival.

Bruno's somber reflections on top of the Ferris wheel follow another scene related to Lefty's ambitions. Shortly before taking their aerial ride, Bruno and Steffi stop by the moving pictures penny arcade. Having given most of his money to Steffi, Bruno uses his last penny to

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<sup>6</sup> In Donohue's *Conversation with Nelson Algren*, Algren tells of his job as a shill at a carnival in his youth and indicates his fascination with and sympathy with the carnival people.

watch “a scarred and faded film of the Dempsey-Willard fight” (57). In the midst of the “fake” park on Chicago's North Side, Bicek catches a glimpse of the world's opportunities captured on film. The scene is reminiscent of Richard Wright's *Bigger* Thomas at the movie theater, where the newsreel featuring happy wealthy people displays for him all the things he is barred from (Wright 29-34). The details of the match Bicek watches are no less important for his broodings on top of the Ferris wheel than the footage of “white men and women dressed in black and white clothes, laughing, talking, drinking, dancing” that *Bigger* watches, and that leads him to conclude that “it was all a game and white people knew how to play it” (Wright 33). The film of the famous boxing event, combined with the eye-opening bird's eye view of the city soon after, play a key role in Bicek's attempts at mapping his way out of his position's entrapments.

The fight Bruno watches took place in 1919 in Toledo, Ohio. The giant cowboy from Kansas, Jess Willard, who in 1915 famously defeated Jack Johnson, thus gaining the official title of the heavyweight champion of the world and the unofficial one of the Great White Hope, was now facing Jack Dempsey, a fighter much shorter and over fifty pounds lighter. Even today, Dempsey's brutal victory over the champion is often described as “the worst beating in boxing history,” and the available radio commentary and film footage of the exceptionally brutal match—some of which Bicek watches in *Never Come Morning*—explain why. The film shows Willard going down on the mat seven times in the first round, after which he cannot stand up on his own. The radio commentator's summary of what he is witnessing--“This is no fight—this is a slaughter, a massacre!”--provides appropriate accompaniment to the film in which Willard's face, despite the black and white image, turns into a bruised and swollen pulp.

But the bloodiness of this famous pugilistic moment is only important for the present analysis when mentioned alongside the highly racialized terms in which the match was framed

by its contemporaries—and by Algren's Bicek. From the start, the passage of the novel that describes Lefty's viewing of the film establishes his empathy towards Dempsey: “With his fighter's heart and his fighter's mind, Bruno sensed the heart and mind of the other” (57). So strong is his identification with Dempsey, that the image of Willard “on his knees, swinging his head like a blinded ox” evokes “no spark of pity” in him (58). In fact, the sight of the enormous fighter's tortured body inspires Bicek's contemptuous comment: “Some white hope” (58). To him, Willard is a disgrace—not only as a boxer but also as a symbol of whiteness.

Jack Dempsey, the fighter giving the White Hope a beating in this encounter—and one that Bicek sympathizes with—was not of WASP origin. His heterogeneous ethnic heritage did not escape the contemporary observers such as a journalist who wrote: Dempsey “shows his Cherokee Indian blood very plainly in his actions rather than in his appearance. He claims, however, to be seven-eighths of Irish blood, but he looks and speaks as if he might be a Czecho-Slav, Pole, or Bohemian. Probably he has mixed much with the Slav element in the mines in Colorado, his native state. In any event, he bears a decidedly 'hunkie' appearance” (“Boxing” 4). The journalist then continues to racialize Dempsey's performance in the ring by claiming that “[h]is disposition is Indian-like. When he goes into the ring his face becomes rigid, 'mean'” (4). Next, the writer compares the two fighters of the 1919 bout, again resorting to the language of race and conflating race with traits of personality in Dempsey's case: “while Willard, a very handsome, courtly, large man, bowed and waved graciously to greetings sent him from the crowd,” “Dempsey sat scowling in his corner. His face was black and hard as anthracite coal” (4). This account of the fight and the description of its winner show that racial discourse was in the foreground of pugilistic discourse in the first decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, what was at stake in the ring was much more than titles and trophies, as—though “marked” by

one's race and ethnicity—one could attempt racial ascension precisely through “Indian-like” “slaughter.”

As Louis Golding's “book of bare-knuckle fights and fighters” (Golding 11) indicates, the preoccupation with Dempsey's race was still very much present even in the fifties. The British writer thus describes Dempsey: “There was something of the Indian about his flat broad cheekbones and narrow eyes, a hint of the distant Cherokee sire who had hunted the broad plains” (219). He also mentions Dempsey's Jewish grandfather (219), as well as “the sap of Irish, Scots, and Indian blood” that ran “[d]own [Dempsey's] family tree” (220). A viewer of the movie featuring Dempsey and Willard's fight in the thirties, then, and especially a boxing fan like Bicek, would approach the picture within this race-centered context. Bicek is aware of Dempsey's non-whiteness. He also roots for Dempsey, enjoying his aggressive attacks, as well as Willard's humiliation and pain. In other words, Bicek—an aspiring White Hope—takes Dempsey's side in the bout not *despite* but *because of* Dempsey's ethnic difference. Given his thorough knowledge of boxing history, Lefty is not watching the movie for the plot, but rather to re-live the satisfaction he feels at the thought of the ethnic other's triumph over the White Hope which in turn paves the road to whiteness for those who still occupy the space of racial in-betweenness.

To Bicek, Dempsey provides the utopian vision that he can see himself trusting. Like him, Dempsey inhabits a gray zone within the American racial taxonomy, as the 1919 article implies in claiming that “[h]e is too small, and too unskilled to trouble seriously the great negroes or the great white men” (“Boxing” 4), thus placing Dempsey in a separate boxing—and racial—category. Also like Dempsey, Bicek has a “fighter's heart” and a “fighter's mind,” as well as no mercy when victory is on the line—or at least that is what he aspires to as he assures

himself: “I’m a killer too” (58). Lefty’s violent reaction to the movie, with “[h]is fingers spread, resisting the urge to get in there for the kill himself” (58), shows both his built-up anger and his aggression, as well as his desire to release them in a bodily act of social ascension. The rhythm of Dempsey’s body in its near-lethal attack on Willard’s mutilated body—“one—two—left to the heart—right to the jaw—to the heart—to the jaw” (58)—spell out the vision of the possible to Bicek.

Before this vision is clouded by the sobering “coalsmoke” view from the Ferris wheel, Bicek shows to the readers just how tightly his daydream of transcending his ethnicity is tied to masculinity and violent corporeality. Once the movie of the fight ends abruptly, and he is ready to leave the penny arcade, he scoffs at Steffi’s engrossment in *Blood and Sand* (1922), one of Rudolph Valentino’s movies. Not only does he refer to the movie as “that old stuff” (58), but he also calls Valentino himself “just a Dago” (58). Explicitly, Bicek undermines the value of Valentino as a relevant cultural icon on the basis of the actor’s ethnicity. But implicitly he also voices his contempt for Valentino’s mapping as an ethnic—his career as a cinematic lover. Despite the fact that *Blood and Sand* is newer than the footage of the bout Lefty watched minutes earlier, the implications of Dempsey’s victory are timeless to Bicek, and in comparison make Valentino’s movie look like “old stuff.” What’s more, the image of Valentino in the 1930s would have been flawed by the scandal that erupted in 1926 around an editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* which accused the actor of promoting an effeminate image that put a dent in the character of American manhood (Leider 373-375). In Bicek’s eyes, then, Valentino is pathetic for he did not find a map out of his category as a “Dago.”

One may wonder if Lefty’s assessment of Valentino would have been different had he known that the Italian “lover” was a fighter, too. The actor was an avid athlete and, in fact, a fan

of boxing. A biographer points out photographs of Valentino training with no other than Jack Dempsey himself, just two or three years after the boxer's victory over Willard (Leider 177). Bicek's "[g]ood Old Jack" and the "Dago" were friends—and Valentino turned to Dempsey for help in restoring his image after the *Tribune's* damage to his masculinity (Leider 375). Dempsey trained him for an "exhibition bout" that he also helped set up (375). In a pugilistic echoing of the Dempsey-Willard match, Valentino defeated his much larger opponent, who later reported to the press that the actor's punch was "like a mule's kick" (375). In her study of the cultural history of boxing, Kasia Boddy writes that Valentino's death a month after the fight is often ascribed to the health complications that supposedly resulted from his frequent boxing (Boddy 223). But Valentino's fame does not rest on his victories in the ring but rather on roles "that were neither properly manly nor properly American" (Boddy 222). Therefore, to Bicek, he remains one of the stupid ones—who have not figured out the rules of the game played in American society. It is a game in which one needs literally to destroy others in order to rebuild oneself, and to sacrifice one's body in order to bleed all the "hunkie" out of it.

Although Bicek chooses the violent bodily practice of boxing over the "fake" vision offered by the amusement park, he enters a carnival scene of its own sort. Apart from the fact that between the Civil War and the mid-twentieth century, boxing was often featured as a sideshow of festival and carnival curiosity, as contemporary sideshow banners and photographs prove (See the link: <http://www.sideshowworld.com/50-AS/thstgod-Athletic-1.html>), the practice itself relies on many qualities that Bakhtin sees as defining the carnivalesque. Whether performed in a boxing booth at a carnival or in a renowned boxing arena, a pugilistic bout is an exercise in excess (of pain and violence) and grotesque (distorted bodies on display for the roaring crowds). It is also a staging of a peculiar social reversal, in which a low cultural form

allows access to “personal triumphs in public places” (Algren, *Never* 31). In the case of a fighter with Bicek's ambition, boxing—the populist low medium—may be a key to the arena of higher social standing, to whiteness. Thus, carnival—in more senses than one—contextualizes Bicek's mapping his way out of the Triangle.

In constructing Nick Romano's “map,” Motley also relies on the imagery of carnival to establish the terms of the character's transgressive practice. Unlike Bicek, Nick wanders into the space of a carnival accidentally. He has just left the reform school—the fictional replica of St. Charles—and arrived in Chicago the previous day. The city and its South Side neighborhood are new territory and during his first exploration of the unknown turf Nick stumbles upon a carnival in Maxwell Street. As in *Never Come Morning*, the effect the scene has on both the readers and the young character witnessing it is established through contrast: “This was a *big* night. The crowd, gathering from all the slum houses, talked about the mayor coming to make a speech. The whole neighborhood was turning out. They came across the cracked sidewalks and the dirty street stones. There was music at the carnival. And laughter” (Motley, *Knock* 86).

With its contradictions of laughter and dirt accompanying each other at the carnival—set in the midst of the slum—Maxwell street reveals itself as an overwhelmingly ambiguous space to Nick. He has never seen anything like this before. When in reform school, one had to escape into the world of imagination or look “out toward the mountains” (71) to get a moment's relief from the grim reality. For example, one time Nick and his friend, Rocky, “struck out away from the buildings, walking under the trees down a straggly path worn and beaten into the ground with grass on either side” (52). There, away from their oppressive concrete prison, “Rocky pursed his lips” and “[t]he whistling notes went up and out” (53). Another time, while listening to Rocky daydreaming out loud about life as a hobo, Nick lets himself drift away. He “felt he was out on

the road with Rocky” (77). “Silence hushed over the mountains and all across the field. Rocky and Nick lying in the grass” (78). In these and other situations, Nick and his fellow prisoners sought refuge from their environment by removing themselves from it physically or by fleeing it in their minds' world. But here, in Maxwell Street taken over by the carnival, Nick encounters laughter and joyful abandon in the midst of the concrete slum.

Nick discovers the *je ne sais quoi* of the neighborhood for the first time earlier that day, when his escapade leads him into the streets “crowded with people. All kinds of people. Negroes in flashy clothes. . . . Young Mexican fellows with black hair and blue sport shirts worn outside their pants and open at the neck,” and “gypsy women” who “wore several different-colored skirts, red and blue, yellow, green” (83). Here, the detail of the clothing worn by the passers-by accomplishes much more than just a vivid, realistic image of the scenery. By drawing almost obsessive attention to the outfits' particulars—and especially to their colors—the narration points out the racial and ethnic variety that Nick finds in these streets. The bright colors of the garments shock the neighborhood's new resident, as he walks “looking at everything” (83), passing “the synagogues, the Greek church, the Negro storefront churches” (83), and hearing “Jewish words, Italian words, Polish and Russian words, Spanish, mixed-up English” (84). The narration produces an overwhelming list of urban stimuli confronting Nick, suggesting that the co-existence of all these different cultural and ethnic markers within the same space is difficult for the boy to process, but fascinating.

To be sure, the heterogeneous crowd, while enchanting, is far from care-free or harmonious. As he walks on, Nick witnesses “beggars with sad eyes” (83), “bums” “picking through the garbage” (84), a robbery of a Jewish store (84), and a knife fight between two black boys (85). The neighborhood's ailments, then, reveal themselves to Nick just as readily as its

colors do. Of all the sobering images he comes across on this first adventure on the South side, one will leave a particularly lasting impression on Nick—a dog run over by a car and left in the street to die. The description of the suffering animal is no less detailed than the descriptions of the “flashy clothes” and “different-colored skirts”: “The puppy lay in the gutter belching blood. His skinny legs pawed the air. . . . The puppy's head lay in an oil puddle. His blood, spewing out of his mouth, mixed with the oil” (85). To Nick, the image of the bloodied dog brings back “memories of Tommy, Jesse, Rocky” (85)—his childhood friends who fell victims to the injustices and cruelties of the reform school and poverty. Within the span of a few hours, then, Nick gets a kaleidoscopic overview of what Chicago's slum has to offer: its diversity bursting with life in many forms, and the death and destitution lurking under its grime.

When, later that day, “[s]omething pulled him back to Maxwell Street” (86)—a summoning that brings Nick to the carnival—it is the combination of life and death he has found there that is calling him. When he returns, the carnival spirit occasioned by the mayor's visit has brought the neighborhood's curious mixture of desperation and joyful abandon to its peak. On the one hand, the street has transformed: “One end of the street had been sectioned off. Wooden horses made an uneven circle around the part that was for dancing. A crayoned sign tacked to one of the horses read: 5¢ A Dance. A string of sickly red bulbs crossed above the dance space. There was a jukebox playing constantly” (87). This “sectioned off” space—space designated for the carnivalesque defiance---sanctions socially transgressive acts such as “a lean young Negro” and “a pretty Italian girl” dancing with each other (88). On the other hand, the cheapness of the crayoned makeshift sign and the “sickly” quality of the red lights are firm reminders of the material environment within which this special space has been created. Observing the celebrating crowd, Nick reads the story of the neighborhood in the faces and bodies of the carnival's

attendees: “There were women ready to drop kids into the world. There were the tough faces of boys who had known no boyhood and the broadened bodies of girls who had known everything before they were fourteen. There were little kids, looking like they belonged to no one—with just a dress pulled over their heads, with their stockings hanging down over their shoes and their shoe laces dragging” (87-88). Although his first encounter with the neighborhood takes place in the special circumstances of the carnival, the slum lets Nick form “no illusions” about its everyday life.

It seems that the scene should come to its logical climax with the mayor's arrival and speech. But the expected culmination appears more like an odd intrusion. The bizarre context created by the juxtaposition of the carnival's chaos and excess—including dancing, drinking, gambling, and young people's giggling and flirting—with the mayor's grand entrance and pathos-filled speech, make the official's presence appear out of place. The mayor arrives to the slum “in a shiny new car” yet attempts to bridge the difference between himself and the local residents by saying “that he had been raised in the neighborhood” and by pointing “toward the street where his school was” (88). “The mayor said, 'I came from the bottom and I'm still with the bottom!' And everybody cheered. The mayor said, 'We thank God for living in a great country and a great city.' And everybody cheered. The mayor said, 'Each boy in this neighborhood has the same chance I had to make his place in the world’” (88). After delivering his speech, “[t]he mayor left” and the “good-natured and happy” crowd's festivities continue.

It is ironic that the event around which the carnival supposedly revolves—the mayor's arrival and speech—takes up no more than nine short lines of the novel's typographic space and is narrated in such cynically simplified style. Such casting of the event marks the socio-economic gap between the mayor and the slum's inhabitants as well as points to the

inconsequentiality of the official's visit for the daily lives of the poor. The very character of the mayor can be read as an allusion to two different mayoral functions in contemporary Chicago: the actual Mayor of Chicago and the unofficial representative of Chicago's black residents, the Mayor of Bronzeville. Reading the scene with these two functions in mind allows one to understand both the novel's intervention in the social abandonment of the ethnic slums and the covert parallels the book draws between the lives of poor blacks and poor white ethnics.

At the time when the novel's plot places Nick at the carnival in the slums, Edward Kelly was the mayor of Chicago. Elected in 1933, he would hold the office for fourteen years. Since my reading of this scene—and Motley's novel in general—rests on a peculiar inscription of blackness into the Italian American character, Kelly's relation to Chicago's black neighborhood, Bronzeville, is worth noting here. He enjoyed “soaring popularity in the black community” (Biles 94) as a result of his increasing the number and quality of jobs for African Americans, his appointing blacks to important committees and positions in city government (91), and “establishing a reputation as a friend of 'the Race’” (91). He also, controversially, gained the support of the leaders of the black underworld by exercising “the policy of benign neglect regarding gambling and vice on the South Side” (90). His general support among black Chicagoans dramatically altered African American voting patterns that began to lean towards Democratic candidates once Kelly was in office.

But the image of Kelly that emerges in St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton's famous *Black Metropolis* helps one put the mayor's relationship with Chicagos' blacks into a new perspective. The description the authors give of Kelly presiding over the first meeting of the Mayor's Conference on Race Relations in 1944 suggests caution—and even cynicism—in their assessment of the official's sincerity: “The first meeting was opened with an address by the

Mayor, a man with a national reputation as the boss of a reputedly corrupt political machine. Practical and hard-boiled, he announced that this was 'not a meeting of idealists and dreamers to sketch a panacea.' Yet, proud of anything that makes the Midwest Metropolis a 'first,' he boasted" about appointing a Committee on Race Relations (264). The "practicality" of the mayor here allows us to read his concern for blacks as a calculated political move. This impression sets in even deeper when one contrasts the mayor's dismissal of "dreams" and "ideals" with the list of idealistic "official, public doctrines" that emerged from that meeting (264). When read in parallel with Motley's scene, the paragraph in Drake and Clayton's book that describes those doctrines takes on an eerie tone:

The Mayor emphasized the *virtue in variety*--'Our people trace their origin from almost every country on the globe. . . .' He stressed the *fact of interdependence* with an epigram: 'Benefits to any one group can result in advantages to all.' The *primacy of civic harmony* was driven home: '. . . to avoid friction and to promote cooperation among the many great groups that make up this city. . . .' The Mayor also revealed his *faith in planning*: 'Only recently have we begun to realize that it is as important to plan for human relations as for material needs.' (264)

The authors refer to the mayor's principles as "verbal commitments" "to the ideal of equality of opportunity for Negroes" (264) and follow this section with one titled "Beliefs Men Live By" which contrasts verbal declarations with the behavior patterns observed in people's lives (266-270).

As Horace Clayton's words that he inscribed on Motley's copy of his *Psychological Approach to Race Relations* indicate, he held the novelist in great esteem. Clayton wrote: "To Willard Motley, a great artist with deep psychological insight" (Clayton). Perhaps then the

similarity between Drake and Clayton's partially quoted account of the mayor's doctrines and Motley's somewhat sarcastic narration of the mayor's speech in the novel comes from minds that thought alike. Both books' passages use the language of pathos and idealism as well as emphasis by repetition--"The mayor said," "The Mayor emphasized," "The Mayor revealed." They also both contextualize the mayor's speech/doctrines by contrasting them with the lives of the common people who, as the writers suggest, are for the most part unaffected by the ideals proclaimed by the mayor. The appointment of certain "respectable" members of the black community to governmental positions does not always directly alter poverty and racism for those in the slums.

That last point also brings to mind the figure of the unofficial Mayor of Bronzeville, the title inspired by James Gentry, a reporter for the *Chicago Bee*, who later joined the *Defender* where he was able to implement his idea of the election (Rutkoff 322-323). The first Mayor of Bronzeville, James Knight, was elected in October of 1934. The election was organized as one of the events to accompany Bud Billiken Day, a holiday in the African American neighborhood that took its name from a character designed by none other than a fourteen-year-old Willard Motley himself who was already then publishing in the *Chicago Defender*. Bud Billiken Day was sponsored by the *Defender's* editor, Robert Abbott, in 1930 and since then has been the occasion for the annual Parade the celebratory scale of which Rutkoff and Scott describe as "Chicago's African American New Year, Decoration Day, Fourth of July, and Mardi Gras all rolled into one" (316).

Undeniably, both the Parade and the unofficial "mayoral" election had their symbolic value for the residents of the South Side in the thirties. "For a day, Bud Billiken erased the word 'depression' from the minds of Chicago's African Americans, creating a symbolic moment of

heaven on earth” (Rutkoff 320) and “[t]he Mayor of Bronzeville election allowed black Chicagoans to participate, even symbolically, in their own political world” (322). Even the support of the newly elected Mayor of Chicago, Kelly, did not eliminate black Chicagoans’ sense of apartness and their desire for more control over their own space and lives. Thus, unsurprisingly, as the authors of *Black Metropolis* write, [t]he annual election of the 'Mayor of Bronzeville' grew into a community event with a significance far beyond that of a [*Defender's*] circulation stunt” (Drake 383). But even more so than in the case of the benefits drawn from the relationship with Kelly, the tangible effects this “mayor” had on the lives of Bronzeville's residents were few. The person elected as “Mayor” was “usually a businessman” (Drake 383) or another member of the African American middle class—and thus someone whose daily concerns were different than those of the poor ghetto dwellers. Besides, and even more importantly, the title held no legislative power in the city of Chicago. While the election gave people a reason to celebrate and enjoy the symbolic freedom of choosing their representative, those gestures did not translate into the ability to pass laws or dramatically to affect the material conditions of the residents' lives.

By drawing connections between the Maxwell Street slum and the South Side black ghetto, the scene of the mayor's speech achieves two goals. It issues a bold comparative statement about the destitution of the city's white ethnics which, to Motley, mirrors the conditions present in the Black Belt. Moreover, the scene exposes the utter abandonment of the poor ethnic others by those in power. Platitudes issued by official figures, the novel implies, are nothing but empty words spoken by the carnival's talking head against which the crowd responds with laughter and music. The talking head's coherent logic has no consequences; “the mayor left” and the music and dance continued as if nothing ever interrupted it.

The complex role that the carnival scene plays in Nick's formation of his alternative urban practice is framed by the image of the dead dog to which Nick returns on his way home. Having witnessed the festivities of the carnival, Nick feels compelled to finish his day with the down-to-earth view of the less joyful experiences the city has in store for its dwellers; he goes "to see if there dog was still there" (89). The dead animal "lay in the gutter" (89). The symbolism of the dead animal reaches beyond the cruelty of the neighborhood and encompasses the injustices that Nick witnessed and suffered in the past. The dead dog again inspires Nick's memories of his previous imprisonment's setting, the reform school: "In the street in the dark ahead of Nick were the reform school grounds. Again he was staring through the little diamonds of its tall wire fence" (89). Standing over the tortured body of the animal, Nick faces the limited choices available to him, the slum and the prison, with the street marking the distance between the two. The death he encountered behind the wired fence of his prison exists on the South Side of Chicago as well, but here there are also alternatives. The same streets that hold "bums," "beggars" and the threat of death also hold music, color, and the promise of excitement. I argue that here, during that first day of strolling around the neighborhood, Nick becomes a Depression Era, ethnic version of Michel de Certeau's "walker" in the city. From now on, gradually, the streets of the neighborhood will become the terrain of Nick's practices that will constantly define his defiance against the imprisonment he experienced earlier—but also the metaphorical imprisonment that the inhabitants of the slum experience on a daily basis.

The "walker" in Nick will eventually adopt his hedonistic motto: "Live fast, die young, and leave a good looking corpse" (Motley 157) and become a "tough" practitioner of the city. As he's growing up in the slum's streets, Nick becomes more intimately familiar and entangled with the neighborhood's life of bodily pleasures and dangers. Nick's use of his social and bodily

capital bears distinctly carnival-like traits. In the light of no alternatives, he throws himself into the life of excess. His experience as a criminal, I argue, reflects the carnivalesque spirit. As Mike Presdee convincingly argues, the lives of criminals may be read as the “second life of the people” described by Bakhtin (qtd. in Presdee 8). As Presdee points out, illicit acts are an integral part of carnival: “In the ecstatic, marginal, chaotic acts of carnival, damage is done, people are hurt and some ‘pleasurable’ performances reflect on or articulate pain. In other words, carnival can be both violent and break the law” (32). Thus, in his life as a delinquent, Nick continues to draw on the lessons learned in Maxwell Street on his first night in the neighborhood. Moreover, the morally ambiguous space generated by the carnival—for “the victims of carnival [are not] only those who wield power” (Presdee 41)--has implications for what I see as Nick's future role as a “badman” and his frequently (self)destructive bodily mapping.

The visions offered by the novels' carnival inspire both boys to gain a clearer understanding of their positionalities and lead them to design their own alternative utopias. However, each character practices his mapping in a strikingly different way, especially in relation to the social environment he comes from. Both the plots and the forms of the two books are part of those contrasts in ethnomapping. Bicek, in his dream of social elevation through the bodily art of boxing, aims for severing his ties to the Triangle and fighting his way into another ethnic category. In that vein, Algren's novel displays a paucity of plot and focuses mostly on the world of Bicek's daydreams and fears. Apart from the few major events that involve Bicek's gang life, and that propel the plot, the readers see little of Bicek's relations with his family or the community. By contrast, Motley's Nick understands his slum as the terrain of possible alternative practices. While remaining within the confines of the neighborhood, he establishes a new identity for himself—one that relies on his bodily capital and that overwrites the identities

projected onto him by the structures of power. The novel is rich in relational details of Nick's life, establishing his character in multiple contexts including the church, family life, and larger community. Thanks to that, Nick's changing persona comes to the readers not only through his own actions and thoughts—often presented through free indirect discourse—but also through the transformation of his relations with other people. Moreover, a parallel analysis of the two books and the two approaches to mapping by their white ethnic characters also can lead to a larger conclusion about the historical situatedness of various groups within the American racial taxonomy.

### **The Great White Hope and the Badman**

As Algren was working on *Never Come Morning*, both his publisher, Edward Aswell, and his friend, fellow writer, and fan, Richard Wright, expressed concerns about the plotlessness of the novel (Drew 130). Even by the time Algren's draft had reached the alarming length of 263 pages, Wright still “couldn't tell where the story was moving” (130). While Algren took the criticism to heart and equipped his book with a more discernible plot structure, *Never Come Morning* remains a novel whose strength rests in the characterization of Bruno and the surrealism of the character's dreams and visions, not in its plot. While such major events in the novel as Bicek's crimes against the Greek and Steffi, or his imprisonment, are certainly important, their primary function lies in providing circumstances for Bruno's psychical processes to reveal themselves to the readers. It is in Lefty's dreams and hallucinations that his own utopian map confronts his most feared entrapments—and, thus, it is there that the story really takes place.

While in his discussion of Jameson's work on utopia Tally writes that “[t]he Utopian project is, in a sense, always *fantastic*” (“Radical” 113), Tally also points to the problem of this fantasy. “Fantasy enables the creation of alternative realities, but it does so at the risk of being

cast aside precisely *as* fantastic” (114). As anti-utopian critics would argue, “[t]he embrace of fantasy, far from forming an active political program, seems to be escapist in the utmost” (114). Curiously enough, Boddy claims that the same threat resided, according to the Marxist critics of popular culture during the Depression era, in readers' and viewers' identification with the pugilistic iconography and mythology of success. Such identification was dangerous “not only because it distracted the masses from the realities of their own lives, but because, by doing so, it made authentic choices and action impossible” (Boddy 270). Boddy cites several contemporary texts, *Never Come Morning* among them, to show that the fantasies of boxing lead their spinners to nowhere. While the tragic ending of Algren's novel undeniably proves Bicek's failure to achieve his goal of fighting his way out of his spatial and ethnic enclosures, Tally helps one understand the usefulness—and even necessity—of the fantastic in the project of mapping alternative practices. “[T]he imaginative function of fantasy makes possible the political project of imagining not only what is, but what *can be*” (“Radical” 114). In other words, regardless of Bicek's failure, no change of the status quo can ever be achieved without utopian mapping. Thus, against Boddy's argument that Algren's novel aims to question “the 'way out' offered by boxing” (267), I suggest that *Never Come Morning* elevates the utopian impulse—embodied here in the boxing myth—to the level of ethnic others' and other social outcasts' potential survival tool.

Perhaps the most telling of Bicek's visions occurs in the police station lock-up where he is held, and later tortured, on suspicion of shooting a drunk in an alley—a crime he did not commit. After the first round of interrogation, and before the rounds that will eventually make him confess and send him to prison for six months, Bicek's feverish mind is “swamped by an image of himself; as though he had been abruptly transplanted before a technicolor movie being reeled a little too fast” (Algren, *Never* 88-89). The movie is a “stirring drama of one Powerhouse

Bicek, the Near Northwest Side's new 195-pound white hope" (89). Although the dream sequence opens with an indication of its fantastic content, soon the vision takes on so many qualities of Bicek's actual life, including the appearance of his gang mates and Lefty's realistic interactions with them, that readers join the dreamer in forgetting the boundaries between hallucination and reality.

In the dream, Bicek—nicknamed “the Modern Ketchel” after the Polish American boxer, Stanley Ketchel—faces off “the beetle-browed titleholder,” “Pinsky, the Jew” (90). Race quickly comes to the foreground of the confrontation, as Bicek daydreams of being visited before the fight by the previous champion, also a Pole, who shakes Bicek's hand, “saying that it didn't matter to him who held it [the title], so long as it wasn't a Jew or a jig” (90). The former titleholder tearfully bemoans the fact that “[y]ou got the case of a Jew callin' himself th' white hope now” (90) and encourages Bicek to “get that title back” (90). In this vision, Lefty occupies the place in the racial hierarchy that is not only superior to the one ascribed to Jews but also unquestionably reserved for whites. He is not just fighting to *win* the title of White Hope—he is “getting it back”—thus suggesting that he is rightfully entitled to whiteness, that he owns it and must now punish the impostor who has tried to steal it.

Throughout the match, the narration—suggestive of Bicek's mental process—marks the confrontation in increasingly racialized language. Pinsky's name gives way to “Jew” as well as epithets such as “sheeny” (91) and “Kike” (92). The references to Pinsky as a “tricky” “fox” and to his managers' fishy smell (91) and supposed bribing scheme (92) establish the ethnic difference between the two fighters. In establishing his own place in the racial hierarchy, Bicek also reveals his racism towards the Greek referee of the bout, thinking of him as “that dirty Greek” (93). All these reaffirmations of his worth, combined with the fact that he is winning the

fight, work towards him emerging as the new White Hope and towards the dream's happy ending. But Bicek's vision of racial ascension and boxing fame are marred by the dark elements of his actual life.

A short paragraph in the middle of the narrator's account of Bicek's hallucination brings the audience—who by now live Bicek's dream with him—down to earth: “Bruno Bicek, leaning heavily against the wall to catch his breath and sweating from stomach to forehead in a corner of the cold little cell, the carpet of filth still feeling a little like canvas to his feet and still eying Pinsky frankly in the opposite corner, hoped that the champ's manager would toss in the towel” (93). The readers find themselves anchored back into the real place and time of the plot: Bicek's hold-up cell. But another realization follows this one: that, unlike the readers, Lefty has never left the illusion. It is we who are temporarily thrown back into the imprisonment; Bicek, perhaps feverish and on the verge of sanity, still feels the canvas floor of the ring under his feet and sees his opponent in the opposite corner. The paragraph points not only to Bicek's investment in his dream but also to his inability at that moment to distinguish between dream and reality.

No wonder, then, that by the end of the vision, the Greek referee gets mixed up in Bicek's mind with the Greek man that he has killed: “He began to feel that the ref must have a scar going from lip to cheekbone and worried, as in a dream, because he couldn't see his face clearly enough to tell” (94). The referee incites Bicek to get more aggressive with Pinsky, and that allows the Polish fighter to feel justified in delivering the final blow to his opponent that makes him the victor. Bicek's mind does not allow guilt about either his imaginary violence against Pinsky or the real violence against the Greek to enter his vision. Instead, his bad conscience —associated not so much with the murder he committed as the rape he allowed—manifests itself in racialized hatred. The mixture of dream and reality here gives the readers insight into the complicated ways

that Bruno processes his experience; at bottom, he feels guilty and helpless, but, as his confused dreaming mind shows, the only emotions he is capable of externalizing are anger and desire for power. “The whole thing had been the damn Greek's fault” (94), he thinks, this time on the verge of coming back to reality. By now it is clear that the Greek on Bruno's mind is the murdered man. Although the roots of Bruno's anxiety and misery extend to the broad familial, social, economic, and psychological areas of his life, they boil down to is the racial hierarchy. A necessary component of Bruno's utopian fantasy is the belief that one can extract oneself from the entrapments of one's circumstances and transcend them through a higher racial status.

Algren's novel is steeped in racial discourse, which reminds the readers time and time again what is at stake for its main character. One category of race-related references comprises numerous ways that Bicek and the other gang members racialize—and draw distinctions between themselves and—others. Among the many examples, the boys show their racist attitudes in conversations about a “Chink whorehouse” (43) and Italian “spooks” (21) whose store they rob. Two of the most shocking instances of racialization in the novel are accompanied by extreme violence, as he shows up to participate in the group rape of Steffi, a Greek man who will later become Bicek's victim is called a “sheeny” and told to “[b]eat it” as “this is a white man's party” (73). At the end of the novel, in his final fight, Bicek faces a black boxer who, in turn, faces a “North Side crowd” on this “white man's evening” (260). Bruno's brutal victory over his opponent takes place in an atmosphere of hate and racism directed at the African American who gets attacked by the audience with questions such as “Where'd you get the sun-boin, Tucker?” (260) and a whole host of racial slurs. Bruno's sense of comfort during this fight, when he hears “the white men give him a hand then, for being white too” (261) accurately illustrates Polish boys' deep-seated insecurity about their racial status and shows some of the underlying causes of

their frequently relentless racism.

But that same insecurity also leads to various forms of ethnic self-loathing from the Polish gang members. Torn between the two cultural worlds, the Polish one, introduced to them by the older generation of immigrants, and the American one, which surrounds them, the boys learn that the lessons of their immigrant community are useless in American reality. Hence, they develop a contemptuous attitude towards their elders, calling them “greenhorns” (8), “dino[s] from across” (48), or “boobatch[es]”—Bruno's favorite word “to indicate a church-going, foreign-born Pole” (87). Alongside the insults towards the foreignness of “greenhorns” go the boys' affirmations of their own Americanness. The inclusion of the words “True American” (18) in the new name of the gang stands as one of the strongest examples of the young Poles' insistence on not being Polish. When questioned about his illegal possession of a knife by the police, Bruno refers to his weapon as his “All-American gut-ripper-upper” (84). Further, he draws a distinction between himself and a drunk he is being of shooting. The old man was a “Polack hillbilly” “n certainly no citizen” (120); Bruno, on the other hand, is “polite-like, like a Polish-American citizen” (122).

But despite the desire to believe in their own claims to both whiteness and Americanness, the boys' defensiveness often reveals that they understand the ambiguity of their ethnic status. This self-doubt manifests itself in Bruno calling one of his Polish friends a “Polack” (47), as well as in Bruno's obsessive need to equate prowess in the ring—which, to him, promises whiteness—with Polishness. Locked up and tortured for a crime he did not commit and haunted by the ones he did commit, he still fixates on his boxing idols' identities as he scribbles a letter to the editor of a boxing magazine in his cell: “What nationality was Ketchel? . . . Is it true that Jack Dempsey is part Polish? What was Joe Choynski?” (134). Stripping these questions of all

pretenses, the narrator reveals that Bicek “knew the nationalities of Choynski and Ketchel as well as he knew his own; he merely sought printed assurance that they too were Poles and they too were unbeatable” (135). For what Bruno needs is certainty that the greatness of the White Hope is possible for him.

Bicek craves whiteness and success as much as he craves many other things. The difference is that, in his mind, he has a tool that can help him achieve the title of the White Hope—his boxing body—whereas he lacks the necessary tools that open other doors. “His life was a ceaseless series of lusts: for tobacco so good he could eat it like meat; for meat, for coffee, for bread, for sleep, for whisky, for women, for dice games and ball games and personal triumphs in public places” (31). Familiar only with want and never with satisfaction, Bicek sees his own experience as perpetual hunger: “I never get my teeth into anythin' all my own” (32). This is not just a question of unfulfilled desire; it is one of humanity, masculinity, and ego: “There were things that made you a man if you possessed them, or a wolf—if you were born where such things were only to the hunter” (32). Boxing and its promise of whiteness become the symbols of ending Lefty's destitution and making him fully human.

But the ring offers as much risk of damage and threat of external manipulation to the pugilist as it does promise of social rising. Perhaps the best illustration of the contradictions that a boxer faces in terms of agency are best captured by Boddy's commentary on a photo of Jack Dempsey addressing prisoners at the State Penitentiary in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1939. Boddy points out that despite “the ropes on the ring separating the boxer from the prisoners” the photo nevertheless suggests “that the ring itself might be a kind of prison” (260). Undeniably, the boxing arena is an ambiguous space when it comes to power. The control that barber Bonifacy has over Bicek's boxing life, the physical sacrifice that pugilism demands, and the

spectacle of race that it entails—all make Bicek's choice of mapping a costly one. But as Foucault's idea of power's distribution has taught us, it is impossible to step outside of power altogether. That space “outside” does not exist. In fact, all spaces, the ring included, are part of the “carcereal archipelago” which brought disciplinary and punitive methods “from the penal institution to the entire social body” (Foucault *Discipline* 298). In many ways then, as Boddy indicates, the pugilistic arena mimics the disciplinary structure of the prison. And one might, in fact, argue that there are multiple parallels between the controlling treatment Bicek receives from the police officers at the hold-up station and the manipulation of his boxing body and future by the novel's villain, Bonifacy. However, as the discussion of Bicek's vision in the cell has shown, the prison and the ring share the potential of transgression as well. As Ward writes, institutional landscapes exemplified by the prison cell “are perpetually invigorated by the dynamic ambitions of the character” (Introduction 14). I agree with Ward's interpretation of the carceral space in the novel as a site of Bruno's most imaginative visions of liberation (“Spatial” 62). Further, the cell and the ring share their qualities as confinement, which disguises hidden pockets of possibility.

Despite Fredric Jameson's criticism of Foucault's notion of power, Tally reveals the compatibility of the idea of mapping with such pockets of possible resistance found in Foucault's thought (Tally “Jameson's” 410). Foucault is perhaps the most useful reference one may turn to for an explanation of mapping's transgressive potential when that mapping leads through exceptionally oppressive and destructive terrain such as the space of the boxing ring. Before further bridging Jameson's and Foucault's ideas, one may turn to John Muckelbauer's musings on resistance in Foucault's thought. Muckelbauer points out the fascinating—from the point of view of the discussion of the utopian impulse--”longing” on Foucault's part for an alternative type of criticism, for “a criticism that, rather than judging his concepts or texts, forces them to

'land in unexpected places and form shapes that [he] had never thought of" (Muckelbauer 73). Foucault's vision of an alternative mode of criticism bears a striking resemblance to Jameson's call for an alternative aesthetic in the idea of mapping. While Jameson cringes at "that shadowy and mythical Foucault entity called 'power'" (Jameson 349), Foucault, as Muckelbauer argues, thirsts for a critical approach that "instead of reading in an attempt to discover what is lacking in a text or theory, . . . reads in order to produce different ideas, to develop possible solutions to contemporary problems, or, as importantly, to move through contemporary problems in an attempt to develop new questions—in this case, the problem of the social conditions of resistance" (Muckelbauer 73-74). Paradoxically, then, one may pose Jameson's own utopian project as defense against his attacks on Foucault. This also reveals that Foucault's notion of ever-present power and the notion of resistance are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Both the interdependence of power and transgression in Foucault as well as the usefulness of the Foucauldian opposition for analyzing Bicek's mapping gain transparency through Brent Pickett's discussion of Foucault's peculiar variety of resistance. The problem with Foucault's conception of power—one that Jameson reacts against—is its ubiquity and the impossibility of pinpointing its source. Power relations "are not univocal; they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of power relations" (Foucault 27). Algren's novel illustrates the complex social relations implicated in Foucault's notion of multidirectionality of power:

And there were different hunters as there was different game. The informer and the pay-roll bandit were equally hunters. The barber hunted women for the woman called Mama Tomek, and Mama T. sheltered a little Jew called Snipes.

And all were equally hunters; though the Jew hunted only cigarette butts and a place to sleep. The alderman's brother-in-law, at the Potomac street station, sought convictions, and Bibleback Watrobinski, with his hair in his eyes, sought converts to the church in order to save his own harassed soul. Both were equally hunters.

(32-33)

The novel suggests that in Bruno's social world the power relations are so pervasive and so complex that everyone, at some point, will find themselves in the position of power over another human being. Although, like the other boys, Bruno may engage in the practice of “wolfin,” as they crudely call their search for sexual partners, the novel reveals the instability of power relations by equipping the word “wolf” with an additional connotation of being the creature of permanent hunger and want (32), one of the hunted rather than a hunter. Thus, power comes from multiple sources and affects everyone.

But Pickett points out that the diffuse character of Foucault's power, although ominous, also opens up possibilities of countering it: “the elements or materials that power works upon are never rendered fully docile. Something always eludes the diffusion of power and expresses itself as indocility and resistance” (Pickett 458). “[R]esistance is concomitant with the process of subjectification” (458); in other words, power is omnipresent but it is also constantly accompanied by transgressive acts. Moreover, Pickett connects Foucault's emphasis on the power's control over the body to the bodily dimension of resistance, making Pickett's analysis particularly relevant to the reading of ethnomapping in Algren. The point of stressing the disciplinary subjugation of the body, Pickett writes, is to “open the possibility of resistance done in the name of the body and its history” (460). Since power, for Foucault, acts on the body, transgressive acts should also “find expression at the level of the body” (Pickett 460). Given the

many ways in which Bicek's experience of oppression can be seen as corporeal—starting with malnutrition, through neighborhood fights, to the torture he undergoes at the police station—his escape into the art of boxing becomes a clear instance of transgression, in a Foucauldian sense.

Perhaps Motley's character's choice of mapping poses an even more difficult question in terms of possible modes of resistance. While the opportunities offered by boxing may suggest a probable arena of transgression, interpreting a slum as a space filled with possibilities requires a rigorous outline of the context where such a challenge can be faced. Just as a critic may feel the necessity to approach this task gradually, so did Motley equip his novel with a wealth of detail that ease the readers' way into understanding Nick's choices. Undoubtedly, the book's style, though frequently criticized for its overload of documentary detail, generates an appropriate context for the transgressions of the main character.

In a stark contrast to *Never Come Morning*, Motley's novel offers an excess of plot to its readers. The book is long and filled with an almost overwhelming number of characters and events that comprise Nick's life from the time he is seven years old to his death. While Algren's novel foregrounds mostly the internal life of its character, Motley goes to great lengths in painting Nick's external environment, with photographic attention to spatial details. The book's critics, including Algren, have pointed to its ethnographic detail as a literary weakness, despite its strengths as a sociological tool. But I argue that given its purpose, one that differs from the purpose of Algren's book, *Knock on Any Door* must build a detailed illustration of Nick's world that relies heavily on the people and spaces around him and on what exactly happens to him. For in creating the ethnomap for his character, Motley has to underscore the fact that juxtaposes Nick with someone like Bruno Bicek—that the slum is all Nick has.

Motley anchors Nick firmly in the community he is a part of, starting with the novel's

initial scenes that show him in the role of a pious altar boy and a promising son. The writer's extensive notes on the Catholic practices of Chicago's Italians and on immigrant customs show the import Motley saw in establishing those contexts of Nick's early years (Spiral Notebook). Although Nick ultimately rejects religion and becomes estranged from his family, these scenes play as important a part as the later scenes—of Nick's experiences at the reform school and in the street—in illustrating the only sites available for Nick's maneuvers. Moreover, as Motley's essays “Slum Patterns” and “Adult Delinquency Problem” show, a poor second generation ethnic's following of the criminal path rather than the path of faith is hardly surprising. Having surveyed all the aspects of his life, both Nick and the readers understand that the streets of the slum are the only possible setting for his character to move around. Having no choice of his space, Nick nevertheless chooses his persona and the types of practices that will help him survive in the slum.

First signs of Nick acquiring his new persona of toughness surface at the reform school. Two scenes have a tremendous impact on his budding “badness”: Nick witnessing appalling punishment inflicted on a group of boys who attempted escape, and a fight in which Nick participates to secure a dominant status among the reformatory's tough boys. Both scenes involve acts of extreme violence but the order in which they appear marks the beginning of Nick's trajectory from the helpless witness or victim of violence to the violent man, a badman.

After a group of boys tries to flee the reform school and gets captured, the school's authorities punish the culprits in a macabre spectacle where the boys are publicly whipped on a stage, while the rest of the inmates are forced to watch. The experience is traumatizing for Nick in whose mind the boys—with “[t]heir hands, between their legs, . . . fastened together” (58)—evoke the image of a mouse cornered by a cat he once saw as a child (59-60). Although not the

direct victim of this violent act himself, Nick learns that “each front to one of the inmates is an affront to you. Their wrongs become your wrongs; their resentment is your resentment. No boy gets beaten without your feeling the lash of the whip in your skin” (72). Hence, the gruesome performance leaves Nick calloused and determined to “never be sorry for anything he ever did again. . . . He'd never try to reform now” (60). The event gives birth to Nick's anti-authoritarian stance which will lead him to commit murder in the future: “He hated the law and everything that had anything to do with it. Men like [superintendent] Fuller were behind it. He was against them. For good. Forever” (60).

In the days following the spectacle of violence, Nick gains “a reputation as a real bad kid with the officers and the guards” (61). It is one of the many instances when the narration uses the word “bad” to describe Nick's willful and defiant—as well as (self)destructive—demeanor. That attitude also equips Nick with previously unfamiliar courage and willingness to take risks, as he no longer seems to think he has anything to lose. When the reformatory's self-proclaimed bully, Bricktop, confronts Nick about his friendship with Sam, a black boy, which violates the unwritten racial code of the school, Nick takes up Bricktop's boxing challenge (61-62). The violent fight that follows is framed by the shocking facilitation of it by the school's officer who attends the bout and even offers the boys boxing gloves. After Bricktop knocks him down, Nick suddenly finds himself feeling an unexpected surge of violent energy: “So mad he could cry. So mad he could kill” (64). Nick's rage leads him to win the fight; afterwards, he “staggered up the low bank of lawn and lay there, face down, tasting blood and sweat and hate” (66). The cruel bodily experience makes the grassy outskirts of the reformatory lose their power to give imaginary escape to the boy's mind.

Once in Chicago, Nick's pledge to “never reform,” combined with his built-up

aggression, cause him to engage in things illicit. Gradually, he tastes the dangerous acts the slum has in store, including stealing, gambling, “jack-rolling,” and engaging in prostitution both as a customer and a sex worker. In other words, his initial opposition to the reform school's authority figures more and more often manifests itself in destructive and violent acts that harm not only his oppressors but also members of his community and family—and himself. In his abandon, he also starts increasingly to rely on his physique for various types of profit. His good looks let Nick lure unsuspecting gay men into situations where he mugs them, and the “trick he had learned to use on Ma” with his “innocent brown eyes” (110) lets him gain people's trust and women's favors. The characterization of Nick in the middle part of the novel oscillates between his two complementary traits: he is both irresistible and dangerous.

Referring to Bad-Lan' Stone, a black folk character, Jerry Bryant writes that he “is one of a distinct type in the African American imagination: the 'bad nigger,' the 'badman,' the 'bully.' He is a violent man: a killer, a creator of mayhem, a sower of disorder” (1). Reading *Knock on Any Door* against Bryant's study allows one to see Motley's Nick Romano as a white ethnic signification on the traditionally black figure. The Italian American character displays most of the qualifying features of the badman, apart from his race. “[A] threat to communal stability and achievement” (4), the badman not only breaks the rules of the white-ruled society, but also “turns his violence and surliness . . . against the people in his own black community” (3). Thus, the badman's violence, like Nick's, is based on rage so overwhelming that it lacks a political program or premeditated direction. In a truly carnivalesque spirit, he throws off the existing order, for better or worse. The traditional African American badman is a boaster, or a braggart, “suggesting how central to the art of the badman song is the *rhetoric* of badness” (Bryant 11), a characteristic embodied in Nick's frequently expressed sexual pride and his daring motto: “Live fast, die

young, and leave a good-looking corpse.”

Bryant also points out the inevitability of the badman's circumstance: “An unavoidable sense that he is fated to die hangs over the classic badman figure” (7). This “preordained fate” (64) is especially characteristic of the badmen created by the post-Depression imagination, such as Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas (64-68). Although he certainly bears traces of the classic “boaster,” Motley's Nick also can be categorized with such tough men as Wright's infamous character. One may even suggest that Motley's title, which appears also as the novel's last sentence—“Nick? Knock on any door down this street” (504)—fits with Wright's ominous description of the epidemics of “badness”: “there were literally millions of [Biggers] everywhere” (Wright qtd. in Bryant 66).

Nick's cruising the city as a badman becomes his way of re-mapping the space of ethnic entrapment into his turf. Since he does not have the option to elevate himself socially from the confines of the slum, he does what Certeau's “ordinary practitioners of the city” do: “They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers” (Certeau 93). Their “bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen” (93). Although the novel places much emphasis on Chicago's spatiality, with Nick's footsteps recorded in street and pool hall names, this almost obsessive topographic detail outlines a different kind of map. While Nick's mind, revealed through the frequent use of free indirect discourse, records his urban journeys around Maxwell and Halsted Streets, or his excursions to the Pastime pool hall, the “text” he writes as he walks bespeaks resistance to mainstream society's marginalization of his territory. His practice of the slum, as he cruises it as a badman, is transgressive although it operates within what Foucault would see as the disciplinary space of the city. His use of urban spaces to forge

his tough persona falls into the category of “these multiform, resistance, tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised” (Certeau 96).

The niche of Foucauldian transgression resides in the streets of Nick's slum precisely because Nick produces his own type of space in the act of walking over the spaces outlined by the city's maps. Certeau writes that “[t]he act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language” (97); “it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place” (97-98). That suggests that the city, and the slum, do not exist only as they were conceived by the urban planners, city officials, and law enforcers but rather that they have other dimensions which are constantly produced and discovered through “a rhetoric of walking” by the practitioners (100). Nick discovers that he has the power to manipulate his own image and thus partially to control his life. Bringing to mind Foucault's notion of resistance residing within the sites of power, Certeau lyrically asserts that “[t]he long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them . . . nor in conformity with them . . . . It creates shadows and ambiguities within them” (101). Rather than being simply the disciplinary space in which one is acted upon, Nick's slum is the stage for his performance of identity.

Reading Nick's mapping alongside Bicek's helps one understand the paradox of the contemporary white ethnics' plight. The picture that emerges from such parallel reading is that of ambiguity; in America's racial taxonomy, white ethnics are positioned like other racial others—and yet strangely above, within the sphere where hopes of ascension are possible. But then, those hopes themselves are tainted by racist practices. Each novel produces its own vision of

ethnicity, but the in-betweenness implicated by both books read *together*—suggesting that even if white ethnics may aspire to whiteness, they're trapped between it and blackness—gives literary insight into the racial complexity of the time.

### **Society on Trial in *Never Come Morning* and *Knock on Any Door***

Despite both novels' investment in the drafting of their main characters' alternative maps, Nick's and Bicek's visions ultimately lead them nowhere. By illustrating the boys' striving for other possibilities and yet ending their struggles with failure, Motley and Algren underscore the larger social phenomena they were both concerned with. The two writers' cooperation on “Date with Gabriel,” a script for a radio program dealing with juvenile delinquency for WBBM's Report Uncensored (Motley and Algren), shows that the two looked beyond their novels into the larger implications of Nick's and Bicek's stories. In the experiences of boys like Bernard Sawicki—and their own fictional characters—the two writers saw an indictment of society that turned its back on its own “native sons.”

Not everyone interpreted Algren's portrayal of the Polish Triangle as sympathetic. The Polish Roman Catholic Union and the Polish newspaper *Zgoda* waged war on the book and its author, accusing Algren of spreading “anti-Polish propaganda” and even suggesting that his book's publication was sponsored by the Nazis (Algren, Preface xi). This hostile campaign led to Mayor Kelly's banning the novel from the Chicago Public Library for decades. In the Preface to the 1963 edition to the novel, Algren addresses the attacks and points out the main purpose of his representation of the Polish American outcasts: disallowing the disowning of those in the margins by the rest of the society, including their own communities. Algren believed that “the presence of the YMCA, of settlement houses and of churches, to which *Zgoda* so proudly pointed, could have no greater modifying effect on incidence of local crime than so many loan

agencies, so long as the people who run the schools, the people who run the churches and the banks, the people who elect people and get out the newspapers feel no identification with the outcast man and the outcast woman. Anything less than such identification is contempt” (Preface xv). The contempt Algren speaks of, and the desire to disavow the actions of the “bad apples,” may explain the almost complete lack of interest in Bernard Sawicki's case on the part of the Polish press in Chicago and other cities. The biggest Polish newspaper in Chicago, *Dziennik Chicagoski* [*Chicago Daily*], limited its account of the case to a few short sentences on the first day of the trial and a laconic report of the execution in January of 1942. But while the lack of reaction to the case from *Dziennik* and other papers known for their the middle-class readership and ties to the Catholic Church is relatively unsurprising given their concerns with upholding the respectable ethnic image, even the more radical periodicals, such as New York's *Robotnik Polski* [*The Polish Worker*] and Toledo's *Ameryka-Echo*, kept what seems like a vow of silence about the case. While Sawicki's arrest and trial were devoured by the sensation-hungry mainstream papers and readers, the keepers of American Polonia's image pretended they could not hear the thunder.

The burden of belonging to the cast of society's disowned native sons weighs heavily on Algren's Bicek. The tightly knit vision of the future he tries to uphold for himself is not nearly impenetrable enough to keep the awareness of his marginality at bay. In *Never Come Morning*, Bicek's dreams are often marred by his consternations with other dispossessed characters, usually older than him, in whom Bruno sees his inevitable future. The novel's opening chapter, titled “The Trouble with Casey,” allows the readers a sneak-peek into Bicek's tomorrow by showing what has happened to his older friend. Before even introducing the main character, we gain an understanding of how life in the Triangle turned a young athlete like Casey from a promising

boxer into a man who “had no interest in daydreams” (25).

But perhaps no other scene displays the futility of Bicek's dreams more than the excruciatingly long police line-up that Bruno participates in at the novel's center. Here, for fifteen seemingly unending pages of police interviews, Algren forces Bicek to watch other arrestees as they are paraded on the interview stage one by one--a series of ominous predictions of Bruno's future. In stark contrast to the stage of the boxing ring, Bicek has no control here. Moreover, the humiliation he observes, unlike the heavy blows delivered to an opponent, brings no satisfaction. In what seems like a never-ending series of exchanges between the interviewing officer and the broken men who recite their charges, two characters stand out as striking articulators of the wrongs society dealt them. The first is “Murray Taub, alias Tom Murray,” also a “graduate” from the St. Charles reformatory (142), whom Officer Tenczara confronts with the apparent discrepancy between the relatively short time Murray has served and the number and severity of his crimes. To Tenczara's accusation, “You beat society out of four hundred years,” Murray responds with “Society beat me out of a thousand first” (143). In this brief riposte, the arrested man encapsulates the injustice of having been doomed by society to fail.

In the most sobering confession of all, another man, Hardrocks O'Connor, tells the interviewing officer that he has not been arrested but rather gave himself up because he “can't make it no more” (141). “I got hard-boiled too soon. I got kicked around too early” (141), he explains. In a disheartening juxtaposition to his “tough” name, “Hardrocks O'Connor was crying” (141) over the chance to “make it” he feels he never got. Hardrocks, of course is speaking for more than just himself, and that painful realization hovers over Bicek's daydreams of an illustrious future. Observing the scene, the boy feels “as though the old man were speaking for Bicek's future as well as for his own past” (141). The scene achieves the double effect of

suggesting that Bicek has been set up by societal hypocrisies to fail and showcasing Algren's solidarity with those in the margins. Walt Whitman's words, which Algren adopted as motto for his novel, ring the loudest during in the fictional space of the line-up: "I feel I am of them—/ I belong to those convicts and prostitutes myself—/ And henceforth I will not deny them—/ For how can I deny myself?"

Similar words appear in the opening of a book authored by another of Algren's idols, Eugene Debs. In an interview, Algren names Debs as one of the last "good radicals" (Donohue 227) and expressed his admiration for the sentiments captured by Debs's famous "Prison Creed": "While there is a lower class I am in it; / While there is a criminal element I am of it; / While there's a soul in prison I am not free" (Debs 11). These words introduce *Walls and Bars*, Debs's memoir based on his own prison experience. Debs was imprisoned twice, once for his involvement in the 1894 Pullman strike and again, in 1918, for openly voicing resistance towards the military draft during World War I. The Wobbly also captured the imagination of Willard Motley who, although "an unaffiliated radical," admired Debs's Socialist Party (Bone 204). But Motley seems to have had even more interest in the famous lawyer, Clarence Darrow, who defended Debs as well as other radicals such as the anarchists charged with the Haymarket bombing, and whose impassioned courthouse style partially inspired the character of Nick's attorney.

In the long section of his novel where Nick is on trial for murder, Motley creates his case against society in two ways. On the one hand, he weaves the character of Andrew Morton, the lawyer passionately committed to social justice, out of actual people, Clarence Darrow and Morton Anderson—both attorneys with experience in controversial cases. On the other hand, he reveals the cracks in Nick's seemingly impregnable guise of toughness under the pressure of his

approaching doom. Nick's fictional defense lawyer, in his attempt to reveal the environmental odds that have always worked against his client, quotes the real attorney: "As Clarence Darrow said, *Before any progress can be made in dealing with crime the world must fully realize that that crime is only a part of conduct, that each act, criminal or otherwise, follows a cause*" (Motley, *Knock* 452). Drawing on Darrow's frequently used appeal to humanitarian values, Morton tells the jurors, "He is your son or your brother or mine" (452), simultaneously emphasizing the responsibility that they all, along with the rest of society, bear for his crimes. Again, in Darrow's words, he argues: "*the crimes of children are really the crimes of the State and Society, which by neglect and active participation have made the individual what he is.*" (452). Motley would echo these same sentiments in his article "Adult Delinquency Problem," where he dismisses the motion of "juvenile delinquency" by placing the criminal responsibility on the rules of society designed by grown-ups (Motley, "Adult").

As Motley drew on Darrow's courtroom eloquence by having Morton quote him, he also may have been impacted by the famous lawyer's 1925 defense of an African American man, Henry Sweet, in which Darrow used the psychological effects of racial discrimination against blacks as a defense method explaining Sweet's assault on whites—a method that would later become known as the "black rage defense." But Motley had another source of material for the defense scene: Sawicki's lawyer, Anderson. Motley attended Sawicki's trial and Anderson's relentless, albeit unsuccessful, efforts to save the young Pole's life moved the writer deeply. Just a day after Sawicki's sentencing in late September of 1941, Motley wrote a long and emotional letter to Anderson. While Motley mentions his desire to meet with Anderson in order better to represent Nick's attorney in his novel, he also expresses his condolences about the trial's tragic end and offers to work on "a petition protesting the death penalty" in hopes that such a protest

would lead to a stay of execution (Motley, Letter). Anderson responded warmly, agreeing to meet (Anderson), and must have had an impact on the writer's development of the character of Morton.

What Motley seemed truly invested in was the calloused masks that young men like Sawicki adopted as defense mechanisms against society's perceptions of them which, in turn, fueled distorted representations of them. Motley must have seen in Anderson's defense the ability to understand that the tough guise is just that—a guise—and look beyond it, into the larger problems it pointed to. The clippings of the same newspaper articles that Anderson included in his petition to the judge to postpone the trial due to the unfavorable depictions of Sawicki by the press (*United States v. Sawicki*) can be found in the stacks of materials Motley gathered while writing the novel. The mask of the badman is the crucial element of the Nick's courtroom performance. But, just as Bicek realizes his helplessness when on the stage of the police line-up, so does Nick's performance begin to crack during the trial. Hard as he tries to turn the courtroom into a theatrical spectacle of his nonchalant attitude and toughness, Nick finds that—far from displaying agency—his moves on the stage are those of a puppet manipulated by powers beyond his control.

Mirroring the newspaper reports of Sawicki's demeanor in court, Motley has Nick walk into the courtroom on the first day of the proceedings “[s]miling with one corner of his mouth twisted up” (371). As he nonchalantly adjusts and re-buttons his “new gray suit” (371) he seems in control and carefree. But the narrator soon reveals the effort in Nick's external composure that produces this image, describing Nick as “keeping his face arranged in its don't-give-a-damn smile” (371). The tough guise does not come easy; in fact, he has to keep it up, “playing the part cut out for him” (371). Although Nick has invested so much of his energy into creating his

badman persona, at bottom he feels it has chosen him, not the other way around. The trial continues with the narrator's frequent reminders of the newspaper headlines' portrayal of Nick as a tough killer, but the readers have by now learned to see through the boy's mask.

Nick loses control over his mask for the first time when one witness testifying in his defense mentions the reform school. "Nick wasn't acting now. He wasn't the tough guy showing how he could take it. He wasn't the smiling killer neighborhoods and newspapers make. He sat there with his head down. His lips quivered" (416). Suddenly, the badman becomes the same boy who stood over the dead dog's body or who thought of a scared mouse while watching his friends suffer. A part of Nick that never changed comes to the character's surface for this short moment. Under pressure, Nick finally confesses his crime and thus makes it even more challenging to hold onto his badman persona. "He was just a scared kid now" (439). Just moments before the announcement of Nick's death sentence, the narrator presents a striking contradiction the young man is now facing: his careless and cruel image reproduced by the press and his sense of humanity. As the headlines scream, "TOUGH GUY ROMANO BETS PACK OF CIGARETTES HE'LL GET CHAIR" (463), behind his "dry" smile, Nick's mind repeats his new mantra: "I want to live! I want to live!" (462).

The final scenes of Motley's novel make the readers long for the book's end, to cut short the agony of the dragged-out preparation for the execution. Nick faces the impossible; society forced him to adopt the tough mask, but in the worst contradictions of all, it now forces him to face the circumstances where the only tool of defense he has—that mask—just does not suffice. Similarly, Bicek just cannot win. One must agree with Ernest Hemingway's pugilistic rhetoric when he said of Algren's work: "You should not read [him] if you can't take a punch," as the back cover of Algren's *Entrapments and Other Writings* claims. Both Motley and Algren put

their readers through countless and often excruciating scenes where their characters try to make sense of the senseless.

One walks away from these novels thinking of yet more injustices and paradoxes that apply to the characters' spatial and social entrapments. They include the irony of Judge Sbarbaro's—the judge presiding over Sawicki's case—double life as the guardian of justice, on the one hand, and a bootlegger and undertaker for Chicago's mafia lords—on the other (Bergreen 277-278); and the fact that St. Charles School for Boys, which advertised its reformatory prowess and home-like conditions by summoning the ideals of education and hard work as well as Abraham Lincoln's example (Whipp 9-15), was the site of frequent escape attempts and became, years later, the birth place of the Vice Lords (Keiser 1). One ponders the paradox that Algren often reflected on, and that Art Shay points out, of slum dwellers living in tenement apartments tucked away behind commercial billboards that “mocked their lives” (Shay102). Decades after Fitzgerald placed Dr. Eckleberg's eyes over the “alley of ashes,” Algren—and Motley—continued to point out the absurdities of those people and places that, while in our midst, are somehow peripheral to society's comings and goings. *Never Come Morning* and *Knock on Any Door* not only provide the maps to reading those identities and geographies; they also, like Cicero's “method of loci,” ensure that once we've visited those lives and spaces, we will never forget them.

**Chapter III: Signifying on the Margins: Jazz Improvisation in the Marginal Spaces of Ann Petry's *The Street*, Billie Holiday's *Lady Sings the Blues*, and Benjamin Appel's *Sweet Money Girl*<sup>7</sup>**

An anonymous artist's image of Washington D.C.'s U Street uses photomontage to adorn a photograph of the street with an image of Billie Holiday (See the link: <http://sirismm.si.edu/archivcenter/scurlock/618ps0239051-01ms.jpg>). Surrounded by a halo of light and placed above the night scene of the city, the singer appears as the street's guardian angel. Despite the photograph's similar formal composition to the cover of *The Great Gatsby* (See the link provided in in Chapter Four) discussed in the next chapter, the tone of each arrangement is strikingly different. As this image seems to suggest, U Street—home to the nation's largest African American community in the 1920s (Smith 29), a “Harlem” before Harlem—and Billie Holiday as well as her craft—jazz—belong together, need each other. And yet, as some of Lady Day's songs suggest, life in the city come with its contradictions and hardships for a black woman. Referring to another city, Holiday sings about “autumn in New York” that “transforms the slums into Mayfair” yet is also “often mingled with pain” (Holiday, “Autumn”). In another song, Holiday's “singing persona” imagines herself standing by the docks and “watching the sea,” “away from the city that hurts and knocks” (Holiday, “I Cover”).

The disconnection from the urban that these lyrics express brings to mind Toni Morrison's argument—mentioned in the first chapter—about difficulty of establishing a sense of belonging in the city, which Morrison sees as a problem for African American literature. But as the photograph that literally incorporates Holiday into a cityscape shows, and as the singer's own autobiography and other literary works indicate, such belonging is possible. What is needed to achieve it, however, is the right kind of medium.

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<sup>7</sup> This chapter includes previously published material.

This chapter continues the trajectory—outlined by the previous chapter—of identifying ethnic literatures' representations of racial others' navigation of urban geography and social hierarchy. The present analysis asks if there are other, less (self)destructive ways for the marginalized to make the city their own than the solutions offered by Motley's and Algren's bodily mappings. What other practices can those pushed to the city's slums and ghettos—and to its social peripheries—use to make the city serve their purposes? The answer, I argue, lies in jazz-inspired African American narratives that feature cultural expression embodied in jazz, as well as jazz-like improvisation as a means of transforming material space into politicized space of transgression.

Urban designer Walter Hood's contention that "Designing is like improvisation. Finding a sound for each place" (qtd. in P. Brown 1) articulates an architectural approach to the relation that a variety of scholarly and cultural perspectives have recognized: that between urban spaces and jazz sensibility. The marriage of the discourses of the city with jazz can be traced to the musical style's early days in New Orleans. It later found some of its most dramatic moments in northern cities where the Great Migration brought black Americans, and where processes such as the commercialization of jazz and Prohibition sealed the troublesome but undeniable union of the city and the music. The testimony to this bond shows up in many artistic forms, including the photomontage mentioned earlier and in African American literature of the city, where the tunes of jazz may be heard from the days preceding the Harlem Renaissance, through the postmodern writing of Toni Morrison, and beyond.

Within this richness of black literary intersections of jazz and city life, a pattern emerges of the music's sound filling those urban spaces that are considered *marginal*, perhaps even *deviant*. To be sure, such a pattern is not entirely surprising, given the ties of jazz to African

American culture as well as black Americans' status as an oppressed minority. Scholars recognized the connection between racism and the perception of jazz as a “low form” associated with social margins as early as the sixties (Means 333). Assuming jazz's connection to the margins of urban geographies as my point of departure in this chapter, I decode the ways in that this connection relates to the construction of ethnic identities in three texts that share similar urban spaces as their setting. The first part of the chapter analyzes the interconnectedness between ethnic and geographic periphery and musical improvisatory sensibility in Billie Holiday's autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956) and Ann Petry's novel, *The Street* (1946). This dissertation's focus on black and immigrant writing leads me, in the latter part of the chapter, to examine whether the world inhabited by the Polish American (anti)heroine of Benjamin Appel's novel, *Sweet Money Girl* (1954), encompasses a similar relation between urban periphery and jazz improvisation, given that both its improvisatory music and its urban spatiality resemble those in Holiday's and Petry's narratives.

The theoretical framework for this chapter grows organically out of the plots and characterization in the three narratives. The worlds of Petry's Lutie Johnson, Billie Holiday's partially fictionalized version of her own persona, and Appel's Hortense Walton are peopled with society's rejects: racial others, prostitutes, transgressive musicians, the poor, the lumpenproletariat, crooks, homosexuals, and others whose identities, for whatever reason, do not fit neatly into the dominant society's rigid definition of normality. My discussion of the three texts' treatment of space builds on the notion of *Third Space*, theorized by scholars of spatiality, culture, and everyday practice such as Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja, among others. All these theorists, despite their differences, see the Third Space as offering the possibility of a new social order and a new identity. For example, according to Lefebvre, new

social relations call for new social spaces. In the three texts' post-Jazz Age, urban worlds, the characters' compartmentalization in the (increasingly policed) spaces filled with vice, sexuality, working-class and music cultures may be seen as an incentive to form a Third Space by the marginalized. I propose that in the two African American narratives jazz-like improvisation becomes a matrix for the space of otherness within the places these outcasts inhabit. Appel's novel, on the other hand, poses questions regarding the white ethnic character's ability to transform her circumstances according to such a matrix, as well as a sense of necessity for her to do so.

Along with the idea of the Third Space, Michel de Certeau's notion of “tactics” contributes to the theoretical foundation for this analysis of the ways that the literary inhabitants of the margins use peripheral spaces to their advantage. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau explains how cultural *consumption*—a characteristic feature of these narratives' music-filled spaces—can become a form of *production* in the hands of the marginalized. Thus, I read the three texts' geographies, outlined by spaces of music, labor, sex, and illicit activity, as potential jazz-inflected Third Spaces, where the characters may negotiate their identities and the conditions of their lives and form an alternative to the dominant culture of white middle class society.

The authors of the three narratives this chapter analyzes lived very different lives. Although she later became one of the best-known and best-paid performers of her era, Billie Holiday—born Eleanora Fagan in 1915 in Baltimore—spent her childhood living in extreme poverty, raised primarily by her mother. Her first job, after she dropped out of school at eleven, was to run errands for a brothel. As a teenager, she was arrested for prostitution in New York where she and her mother moved when Holiday was twelve. Her singing career started

somewhat accidentally when, looking for a job as a dancer in a speakeasy, she instead auditioned as a singer. Spotted as an extraordinary talent by jazz writers and producers, at twenty she entered the circles of the best jazz musicians in the country. But Holiday's life as adult was marked by racism, violence, and addiction as much as by her career. She was not exempt from the rules of segregation and the humiliation associated with it even as white Americans came to recognize her talent. Many of her romances were with abusive and violent men. Finally, she suffered from an alcohol and heroin addiction that affected every aspect of her life and contributed to a large degree to the decline of her career. The publication of her ghost-written autobiography was likely related to her financial struggle, which did not escape the attention of contemporary reviewers who saw the narrative's naturalism as sensationalist and exhibitionist, implying its commercial aims even as they praised its vividness (Hunton 171). Holiday was only forty-four when she died of liver and heart problems.

Ann Petry did not become familiar with the kind of economic hardships that Holiday knew as a child and that most African Americans experienced at the time—until she was an adult. She was born in a typical New England town in Connecticut to one of the town's few black families. Although her mother and aunts worked in a factory and as domestic workers when Petry was a child, her father eventually opened a pharmacy and the family entered the middle class. Petry initially pursued a career as a pharmacist, even earning a doctorate in the discipline, to fulfill her family's wishes, but she wanted to be a writer. When at thirty she moved to Harlem, that opened her opportunities not only to write and publish but also to experience the everyday struggles of blacks living in Harlem. *The Street* is a testament to those new insights. The novel won Petry not only an audience, as the book broke records in sales, but also the

recognition of critics and a major literary fellowship. None of Petry's later publications ever matched that success. She died in 1997.

Of the three writers whose New York-based narratives this chapter discusses, only Benjamin Appel was born in New York City. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Poland who settled in the poor neighborhood of New York's Hell's Kitchen. Born in 1907, Appel grew up in this rough environment and later used that first-hand experience in his writing. Thanks to his parents' attempts to help him experience a future without poverty, he was able to attend the University of Pennsylvania. In his youth, Appel held various jobs, including a farmer, lumberjack, factory worker, and an inspector of housing conditions in New York City; he drafted some of his early writing on stationery used by building service maintenance workers (Osborn). He served during the Second World War. His first book, a book of poetry, *Mixed Vintage*, was published in 1929. During the thirties he published widely in small literary magazines and in 1934 he published his first novel, *Brain Guy*. His writing received reviews that praised his ability to capture the life of poverty, violence, and prejudice (Osborn). Many of his works are categorized as detective fiction or hard-boiled fiction, which obscured the radical leftist dimension of some of them. He was a fan of Algren's fiction. His praise-filled review of *Never Come Morning* calls it "a knockout" (Appel, "People" 7) Appel's work also appeared in a magazine that Algren edited, *The Anvil*. Appel died in 1977.

While—except for Holiday, for obvious reasons—these writers' lives will not be the subject of the following analysis, it is a curiosity worth pointing out that it was the writer who knew New York most intimately, Appel, who wrote the novel most cynical in its depiction of alternatives to the life of poverty and corruption. Of the three female characters fronting the pages of these books, his Hortnese is the loneliest, with little hope of transformation at the end of

the novel, as my analysis will show. Perhaps this is evidence against Morrison's thesis about African Americans' relationship to the city. Or maybe, as I suggest, a complementary reading of Appel's novels with the other two books reveals that, given the difference in the position of European immigrants' children in the 1940s and the 1950s and the position of blacks, for African Americans in the northern city power and the possibility of transformation lies in the community, while white ethnics can, for better or worse, fare on their own.

### **Jazz as a Promise of Change: The Utopian Impulse in Holiday and Petry**

Jazz's engagement with the social praxis of the marginalized frames the discourse of resistance in the texts by Holiday and Petry. Walter Hood's design strategies may once again further the analysis of the union between jazz and the everyday lives of the dispossessed. In fact, the belief that jazz's improvisatory mode may outline an alternative urban geography of the oppressed seems to be firmly embedded in Hood's projects. He intends for his designs to "reflect the social and cultural patterns of their low-income community contexts" (Rowan 10), and thus he proposes improvisatory spontaneity to accommodate uses of urban sites that would be considered unintended by traditional designers, as in his idea of a beer garden where alcohol consumption would be an accepted routine rather than a legal violation. However, for all its innovativeness and what seems to be a bow towards the Situationists International's notion of constructing situations, Hood's theorizations of improvisation and the city are limited by the very notion of *design*. In Holiday's and Petry's narratives, I observe forms of jazz-like alternative spaces that the architectural approach cannot account for. Hence, while embracing Hood's core idea that urban spaces can be negotiated according to an improvisatory mode, I want to take to task his claim that cities play out *according to a 4/4 beat* (D. Brown 1). I see that proposition as an attempt to inscribe urban space within a controlled order, to contain it within a grid which

mirrors the predictability of the common meter in jazz, a limit that I challenge in my reading of Petry's and Holiday's narratives.

Without doubt, the repetitive and orderly quality of jazz's common measure has underscored many creative impulses in a variety of cultural productions across time, including a Harlem Renaissance short story, "Common Meter," by Rudolph Fisher; less evidently yet arguably, Piet Mondrian's 1943 painting, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*; and finally, Hood's late twentieth- and early twenty-first century architectural designs. Yet the jazz-inspired formation of "other" space in *Lady Sings the Blues* and *The Street* resist containment within the bounds of the common meter. As Anne Galloway points out, jazz itself has also withstood such a restriction, through musicians' explorations of different time signatures and venturing beyond the standard 4/4 beat. Similarly, the creative spatial maneuvers in Petry and Holiday do not follow the limits of the common meter, and instead resemble *cross rhythm*, with irregular accenting promising an unexpected turn of events.

Relentless pursuit of change and opposition to the norms of racist and capitalist society, as the previous chapters of this dissertation have shown, characterizes the literary worlds created by the ethnic writers whose works I analyze. Additionally, change is a key element of jazz narratives such as Fisher's "Common Meter" (1930) where he contrasts the repetitiveness of the "regular impulses" of the 4/4 beat with the "rising" of "an all-pervading atmosphere through which soared wild-winged birds" (Fisher 183). That change carries promise: "The rhythm persisted, the unfaltering common meter of blues, but the blueness itself, the sorrow, the despair, began to give way to hope" (183). For Petry's and Holiday's characters, hope is crucial; they occupy the physical and ideological space that relies on the promise of transformation and the possibility of a new, counterhegemonic order. Inhabiting the chaotic, unpredictable, often

violent, and always disruptive spaces of speakeasies, urban ghettos, brothels, tenement houses, and prisons, the characters—through their creative departures from the “common meter” of urban geography—build a public culture in which liberation, even if not readily available, is always a possibility.

A. Yemisi Jimoh also credits jazz with the promise of transformation, and locates jazz within the realm of in-betweenness—a realm that may also be used to describe the Third Space: "Jazz is innovative, multifaceted, oblique and direct, deep and shallow. It expands, includes, reshapes, and elaborates. It makes no claims on the permanence of its form, on its purity, on its originality" (29). Jimoh then outlines what she calls jazz philosophy, which "embodies the idea that there is a space for one to go beyond the margin into the unknown in order to change the rules within the existing structure, to present the 'unpresentable,' to say the unsanctioned" (29). Jazz philosophy, then, epitomizes the values which uphold the Third Space: the desire to gain a voice, as well as the pursuit of alternative ways of organizing social relations against the grain of the established norm. The characters in *The Street* and *Lady Sings the Blues* make Jimoh's jazz philosophy appear as a rational and logical choice.

In both narratives, the characters' lives indicate the need for a change for the better. Despite the now mythological status of Billie Holiday as a legendary jazz singer, her book discloses an abused, lonely, and overworked woman whose life journey may be more easily likened to those of countless black female workers of the first half of the twentieth century than to that of a star. Rather than enjoying the luxury of a typical star's life, Billie lives on the verge of financial destitution, drug addiction, and crime and moves between spaces as "unfit" for a successful artist as cheap apartments, a brothel where she lives and works as a child, a prison, and segregated hotels. The racist attitudes of many club owners who often force Billie to enter

the stage through the clubs' back doors, treat her art as minstrelsy, or simply reject her altogether on the grounds of her race and gender, subdue the glamor of the stage usually associated with artists. Images of the burdens carried by other dispossessed people accompany Holiday's story: namely, her parents and great-grandmother whose lives were marked by racism; other jazz musicians who shared Billie's status of exploited workers; the women prisoners she was incarcerated with; and Billie's transvestite wardrobe assistant, "Miss Freddy," whose cross-dressing puts him in conflict with heteronormative law.

Ann Petry's novel, written within the tradition of literary naturalism, also portrays an array of marginalized characters and spaces. The titular "street" is 116th street in Harlem. Lutie, the protagonist, and her eight year old son, Bub, are just two of the many inhabitants of this urban ghetto who have been forced into Harlem's crowded, squalid tenements simply because they were black and poor. Lutie thinks of the street as "a bad street" but realizes that "It wasn't just this street that . . . was bad. It was any street where people were packed together like sardines in a can" (206). Her neighborhood is home to people like the "madame," Mrs. Hedges, and her employees who choose life in a tenement brothel over homelessness; Jones, a superintendent who has turned violent and hateful after years of living in destitute houses' cellars; Min, a woman who lives with Jones, submitting to his hate and insults in return for housing; and Boots, a jazz band leader who "sells his soul" by becoming an agent to the white owner of a jazz club to avoid joblessness or working as a Pullman porter. As her main life goal, Lutie aspires to save up enough money to move with her son away from "the street," for she does not see any prospects "where people were so damn poor they didn't have time to do anything but work, and their bodies were the only source of relief from the pressure under which they lived; and where the crowding together made the young girls wise beyond their years" (206). This aim

leads her to a jazz club where, leaving behind her previous jobs as a maid and a file clerk, she seeks her fortune as a jazz singer.

Despite the hardships they confront, many of the characters in the two books do not seem resigned, but rather appear to move through their lives as if in hope that the future holds a change, as if their identities have value, even though mainstream society or the law do not recognize that value. I argue that their approach to life embodies a philosophy of jazz-like improvisation, which emphasizes that difference and alterity hold a promise of liberation. This association of improvisation with the notion of choice and transformation is the driving force behind Dean Rowan's argument for an improvisatory mode of designing city spaces. Rowan reinforces the notion of improvisation's importance in the social practice of democracy:

"Improvisation . . . becomes a figure for liberation, expression, risk, spontaneity, and excitement; at another register, for noise and cacophony; and also for flexibility, cooperation, and even an idealized conception of democracy" (2). This affiliation between the improvisatory musical mode and liberation or democratic impulses is validated by the associations with rebellion and difference that have always accompanied jazz.

The music's hybrid character as well as its liaison with racial and radical politics has made it a musical metaphor for subversion and defiance. The theme of hybridity that has accompanied jazz from its very conception has been reinforced by generations of musicians. Miles Davis' major influence on the development of what came to be known as *jazz fusion* in the late 1960s provides a prime example of the experimentation and resourcefulness associated with jazz. "[T]hroughout his career Davis was constantly reinventing, adapting, and borrowing from music outside jazz to develop playing styles" (Ancher 238), thus paying tribute to the music's hybrid character. Moreover, the spirit of reinvention that led Davis to merge such

seemingly unlikely companions as jazz and rock in turn has become the inspiration and metaphor for a *spatial* enterprise undertaken by the Launceston School of Contemporary Music at the University of Tasmania, Australia. In seeking relocation from the outskirts of town to the inner city arts campus, the school used the philosophy of experimentation in Davis' fusion and proposed the Inverest Railyards—a site previously used for railway workshops and for manufacturing munitions—as its new location (Ancher 231-232). Garth Ancher grounds the school's choice of the new site and the philosophy behind it to the constant evolution and reinvention that have characterized jazz since its beginnings.

In his discussion of the development of jazz, Ancher also points to the association of the music in its early stages with “alcohol, drugs, and prostitutes” (236). As *Lady Sings the Blues* and *The Street* imply, that link persisted well into the middle of the twentieth century. I want to emphasize the relation between jazz's experimental and hybrid character and its connection to the “underworld.” Ideas developed by race studies and postcolonial studies scholars of “restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms” (Bhabha, qtd. in Evans 31), which relate mainly to interracial and colonial contexts, can nevertheless find a useful application in relation to other types of Third Spaces, where there is a need to challenge the established categories. This hybridity may be metaphorized as *cross-rhythm*, which, found in free jazz and bebop, relies on a combination of contrasting rhythms thus symbolically emphasizing multiplicity and diversity as signs of freedom. The embodiment of the plurality and flexibility in jazz make it an ideal model for the new modes of self-identification and ideologies of social transformation. It is not coincidental, then, that jazz should find a home in those spaces and among those people who have been marginalized by society at large. In the Third Space of Petry's and Holiday's narratives, jazz thus becomes both a medium and a matrix

for living in a way that presumes that change and choice *are* possible. Thus, jazz-like improvisation marks the lives of Petry's and Holiday's characters who—unable to enjoy democracy within the bounds of dominant society—find their own, alternative ways of negotiating their democratic identities and their future.

This relentless push for a change of the status quo, characteristic of jazz philosophy, marks the lesbian, and often interracial, relations between women in the prison where Billie serves her sentence for drug possession. She talks about "long-timers," some of whom "were lovers and would take farm jobs so they could be together when they worked" (134). Thus, Holiday's prison functions in much the same way as the spaces Kevin Mumford calls "interzones" which form marginalized yet subversive sites for interracial, same-sex, working class, and illicit relations. Mumford draws connections among homosexuality, policed spaces, and jazz in his discussion of the music of the speakeasy. He describes Harlem clubs as "site[s] of homosexual leisure" (84), where black female blues singers "performed songs with sexually explicit lyrics, which included the speakeasy language of homosexuality. . . . Some of the lyrics hinted at the fluidity of sexual desire" (84). Mumford argues that in those clubs, despite the threat of police raids, same-sex and oftentimes interracial couples carved out a space for themselves. The prisoners described by Holiday occupy a space of social exclusion and labor that is even less likely to foster positive relationships than the spaces Mumford describes. And yet they appropriate the prison grounds and transform them into interzones, or the Third Space.

A similar attempt to transform marginalized space into a productive space of alterity characterizes Miss Freddy's habit of putting on Billie's dresses. He not only uses the dressing room backstage as his own personal stage for gender-bending, but he also puts the dresses on to go out, as Holiday's account indicates, when she says that the police are "so narrow-minded they

were always picking on him for being overdressed. I'd have to go down to the station to bail him out" (23). In this dangerous and transgressive act of using the street to express his gender identity, Miss Freddy crosses boundaries, both those designating gender and spatial boundaries. The philosophy of "moving beyond the margins" finds literal realization in Count Basie's band that Billie tours with. The band members spend endless days in constant motion on an old bus, often with little financial gain, yet engaging in the activity that for many of them defines the meaning of life: playing their music. Billie herself also embodies the philosophy of the Third Space through her persistent attempts to fulfill her dreams of security and independence. While accepting the conditions of a hard, uncertain life on the go, she sees it as a gate to possible change, which, notably, she perceives in *spatial* terms: "Before I die I want a *place* of my own where nobody can tell me *when* to go on" (170, my emphasis). Thus, Jimoh's words, when she writes that "[t]hrough music, Jazz creates a space for . . . survival or triumph, even when these concepts seem impossible" (29), find reflection in the text on more than one level; jazz acts as both a direct medium through which some characters transform the spaces they occupy into productive spaces of alterity, and it indirectly injects its innovative energy into the non-musical elements of other characters' lives.

A pronounced call for change, voiced by Billie Holiday herself, can be found in the incorporation into her repertoire of the protest song "Strange Fruit." Most lyrics to Holiday's songs until that point explored subjects related to romantic relationships, such as loneliness, disappointment, or longing. And even though—as Angela Davis argues in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*—Holiday's *rendition* of those popular love songs may also be interpreted as "an effort to transform social relations aesthetically beyond the shallow notions of love" (Davis 163), no other song in the singer's career can match the political salience of "Strange Fruit." The song

articulates a bitter and straightforward condemnation of the lynching of African Americans in the South. However, sung by Holiday in clubs in northern cities, "Strange Fruit" became an expression of criticism against racism *everywhere* and in all its forms: in the North, in the South, de jure, and de facto. Given the extraordinary character of the song in the context of the rest of Lady Day's repertoire, as well as the description of her own personal attachment to "Strange Fruit" that she includes in *Lady Sings the Blues*, I read Holiday's use of the song as an act of productive dissonance, a risky improvisatory move.

Holiday's performance of "Strange Fruit" becomes a *musick*, in the meaning established by Christopher Small, whose study of the relation between music and society leads him to see music as an *act*, rather than merely a *thing*. In the narrative, Billie's *musicking* as she performs "Strange Fruit" has a profound meaning for social relations, and particularly the white audiences' racial attitudes. To Billie, the song voices both her own personal drama and a larger problem of American racism. She refers to the song as "my personal protest" (Holiday 84) and confesses that it brought back memories of the death of her father, who died of untreated pneumonia in Texas after several hospitals refused to admit him because of his race. The internal struggle associated with her performing the song shows that Billie is very much aware of the rupture that "Strange Fruit" introduces to her stage routine. She knows that she is transgressing the established audience expectations: "I was scared people would hate it" (84). However, that does not stop her from risking her status as a popular singer. In fact, singing "Strange Fruit" becomes her mission: "It depresses me every time I sing it. . . . But I have to keep singing it, not only because people ask for it but because twenty years after Pop died the things that killed him are still happening in the South" (84). By performing the song, then, Billie uses the political potential of jazz and

transforms the stage from a space of mere entertainment into a potentially revolutionary space where she gives a voice to otherness and discontent with injustice.

Billie's and other characters' use of the limited resources available to them, such as the street, the stage, or the prison, to make their own resistant space within the space of the other, where their otherness signifies a *potential* rather than a *deviance*, can be productively theorized with the help of the notion of *tactics* developed by Michel de Certeau. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he describes the maneuvers through which the marginalized turn their disadvantageous circumstances into opportunities:

Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other's game . . . , that is, the space instituted by others, characterize the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. *People have to make do with what they have*. In these combatants' stratagems, there is a certain art of placing one's blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space. (18, my emphasis)

Therefore, to use tactics is to adjust acts of resistance to the means within reach. Moreover, it is also to use the space and resources created by those in power *against* them. It is this “foiling of the other's game” that Billie Holiday describes herself as exercising while “scrubbing those damn white steps all over Baltimore” (Holiday 9). Trying to earn money as a sixteen-year-old girl, Billie turns to cleaning white people's houses. Before she is ever admitted *inside* the houses, she confronts the “damned white steps” where she goes through a peculiar lesson in social boundaries and racial segregation. On these white steps she invents her own tactics of “getting around” the system of labor exploitation which affects her.

By referring to the site of her labor as the “damned white steps,” Billie underscores the symbolic and literal border that separates her from the white house owners. The *whiteness* of the steps is a constant reminder of her own blackness, and her place and role on those steps do not let her forget what her blackness *means* within the structure of power. Yet, Billie's acute understanding of her situatedness vis-à-vis the people whom her labor services goes beyond these observations; it also encompasses the knowledge of her work's value and the awareness of her capability to use the space to which she has been relegated in her own creative way. She “keenly understands and exploits the paramount significance given to markers setting off inside from outside, as well as her position in relation to such markers” (L. Barrett 872). Billie realizes that her labor performed for white women is invaluable as “[a]ll these bitches were lazy. I knew it and that's where I had them. They didn't care how filthy their damn houses were inside, as long as those white steps were clean” (10). Having recognized what in her eyes is a hypocrisy, she negotiates the terms of her work: “I bought me a brush of my own, a bucket, some rags, some Octagon soap, and a big white bar of that stuff I can't ever forget—Bon Ami” (9). Thus equipped with her own cleaning supplies, next time Billie stands on a white doorstep, to the white woman's shock, she demands fifteen cents for the job for which she had previously been paid a nickel. She redefines the roles ascribed to the steps and to her own person by the wealthy white people. As Lindon Barrett argues, “Holiday's negotiations across the marble steps of Baltimore engage the terms of inside and outside, high and low, up and down, clean and dirty, mistress and maid, the commanding and the commanded” (873). Billie transforms the white steps from the site of exploitation to the space of opportunity, thus ensuring that the owners of the marble steps do not win all the marbles.

Certeau's claim that “*a way of using* imposed systems constitutes the resistance to the historical law of a state of affairs and its dogmatic legitimations”(18) finds support in the example of Billie's use of capitalist logic. She finds a way to use the system that was put in place to control her—to gain control. Using the “white bar” of detergent, she symbolically uses the “whiteness” of the detergent to combat the racial and economic injustice signified by the “whiteness” of the steps. In other words, she uses the very system that positioned her in the peripheral space on the outside “to take from within it that which is within her reach to take” (L. Barrett 874). As Barrett points out, despite being excluded from “the site of value,” she creates value in a “place of no value” by “transgress[ing] the boundary, [and] (re)configuring the integers to her own ends” (872-873). While she differs from Certeau's workers who use the time on the job to pursue non-job related activities in that her goal involves profit, she resembles those workers in that she negotiates an innovative way to escape the effects of the dominant social order without leaving it (de Certeau xiii).

Desire for innovation and the freedom to redefine one's identity also characterize the form of Holiday's narrative. It has been argued that Holiday's autobiography is concerned more with creating a mythology around its heroine than with truth. Both the tremendous influence of the book's editor, William Dufty, and the documented “fabrications” of the facts of the singer's life render the text's reliability as an autobiography questionable. However, it is precisely in those moments of fiction and in the problem of authenticity that the narrative reflects its affinity with jazz-like improvisation. Dufty's role in the process of writing the book admittedly complicates the claim for the narrative's authenticity, but it is not contradictory to the rules governing the production of jazz, which may be seen as the underlying matrix for Holiday's autobiography. Jürgen Grandt argues that the “hybrid” character of dictated autobiographies

mimics the collaboration between an individual and a collective which is characteristic of jazz. Grandt's study also proves useful when establishing a relation between jazz and "fabrication" in autobiographies. As he explains, jazz and African American literary tradition share "the notion of the importance of personal narrative" (xiii). Using another jazz musician's—Sidney Bechet's—autobiography in his analysis, Grandt shows that the narrative's strategies of storytelling are much like those that Bechet uses as a musician improvising on stage (7). In fact, a jazz autobiography *is* a stage of sorts, where the artist can create a self-image (16). Grandt writes that "[t]he [literary] jazz aesthetic . . . affords its practitioners a figurative space of temporary freedom that plays on and against the social, cultural, and racial binaries of the American landscape" (xvi). The use of spatial imagery in this passage is fitting indeed, as it allows us to understand Holiday's self-mythologizing text as “making room” within American literary and cultural imagery for narratives and heroes of the margins. Her autobiography, which uses narrative techniques reminiscent of slave narratives, opens the narrative of an individual life into the context of a communal struggle. By dramatizing some events and situating the text within the tradition of narratives about African Americans' struggles, Holiday flavors her autobiography with resistance to the oppressive society.

The impulse to generate space for such narratives, even if that should mean altering the definition of “autobiography,” and to pursue a new order comes, of course, from the fact that Billie Holiday, the person, as well as her literary alter ego and other characters of her text feel disillusioned with the injustices of the existing order. The same sense of injustice and desire to create alternatives to that injustice drive the plot of Petry's novel. While outlining the possibilities for change and improvisatory transformation, then, Holiday's and Petry's narratives also articulate a critique of the status quo and its underlying myths.

### **Billie and Lutie versus The American Dream.**

If Levi-Strauss's contention that "music in our societies has become a substitute for myth" (Attali 28), where myth provides "*an affirmation that society is possible*" and "*the code of music simulates the accepted rules of society*" (29), then jazz in *Lady Sings the Blues* and in *The Street* exposes the hypocrisies of that myth. My reading of "myth" here follows Roland Barthes's theory of the term in *Mythologies*. "Myth" for him means "implicit ideological messages carried by the products of contemporary society," which "lend an appearance of naturalness, of inevitability, to the social status quo" (Townsend 160). I argue that Holiday's self-mythology and Petry's criticism of the myth of the "American Dream" offer alternatives to the ideologies governing American society.

As many biographers of Holiday have implied, *Lady Sings the Blues* may, in many ways, be one of the least factual of the available written accounts of the singer's life. Donald Clarke, Farah Jasmine Griffin, and Julia Blackburn all indicate that the opening of Holiday's autobiography distorts the facts, portraying her parents as younger than they were at the time of her birth: "Mom and Pop were just a couple of kids when they got married. He was eighteen, she was sixteen, and I was three" (Holiday 5). It may be argued that this, and other, fictionalized parts of the narrative enhance the dramatic quality of the text and present Holiday as a heroine who overcame unlikely odds. A reading of excerpts from her autobiography at Carnegie Hall just a few months after publication, which she combined with a performance of her songs (*New York Times* 38), also points to a desire to cross genres and media, and to prioritize *the story*, rather than pay tribute to the form.<sup>8</sup> I contend that Holiday's narrative indeed uses the

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<sup>8</sup> An article in the *New York Times* emphasizes the notion of storytelling: "Billie Holiday told her story . . . in both song and prose" (38). The article argues that the interweaving of reading of the book's fragments with Holiday's performance of her songs "made many of them more meaningful" (38), which points to the meaning behind the larger narrative, and not the particulars of the form.

improvisational poetic license to aggrandize the impact of the success of an unlikely hero such as herself. The autobiography, then, offers an alternative to the myth of American success. It serves a similar “tactical” function to what Certeau ascribes to legends:

The formality of everyday practices is indicated in these tales, which frequently reverse the relationships of power and, like the stories of miracles, ensure the victory of the unfortunate in a fabulous, utopian space. This space protects the weapons of the weak against the reality of the established order. It also hides them from the social categories which “make history” because they dominate it. And whereas historiography recounts in the past tense the strategies of instituted powers, these “fabulous” stories offer their audience a repertory of tactics for future use. (23)

The manipulation of facts in *Lady Sings the Blues* generates a “fabulous” story: a black woman from a poor family who suffers from a drug addiction can become a world-known artist. Moreover, the narrative ends on an optimistic note, with Billie looking to the future with hope of overcoming her addiction with the support of her life partner, Louis McKay. While other biographies portray her relationship with McKay as marred by abuse and describe Holiday's drug problem as persisting beyond the point when the autobiography ends, *Lady Sings the Blues* has other concerns than reportage at its core. It creates a space where a black poor girl known as a “tomboy” (Holiday 14) can become “Lady.”

Peter Townsend's argument allows us further to elucidate the relation between jazz-like improvisation in the two texts and the idea of debunking the exclusionary myths of Americanness. Townsend discusses how mythologizing jazz as a commercial product leads to the stripping of its complex history and meaning (160-161). He claims that “To study jazz

closely in a specific historical context is to begin to demythologize it" (161). His point is especially worth considering in the context of Holiday's and Petry's narratives, as it refers to the music's connection to the history of racial struggle. Thus, while it is not likely that a conscious influence connects Townsend's argument and Bernard Bell's essay about demystification of myths as a function of Ann Petry's writing, the shared element of "demythologizing" allows us to consider the two in relation to each other. Townsend argues that to expose such history is to demythologize jazz; Petry—and Holiday, for that matter— suggest, in turn, that to reveal the workings of the marginalized cultures surrounding jazz to disclose the shortcomings of the myth of the American Dream. Both Petry's and Holiday's narratives use jazz and jazz-like narrative modes to point out the injustices oppressing blacks, the poor, women, and other marginalized groups, and to pursue different ways of organizing social relations. Both narratives trace how the protagonists learn that the spaces they occupy do not operate according to the rules that the dominant society applies to the privileged, private spaces of the white middle-class, just as the myths of the American Dream do not apply to people who live in the spaces of otherness. While Holiday does so by generating an alternative to that myth, Petry achieves this goal by showing the protagonist's misplaced trust in the American Dream and the consequences of her false consciousness.

One of the "myths" Bell discusses is the figure of Benjamin Franklin. While Petry directly inscribes Franklin's presence into her narrative through Lutie's initial attempt to identify with him, Holiday's story indirectly alludes to Franklin in its narrative structure as an intertextual signification on his autobiographical narrative. This ubiquitous figure proves to be a symbol of the exclusion that the inhabitants of the Third Space are subject to. Gayle Wurst also points to Lutie's attempt to treat Franklin as a model of American success as one of the determinants of the

novel's plot (Wurst 2). I want to echo Bell's and Wurst's contentions that Lutie Johnson's choice of Franklin as an inspiration and a hopeful example exposes the exclusionary qualities of the American principles of self-reliance and prosperity. I also argue that Lutie's desperate fixation on Franklin's example, in the end, prevents her from following the example of other inhabitants of the street, who have understood the hypocrisy of the “rags to riches” myth and thus have resorted to tactics as their weapon.

The first few chapters of *The Street* establish a sense of affinity that Lutie feels towards Franklin, and a hope that she derives from Franklin's story. Having just moved to Harlem from a New England town, and disgusted and terrified with the ghetto, she holds onto Franklin's ideology of a “way to wealth” as a guarantee of escape:

feeling the hard roundness of the rolls through the paper bag, she thought immediately of Ben Franklin and his loaf of bread. And grinned thinking, You and Ben Franklin. You ought to take one out and start eating as you walk along 116<sup>th</sup> Street. Only you ought to remember while you eat that you're in Harlem and he was in Philadelphia a pretty long number of years ago. Yet she couldn't get rid of the feeling of self-confidence and she went on thinking that if Ben Franklin could live on a little bit of money and could prosper, then so could she. (64)

Even if at bottom she is aware of the differences between herself and Franklin, Lutie chooses to think of those differences in terms of space and time, rather than casting them as differences of race, class, and gender, which lie at the heart of the disparity between her and her model. This avoidance allows her to continue to believe that all she needs to do to mimic Franklin's success is to follow his principles of hard work and frugality: “In spite of the cost of moving the furniture, if she and Bub were very careful they would have more than enough to last until her next pay-

day; there might even be a couple of dollars over. If they were very careful” (64). In fact, she goes as far as to blame herself for her poverty. As Wurst points out, Lutie compares her own condition to that of the Chandlers, white people she worked for before moving to Harlem, as well as to the Pizzinis, first-generation Italian-American grocers (Wurst 4-9), and the contrast between the success of the two families and her own circumstances leads her to conclude that she has not “tried hard enough, worked long enough, saved enough” (Petry 43). Her desire to believe in the American Dream and own it prevents her from taking into account the taxonomies that shape how it works and separate her from Anglo Saxons, like the Chandlers, and from white ethnics, like the Pizzinis.

Wurst points to Lutie's feeling of enchantment when she first sees the Chandlers' house which comes to represent the American Dream to her (Wurst 4): “She never quite got over that first glimpse of the house—so gracious with such long low lines, its white paint almost sparkling in the sun” (Petry 37). What is striking about Lutie's reaction to the house is not only its almost worshipful quality, but also the sharp contrast that it presents to Billie's attitude to the “damn white steps” in *Lady Sings the Blues*. As in the case of the whiteness of the steps to Billie, the whiteness of the house signifies to Lutie the difference between herself and the wealthy white family. However, unlike Billie, Lutie does not respond to this sense of difference with the burning indignation that pushes Billie to devise her cunning plan to outsmart the owners of the house. Instead, “to Lutie the house was a miracle”(37). While Billie enjoys thoughts of having outwitted the “lazy” “bitches” living in the houses with white steps, Lutie—when asked by the owner, Mrs. Chandler, if she likes the white house—responds “ Yes, ma'am” (38). I argue that these dazzling differences between the two protagonists' demeanor in their confrontations with white employers stem from Billie understanding that she faces a system that she needs to resist

and outsmart, and Lutie's hope that she can one day claim the American Dream for herself, if only she respects its rules.

The contrasting levels of awareness that Holiday's and Petry's protagonists initially bring to white steps/house lead to their different approaches to the rules of the society that excludes them. Billie has no illusions regarding her assigned role on the steps and quickly understands that she needs creatively to permeate the boundary that she is expected to respect. On the other hand, to Lutie, the discovery of the boundary is a shock: "It made her feel that she was looking through a hole in a wall at some enchanted garden. She could see, she could hear, she spoke the language of the people in the garden, but she couldn't get past the wall. The figures on the other side of it loomed up life-size and they could see her, but there was this wall in between which prevented them from mingling on an equal footing" (41). As Lindon Barrett notes, Billie understands that "[b]oundaries separate, but also mark places of exchange and crossings" (874), and thus she improvises a way to permeate "the boundary in order to take from within it that which is within her reach to take" (874).

For Lutie, the realization of the difference between herself and white people does not inspire creativity, but rather triggers a sense of hopelessness. The boundary, in her perception, is impermeable; it is "a wall." Even though she believes that "[t]he people on the other side of the wall knew less about her than she knew about them" (41), just as Billie "knows" that white women are hypocritically particular about the cleanliness of their houses' steps, Lutie fails to use that knowledge to her own advantage. Her initial belief in the accessibility of the Franklinesque success makes her confrontation with reality too paralyzing, and her sense of separation from whites too absolute to attempt a tactical use of their territory.

### **Third Space: Space of Oppression, Space of Possibility, Space of Community**

Even if to Lutie the marginal space she occupies seems disabling, other characters in *The Street* find ways to put the margins to new, originally unintended uses. For the "people of the street" Lutie lives among, the actual physical space available to them, where they are "packed together like sardines in a can" (206), seems to offer little opportunity for challenging the existing order. They live in a segregated northern city, "where they [the authorities] set up a line and say black folks stay on this side and white folks on this side, so that the black folks were crammed on top of each other—jammed and packed and forced into the smallest possible space until they were completely cut off from light and air" (206). As Marx's materialism would have it, the physical conditions of these characters' lives have a decisive impact on their consciousness. However, while some—like the superintendent Jones, who "lived in the basements so long [he] ain't human no more" (237)—have indeed been reduced to the animalistic pursuit of basic physiological needs, many others have found ways to *improvise* with the resources available to them. In much the same way as Hood approaches physical space—"creating, fabricating, and using what is at hand" (qtd. in Rowan 10)—many minor characters of Petry's novel apply this improvisatory philosophy to *both* the material space *and* the ideological space of their lives.

Fixated on her goal of escaping the despised "street," Lutie overlooks the possibilities of alternatives to the claustrophobic space of the ghetto that other characters explore. As Marjorie Pryse writes, "the power [Lutie] needs in order to counter the white world already exists, on the street itself" (123). Among the characters who have discovered such an alternative way of living, Mrs. Hedges stands out as perhaps the most complex. A black woman living in a racist and sexist world, as well as the only survivor of a fire that devoured a tenement building where she lived

and that left her scarred for life, Mrs. Hedges is nevertheless toughened rather than destroyed by experience. She retains enough strength to turn her painful past towards creating a safer living space for herself and those around her. As Pryse notes, "she intervenes when Bub is overpowered by the other boys, and she saves Lutie from being raped by Jones" (124). She advises Min when Min seeks a way of escaping her life with the abusive Jones. As a love interest of Junto, the white owner of both the jazz club where Lutie works and of the apartment building where many of the characters live, she uses his help and support to become a "madam." She finds economic security for herself and others by admitting homeless young women into her apartment in exchange for their prostitution. Pryse even suggests that she is a mother of sorts for her "girls" (124).

Mrs. Hedges's role as a bordello owner, of course, renders her integrity questionable; her brothel offers a compromised refuge. But so does the Third Space, by definition. However, even though it does not offer instant gratification, the Third Space is characterized by a multiplicity of possibilities and an infinity of options. Even though the "asylum" Mrs. Hedges offers to the women is far from liberating, it is a space where she attempts to form a distinct community and where, despite the ever-present tentacles of capitalist exploitation, relationships based on concern and care remain a possibility. Mrs. Hedges's attachment to the idea of communal spirit is also accompanied by the belief that marginalized space can be injected with a community's self-affirming sense of identity: "When she referred to it as 'the street,' her lips seemed to linger over the words as though her mind paused at the sound to write capital letters and then enclosed the words in quotation marks—thus setting it off and separating it from any other street in the city, giving it an identity, unmistakable and apart" (251-52). This contrasts with Lutie's view of that same space: "It was a bad street. And then she thought about the other streets. It wasn't just this

street that she was afraid of or that was bad. It was any other street where people were packed together like sardines in a can” (206). For Lutie, then, the “street” is not only terrifying but also indistinguishable from other marginal places. Meanwhile, as Jimoh notices, Mrs. Hedges's attachment to the street community is so strong that she refuses to abandon her place within it even when Junto gives her a chance to do so. The "identity" that she attributes to the street gives her and other "street people" an opportunity to define themselves, rather than relying on the derogatory definitions that the dominant society bestows upon them.

Mrs. Hedges's attachment to "the street" is symptomatic of the complex meaning that the spaces of Petry's novel encapsulate. The street itself, the jazz club where Lutie sings, the brothel, the Children's Shelter for juvenile delinquents—all these and other spaces in the narrative reflect Henri Lefebvre's concept of lived spaces of representation. In Lefebvre's theory, one can see a resolution of a seeming contradiction that the marginalized Third Space embodies: being simultaneously an oppressed and productive realm. As Edward Soja explains, Lefebvre understands this sphere as representing power spatially and acknowledges that it is "filled with politics and ideology," "with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other material spatial practices that concretize the social relations of production, reproduction, exploitation, domination, and subjection" (Soja 68). However, Lefebvre's lived spaces are also "the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces,' spaces of resistance to the dominant order *arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning*" (Soja 68, my emphasis). The spaces of Petry's and Holiday's narratives, with their hybrid, cross-rhythmic ability to reconcile contradictions, fit Lefebvre's description of lived spaces. Admittedly, they are by no means free from the ills of the oppressive, dominant system. Capitalist exploitation of labor, commodification of women, and racism stay close to the surface of both narratives, as in such

plot elements as Billie's two year performing "adventure" with Bessie's band in hellish conditions, Lutie's experience with the jazz club where she is treated like a prostitute rather than a singer, and Lady's performances to white audiences after which she and other black musicians "were not allowed to mingle [with whites] any kind of way" (Holiday 97). Still, the example of Mrs. Hedges is an emblematic illustration of the Third Space as a space where transgression can be improvised, where oppression and even self-commodification can produce counterhegemonic energy.

Other minor characters in *The Street* also perform their own acts of defiance of the limited choices ascribed to them by the racist and capitalist system. Their attempts, though imperfect, exemplify the belief that a new identity or new opportunity can be improvised in marginalized urban spaces. Little Bub, for example, helps Jones in his shady activities in hope of earning money; Min searches for love advice from a self-proclaimed "prophet"; and Boots works as a henchman at Junto's disposal. For Lutie, the alternatives that these characters find to the life that society designed for them are difficult to accept. However, even if she never changes her mind about Harlem and never stops to yearn to leave it, over the course of the novel she learns to identify with the community of the street, and to channel her anger towards the dominant racist society.

Both Pryse and Jimoh see Lutie's grandmother as the source of her eventual reconnection to the community of the marginalized. Moreover, as Jimoh argues, Granny—who appears only in Lutie's memories—manages to imprint her values onto Lutie through music. In the scene describing Lutie's first visit to "the street" and the building where she later rents an apartment, she is unconsciously humming "an old song that Granny used to sing, 'Ain't no resting place for a sinner like me. Like me. Like me'" (Petry 17). Jimoh's fascinating analysis reveals the lyrics of

Granny's song as a lesson which helps Lutie see the motives and humanity of the street's "sinners." Moreover, "the song conveys the idea of the sinner as the resistant, rule-breaking individual whose struggles are formidable yet whose solutions often are justified, even if they deviate from established but flawed rules of society" (Jimoh 124). A sinner, then, can be interpreted as an objector to the status quo—a rebel.

Music also recurs in the novel as a freeing force that indicates to Lutie that entrapment is not the only option available to her. She associates jazz with the possibility of a less restricted space. Sitting in Junto's club, she lets her thoughts drift away "for the juke-box in the far corner of the room started playing 'Swing It, Sister.' She hummed as she listened to it, not really aware that she was humming or why, knowing only that she felt free here where there was *so much space*" (146, my emphasis). The relation between freedom and access to space here is twofold. On the one hand, she juxtaposes the "enormous room" (146) of the club with the cramped "sardine cans"—a metaphor she applies to the "small shadowed rooms" of 116<sup>th</sup> street (146). On the other hand, "so much space" refers to the range of options she learns about in that brief moment of reflection and relaxation. Even if her realization does not linger, Lutie discovers that it is possible to negotiate one's identity within the boundaries of the ghetto. The jazz-filled space of the club allows her to view herself and others from a different, fresh perspective. Looking across the room into the mirror hanging on the opposite wall, "[s]he examined herself and the people standing at the bar to see what changes the mirror wrought in them. There was a pleasant gaiety and charm about all of them. She found that she herself looked young, very young and happy in the mirror" (145). Lutie, then, is led to rediscover herself. Moreover, her self-rediscovery involves the understanding of both the possibility of her personal happiness, and her place within the Harlem community.

I argue that jazz equips Lutie with a sense of belonging to the African American ghetto community, as well as inflecting her life with an element of improvisation—a necessary tool of navigating the Third Space. Not surprisingly, then, Lutie's ability to improvise in the constricted space of her experience—however limited and unlasting that improvisation may be—first appears in the novel in the passages describing her visits to the musical heart of the alternative urban geography: the jazz club. The account of Lutie's first night out at Junto's establishes liaisons among the African American culture of the Third Space, jazz, and improvisation as a mode of living. Here Lutie, without any intention to do so, gives her first singing performance: "She listened intently to the record. It was 'Darlin',' and when the voice on the record stopped she started singing" (147). Grandt brilliantly decodes the improvisational spirit of Lutie's performance of "Darlin'" when he points out the differences that Petry's character introduces to the song's original lyrics. Grandt notes that Lutie's superimposition of "There's no sun, Darlin'. There's no fun, Darlin'" (Petry 147) on the instrumental bridge of the chorus, when the original lyrics are: "There'll be no play / Until the day," changes the rhythmic value, since Lutie's lines are one syllable longer than the original ones (Grandt 34). Not unexpectedly, Grandt refers to Lutie's rhythmical improvisation of the song as *signifying*, thus locating Lutie's innovative rendition of the song within the African American tradition that Henry Louis Gates Jr. calls "tropological revision" (xxv). Zora Neale Hurston's 1934 essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression" describes this "repeating with a difference" (Gates xxv)—or signifying—as "originality" relying on "the modification of ideas" (37). Hurston sees such innovative imitation as a black form of art. Gates also observes that "[r]epetition of a form and then inversion of the same through a process of variation is central to jazz" (104). Petry, then, culturally situates Lutie's variation on "Darlin'" in the African American artistic tradition.

Lutie's musical signifying, then, also places her within the circle of jazz performers known for inflecting their music with new meanings—an art that Holiday mastered. Listeners often praise Holiday for her ability to render ordinary material in an extraordinary way. Angela Davis draws a connection between Holiday's jazz expression and the innovative repetition discussed by scholars as a characteristic of African American art and expression in general: Holiday's "relationship to her musical material is analogous to African Americans' historical appropriation of the English language" (165). Davis thus points to Holiday's manipulation of the songs through the act of interpretive delivery. She argues that "[w]ith the incomparable instrument of her voice, Billie Holiday could completely divert a song from its composer's original and often sentimental and vapid intent" (175). In fact, the singer could be said to *produce* new meanings through her *use* of the musical material. Such a "tactical"—to recall Certeau's term—approach to the popular culture of the time stems from Holiday's understanding that it is interpretation, and thus the act of putting the material to a specific use, that ascribes meaning.

Davis cites a 1956 interview where the singer vividly expresses her sense of the transformativity of meaning based on usage. When asked by the interviewer what her favorite "happy" song was, Holiday responded with an unlikely title—"Yesterdays" by Jerome Kern (Davis 173). To most listeners, the song's lyrics are more likely to evoke the feeling of sadness and nostalgia:

Yesterday, yesterdays

Days I knew as happy

Sweet sequestered days

Olden days, golden days

Days of mad romance and love

Then gay youth was mine

Then truth was mine

Joyous, free and flaming life

Then sooth was mine

Sad am I, Glad am I

For today, I'm dreaming of yesterday. (qtd. in Davis 174)

Holiday's response to the interviewer's question indicates that in her understanding the quality of “sadness” is not *written* into the song. In fact, it is only through practice and interpretation that the song becomes sad or—in Holiday's improvisatory reworking of it—happy.

Lutie's and Holiday's renditions of the songs embed the singers in the long-lasting cultural tradition which is intricately connected to the notion of reinvention and interpretation. Another aspect of that tradition is the relationship between an individual, or an artist, and the community. Lutie's and Holiday's jazz improvisations reach beyond the personal to establish a stronger bond with the larger African American community. Lutie's performance at Junto's club generates within the listeners a sense of shared experience:

The men and women crowded at the bar stopped drinking to look at her. Her voice had a thin thread of sadness running through it that made the song important, that made it tell a story that wasn't in the words—a story of despair, of loneliness, of frustration. It was a story that all of them knew by heart and had always known because they had learned it soon after they were born and would go on adding to it until the day they died. (Petry 148)

In this intimate moment of connection between Lutie and the community via jazz improvisation, she becomes a figure of mediation between the collective and their trauma. Her status here is that of a "shaman," as Michael Titlestad describes jazz performer. Her "own suffering becomes emblematic of the suffering of a people for whom musical enchantment is often the only escape from anguished and oppressive circumstances" (Titlestad 289). Music, then, provides her a way of overcoming trauma—both personal and social. This "shamanic" role figuratively positions Lutie in the company of real-life blues singers, who would come to be perceived by some as America's only tragic heroes, as well as, in Antonio Gramsci's words, *organic intellectuals*: rooting their art in the needs and values of their communities. This same role can be ascribed to Holiday, whose singing, according to Angela Davis, was saturated with a sense of communal character: "However skillful she may have been in musically conveying her own state of mind, she also achieved a mode of expression that forged community even as it remained deeply personal. Her songs acted as a conduit permitting others to acquire insights about the emotional and social circumstances of their own lives" (194). The example of Holiday furthers Davis's claim that African American music, as it developed in the decades following emancipation, was a primary means of expression of the new social relations and conditions for black women and men (4-5). Thus, the communal quality and the articulation of shared needs and desires have always been integral elements of blues and jazz.

Titlestad's elaboration of jazz as an instrument of healing also stresses that jazz improvisation articulates a potential to create something "elevating and lasting" (291) in the process of linking the individual to the collective experience. While both Lutie and Holiday may be "healing" figures, it is crucial to emphasize that the link between them and the black community benefits them as well. The community plays an important role in the lessons Lutie

and Holiday learn about improvising in the space of their own lives. Using a spacial metaphor of climbing out of a claustrophobic, constraining barrel, Holiday thus refers to the part other marginalized people had in her success:

It was slow, this attempt to climb clear of the barrel. But as I grew older, I found those trying to keep me in it were not always the corner hoodlum, the streetwalker, the laborer, the numbers runner, the rooming-house ladies and landlords, the people who existed off the twenty-five and thirty-dollar-a-week salaries they were paying in those days.

They, I found, were the ones who wanted to see me “go,” to get somewhere. It was their applause and help that kept me inspired. These “little people,” condemned as I have been ever since I can remember, gave me my chance long before the mink-coated lorgnette crowd of Fifth Avenue and Greenwich Village ever heard of me.<sup>9</sup> (qtd. in Davis 163)

Holiday sees her ability to improve her life as partially stemming from the inspiration and support of the community. Lutie also acquires a new perspective with the help of the other inhabitants of Harlem. As she is singing at Junto's, to Lutie and her audience jazz expresses the need to find alternative modes of living within the Third Space of the ghetto. African American music and community, then, are integral parts of Lutie's epiphany regarding the rules of mainstream society and her desire to oppose them.

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<sup>9</sup> Holiday sees a difference between “society” people and the people on the margins that shows her sympathy for the former and dislike of the latter:

I found out the main difference between uptown and downtown was people are more for real up there. They got to be, I guess. Uptown a whore was a whore; a pimp was a pimp; a thief was a thief; a faggot was a faggot; a dike was a dike; a mother-hugger was a mother-hugger.

Downtown it was different—more complicated. A whore was sometimes a socialite; a pimp could be a man about town; a thief could be an executive; a faggot could be a playboy; a dike might be called a deb; a mother-hugger was somebody who wasn't adjusted and had problems. I always had trouble keeping this double talk straight. (Holiday 86)

### **Looking for Transgression in Petry**

Gradually, Lutie's thoughts about the conditions in which she and others in "the street" live begin to bear traces of subversion. She identifies the racist and classist prejudices towards the group to which she now sees herself as belonging: "Streets like the one she lived on were no accident. They were the North's lynch mobs, she thought bitterly; the method the big cities used to keep Negroes in their place" (323); and later, "Perhaps, she thought, we're all here because we're all poor. Maybe it doesn't have anything to do with color" (409). Lutie's reflections on the underlying reasons behind the othering that she and her community experience lead her to develop her own desire to oppose the oppressive conditions. We may read the last few scenes in the book as the culmination of this desire. Notably, the book ends with Lutie leaving New York on a train—a means of transportation immortalized in numerous jazz and blues songs that signifies a search for a better future. However, Lutie finds her way to the train station through a chain of tragic events which seem to leave her no other choice but to run: in self-defense, she kills Boots, who attempts to rape her and, as a result, leaves New York without her son, in search of a place that "would swallow her up"—Chicago (434).

If seen from the vantage point of her dismal life in Harlem and her desire to escape it, perhaps Lutie's final decision could be considered the moment of her riskiest improvisation. Above all, her gesture means that, despite the trauma she has been through and despite being separated from her son, who is now at the Children's Shelter, she has the courage to change her life and seek a new beginning. Connecting improvisation to "a fundamental socio-political principle of democratic choice" (Rowan 9), Rowan quotes CeDell Davis, a Blues musician

known for his improvisatory approach: "If you don't never change nothin', how do you know how good it's gonna ever be? You *got* to change it. Suppose everybody just did the same thing all the time and never did nothing different: You never could bring out nothing new. You got to give people a choice" (qtd. in Rowan 9). However, by getting on the train, Lutie does not grant herself a *choice*, but rather proves that there are *no choices* left for her. In contrast to Certeau's tactics, her move does not allow her to escape the oppressive order without leaving it (xiii). Lutie's brief glimpse of alternative ways of organizing the space of the ghetto, when she sings at Junto's, is the only time she allows herself to hope for such a possibility. Having that hope extinguished by Junto and Boots, she resorts to actions that—while unplanned by *her*—are inscribed into the larger system of racism; she becomes a criminal, and thus a “statistic” of racist ideology.

Lutie's act, then, even if "displaced" from her planned scenario of leaving Harlem with her son and on her terms, has little to do with the hopeful play on the other's territory that Certeau discusses. Granted, it could be perceived as a *syncopated* moment in Lutie's life, to use a jazz metaphor, given that "[s]yncopation can be defined as the displacement of an expected stress to an unexpected place" (Townsend 142). However, it is the syncopation of Theodore Adorno's famous harangue against jazz, in which he proclaims syncopation to be one of the most ineffective elements of the music:

The syncopation is not, like its counterpart, that of Beethoven, the expression of an accumulated subjective force which directed itself against authority until it had produced a new law out of itself. It is purposeless; it leads nowhere and is arbitrarily withdrawn by an undialectical, mathematical incorporation into the

beat. It is plainly a "coming-too-early," just as anxiety leads to premature orgasm, just as impotence expresses itself through premature and incomplete orgasm."

(Adorno 490)

Indeed, no "new law," or productive change, can be expected from Lutie's desperate action. Just as Adorno's syncopation "leads nowhere" and becomes "incorporated into the beat," so is Petry's protagonist's flight an escape "into the darkness" (Petry 436) mapped out by a "series of circles that flowed into each other" that Lutie traces on the window of the moving train (435). Lutie does not anticipate change, but rather resigns to the thought that her life is a self-enclosed cycle. In contrast to Holiday's narrative, the novel ends with the protagonist feeling hopeless *and* helpless.

Nevertheless, while the penultimate paragraph of the novel professes Lutie's sense of being a victim of environmental determinism, picturing her—once more—cursing that "god-damned street" (436), the last paragraph, narrated from the omniscient point of view, presents a more ambiguous picture of the street: "the snow laid a delicate film over the sidewalk, over the brick of the tired, old buildings; gently obscuring the grime and the garbage and the ugliness" (436). This juxtaposition of the "grime" and "ugliness" of the street with the gentleness and delicacy of the snow that covers it may be read as the perception of the ghetto by its other inhabitants, such as Mrs. Hedges. For them, the brutal reality of the street does not exclude the possibility of introducing positive aspects to it. Paralleling Billie Holiday's ability to interpret a "sad" song as a "happy" song, "the people of the street" notice the "delicate film" of snow, where Lutie only sees "grime." Moreover, the "tired, old buildings" imply a sense of the people's identification with the spaces they occupy; like them, the houses are worn out and their imperfections call for understanding.

When applied to the tactics deployed by “the people of the streets,” Adorno's critique of jazz needs to be taken to task. Adorno denies syncopation, and—ultimately—jazz, revolutionary potential. Such dismissal seems only fitting when applied to desperate and hopeless acts, such as Lutie's, which lack grounding in conscious and calculated use of the oppressive system. But what Adorno sees as mere "eccentricity" and futile "premature orgasm" holds a value for the inhabitants of the Third Space. The "new law" that Adorno posits as a condition for syncopation's purposefulness is already in place, for the dissonance introduced by syncopation—or by an unexpected, out-of-place use of the resources—always entails a change of consciousness. It brings about a discovery of the ambivalent character of established norms. It gives insight into the *possibility* of a new order, and hence produces *new knowledge*. This knowledge leads Billie Holiday onto the stages of racist cities with an anti-racist song on her mouth, and this same knowledge accompanies Lutie's neighbors in their daily maneuvers to transform the street into a place they can call home.

Adorno's insistence on the anticlimactic role of jazz finds an opposition in a long tradition of associating the music with rebellious energy. "At an explicitly political level, jazz was seen as a harbinger of literal revolution," a symptom of "social unrest embodied by race riots and ethnic-immigrant labor activism" (Evans 102). I argue that jazz does not have to occupy the privileged place of being the direct cause for a revolution in order to be perceived as a worthy model for, or element of, a revolutionary mindset and imagination which, in turn, may lead to order-changing action. In *Lady Sings the Blues* and *The Street*, I see jazz philosophy as a crucial part of the characters' thinking about their own identities and their positionality within the oppressive system. Jazz-like improvisation permeates their engagement with cultures of art,

labor, crime, and entertainment; it helps them see beyond the margins of those spaces and create within their boundaries alternatives to the order existing outside.

Ajay Heble writes: "Jazz . . . has always been about different ways of knowing (and thinking about) the world, about using contingency, variance, improvisation, and risk as models for critical (and social) practice" (237). The pursuit of positive change, of refreshing transformation expressed in this association with jazz may explain the connection that David Harvey finds between jazz and Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* or, as Harvey describes them, "spaces . . . within which life is experienced differently" (184). Notably, Harvey's words parallel Heble's emphasis on the "*different ways of knowing the world*" linked to jazz; thus, it comes as little surprise that Harvey expands Foucault's original list of heterotopia—which included, among others, spaces such as a prison, and a brothel, forms which appear in Holiday's and Petry's narratives—by adding a jazz club (Harvey 184). Jazz, then, is an element of a network encompassing *public cultures* that pose alternatives to middle class norms of domesticity and privacy. As such, it has more anti-hegemonic force than Adorno cared to grant it. Even if the moments of dissonance are fleeting and often "incorporated into the beat" marked out by the larger system of racial injustice, they leave behind a new awareness.

In response to Adorno's criticism, I also turn to Jacques Attali's distinction between *music* and *noise*. Attali sees music as a force channeling noise, which finds its translation into social terms in the creation of social order. Noise, on the other hand, is associated with disorder and disturbance (26). While "the production of music has as its function the creation, legitimation, and maintenance of order" (30), noise "makes possible the creation of a new order on another level of organization, of a new code in another network" (33). In the Third Space of Petry's and Holiday's texts, jazz may be read as containing the elements of noise, which allows the

characters to conceive of a different reality. The chaos inherent in the idea of noise also marks the public spaces of the two narratives which, despite the system's attempts to police them, retain their disorderly characters. And even though this chaos often implies danger—embodied, for example, in Billie's drug addiction and Lutie's loss of her son to the law—just as the chaos of Attali's noise has the power to destroy (26), it also signifies the dominant order's failure to contain these spaces, to inscribe them in its narrow norms.

### **Against Improvisation: The Rules and Laws of Appel's Novel**

Attali's Marxist critique of music, and the analogies he draws between the work of music and social structure, offer a convenient medium for introducing into the analysis Benjamin Appel's 1954 novel, *Sweet Money Girl*. Noise, like the “new noise” that Attali reveals to designate free jazz, suggests “the emergence of a truly new” societal order (133). It is a “noise of Festival and Freedom” (133). This freedom is the binary opposite of the orderly structure into which noise is channeled by the rules of music. The contrast between freedom and rigorous order becomes the matrix for the contrast I draw between the jazz-like tactics organizing the fictive worlds of *The Street* and *Lady Sings the Blues* and the principles of noise that rule the world of *Sweet Money Girl*. The cover of Attali's book pictures a portion of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1559 painting *The Fight between Carnival and Lent* (See the link: <http://www.mheu.org/en/timeline/fight-carnaval-lent.aspx>), which, in Attali's opinion, illustrates the opposition he was concerned with. The painting depicts the contrast between two periods of time in the religious and cultural life of the sixteenth-century in the Southern Netherlands. The inn on the left side of the painting and the church on the right side designate the symbolic centers of the pleasure-oriented Carnival and the religious observance of Lent. The “noise of Festival,” then, relates to jazz's playfulness, but also to its “carnavalesque” quality, which Mikhail Bakhtin

has linked to the overturning of the established hierarchies of everyday life. Petry's and Holiday's texts both abound with examples of the “play” within the oppressor's territory, as Certeau would call it, which bear a resemblance to Bakhtin's idea of “carnavalesque.” On the other hand, in the world of Appel's novel, characters do not display the same determination to alter the order they are inscribed into. In other words, if Petry's and Holiday's narratives provide examples of jazz-inspired, creative *noise*, Appel's text plays out to the prescribed tunes of *music*.

A son of Jewish immigrants from Poland, Benjamin Appel grew up the rough neighborhood which found its way into many of Appel's texts. The protagonist of *Sweet Money Girl*, Hortense Pavlec, self-renamed Hortense Walton, comes from a Polish immigrant family—a background which occupies a peculiar place in New York's ethnic landscape of the first half of the twentieth century. Both her ethnic origin and the exploration of urban geography in the novel make Appel's novel a fitting subject for comparison with Holiday's and Petry's texts. In *Sweet Money Girl*, the inhabitants of what used to be Hell's Kitchen, as well as Hortense's family, are “white ethnics”—European immigrants and their children. Like the Pizzinis—the Italian American family in *The Street*—in the contemporary racial trajectory, they are positioned “in between” the native-born Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin and African Americans.

Gayle Wurst points out the difference in the social status of blacks and white ethnics by casting Lutie's identification with the Pizzinis as a classic example of an “apples and oranges” comparison, for “by the 1940s, the American dream had long been more accessible to white immigrants than to the African Americans, citizens for many generations, forced to live—and remain—in the ghettos where families like the Pizzinis often got their start by setting up small businesses” (8). However, as the previous chapters of this dissertation have shown, and as James Barrett and David Roediger demonstrate, both “white ethnics” themselves, and society at large,

approached the racial categorization of the European immigrants and their children with a big dose of ambiguity. Barrett and Roediger describe the Americanization of those immigrants as involving a process of “whitening” (6), arguing that—even though most immigrants did not enter American society with “conventional United States attitudes regarding 'racial' difference”(3) —being placed in the “inbetween” racial categories made them adopt the racial taxonomies in an attempt to climb their way to “whiteness” and thus Americanness.

The confusion and uncertainty regarding the place of white ethnics in America's racial landscape shows not only in many works of literature, some of them discussed in this dissertation, but also in the press of the first half of the twentieth century. The Polish New York newspaper, *Nowy Świat* [*The New World*],<sup>10</sup> points to—on the one hand—Poles' sympathy with blacks and their struggle, while—on the other hand—underscoring their desire to appear as distinct from “non-white” groups, including other European immigrants, thus implying their worthiness as American citizens. Polish sympathy, and even identification with African Americans, underlines a 1921 article entitled “The Shame of the State of Georgia,” which condemns the lynching of eleven black men. The killings were ordered by a landowner the men worked for, having been forced to do so by Georgia courts that convicted them of various crimes. The article points out the hypocrisy of the system that, while decrying communism, murders its own citizens the way “the red communists” murder their victims in Russia (6), thus drawing an analogy between European and African American victims of injustice. A similar sentiment of shared misery seems to emerge in the paper's increased frequency of reports about the activities of the Ku Klux Klan around 1924, probably provoked by the political and social climate surrounding the immigration restrictions imposed that year. In the 1940s, the paper continued periodically to mention the plight of African Americans, as in an article dated two days after the

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<sup>10</sup> All titles and quotations from this newspaper will be provided in my own translation from Polish.

Harlem riot of 1943. In “The Harlem Ghetto” the author points to social inequality as the cause of the violence, arguing that “Negroes serve in the army and in the navy, they work in factories, they pay taxes, they are citizens” (3) and thus the “Negro problem” is “the responsibility of not only the government, but also of the society” (3).<sup>11</sup> Further, in 1946, a Sunday special addition to the paper includes a long article entitled “Racist Prejudice is Madness,” which declares that categorizing peoples according to “superior” and “inferior” races has been dismissed by science, and is thus irrational.

Yet, even as Polish Americans expressed their compassion for American blacks, they—almost simultaneously—represented themselves as a group whose main goal was access to the social and political space of whiteness and Americanness, even if that meant casting others as less deserving of that access. This determination to secure one's turf is evident in a 1921 article in *The New World*, “Illusional Hopes,” which blames the negative image of the Polish immigrants in the American press on the number of Jews arriving to the United States from Poland. Two weeks later, the paper's column, “Local Chronicle,” included a report on the New York census of 1920. Despite its shortness, the text manages to underscore the desire of European immigrants to secure their place in American society as “whites” by dividing New York's population into “whites,” “Negroes,” and “other races” such as “Chinese, Japanese and Indians” (6), thus including immigrants from Europe in the first category.

While desperately trying to defend their “whiteness” and sense of “belonging” to American society, however, Poles and other white ethnics were constantly reminded of the

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<sup>11</sup> Episodes of white ethnics' support of African Americans' struggle also find reflection in the the black press of the time. In August of 1949, *New York Amsterdam News* published an article under the self-explanatory title: “Greenpoint Residents Launch Fight on Race-Riot Hoodlums.” The article reports the Greenpoint residents' outrage and demands of police investigation into an attack on three black youths stabbed in a local swimming pool the week before. Describing the ethnic composition of the Greenpoint delegation that voiced their concern to the police, the author of the article writes: “An interesting observation of the group was that more than ninety percent of them were Italian-Americans and Polish-Americans. Several Hebrews and Puerto Ricans were also in the delegation” (B4).

volatility of their status. A 1921 photograph of immigrants on Ellis Island, awaiting medical examination in the wake of the typhus epidemic among European arrivals, illustrates the uncertainty of the immigrant fate. Crowded together, scared, and exhausted after the long journey, the people in the photograph seem aware that, even though they have set their feet on the 'Promised Land,' they are not quite there yet. The space they occupy is, this time—literally—“inbetween.” Suspended between their own homelands and America, with the possibility looming large of quarantine or being sent back, they belong neither to their own countries nor to this New World, which also means they are not “white.”

Immigrants' fear of being perceived as “non-white” and thus not American understandably increased in 1924, with the passing of the Immigration Act. In May of that year, *The New World* published an article entitled “The Story of a Real American,” which praises the generosity and open-mindedness of an Anglo-Saxon blood donor whose donation saved the life of a little girl from the Italian immigrant ghetto. The article contrasts the noble deed of the donor with those Americans who deny the Italian girl's “fellow countrymen” the “vast spaces of America” and who want to “expel them from the streets of American cities” (5). Perhaps this emphasis on spatial exclusion shows the anxiety of white ethnics over the denial of physical space as symptomatic of their rejection as potential American citizens.<sup>12</sup>

In *Sweet Money Girl* the tense “inbetweenness” of white ethnics is signaled in the historical background of Hell's Kitchen's ethnic ascendancy, as well as through Hortense's

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<sup>12</sup> The designation, “Real American” in this article may point to an understanding of national identity as flexible and dependent not so much on the ethnic origin as the adherence to the ideals of the republic. Yet, as an article from the same paper, “About Polonia,” published over two decades later, indicates, the idea of “blood” and “racial” heritage persisted among white ethnics as internalized markers of Americanness. The 1946 article addresses the subject of intermarriage among Polish Americans, and suggests that Poles' tendency to be conditioned by the factor of common religious beliefs, and thus choose Italian and Irish spouses, *if* they intermarry at all, is counterproductive to the goal of assimilation. The article claims that by marrying into other *immigrant* groups, Poles are creating “new types” which are “not American” (4). The message of the article emerges then as a call to marry Anglo Saxons, and thus “whiten up.”

determination to conceal her Polish origin. Appel manages to indicate that, despite white ethnics' admittedly more advantageous social position in comparison to the immigrant groups who came after them, white ethnic background may still stigmatize. While many may see Appel's novel as downplaying the theme of ethnic difference by placing it in the background of the main plot, I argue, to the contrary, that ethnic liaisons play the crucial role of explaining the plot of the novel, including the protagonist's most controversial decisions. I re-sound and reapply Emily Bernard's poignant argument about Ann Petry's *Country Place* where she contends that the label "raceless writing," applied to texts authored by black writers which do not focus explicitly on black characters, reflects a lack of understanding of the nuanced ways in which "race [can] move meaningfully in the story" (89). According to Bernard, Petry's *Country Place*, perceived by many as an example of "raceless writing," "represents white characters in order to destabilize conventional assumptions about whiteness and universality"(89). Similarly, Appel's *Sweet Money Girl* complicates the category of whiteness and investigates its subcategorization and implications.

While Hell's Kitchen, with its complex ethnic history, and Hortense's Polish family past are important in *Sweet Money Girl*, perhaps the best vantage point for understanding the spaces occupied by Appel's protagonist is another landmark of the novel's New York geography: the school of dance where Hortense works. Like the clubs in *Lady Sings the Blues* and *The Street*, the George Lawrence School of the Dahntz is filled with the sound of music. But for Hortense, the daughter of Polish immigrants whose dream of becoming a Broadway actress ended with the advances of an agent who approached her like a prostitute—a circumstance closely resembling Lutie's—the school is a stifling, unbearable place. Rather than offering an opportunity for tactical maneuvers, or cross-rhythmic contradiction of the underlying meter, Hortense senses that

the school designates the disabling routine of her life from which she wants to escape, just as Lutie wants to flee the prison that to her is “the street.”

The School of the Dahntz works according to a predictable schedule. Every moment and every move are calculated, measured, timed. Hortense's cynical account of the daily teaching routine reveals her loathing of both the superficiality of the school's etiquette and the monotony of its rut which permeates other aspects of Hortense's life as well:

We rumbaed until the five-of bell stopped the dancing. *Bonggg* it sounded. By *onggg* we were all saying good-by to our two o'clocks. Good-by, good-by, dear left feet, dear cripple, good-by, for in the reception room were all the dear little three o'clocks. I unloaded my two o'clock and thought what a feeling it'd be to hear those bells for the very last time. To hear the *onggg* fading to *nggg* for the very last time. . . . *Bonggg* and *onggg* and *nggg*. All day long, on the hour and on the half-hour, . . . the teachers caught by the bells as much as the pupils, and that went for me, too, Miss Wise Guy in person, in the flesh, especially the flesh that I tanked up with booze every other night and then dumped on some bed somewhere. (53)

Hortense's thoughts about the school revolve around time and its “portioning” into teaching units. The narration bombards the reader with time-related vocabulary—“five-of bell,” “two o'clocks,” “very last time,” “all day long,” “on the hour and on the half-hour,” “every other night,” which—in combination with the onomatopoeic “*bonggg*,” “*onggg*,” “*nggg*” produces the effect of imprisonment within the schedule and, at the same time, fatigue. The predictable pattern even turns the students, in Hortense's mind, into human metronomes; they are “two o'clocks” and “three o'clocks.” As her references to the students as “cripples” and “left feet” and

to herself as “Miss Wise Guy” reveal, she feels contempt for all those who follow the precise timing of the routine at the school, including herself. The allusion to her life outside the school, with frequent drinking and depersonalized sex as its components, also shows that Hortense's disgust with the school is a symptom of her general discontent with the routine of her life.

The even measure of Hortense's life, both at work and outside of it, bring to mind the “common meter” whose regularity Holiday's and Petry's characters resist. The music of the George Lawrence School of the Dahntz stays within a grid similar to Piet Mondrian's interpretation of the twelve-bar blues form in his 1942-1943 painting, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (See the link: [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=78682](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78682)). David Brown writes that Mondrian arrived in New York in 1940, “in the midst of boogie-woogie's revival” (2), and was highly influenced by the music which, unlike most other forms of blues, is mostly associated with dancing, thus forming yet another bridge between Mondrian's work of art and Appel's novel. While Brown lists “[r]apid, syncopated rhythms and irregular rhythmic flickers of color, improvisation, and new process oriented techniques” as elements of Mondrian's portrayal of urban music, what may be the most striking first impression for many other viewers of the painting are the regular lines forming a grid. In his characterization of boogie-woogie, Brown writes: “Often consisting of one note intermittently repeated as a counterpoint to the primary rhythm, these melodic ideas . . . are vertically restrained and rhythmic in their conception. A rhythmic emphasis is reinforced by the frequent lack of progressive development” (1). It is that “restraint” and “lack of progressive development” that I see as dominating Mondrian's angular representation of boogie-woogie, and as characterizing the score to Appel's dance school's music, as well as the score to Hortense's life in general. The “restraint” of the shapes in Mondrian's painting through the ninety degree angles, as well as through the very boundaries of the frame,

once again echoes Attali's analysis of music as the force that imposes the constraint of form onto noise. Another commonality between the painting and Attali's characterization of music is the shared theme of commercialization. Mondrian chooses the space of the avenue associated with the world's most famous commercial theater district, Broadway, as the site for his artistic vision of boogie-woogie which had achieved its commercial apex by the time of Mondrian's love affair with it in the forties. Attali sees the commercialization of music as the distancing of production from consumption and claims that the process found its completion in the environment of capitalism and mass production. On the contrary, the "new noise" of which he writes is not created for its exchange value; it "calls into question the distinction between worker and consumer" (135). It erases the distinction between production and consumption, for "to compose is to take pleasure in the instruments, the tools of communication, in use-time and exchange-time as lived and no longer as stockpiled" (135). As in Certeau's tactics, then, consumption and production become one.

But while exchange value is not the only motive for the characters of Holiday's and Petry's texts, who put their musical and non-musical spaces to use for building resistance to the oppressive system and forging community bonds, in Appel's narrative, the grid-covered spaces of New York are organized in a pattern traced by monetary concerns. Hortense, the titular "sweet money girl" perceived by many other characters as a gold digger, sees the world around her as requiring a materialistic life philosophy. The superficial values of the School of the Dahntz where "Appearance with a capital A" is "the big thing" (46), and about which Hortense says that "[i]t's a rat race" (26), is a microcosm of her world, where "I-love-you and I. O. U. . . . were the same damn thing" (115). This conviction underlies Hortense's determination to "find a guy with

money! Money, money, money!” (42). Unable to do so, and unhappy with her meager salary at the dance school, Hortense decides to become a sex worker.

The reader's perception of Hortense's obsession with money is cleverly manipulated by the first person narration which rotates throughout the text among the three main characters: Maxie Dehn, a former sergeant in World War II who returns to his own routine life and job in a realtor's office, and who tries to win Hortense over with unrealistic prospects of wealth; Hugh Pierson, who was Maxie's army companion, and who now comes to New York to go to school on the G. I. Bill and ends up living with Maxie and his mother and falling in love with Hortense; and Hortense herself. Despite being the titular character and the center around which the narrative revolves, Hortense is the last of the three characters to be given a voice. Before she ever enters the stage as the narrator, in chapter three, the reader has already constructed an image of her character based on the perspectives of Hugh, in chapter one, and Maxie, in chapter two. From their accounts, Hortense emerges as a “cheap gold digger” (17) who, while leaving the men around her with the sensation of an “electric shock of sex” (24), is more than likely to leave them, in the most literal sense, if they are not financially secure.

### **Ethnicity and the Potential for Improvisation in *Sweet Money Girl***

The rotation of the narrative voice reveals a new dimension of Appel's novel when Hortense herself becomes the spinner of this tale. But that new perspective does not emerge immediately. When finally allowed to overtake the narration of the novel, Hortense herself, at first, does little to recuperate herself in the eyes of the reader. As she wakes up from a drunken stupor, she “turned sideways to see who [she] was with” (40). Hortense does not seem to know the man next to whom she awakes, nor does she recognize the room. A transient visitor to this random space, she implies that she is no stranger to casual encounters with people and places

that mean nothing to her, as she confesses matter-of-factly: “I'd get so crawly drunk I'd go to bed with almost anybody” (40). She then reflects on the offer she has received of becoming a call girl under the “protection” of Dexter, the husband of one of her fellow dance teachers: “Some of these bastards think that money can buy anything, and they're so right, damn them” (40). Her control over the narrative, then, seems initially to confirm the emotionally barren, overly sexualized, and materialistic identity that the male characters outlined for her earlier in the text. And yet, gradually, the rest of the chapter reveals Hortense's traits that complicate her character and begin to point to the causes of her present attitude and values. Having indicated her miserable work situation, as well as the pressure of time that she feels as a woman whose chances of finding a provider, as she believes, are contingent on her youth and beauty, she discloses, at the end of the chapter, the fear and loneliness that underlie her rough and seemingly indifferent exterior: “I inhaled my cigarette deep into my lungs because I felt afraid. Of what, I don't know. I thought that all I wanted was somebody halfway decent to care for me” (59). The three-dimensionality of Hortense's character, which manifests itself throughout the latter parts of this chapter, becomes central later in the novel through the revelation of her ethnic background and its implications for her use of the city's spaces.

The theme of the city's ethnic history is first signaled by Hugh, after Maxie offers him lodging in the brownstone where he lives with his German-born mother. Hugh is amazed by the neighborhood's ethnic diversity: “It was another tenement street, but to me it was fascinating. . . . Many Italians and Irish lived in the tenements. There were also a few old-time German families like the Dehns, who remembered the days when this West Side neighborhood had been known as Hell's Kitchen” (10). To Hugh, living amongst this mixture of peoples is liberating; it gives him a feeling of openness despite his enclosed and small living space: “My room was on a shaft, the

single window dark and gloomy even in the daytime, but I didn't feel shut in. For all about me were millions of people, all kinds of people” (10). However, Hugh's closer examination of the ethnic history of the city, which starts with the beliefs held by Mama Dehn, reveals the various dimensions of interethnic animosities, as well as the legacy of the ideology of racial hierarchy.

Although herself an immigrant, Mamma Dehn's views of her own ethnic group vis-à-vis others corresponds with the ideas popularized around the turn of the century by scientific racists who divided the changing demographics of the republic according to a precise taxonomy based on what was then understood as “race”:

“We were a good German family,” Mamma used to say proudly whenever the conversation got around to Hell's Kitchen. She hated the old Hell's Kitchen days, when there had been a saloon on every corner, hoodlums on every block, the cops patrolling their beats in pairs. When Mamma looked back on that time, it was like some pioneer remembering the rough wilderness days. Except that in Mamma's wilderness, the Irish had been the Indians and the good German families the settlers. (16)

Mamma Dehn associates her own immigrant group with the Anglo-Saxons, perceived here as the true founders of the nation, thus assuming an air of superiority towards that nation's other ethnic and racial groups. Matthew Frye Jacobson explains the situatedness of Teutons and Celts, as the terminology of the time named them, within the racial fabric of the United States: “As the first to immigrate in huge numbers at once well within the literal language but well outside the deliberate intent of the 'free white persons' clause of 1790, Irish and German arrivals of the 1840s and after drew special attention in discussions of race and its implications for assimilability and citizenship” (46). Jacobson points out the difference in the two groups' place in the commonly

adopted racial hierarchy, despite their shared status as immigrants, noting that the labels of racial difference were less frequently applied to Germans than to the Irish (46). That may be explained by the fact that “[b]y longstanding tradition in the high discourse of race, the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic traditions were closely aligned; indeed, by many accounts Anglo-Saxons traced their very genius to the forests of Germany” (46-47). Mamma Dehn is an heiress to this ideology, and her opinions, voiced through Hugh, set the tone for the novel's theme of ethnic prejudice's shadow cast over the characters' world.

The section of *Sweet Money Girl* that reveals Hortense's ethnic origin also presents a potential for her improvised act of resistance to the wretched condition of her life. She opens the narration of the chapter with “I had the misery blues” (115). Like Billie in *Lady Sings the Blues* and Lutie in *The Street*, Hortense understands her pain through the channel of improvisatory music. She discloses the source of her anguish and, at the same time introduces suspense into the plot, by saying: “The misery blues, this morning, had a different beat to them, because I knew I was saying yes to Dexter”(116). Yet, even as she says “I knew,” the blues that accompanies her words allows the hope that Hortense will somehow refuse the commodification of her body through prostitution, and that she will improvise a way to achieve her means otherwise. The “noise” of the blues suggests a possibility of her detour from the self-destructive grid that she follows, as it seems to overtake Hortense's consciousness: “The misery blues, they were driving me mad” (117). In fact, the “blues” leads her to reminisce about her family, for the first time in years:

I was thinking of my mother who had tried so hard to make a home for us. She'd planted violets and sweet Williams in the flowerpots as she used to do when we were living in Pennsylvania. And my father, that dumb Polack, would laugh like

when he was still a miner and not a janitor in New York. “Flower tings no grow by coal tippel!” he used to say back in Pennsylvania, and in New York, “Flower tings no grow by skyscraper!” A dumb Polack if there ever was one. (118)

No number of ethnic slurs can overshadow the note of nostalgia in Hortense's memories of her family. She finds a moment's escape from the “combined bed-living room” (74), where she lives, with “the bed against the wall, disguised as a couch and covered with gaudy red and green Mexican serapes” (74), by remembering the “home” created, despite their poverty, by her parents. Her mother's efforts to beautify the family's living space, and her father's laughter filling that space, make Hortense's own living arrangements, where she wishes she “had somebody— But nobody. Nobody!” (73), appear even more alienating and unappealing.

However, the “blues” that brings back the memories of a less lonely and miserable time and space with her family turns out not to be sufficient to cause Hortense's refusal to follow the path which she feels she is destined to follow. She seems helpless and unable to control the course of events, echoing Lutie's desperation and hopelessness in the last part of *The Street*: “This was a morning. I was going to say yes to Dexter but without cheers. I never was one to kid myself, and I felt so blue. So damn blue. The misery blues, I had them bad. I felt as if something'd gone out of me for keeps” (116). Hortense feels unable to oppose the forces that lead her towards Dexter and prostitution as “something” “had gone out of her.” I connect that profound sense of loss and spiritual emptiness to Hortense's rejection and suppression of the only thing that seems to offer an escape from her present angst: a connection to her family and heritage. Having allowed herself a moment of reminiscence, she quickly pushes the memories away, saying: “There's no point to it. . . . The only smart thing is to let your life go by. Let it go and let it go for you never get what you want” (118). As her self-imposed severance from her

ethnic ties indicates, she does not see maintaining contact with the Polish community as a “smart thing”; yet, being away from it renders Hortense lost and hopeless. Unlike Billie in *Lady Sings the Blues*, she lacks the support and inspiration from the sense of communal struggle and goals.

Having changed her ethnically marked name, Pavlec, to the Anglo Saxon Walton, in hopes of increasing her chances of becoming a top dancer, Hortense continues to build a gap between herself and all things Polish. While referring to a former dance student of hers, she nonchalantly remarks: “He was a millionaire. He called all his chauffeurs Jones. When I knew him, his chauffeur was a Polack with one of those long Polack names. But he was Jones, too” (71). Hortense tries to disassociate herself from the chauffeur's ethnic identity, both through mocking his name and concealing her own discarded Polish name, as well as through the repeated use of the ethnic slur. She is here in the peculiar position of a person who, in an attempt to avoid discrimination, strips herself of her nominal group connection, and who now sees another member of that group having his name taken away from him. One is tempted to look, under Hortense's cover of indifference and sarcasm, for her hidden empathy for the “Polack Jones,” as her own sense of namelessness does not cease to haunt her. When someone calls out her name during one of her many drinking bar escapes, she responds with: “Who's Hortense?” and then: “I've got no name,' she says real sad. 'Got nothing, got nobody” (32). The loss of her “dumb Polack” father's name, even if self-imposed, makes her feel not only nameless, but also dispossessed in a more all-encompassing way.

Hugh's and Maxie's reflections about Hell's Kitchen provide a context to the complex situatedness and history of ethnic minorities in the symbolic and physical space of the city that produced Hortense. Both male characters point out the transience of different ethnic groups in Hell's Kitchen. Hugh thinks “of all the people who'd come and gone on this street of railroad

flats. Old-time Irish and Germans, Italians, Jews, Greeks, and now the Puerto Ricans, staying a year, ten years, a lifetime, and every last one of them with some secret or other, and in the long run, going, going for good” (78). While the rotation of ethnicities in that space suggests, on the one hand, the potential of immigrants' movement “upward” on the social scale and out of the ghetto, Hugh's reflections revolve around the notion of the meaninglessness of the past. He ponders “a thousand forgotten people in a world where nothing had ever been true but the living moment” (78), suggesting that the lives of the past inhabitants of urban peripheries, with their challenges and victories, have no bearing on the present and are—in the larger scope of things—just specks of history. The constant, dynamic movement that characterizes ethnic neighborhoods remains unnoticed and unimportant to the rest of the city, and the world. Even to Maxie, whose family history is submerged in the depths of Hell's Kitchen's complex ethnic relations, the appearance and disappearance of various ethnicities in and from that space is only a marker of the passing time: “I thought how the Puerto Ricans were pushing the Italians and Greeks out, like the Italians'd pushed out the Irish and only a jerk like me could still be making believe things were like they used to be” (113). To Maxie then, the changing ethnic composition of the neighborhood generates nostalgia for a time long ago, perhaps one when his own ethnic group dominated the area. To Hortense, this passing of ethnic worlds means that the problems of her immigrant family are of no concern for the world where she lives at the present moment, and the identity of “the coal miner's kid” (136) will not make her a winner in the urban jungle.

With the sad hindsight of Hortense's failed career plans, unsuccessful marriage to an unfaithful actor, and finally, her decision to prostitute herself, Hugh thus imagines her first confrontation with the space of New York:

I thought of the coal miner's kid coming to live in the fabulous city. . . . I thought of the coal miner's kid walking from the tenements between Second and Third onto the crowds of Lexington, to Park, Madison, and Fifth, into a world of elegant restaurants and department stores. To the kid going to the library on Fifth Avenue, it must have been a magical experience like turning from a drab chapter in a book to a chapter all blazing light. She had dreamed of marrying a Hero when she grew up, of being a Dancer, and she married Ronny Culver and become [sic] a dancer, and the books were all closed. (136)

Hugh's vision sheds light on the disillusion that the little Hortense Pavlec had to face about the difference between the physical distance from her tenement to Fifth Avenue, which she crossed many times, and the cultural and social gap that separated those places, which the immigrants' child could not bridge. Despite stripping off the label of her ethnic origin, not only does Hortense Walton not move successfully around the urban landscape of New York, but also she cannot make any creative use of that landscape. The “fabulous city” with its “elegant restaurants and department stores,” and “magical” libraries becomes the city of random bars, followed by random apartments and random beds, the city filled with mechanical dancing and superficial smiles “recommended by the Teachers' Guidebook” (51), the city of countless and narrow apartments unadorned by flowerpots of violets. Having rejected her community, Hortense feels alienated in her efforts, and lacks the hope necessary to use the existing order against itself, instead becoming one more instrument of the capitalist system of objectification and commodification or, in Hugh's words, “a Broadway moth fluttering her life away. . . . Wise without wisdom” (136).

In his final contemplation, which closes the novel, Hugh brings Hortense's lack of hope and lost dreams together with the idea that the space of the city can only be what one decides to make of it:

I walked back into the city and the gate in the sky was blocked out of sight by houses, black roofs, and the sound of footsteps, mine and those of others on the sidewalks. The gate in the sky—it would open again someday, I felt. In another autumn, another Christmas, in another time when we would dare follow our dreams and hopes into the universe revealed no matter how momentarily in every man's and woman's heart, to ascend, always to ascend, instead of walking our lives away, with our dreams and hopes dragging behind us like unwanted shadows, mourners following us down the dark sidewalks of cities left to us by our weaker selves. (191)

The implications of the novel's ending are similar to those of the final paragraphs of Petry's novel, and both conclusions follow their protagonists' failure to apply the jazz philosophy to the spaces of their lives. Hugh, though not an ethnically marked character himself, admits that the urban landscape, with its “houses” and “black roofs”—similar to the “grime” of Petry's Harlem—can threaten the “dreams and hopes” of its inhabitants; it can “block out” the “gate” to a vision of a better life. However, the city that obscures dreams is the city *created* as such by its inhabitants, the city “left to us by our weaker selves,” and thus it has the potential to become a different kind of space, if *used* differently.

In her biography of Holiday, Julia Blackburn similarly describes the ultimate Third Space of New York City: “people made the best of what they had, and Harlem in the first decades of the 1900s was full of clubs, ballrooms, speakeasies, hole-in-the-wall joints,

whorehouses, and reefer pads; all sorts of enclosed paradise worlds where you could forget your troubles for a while, with the help of music and dancing, and sex and liquor, and whatever drugs were available at the time" (60). One might say: there are not the noblest company and locales to choose as a refuge from racial inequality and poverty. However, as the characters in *Lady Sings the Blues* and *The Street* demonstrate, the "shady," marginal "interzones"—with their illicit and disorderly cultures—provide both a fitting and a purposeful venue for the ideology of jazz. Jazz energy provides those already dissonant spaces with radical potential which goes unnoticed and unused by the protagonists of *The Street* and *Sweet Money Girl*; it outlines a way of improvising within their boundaries to achieve a possibility of changing the reality and becoming something new. In the words of Ajay Heble: "Landing on the wrong note . . . can be a politically and culturally salient act for oppressed groups seeking alternative models of knowledge production and identity formation" (20). Thus, with an ability to improvise comes a promise that the space of alterity can turn into a space of safety. As Bessie Smith sang:

Say, I wished I had me a heaven of my own  
 Say, I wished I had a heaven of my own  
 I'd give all those poor girls a long old happy home.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This quotation is a part of the lyric to Bessie Smith's song, "Work House Blues," which is quoted in its entirety on pages 352-53 of Angela Davis's book the full citation for which may be found in Works Cited.

**Chapter IV: You Cannot Change Your Grandfathers: Louis Adamic's  
Counternarrative in *Grandsons* and the Repressed Past in *The Great Gatsby***

At least one narrative illustrating the fragmentation and moral bankruptcy of post-World War I American society evokes recognition from anyone even remotely interested in American literature. It tells the story of a seemingly successful man in his early thirties who, as we gradually learn, is haunted by the past and obsessed with one goal that, in the end, leads to his premature death. The story's narrator—a man of roughly the same age as the protagonist, who shares with him the experience of having fought in the First World War—becomes entangled in the life of the main character and engrossed in his anxiety-ridden journey. The narrative is steeped in a modernist atmosphere of fragmentation; it is driven by the restlessness of the neurotic protagonist and the theme of individuals' alienation. Some other elements contributing to the tension include criminal business transactions, a dramatic past involving a name change, and a troubled relation with the familial social status. A woman serves as an idealized object of desire and a metaphor for life aspirations. The story I'm referring to is, of course, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Or is it Louis Adamic's lesser known *Grandsons: A Story of American Lives* (1935)? The parallels in characterization, narrative structure, and themes invite a comparative reading. Further, reading the novels against each other reveals that—beneath the surface similarities—what is at stake in the comparison is contemporary America's repressed social history.

In comparing these two novels, one an acknowledged masterpiece of American belles lettres, the other a largely unknown novel by an immigrant writer regarded by his biographers as a forefather of American multiculturalism, this chapter closes the dissertation by proposing a different understanding of spatiality in the context of ethnic literature. My aim here is to examine

the place of ethnic difference in America's story of itself. I show that, while there is no evidence pointing to Adamic consciously responding to Fitzgerald's novel with *Grandsons*, Adamic's novel can be read as an act of "making room" for ethnic experience within American cultural and historical narrative as preserved in Great American novels such as *Gatsby*. Rather than examining a dynamic between multiple ethnic texts, I approach this task by staging what I see as a literary and historiographic duel between Fitzgerald's canonized vision of America and Adamic's imaging of his adopted country's relation to its ethnic multitude.

The complexities of identity form both novels' foundations and manifest themselves in the main characters' different approaches to what it means to become fulfilled or to be one's best self. When Gatsby first presents himself to the readers and Nick, the narrator, he embodies the idea of put-togetherness; he is "elegant" and he weighs his words, making them sound more elaborate (Fitzgerald 53) Nick's comment about the understanding and reassuring quality of Gatsby's smile (52), and thus Gatsby's ability to instill confidence in others, gives the impression that Gatsby has a clear sense of who he is. Adamic's Peter, on the other hand, appears to be grasping at straws. To L., the narrator, he appears "brusque, abrupt, at once impulsive and hesitant; hectic, and jittery" (Adamic, *Grandsons* 20). He lacks Gatsby's formal eloquence, as "[h]is speech was jumpy, jerky" as well as "slangy" (20). "[H]is laugh," L. records, was "sudden, uncertain" (20). But this simple contrast outlines only the surface of the two novels' grappling with the problem of identity formation. These initial characterizations of Gatsby and Peter inspire curiosity; Fitzgerald's character seems too perfect to be real while Peter's shakiness calls for diagnosis. In both cases, the probing that the readers are invited to undertake leads to revelations of the two books' stance on the identity forging processes that each

novel poses as essential to being an American.

Starting from the end may allow us a revealing glimpse at the striking difference between the sets of values *Gatsby* and *Grandsons* feature as American. Both books end with their main characters dying, and the core of this analysis rests in what each leaves behind. Two aspects of Nick's famous last stroll to Gatsby's house are worthy of closer attention here. The first is the narrator's mention of "an obscene word, scrawled by some boy" on the stairs of Gatsby's mansion (188). Nick erases the writing and only then continues to the beach where he then famously reflects on America's past. Nick imagines "Dutch sailors" arriving at that "fresh, green breast of the new world" (189) in enchantment and wonder. He then ponders Gatsby's illusive dream and finally closes the novel with the image of "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (189). Images of erasure, emptiness, and escape from history remain in the place of Gatsby. His mansion, an integral part of Gatsby's identity, as I reveal later, is now just an empty shell and even Nick calls it a "failure." But even as he does so, he erases the obscenity that defiles it, as if intent on erasing the failure embodied in it as well. Finally, his closing image of boats pushed back "into the past" implies a struggle to avoid confrontation with history, perhaps a desire to erase the past as well. Posthumously, Gatsby's wish for erasure of the past is granted, after all, as nothing but the empty walls of his house remain to remind anyone of his existence.

Nick's erasure of the word left on Gatsby's steps contrasts sharply with the last souvenir that L. has left of Peter: a letter. The narrator receives it after Peter's death and in it finds instructions to "write *Grandsons*" (369), a book about Peter's family's history. In place of erasures, then, Adamic installs preservation. Peter's tool of preserving the past—writing—stands in direct contrasts to Nick's fear of the word's power to unearth what is repressed. Along with the

letter, L. inherits Peter's "papers, including the Haymarket material, my notebook, the chapters I wrote in San Pedro, and so on" (370). Peter's legacy includes no monetary valuables but it encapsulates what makes him him: his heritage. As his last dying act, Peter ensures that no word of his ethnic family's history is left unsaid or erased—and that the boats do, in fact, return to the past. Thus, in contrast to Nick's nostalgia for anonymous Dutch sailors, Peter's book gives a face and a name to America's hopeful immigrant, his grandfather Anton Galé, a Slovenian laborer.

The protagonists of the two novels are both motivated by an obsession with the past. The crucial difference between them is that while Gatsby—in his attempt to win Daisy—invests all his resources and energy in first erasing and then manufacturing his past, Adamic's Peter, in his search for a sense of wholeness or, in his words, "the real thing," pushes the limits of reason and his own psyche to recover and understand his familial ethnic history. The implications of both Gatsby's and Peter's wrestling with the past reach far beyond the man characters' individual tortured minds; their struggles comment on contemporary American society's definitions of Americanness and the role of cultural difference within the American national space. Extending other scholars' arguments about ethnicity in Fitzgerald's novel, I show that his depiction of the Roaring Twenties obscures the historicity of class and ethnic minorities in that "gaudiest spree in history" (Fitzgerald, "Early Success" 87). While exposing the Jazz Age's "perils of prosperity,"<sup>14</sup> *Gatsby* reveals the narrator's—and, indirectly, the author's—infatuation with the era and its social apathy. By contrast, Adamic in his 1935 novel focuses on the struggle to evaluate and withstand the social, cultural, and psychological heritage left by America's flawed values in the preceding decades. Through the use of a second-generation Slovenian-American protagonist—one who is simultaneously submerged in and out of America's system of values—Adamic depicts the

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<sup>14</sup> I borrow this phrase from the title of William E. Leuchtenburg's book, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*, where he discusses America's entry into the era of industrialization and modernization.

difficulty of disentangling the American ethnic past from the historical grand narrative, while at the same time he underscores an urgent need to do so. America's ethnic multitude, as the novel indirectly shows, is an invaluable resource in America's social progress and nation building. In fact, that is America.

*The Great Gatsby's* insistence on preserving an illusion pushes the underlying social history under the narrative surface—to the text's “political unconscious.” Reading Fitzgerald's novel from the intertextual vantage point of Adamic's text enables us to undertake the task outlined by Fredric Jameson: unearthing the political unconscious that the text's surface conceals. *Grandsons* allows me to pose new answers to the problems of American angst and moral bankruptcy featured in Fitzgerald's novel. Those answers lie in the repressed social history of the decades preceding the 1930s. Adamic's novel acts here as a counternarrative—a symbolic space between the past and the present, the old world and the new—where the silenced past can be confronted, thus allowing the readers to build an alternative vision of America's diverse social landscape.

The critique of American ideals outlined by Adamic's counternarrative emerges as the main character takes pains to secure a sense of place for himself. In the latter part of the chapter, I compare Jay Gatsby's and Peter Gale's contrasting approaches to notions of home and belonging through the lens of Martin Heidegger's 1931 essay, “Building Dwelling Thinking.” Revealing *Gatsby's* adherence to the consumerist logic of the 1920s in his construction of “home” through the accumulation of material possessions, I locate Peter's “home” in his collection of historical materials that allow him to reconnect with his family's past. In my reading of ethnic history's recovery in *Grandsons*, I also rely on a critical approach derived from Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's idea of transgenerational trauma, which departs from

psychoanalysis' usual individualistic focus. I see the cultural memory represented by the struggle-filled lives and violent deaths of Peter's relatives as a phantom that returns to haunt him. Thus, through these theoretical approaches, I reveal the the psycho-historical space created by the layers of family past to be an alternative to Gatsby's consumerist approach to identity and his cultural amnesia.

While Fitzgerald's novel needs no introduction, that is not the case with *Grandsons*, as recent decades of readership and literary criticism have left both the novel and its author in obscurity. Louis Adamic was born Alojz Adamic in 1899 as the oldest son of a peasant family in Blato near Grosuplje in what is now Slovenia (then under Austrian rule). Even in primary school he was involved in politics, joining a secret students' political club associated with the Yugoslav Nationalistic Movement. In an ominous foreshadowing of his persecution by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the last decade of his life, he was arrested for participating in a demonstration in November 1913, expelled from school, and denied access to any government educational institution. That same year, choosing his own dream over his parents' ambition to see their oldest son become a priest, he decided to reject admission to the Jesuit school in Ljubljana and, at the age of 14, he emigrated to the United States.

He was naturalized as an American citizen in 1917. For his first two years in America, he worked at manual jobs and in the mail room and then editorial office of a Slovenian daily newspaper, *Narodni Glas* ("The Voice of the Nation") in New York. In 1916 he enlisted in the army; he served two tours of duty and participated in combat during the First World War. A military typist's mistake is the origin of the new spelling of his name. After returning from the service, he worked as a journalist and professional writer, a job that helped prepare him for his career as a writer. The publication of his bestselling 1934 book, *The Native's Return*,

brought him fame. Throughout the thirties and a larger part of the forties, he was a widely read writer. However, his overtly leftist politics and his criticism of the antidemocratic impulses in American politics of the McCarthy era eventually rendered him a target of the the Red Scare in the late 1940s, injuring his reputation and straining him psychologically. On a September night in 1951, firefighters rushed to rescue his burning house in Milford, New Jersey, but it was too late to save Adamic himself; his body was found lying in a bedroom, with a rifle across his lap. There is no definitive answer to the question of whose finger pulled the trigger that sent the bullet through the writer's head. Even though the court ruled his death a suicide, much evidence—including the death threats he received in the last years of his life and that he credited to both the Soviet Union and the American political right—point towards murder.

Notably, Adamic's craft as a fiction writer—often overshadowed by his journalistic and historical writings—found a supporter and admirer in Fitzgerald. Adamic lists the author of *Gatsby* among the literati who wrote recommendations for him (Adamic, *Laughing* 327), and a 1929 letter from Fitzgerald, praising the young Slovenian writer's short story, “Superman” (1928), further testifies to this endorsement (Christian 1-3). Moreover, both writers were a part of the circle of writers and critics surrounding H.L. Mencken.<sup>15</sup>

While Adamic's work has been largely forgotten and is in dire need of recovery, at the time *Grandsons* was published in 1935, he enjoyed the national acclaim that he won a year earlier with *The Native's Return*. Even though *Grandsons* did not attain the same commercial success, it was received by a public eager to see more of Adamic's writing. The narrator of *Grandsons*, although never explicitly revealed as Louis Adamic, is clearly based on Adamic's life and is even referred to as L. He relates the story of three grandsons of a Slovenian

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<sup>15</sup> Henry Louis, “H. L.” Mencken (1880– 1956) was a leading American journalist, magazine editor, and satirist, and a critic of American culture and literature. He co-founded and co-edited *The American Mercury*, a literary magazine where both Fitzgerald and Adamic published.

immigrant from Carniola, Anton Galé, one of whom—Peter Gale—shared a dog-tent with L. in a rest zone in France during the First World War. Nine years after the War, the narrator meets Peter again, in Los Angeles. He finds Peter a nervous, unhappy drifter who uses his job as a newspaper writer to justify his inability to settle in one place for more than a few months. Gradually, Peter reveals to the narrator both his story and the reason behind his disquiet: the emotional void he feels as a result of his complex family history and relations, and because of the larger problem with America's spiritual alienation. The second titular grandson, Peter's brother Andy, a.k.a. George Andrews, is a bootlegger and racketeer who works for Al Capone. While struggling to disentangle himself from Andy's grip, Peter also struggles with the sense of guilt and inferiority bestowed on him by his Slovenian grandfather's work-oriented life and his death in the Haymarket Riot, and by the third grandson, his cousin Jack, an organizer for the International Workers of the World.<sup>16</sup> Peter becomes obsessed with the history surrounding his grandfather's immigration and death, setting himself the goal of writing a book that would somehow capture the totality of his familial history and restore a sense of unity and tangibility to an America that he sees as a “shadow” place. As Peter's story unfolds, the narrator increasingly identifies with Peter's confusion, a confusion caused by the country's materialistic self-destructiveness, and grows aware of the ethnic connection that Peter seeks in him. He becomes a companion and confidante in Peter's search for “the real thing.” Eventually, both Jack and Andy are murdered as a result of their involvement in the labor cause and the racket. As the only grandson left, Peter cannot stand the psychological burden of the family's disintegration and America's alienation. He falls victim to amnesia and psychosis, adopts an alter ego based on his grandfather Anton and cousin Jack, and disappears. He dies soon after L. finally locates him. He has just enough time to ask L. to complete his task of writing the book, and that book is

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<sup>16</sup> The Industrial Workers of the World, also known as IWW or the Wobblies, is an international labor union.

*Grandsons*.

As this summary shows, under the surface similarities between the plots and protagonists, *Grandsons* and *The Great Gatsby* reveal immense differences in the realms of social life they highlight. Adamic's novel reflects what his biographers and scholars describe as his fixation on the problems in America's social and political spheres. For example, a meeting between Adamic and Fitzgerald in North Carolina in 1935, documented by Tony Buttita's memoir of that summer which he spent with Fitzgerald, sprang from circumstances of Adamic's life unmentioned by Buttita yet revealing Adamic's response to what he saw as American social problems. While Buttita's book only mentions Adamic's visit in passing, commenting on Adamic's concern about Fitzgerald's alcohol addiction (Buttita 120), ironically Adamic's trip south was a means of escaping his own obsessive demons that haunted him that summer. Several weeks prior to the meeting between the two writers, Adamic found himself working for ten to fourteen hours a day on *Grandsons* and nearing a nervous breakdown (Shiffman 53). He stopped writing and tried to soothe his mind with traveling.<sup>17</sup> Readers of *Grandsons* may draw a parallel between Adamic's tailspin and the sudden disappearance of the novel's protagonist, Peter, after he loses his mind. What drives Peter insane is his obsession with America's "cultural coreless[ness]" and spiritual vacuity (Adamic, *Grandsons* 246). Writing about what he saw as "shadow America" put Adamic on an edge not entirely different from the one Peter found himself on. This example shows how deeply questions of communal value affected Adamic. While his anxiety may have partially stemmed from his status as an immigrant who never felt truly at home in the United States

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<sup>17</sup> While the trip may have allowed him temporarily to escape the fixation on *Grandsons*' subject, it quickly led to another socially-oriented fascination: Adamic's interest in the Black Mountain College (Shiffman 53). In "Education on a Mountain: The Story of Black Mountain College," he writes of his visit that what he initially intended as an overnight stay turned into a visit lasting two and a half months (516). In the introduction to the essay, he reveals his tendency to become fully engrossed in whatever he found socially relevant: "On the third day I found myself making notes about the place. . . . I knew I had stumbled on what might eventually prove one of the most fascinating –and probably important–stories developing in America to-day" (516).

(Shiffman 65), even that falls into a larger category of socio-political and cultural ills that troubled him until his final days. As Shiffman writes, “he was suffering from the accumulated burdens of his own independent-minded commitment to democracy” (63).

Perhaps more famously, Fitzgerald's book also reflects its author's personal anxieties, most notably alluding to Fitzgerald's sense of his social inadequacy in relation to his beloved Zelda's class and economic status. As biographers have noted, in the early stages of the couple's relationship, Zelda was hesitant to marry an unpublished writer (Brucoli 91), thus making Fitzgerald's zealous desire for success—which characterized him since childhood (37)—burn all the more. Furthermore, Fitzgerald seems to have suffered from an inferiority complex related to his ethno-religious background. According to Matthew Brucoli, Fitzgerald attempted to “rewrite his pedigree” when he claimed: “I'm not Irish on Father's side” (160). His “erratic behavior,” Brucoli writes, “resulted from his social insecurity as an Irish Catholic” (160).

Anxieties and obsessions that accompanied Fitzgerald and Adamic find their close reflections in the portrayals of Jay Gatsby and Peter Gale, and result in their different treatment of the binary between social (or communal) and individual concerns. While Fitzgerald's narrative generates a fiction of the self as its primary ethos, Adamic's novel strives to assemble a history of an ethnic community. Thus, *Grandsons* may be read as an attempt to complicate the American cultural and historical narrative—exemplified in *Gatsby*—of American individualism and American social minorities.

### ***Gatsby's Individualism and Grandsons' Community Building***

My assessment of Fitzgerald's novel as a text consumed with the notion of the ego is hardly a discovery. Scholars have long discussed Jay Gatsby's birth out of “his Platonic conception of himself” (Fitzgerald, *The Great* 104) and his fall to the perils of this self-forging.

What remains to be resolved, however, is the ambiguous question of the novel's relation to American individualism. While a thesis about Fitzgerald's insight into the ailments of his contemporary society proposed by critics is valid, one should also acknowledge the fineness of the line that Fitzgerald walks—a line between criticism of and captivation with American individualism. Just as is the case with his narrator, Nick, it is hard to determine to what extent Fitzgerald is an onlooker and judge, and to what extent he is an active participant in and practitioner of the individualistic philosophy he portrays. Fitzgerald's novel, in other words, is unreliable as a manual to resolving the problem of the American individualist mindset. Given Carey McWilliams's assessment of Adamic's ability to interpret American culture “with exceptional clarity” only available to an outsider to a culture (10), McWilliams would have likely located the reason for Fitzgerald's logic of individualism in the writer's submergence in American culture.

McWilliams' conclusion about Americans' inability to reflect deeply on their country's character—“They are stewed, so to speak, in their own juice” (75), has of course no consequence for any serious evaluation of Fitzgerald's—or Adamic's, for that matter—skills as social commentators. His illustrative metaphor is, however, a useful lens for approaching the two novels' relation to the concepts of individualism and community. Featuring a Yale-educated “Midwesterner” of middle class origin as the narrator and a nouveau riche who has spent himself in pursuit of image and status as the protagonist, Fitzgerald's novel revolves around the world where American individualism is bread and butter to some, and the most desirable goal to others. That leaves little room for challenges to individualist philosophy from the characters. Adamic's narrator, on the other hand, occupies a peculiar place in American society. L. is simultaneously on the inside and the outside of America—close enough to become engaged in its national

drama, yet removed enough to analyze its curiosities. Similarly, *Grandsons*' protagonist—although born and raised in America—ends up on the cusp of cultures. Fascinated and tormented by his family's immigrant history, this second generation Slovenian ends up feeling conflicted about the individualistic mentality that shaped him and the world around him. These choices illustrate Adamic's belief that ethnic diversity helped “discourage Americans from measuring their lives against mythical narratives of unbounded upward mobility” and challenge America's “narrowly individualized and isolating notions of success” (Shiffman 15). Hence, adopting an ethnic perspective for his novelistic confrontation of American individualism made sense for the immigrant author to whom “an individual's energy needed to be connected with . . . a wider community” (Shiffman 19).

The titles of the two novels alone set up strikingly different tones for the narratives' engagement with questions of America's troubled relation with social history and individualism. Much has been written about the ambiguity and irony in Fitzgerald's novel's title. *Gatsby*'s “greatness” is one of the subjects most relentlessly discussed by the novel's readers, ranging from high school students to literary critics. But rather than dwelling on whether or not Fitzgerald's protagonist deserves his modifier, I want to consider the individualistic focus that the title suggests. As Matthew Bruccoli points out, the title as we know it is the product of six-month-long negotiations between the author and his editor, Maxwell Perkins, who rejected Fitzgerald's original proposal to call the novel “Among the Ash Heaps and Millionaires” (Bruccoli, “Celestial”). While this initial idea for the title addresses America's class inequalities, the later proposals Fitzgerald sent to Perkins exude a considerably less socially oriented tone and gravitate towards a concentration on the individual. In fact, even the first working title, as Veronica Makowsky points out, projects a troubling vision of social relations: “the millionaires

are identified as people, millionaires, but the poor are only evoked by their environment, ash heaps” (77). Admittedly, Fitzgerald was never convinced of the effectiveness of the final title (Brucoli, “Celestial”), but it was his discomfort with the title's suggestion that the novel would overtly discuss Gatsby's greatness that made him uneasy—not the title's demiurgic elevation of the individual as the sole focus. As it is, *The Great Gatsby's* title announces the novel as a narrative driven by personality, perhaps as a story of a celebrity. To the novel's readers, the title sets the tone for the novel and the readers' expectations. The novel's lens appears narrow and all eyes focus only on the “great” Gatsby.

Fitzgerald's title presents itself to readers in the context of arguably the most famous book cover in the history of American publication, which visually prepares the audience for the egocentric literary feast. Francis Cugat's design (See the link: [http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-NCCbPSJMBTs/TnYFVzn8KtI/AAAAAAAAEUo/vKW6nh6zA18/s1600/cugat\\_10.jpeg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-NCCbPSJMBTs/TnYFVzn8KtI/AAAAAAAAEUo/vKW6nh6zA18/s1600/cugat_10.jpeg)) actually preceded the final draft of the novel and inspired one of the text's most iconic images: Dr. T. J. Eckleburg's eyes overlooking the “valley of ashes” from the billboard (Brucoli, “Celestial”). Fitzgerald found Cugat's cover captivating and—while struggling to meet encroaching publication deadlines—he pleaded with Perkins to keep the cover for his novel rather than give it away to another author (Brucoli, “Celestial”). I find the special relation Fitzgerald developed with what would become his novel's dust jacket crucial in light of the painting's theme of individualism. The text and the cover enter an intertextual play, mutually reinforcing each other's egocentric orientations.

Despite the fact that the bottom part of *Gatsby's* cover features a city, the urban scene is likely forgettable to most viewers of the painting; it simply cannot compete with the memorable faceless pair of eyes and the mouth which take up the majority of the illustration. The size of the

disembodied staring eyes in proportion to the glare of the city lights makes the lights seem insignificant. That impression is enhanced by the way the bright yellow halo of light seems to swallow up everything that makes up this urban scene, thus becoming the only referent of the city apart from a ferris wheel.<sup>18</sup> Whatever joys and sorrows of city dwellers this glare obscures, they are literally and symbolically not the focus of the illustration—their overseer is. Hovering above the city, with not even the sky as its limit, the seemingly all-encompassing countenance may summon the concept of God in the onlooker. For example, to Wilson, one of the few working class characters of Fitzgerald's novel, the Cugat-inspired image of Dr. Eckleburg in the billboard evokes religious connotations. "[P]ale and enormous" (Fitzgerald, Great 167), Dr. Eckleburg's eyes overlook "the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust" (27) that make up the part of town inhabited by the blue collar characters of *Gatsby*. In his grieving moment of near-madness, Wilson becomes convinced that those are omniscient, judgmental eyes of God who "sees everything" (167).

And yet, in contrast to the madman, we know the image is no god. Rather than paint a picture of the divine, Cugat's cover, so eagerly embraced by Fitzgerald as a perfect fit for his novel, represents what modernism came to hold in much higher esteem than God. I see the larger than life image on the cover as a self-referential representation of the self—one elevated above everything else, unbounded by borders, and disconnected from the mundane existence of places and people around it. It commands attention as, simultaneously, it appears to give none to the world beneath it. Understanding the image as a representation of self-absorbed withdrawal from material concerns also allows us to draw the connection between the image's feminine features and Fitzgerald's novel. It seems that the billboard overlooking George Wilson's modest house

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<sup>18</sup> My discussion of Nick Carraway's comparison between Gatsby's house and a world's fair sheds more light on the inclusion of the ferris wheel on the cover.

shows only one of the two ways that Cugat's painting inspired the writer. After all, one of the most egocentric characters in the book is a woman—Gatsby's love—Daisy. Gatsby's reverence for her, equaled only by his awe of the social status she represents, makes Daisy a deity in the novel's world of values.

This divine self's placement above the material world, with the blue of the sky not only surrounding but actually composing the face-like image, becomes less odd when read in the context of modernism's fascination with an individual ego. The idea of self as God, or self as unreachable and awe-inspiring celestial body makes sense when one considers that Cugat produced the painting during an era which concluded in 1940 with a proposal—by A.P. Herbert, an English poet and satirist—to rename the stars after famous historical figures (Jaffe and Goldman 1). The novel's cover, then, provides a fitting bridge between modernism's love affair with ego, its aggrandizement of certain individuals, and the novel's fixation on the rootless “greatness” of its protagonist promised in the title.

*Grandsons: A Story of American Lives*—the full title of Adamic's novel—opens up the readers' expectations to the possibilities of narrative development that the singular emphasis of *The Great Gatsby's* title glosses over. With his title, Adamic constructs multi-layered foci for the novel, spanning such diverse communal realms as the family and the nation. The title's core, “grandsons,” points to the general relational orientation of the text and also, more specifically, to the trans-generational ties that comprise the narrative's backbone. After all, the word “grandsons” necessarily calls into presence and bestows importance on the seemingly absent grandparents to the titular grandsons. The second part of the title situates the familial relations within a larger national context, all the while emphasizing non-singular experience with the plural “lives.” While not apparent in the title alone, “American” turns out to be a loaded

modifier. In the novel, Americanness is a product of transgenerational and transnational experience. Understanding “American lives” must involve a historical journey back in time, from the grandsons back to the grandfather, as well as a geographical and cultural journey across space, from the New World to the Old Country. Adamic's title, then, opens the narrative with a hint at a broad spectrum of social relations. This relational approach is symptomatic of Adamic's attitudes. In a 1936 essay inspired by the trip south he took on his break from working on *Grandsons*—the same trip during which he met Fitzgerald—he praises Black Mountain College for its communal approach to learning. The college's philosophy rested on the idea that a truly educated person understands “that life is essentially not competitive but calls for co-operation everywhere” (519). Given Adamic's attitude towards an individualist mindset, then, it is unsurprising that no single individual steals the spotlight in *Grandsons*, and that the novel channels the readers' expectations not towards particular characters but rather towards the connections among them.

The first pages of both novels stay consistent with the tone set by each title. In both cases, the first person narrator opens the novel, yet Nick Carraway and L. prepare their audiences for the upcoming stories in strikingly different ways. The individualistic logic of *The Great Gatsby* accompanies the narrative from the start as the narrator, Nick Carraway, opens with a divagation about his own character and background. The detail in which he paints his own image seems almost to compete with the task of outlining the topic of the book which, as Nick assures the readers, is Gatsby (6). The emphasis oscillates between Nick's rather in depth self-presentation, as in “I'm inclined to reserve all judgments” (5), “in college I was unjustly accused of being a politician” (5), and many other “I” statements, and his vague, curiosity-arousing mentions of Gatsby: “If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something

gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life” (6). What could be read as Fitzgerald's maneuver to build up the character of the disputably reliable narrator while clouding the enigmatic protagonist in mystery strikes me as underscoring the novel's investment in glorifying individualism. Nick's attempts to create his self for the readers—in and of itself crucial for the novel's individualistic orientation—actually heighten the anticipation of Gatsby's self. Shoehorned between the multitude of information about Nick and the scarcity of information about Gatsby, the readers' attention narrows to a focus on individual characters. The characters' psyches and personae are the novel's horizon.

The horizon in *Grandsons'* first pages, by contrast, comprises the allies' camp in the rest zone in the midst of First World War-torn France. Before allowing the readers a closer glimpse of his narrative's protagonist or himself, L. establishes the mood for his story by focusing on the setting where he met Peter. He provides descriptions of Peter—“A young sergeant, who, I soon found out, was even younger than he looked” (3)—and of himself: “I was a regular line noncom” (3) But those descriptions are easily overshadowed by the much more extensive delineation of the camp's ambiance and the relations among the soldiers. The idleness into which the outfit is forced combined with the dreadful suspense before being sent back to the front causes the men to lose sight of their own and others' individuality: “Most of us soldiers were not deeply, intimately interested in one another as persons, except now and then, perhaps, for a moment or two. Also, at the time most of us, I suppose, were not particularly interesting as individuals, only in the aggregate, as parts of parts of parts . . . of a colossal, hastily-put-together war machine” (4). Here, L. reveals the military camp's inherent paradox: in the face of the overwhelming political historical event that they participate in, the physical proximity of the soldiers, where they are “thrown in close personal contact; too close for comfort” (3), does not lead to an interest in one

another's idiosyncrasies. Instead of seeing their comrades as individuals, they see themselves as parts of a collective. Although the “hastily-put-together war machine” connotes a negative, basis for that collective, the description of the shared inactivity of the soldiers implies that they have become a community: “We lay on the damp, dirty straw and blankets under the wet leaky canvas, reading damp copies of the soldiers' newspapers. . . . , merely to be reading, to kill time; and talking spasmodically; often just laying still, very still, arms crossed under our heads, looking at the sippy khaki canvas above” (3-4). The pronouns “we” and “our” show the narrator's sense of belonging to this community that he did not choose. Although “uninterested” in one another, the soldiers, after all, share the makeshift shelter and the enforced stillness of their days—and thus share space and experience. Created out of necessity, this community is nevertheless the most pronounced focus of *Grandsons'* first several paragraphs.

To be sure, once L.'s narrative moves beyond the setting of his first meeting with Peter, it focuses on the novel's protagonist. But after he has described Peter's appearance and demeanor, L. proceeds to envelop both his own and Peter's characterizations in the story of the ethnic heritage that connects them. Just as the readers begin to harbor some interest in the “restless, moody young man” (5), a new subchapter cuts that narrative thread short and redirects attention to the “one comparatively lengthy conversation with” Peter (7) that sticks in L.'s memory. This singling out announces the next section as the true focus of the novel, and that turns out to be Peter's fascination with his Slovenian origin, his preoccupation with his grandfather's life and death as an immigrant worker, and his perception of L. as a bridge between Peter and Peter's lost ethnic roots. While Nick's Gatsby remains a floating signifier in the novel's beginning, L. quickly establishes a network of relationships that anchor Peter; his familial history and ethnic roots form the context in which we are asked to read the protagonist.

The two novels' contrasting orientations towards individualism have everything to do with their treatment of the historical narratives underlying the stories of Gatsby and Gale. When, enticed by the educational goals of Black Mountain College to “produce individuals rather than individualists,” Adamic wrote, “the individual must also be aware of his relation to others” (521), he professed the same philosophy he was infusing into the novel he was working on. That novel’s conception of national community as rooted in ethnic difference radically revises the myth of Americanness as based on individualism encapsulated in America’s “Great Novels”—or “grand narratives”—such as *The Great Gatsby*.

### **Gatsby’s Self-Making and Home Building**

The quintessentially American notion of individualism embodied in the figure of Jay Gatsby has traditionally been a part of the American Dream. When R.W.B. Lewis characterizes what he calls the “American Adam” as “an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritance of family and race; an individual standing alone and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources” (5),<sup>19</sup> he stresses a relationship between self and achievement. Moreover, as Lewis indicates, the American self is crafted; it comes to life through the use of one’s “resources” and claims no roots in “history” or “ancestry.” Rootlessness, then, becomes a figure of liberation and opportunity. Gatsby doubtlessly fits this definition, as Lewis notes.

Perhaps paradoxically, that same quality that makes Gatsby’s story typically American—his odyssey “from rags to riches”—also draws a parallel between Fitzgerald’s novel and many ethnic texts of the first half of the twentieth century. As Werner Sollors has noted, many ethnic writers at the time eagerly adapted the typically American narrative of social uplift in their works

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<sup>19</sup> Kathleen Pfeiffer explores the relationship between abandonment of one's racial heritage and the national myth of individualism.

(*Ethnic Modernism* 43), equipping the heirs of Horatio Alger and Benjamin Franklin with a range of accents and complexions.

To be sure, immigrant and black authors' rewritings of the American Dream underscored the obstacles barring ethnic others from easy access to that dream. As discussed in another chapter, Billie Holiday's autobiography is one example; Louis Adamic's autobiographical *Laughing in the Jungle: The Autobiography of an Immigrant in America* (1932), with its highly critical titular metaphor, is another. Yet, sour-flavored or not, "from rags to riches" mythology echoes through many ethnic novels and autobiographies in the decades surrounding the publication of *The Great Gatsby*. Such texts intersect with Jimmy Gatz's explicitly Franklinesque vision of his personal progress and then Jay Gatsby's persistent, albeit ethically questionable, journey to the higher strata of society. I argue that reading *Gatsby* in the light of those intersections allows us to unearth the classic's unwritten subtexts—its political unconscious. The lens of ethnic literature, and Adamic's novel in particular, reveals the exclusionary character of the American success story. It exposes the selective cultural memory underlying the American Dream as a partially unconscious undercurrent of Fitzgerald's novel.

In his compelling study of the quintessentially American literary theme of self-invention, Arnold Weinstein unsurprisingly includes *Gatsby* as a classic feat of identity forging in literature. Weinstein's analysis of American fiction hinges on "the subject in American literature" who "resembles Lévi-Strauss's *bricoleur*, in that he or she is endlessly in pursuit of the bits and pieces with which to make an identity or, better yet, to remake an identity, to fashion, in Hawkes's term, that 'second skin' as a way of living other, elsewhere, and again" (6). Although Weinstein devotes most of his book to mainstream American writers such as Hawthorne, Twain, and Fitzgerald himself, the above statement of the book's focus perfectly summarizes the formation of the self

in European and black migrant narratives. Furthermore, Weinstein's emphasis on the *freedom* to make oneself against “the constraints of social and economic origin” (4) makes one recall Werner Sollors's theory of descent versus consent. Sollors examines African American, immigrant, and mainstream American literature with respect to what he sees as “the central drama in American culture” (*Beyond Ethnicity* 6): the tension between hereditary social markers of identity and free agency in choosing one's identity as a member of the heterogeneous American nation. Yet, despite the similarities between Weinstein's freedom and Sollors's consent, there is a crucial difference with respect to self-forging between Weinstein's reading of *The Great Gatsby* and Sollors's examination of ethnic literature's double binds of consent and descent.

The multitude of texts that Sollors analyzes in *Beyond Ethnicity* is not my focus here. For the purposes of this study, it should suffice to say that his analysis of ethnic narratives—even the most consent-oriented ones—reveals the forces of descent, frequently translated as ancestry or ethnicity, as actively figuring into the act of creating a new self. Sollors concludes, in other words, that ethnic writers have adapted both discourses in their imaginings of the new ethnic identities. The past, then, bears on the present, and history encapsulated in descent participates in the articulation of the changing self. This, as Weinstein's reading of *Gatsby* suggests, could not be less true of identity forging in Fitzgerald's novel. Weinstein makes a key argument that, in its focus on the crafting of the self and the world, *The Great Gatsby* insists more on the power—and the maintaining—of an illusion than on truth (133). Only seemingly following the “nineteenth-century tradition of 'great expectations' and 'lost illusions'” (Weinstein 132), where the characters' initial fascination with “secular achievement” (132) is juxtaposed with the gradual discrediting of such achievement's erroneously aggrandized value, Fitzgerald's novel is invested in the preservation of the facsimile—or on Gatsby's “greatness”—until its bitter end (Weinstein

132-33).

Apart from relying on the disavowal of the past, Gatsby's assemblage of the self is also contingent on another important element of its time. Namely, Fitzgerald's modernist sensibility and mode of characterization give the national myth of individualism a peculiarly consumerist flavor. Freedom from ancestral ties in *The Great Gatsby* leads to what may be called “shopping for identity,” and Jay Gatsby's maneuvers to become his ideal self fit comfortably into the modernist phenomenon of the cult of personality. Like identity based on consent, personality can be divorced from one's heritage. It can also be made-up, assembled from random bits and pieces, and even purchased. I see the novel's troubled relationship with ethnicity and history manifesting itself in Gatsby's commodified model of constructing an identity—and a home.

Suffused with name-dropping and celebrity-generating gossip, *The Great Gatsby* represents well its time's fascination with personal image. Jaffe and Goldman identify the modernist “triumph of a mass idol as a fantasy of discretely defined individualism” (9), and illustrate the birth of celebrity culture during the Jazz Age. But as Warren Susman's analysis shows, that same impulse caused much more than just an elevation of certain individuals to illusory greatness. It affected the cultural function of identity, endowing the concept with the implications of mass commodity and mass consumption.

Susman's contrast between the concepts of “character” and “personality” explains well the change in the understanding of identity in the early twentieth century. Susman calls nineteenth-century culture “a culture of character” (273) and claims that the concept of character “filled two important functions. It proposed a method for both mastery and development of the self. In fact, it argued that its kind of self-control was the way to fullest development of the moral significance of self. But it also provided a method of presenting the self to society, offering a

standard of conduct that assured interrelationship between the 'social' and the 'moral'" (Susman 273). This culture of character, Susman argues, started giving way to "another vision of self" in the first decade of the new century (276). Preceded by a growing sense of profound social changes—an awareness linked to the so-called "American nervousness," some symptoms of which parallel Gatsby's and Peter Gale's neuroses—the need for a new concept of self emerged in increased emphasis on individual needs, idiosyncratic traits, and self-realization. Susman suggests that American culture responded to the disorienting experience of the fast-moving modern world with a notion of personality as an antidote. Although constructed from fragments—and thus a reflection of the modern world in which new technologies, modes of production, and power relations created a need to understand the world anew—personality paradoxically allows the subject to harbor a sense of self-control. Contemporary self-help books prove that dominion over one's self is precisely what the idea of personality offered. A series of such manuals from 1915 includes a volume on personality published under the telling title, "How to Build It," in sharp contrast to the volume on character entitled "How to Strengthen It" (Susman 277). The attraction of the new vision of selfhood rested in its "up for grabs" status.

Personality building not only embodied contemporary America's embracing of the logic of consumerism and mass production but it also spoke volumes about the struggle to preserve a national identity in the face of mass immigration and internal migration, which both challenged Americans' ability to see their culture as uniform and rooted in common—Anglo-Saxon—origins. An intriguing link emerges out of Susman's analysis of contemporary personality manuals between the notions of self-confidence and supremacy. According to Susman, most personality manuals published at the time repeated the following statement as their mantra: "Personality is the quality of being Somebody" (277). But being "somebody," as Susman's study

suggests, also necessarily implied asserting the strength of one's personality in relation to others. Orison Swett Marden's 1921 *Masterful Personality*, for example, offers supremacy as a remedy to counteract the feelings of weakness or inferiority (Susman 279).

Such an antidote was in great demand at the time, not just on a personal but also on a larger, national level. As the nativist paranoia over the disappearance of the white race swept the nation "threatened" by unprecedented "waves" of ethnically and racially diverse peoples, not just those stricken with American nervousness, but the entire "Nordic race" appeared weakened. The titles of Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920) and Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), two of the most influential books of scientific racism of the era, both deploy metaphors indicating the fear of that weakness. The loss by destruction and disappearance implicated by the "rising tide" and the "passing" that these writers foresee in the future of white supremacy suggests that advice offered by Marden's manual to individuals with weak personalities may have spoken a larger story of American culture. The following excerpt from *Masterful Personality*, with its use of "pygmy" to indicate inferiority, exemplifies not only a recipe for a commanding individual ego but also a directive for ridding white-controlled society of its perceived feebleness: "Remember that the world will feel you if you are a real force. If you generate power you will radiate it. Others will know whether you are a little picayune dynamo or a powerful one, whether you can pull a big load or a little one, whether you are a giant or a pygmy, a winner or a loser. You can only radiate the force which you generate" (Marden 5). Building a personality, then, may also mean asserting one's identity in compliance with the logic of nativism, in opposition to the encroaching multiethnicity.

The connection between forging a personality and perpetuating nativist philosophy has multiple implications for reading *The Great Gatsby*. Scholars have examined the role of race in

the novel since the 1960s. Some of the most compelling analyses include the first lengthy reading of the novel as racist by Felipe Smith in 1989, Jeffrey Louis Decker's examination of Jay Gatsby's involvement in ethnic criminality as illustrative of the era's anti-immigrant climate, Meredith Goldsmith's study of racial passing in the novel, and, most notably, Walter Benn Michaels' discussion in his study of nativism in American modernist culture. One thread in these analytical readings points out that the obvious racism professed by Tom Buchanan is accompanied in the novel by the subtler, yet multiple, instances of the narrator's and other characters' hints at their discriminatory views. Another thread argues for Jay Gatsby's implied ethnic difference, suggested in a number of ways, ranging from his original name, Gatz, through his association with the Jewish Wolfsheim, and other characters' vague comments about his ancestry. On the one hand, then, the novel complacently underscores the nativist philosophy as the contemporary status quo, and on the other hand it uncovers the protagonist's escape from his ambiguously ethnic past in an attempt to meet the demands of that status quo. I argue, then, that the novel offers a selective approach to history as a method of forging not only personal but also national identity.

Jay Gatsby's identity in Fitzgerald's novel resembles a magician's prop—it seemingly appears out of nowhere. And yet it is the result of much creative effort on the part of the protagonist—effort that relies on erasure and fabrication of his personal history. Gatsby so effectively deletes his actual past—and leaves such gaping emptiness in its place—that the readers, the narrator, and the participants in his lavish parties eagerly devour every smallest and even most outrageous scrap of information that may help define him. Noble soldier, enigmatic spy, or heartless murderer—any speculation about their mysterious host appears “romantic” to Nick and the party crowd at Gatsby's house (48). The strategy of relying on illusion to build a

striking self-image works wonderfully for Gatsby who, as he later reveals, learned early the value of self-invention in his courtship of Daisy: “What was the use of doing great things if I could have a better time telling her what I was going to do?” (157).

Gatsby does, however, worry that some of the hearsay may divert from his desired self image. In an attempt to control the process of forging his new identity, he imbues an invented story of his life with vocabulary intended to embed him in the past: “I am the son of some wealthy people in the middle-west—all dead now. I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition” (69). By making himself the “son” of fictional parents, the descendant of nonexistent “ancestors,” and a follower of imagined “family tradition,” Gatsby appeals both to his listener’s, Nick’s, sense of logical historical continuity and to Nick's attraction to Gatsby's myth. He also tries to establish his made-up family’s social status by implying parallels between himself and Nick with references to his Midwestern, elite, and presumably WASP ancestry.

If Gatsby is a “hazy product of rumor and anecdote,” as Mary McAleer Balkun calls him (142), Nick is that product’s ardent consumer, despite his awareness of its counterfeit character. Given that Nick tells the story in retrospect, aware of Gatsby’s real past, and given that he admits having doubts about his neighbor’s truthfulness even before he learns the truth (69-70), Nick seems committed to the primacy of Gatsby’s self-invention. Choosing not to dwell on the exposures of Gatsby’s camouflaged past encapsulated in the story of Dan Cody and Gatsby’s name change, and Gatsby’s real father’s appearance after his son’s untimely death, Nick communicates to his audience that he has invested too much in Jay Gatsby’s narrative to let the story of James Gatz interfere with it. When, on the eve of Gatsby’s death, Nick reflects back on the first time he visited his neighbor, he gives away his desire to clutch onto the fantasy by

referring to Gatsby's house as "his ancestral home" (162). While it is tempting to look for sarcasm in this paraphrase of Gatsby's lies, Nick's nostalgic tone—as he mourns his hero's "incorruptible dream" (162)—leaves hardly any room for irony. By now, the imagined ancestors have been given a history so convincing that even the flesh and blood Henry Gatz, who arrives in the next chapter to attend his son's funeral, somehow seems less real than they do.

Gatsby's "ancestral home" brings us back to the previously mentioned "obscene word" that Nick erases in a gesture of protection of his friend's good name. Barbara Will's discussion of the scene points to the original Latin meaning of the word "obscene" as "unrepresentable" (127). She makes a crucial point that "[w]hatever the word scrawled on Gatsby's steps may be, the point is that we cannot know it" (127). As unknowable, "it points to a signifying void" which can be interpreted as a threat to the "acceptable or the normal, . . . including the political and social hierarchies that sustain 'meaning'" (127). Such a reading of the scene implies that the emptiness left by the erased word has swallowed precisely what Gatsby tried to hide all his life. Nick understands that such erasure is necessary to continue the illusion of Gatsby's past as an image of upper-class WASP Americanness.

I want to underscore the location chosen by the scribbler of the "obscene word" Nick refers to. The "white steps," for a brief moment defiled with an implication of a repressed past, form a bridge between Gatsby's assembled identity and that identity's material representation—Gatsby's house and his possessions. Through this place—the mansion—and the objects it holds Gatsby attempts to establish his sense of belonging to the world of social values he has chosen to emulate. His need for affirmation—"My house looks well, doesn't it?" (95)—shows how the house stands for his image. Gatsby's pathetically desperate demand for avowal of his success manifests his insecurities about the murky past that the house masks. Compared by Nick to

“some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy” (9) and the world’s fair (86), the luxuriant mansion that “looks well” allows him to separate himself from the “terrible place” inhabited by George Wilson and other blue collar characters (30). The house is Gatsby’s ultimate achievement in separating himself from his inconvenient history.

Nick’s impressions of his neighbor’s house—as “a factual imitation” of the world’s fair (86)—say a bit about the mansion’s owner’s relation both to this place and to the past. To evoke the image of the world's fair is to connote two qualities that Erik Mattie lists as characteristic of these types of exhibitions: prestige and temporariness (7). Designs created for such occasions arise over the proverbial night, live their short constructed life to impress, and then often disappear once their builders’ mission is complete. A world's fair, as it was understood in the era of industrialization and as Nick would understand it while voicing his comparison, meant a prideful display of achievement, a staging of a show for prestige. Appropriately, then, Nick’s comparison of Gatsby’s house to the world’s fair is inspired by the “blazing” light all over the mansion as Gatsby is “glancing into some of the rooms” (86) in preparation for impressing Daisy.

The experience of reading the paragraphs that describe Gatsby's tour of the house with Daisy resembles turning the pages of a photographic album of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Daisy's admiring eyes and Nick's memories lead the readers “through period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk and vivid with new flowers, through dressing rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths” (96) with a sense of wonder that must have accompanied the visitors to Chicago's White City in 1893. The tour culminates with the famous scene where Gatsby display his opulence through his shirt collection: “He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them one by one before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine

flannel which lost their folds as they fell and covered the table in many-colored disarray. While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher—shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple green and lavender and faint orange with monograms of Indian blue” (97-98). The overview of Gatsby's opulence that Daisy gets on the tour, one that could be compared to a Ferris Wheel ride at the Fair—much different than the ride Algren's Bicek takes over Chicago's grey factories—allows Gatsby to display the status he has worked to keep up. The Ferris Wheel on the cover, then, as the only element of the city able to divert the viewers' attention from the face above, symbolically marks Gatsby's achievement.

The variety show Gatsby puts up in his house can only become a success, of course, through the inclusion of his most desired “possession”: Daisy. As Jordan Baker straightforwardly reveals to Nick earlier in the novel, Gatsby's house is a part of his elaborate plan to elevate himself into the social class that would make him deserving of Daisy's love (83-84). Yet the woman's affection here stands for much more, as Gatsby himself indicates with his choice of figurative language when describing Daisy. The iconic metaphor, “Her voice is full of money” (127), precedes another value-oriented description of Daisy “gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (157). The price tags Gatsby affixes to his beloved indicate that he craves acceptance by the world of “money” and “silver,” a desire to occupy a place “above the hot struggles of the poor,” much like the place inhabited by the indifferent eyes in Cugat's painting.

But admission to such superior position has its price. With the flashy assault on the senses in the industrial era's world's fairs and in Gatsby's mansion, it may be easy to forget that the success of either is contingent on meticulously edited representations of achievement. More specifically, the prestige of the world's fairs goes hand in hand with the effort to showcase what

is appealing while omitting what is off-putting. And it is this selective approach that makes Nick's choice of simile strikingly fitting; Gatsby's "expo" relies on the same condition. To win Daisy or a place in white America's elite, Gatsby must choose the elements of his perfectly constructed identity and house carefully. How precise he is in editing the undesirable connotations becomes most evident when, upon seeing the house, Gatsby's own working-class father readily buys into his son's rootless vision of himself. Filled with "awed pride" (176), Henry Gatz daydreams of his son's unfinished path in the footsteps of James J. Hill, The Empire Builder, though the contemporary hero of the working people was another Hill—the labor activist, Joe Hill.<sup>20</sup> But it is by emulating Hill, the capitalist, Henry Gatz imagines, that his son would have "helped build up the country" (176). The fact that The Empire Builder's "building" occurred at the cost of workers' wages and wellbeing is here of little consequence to Mr. Gatz. Of equally little import to him are the means by which his son "rose up to his position in the East" (176). Just as the glamor of the world's fairs obscured the everyday struggles in the urban slums blocks away from the expositions, and erased the contribution of the laborers whose toil "built up" the whitewashed representations of industrial America, so Gatsby's house erases his working class ethnic roots in order to ensure his admission to Daisy's world—or, to the novel's America.

Even after we have learned about Gatsby's personal history, we are encouraged to pretend that we do not know it at all, and to accompany Nick as he clings to the idea of Gatsby's mystique, even though the veil is down. The hypnotic value of making believe, which Weinstein detects as the narrative's core value, exposes the novel's underlying unvoiced attitude to the historical past. While Fitzgerald *explicitly* features his protagonist's conflicted relation to the

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<sup>20</sup> James Hill (1838 – 1916), was a Canadian-American railroad executive. Because of the economic prowess of his business, Hill became known during his lifetime as The Empire Builder. Joe Hill, on the other hand (1879–1915) was a Swedish American labor activist, a Wobbly, and a songwriter.

past, the narrative unconsciously mimics Gatsby's desire to silence shameful and inconvenient histories. The mesmerism of unreality in *The Great Gatsby* brings to mind the modern tendency to repress a conscious awareness of history discussed by Jameson (34). While Gatsby, the character, tries to blanket his past like someone sweeping dust under the rug—*Gatsby*, the narrative, resembles not so much someone who pretends as someone who lives in denial. Even as the dust bunnies start creeping from under the rug in the form of Gatsby's real story, the text does not let go of the conjured version of the past since, as Weinstein has shown, reality just cannot measure up to the fancy. Thus, at the same time as the narrative foregrounds the individual-centered theme of the decline of the American Dream, it largely bypasses other crucial aspects of the 1920s social milieu: class and ethnicity. Fitzgerald's narrative of the twenties, then, can be seen as a projection of master narratives that govern the writing and reading of literature, according to Jameson. “[S]uch master narratives have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking about them,” and they remain “a persistent dimension of literary and cultural texts precisely because they reflect a fundamental dimension of our collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality” (Jameson 34). Granted, many critics have discussed *Gatsby*'s treatment of ethnicity and class, but the task of chipping off the layers of the master narrative reveals new aspects of the text's unconscious when done in close parallel with an ethnic novel that features an ill society similar to *Gatsby*'s, yet offers a different diagnosis of the illness.

By obscuring the cost of the Roaring Twenties' excess and xenophobia borne by the nation's working class and its ethnic minorities, *The Great Gatsby* remains complacent about the nativist vision of America. Like the fiction of white American civilization, the novel expresses a longing for a past which never was—a simulacrum built on a rejection of what is. Adamic's

counternarrative insists on inverting the logic of passing that Gatsby's rejection of the past adheres to. In place of nostalgia for an alternative past, *Grandsons* makes a case for coming to terms with the actual history, all the while admitting the difficulty of such a task. In response to Gatsby's famous "Can't remake the past? Why of course you can!" (116), Adamic's novel offers a lengthy paraphrase of Horace Kallen's words: "Men . . . cannot change their grandfathers" (Kallen 218).

### **Scrap-booking an Ethnic Identity in *Grandsons***

A likeness of the world's fair exposition, and reminiscent of the artificial "city" built in Chicago in 1893, Gatsby's house directly contradicts any sense of belonging or meaningful relation with a place. Yet, on the most basic level, Peter Gale's inability to make any place his home does not make *Grandsons* a counterexample to Fitzgerald's protagonist's self-uprooting. After all, unlike Gatsby, Peter does not have a home at all and "can't stay anywhere more than four, five months at a time. It's seldom that I stay as long as that" (34). In a letter that rekindles his relation with the narrator, he confesses that he has been moving "all over the map" for years, and he calls his current residence in Los Angeles momentary, predicting that he will leave "before long" (18). "I have the itch, the big itch; can't stay put" (38), Peter confesses, adding: "I don't know why" (38). But the narrator seems to know exactly why. L. diagnoses Peter's "itch" as "the great human-American disease" (31) of restiveness and ascribes this inability to anchor himself to that condition.

It is important that Peter's restless drifting comes from his profound desire to and inability to feel at home in America. His constant mobility stems from the longing for home, where home can be understood as a multifaceted connection not only to a place but also to the relations it houses. In fact, what Peter is looking for is "dwelling" in the meaning explained by

Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1951) opens with a question: "What is it to dwell?" (145). His answer suggests a recovery of what he sees as the lost meaning of "dwelling"—one that underscores humans' relation to their lived space. Heidegger claims that the original meanings of the words "to build" and "to dwell" have been forgotten, leaving people with an impoverished understanding of those terms as signifying mere habitation. In tracing the etymology of the German word for building, "bauen," he reveals its connections to the words for dwelling and even for being (146-147). Moreover, Heidegger writes, "bauen" "also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for" (147). Within the semantic scope of dwelling, then, Heidegger underscores the notion of living, with all its implications of relationships, rather than merely inhabiting or existing.

The earlier discussion of Jay Gatsby's relation to his house and possessions suggests his "dwelling" practice as a direct antonym of Heidegger's holistic definition of dwelling. I borrow Mary McAleer Balkun's reading of Gatsby as a collector and use it here to outline the crucial difference between Gatsby's and Peter Gale's realization of dwelling and a sense of home. Gatsby's dwelling consists in assembling emotionally irrelevant collections: mutually unrelated rooms in the house, the guests at his parties who have no bond with their host, and the objects he owns, such as the shirts, that he did not choose himself. All these components of his lived space have no inherent meaning; prestige and monetary value are the only attachments between the collections and their keeper. As Latimer and Munro's extension of Heidegger's argument indicates, "what people 'keep' affects their experience of dwelling" (Latimer and Munro 317). Thus, given Gatsby's lack of personal connection to anything that composes his space, his dwelling appears emptied out of its original meaning.

Latimer and Munro take their argument even further. Understood as "giving room to

things,” they write, Heideggerian keeping also entails making room for relations (Latimer and Munro 318). To them, “dwelling is not only grounded within locales” (318). It also “takes place” “whenever relations are formed in the here and now” (318). This formulation of dwelling as contingent on establishing relations allows me to turn to Adamic's novel as an ethnic counternarrative that writes a new understanding of “home” into the American cultural consciousness. Although a drifter, Adamic's Peter Gale forms a sense of belonging through his peculiar collection of Haymarket related materials. His collection contrasts sharply Gatsby's impersonal assortment of objects, spaces, and people as it establishes Peter's relation with his family's history and origins.

Peter first mentions the Haymarket tragedy when he and the narrator are stationed in France during the war. At that time he does not “know much about it” but “intend[s] to look it up” after the war (12). He reveals to L. that his family's history sparks his interest in the event; his grandfather, “a Hunky laborer,” attended the 1886 Haymarket rally and got killed in the riot (12). When the two men reunite nine years later, L. quickly realizes that that particular part of American history, with its connection to Peter's familial past, has preoccupied Peter, who now “want[s] to write something about that” (53). Having recognized a sense of kinship with L. based on their common ethnic background, Peter shares with him his most valuable possession: “Peter went to the clothes-closet, pulled a big leather bag from behind the case of whisky, and unstrapped and opened it. It was filled with books and pamphlets and rolls of paper. The rolls of paper were photostatic reproductions of newspapers” (54). Peter explains that it is “[a]ll about the Haymarket bomb” (54).

The protective hiding place where Peter keeps the collection as well as his anxious demeanor while displaying the bag to L. testify to the collection's importance to him. The

narrator notices that Peter trembles and that “[h]is whole body was rigid” (54). Later, Peter discloses to L. that the beginning of his obsessive interest in Haymarket was a turning point in his life. Years in hospital after the war as a result of being gassed on the front left him resigned and depressed. Feeling disconnected from everything and everyone, he even considered suicide (112). A visit to a San Francisco bookstore, where he stumbled upon Frank Harris's *The Bomb*, gave him a new sense of purpose. Harris's book was the first of countless accounts of the Haymarket events that Peter discovered under the auspices of an old German immigrant, Heppner, who owned the store. “Getting all those books, pamphlets and photostats and reading about the Haymarket affair and listening to the old man telling me about it sort o' linked me up again, more than anything else, with things, with my life, my pre-war existence” (115), Peter tells the narrator. The information gathered in the leather bag gave Peter's life a new direction.

The newly acquired “sense of continuity” (115) that Peter ascribes to his Haymarket research brings me back to Heidegger's notion of dwelling and the connections between keeping things and forming relationships discussed by Latimer and Munro. Peter's collection connects him—via a slice of violent American labor history—with the roots of his Slovenian grandfather's immigrant journey. The “continuity” he feels comes from his increased ability to anchor his own experience in the past, in recovering the relation between himself and his ancestry. From the scraps in his Haymarket bag emerges a narrative of Peter's heritage. Thus, through the bits of information about the circumstances of his grandfather's death, Peter pieces together his own sense of identity.

Scholars in various disciplines have discussed the role of memory and narrative as key components of identity forging and affirmation.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on those studies, and especially on

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<sup>21</sup> Various versions of that argument have been developed by Paul John Eakin in autobiographical studies, Yi-Fu Tuan in geography, Oliver Sacks in psychology, and David Lowenthal in cultural studies.

Paul John Eakin's work, Denis Walker suggests a special division of stories assuring a sense of continuity of the self: narratives recollecting place. Walker points out that “[o]ur narratives of the self, both in casual conversation and in written autobiography, are dominated by narratives of place.” Agreeing with Walker's emphasis on the primacy of spatiality in identity-centered narratives, I want to stress the special role that focus on place plays in stories of migrant peoples' heritage. Both displacement and the task of making room for oneself in the spaces of one's destination have implications for the sense of individual and collective identity.

To be sure, *Grandsons*, like *Gatsby*, features an extreme case of discontinuity of identity. Walker borrows Marcel Proust's expression to describe the condition the narrator of *Swann's Way* experiences—“the abyss of not-being”—and in fact this phrase could apply to Peter who, in a scene preceding his complete amnesia and departure, confesses to L. that sometimes he feels as if he disappeared (295). But the irony of Peter's memory loss is that it is caused precisely by his obsession to recover and remember everything. Adamic uses this irony—the cause and effect collapsing into one entity—to underscore the difficulty of processing the repressed histories. While on the surface, the contents of Peter's precious leather bag do not seem all that different from the news clippings about Daisy that Jay Gatsby obsessively collects over the years and the two protagonists experience a break from the past, their motives could not be more disparate. As Adamic's narrative restores Peter's memory towards the end of the book, the character gets a chance to follow up on his motives: ensure the recording of his family's past and thus saving it from both individual and cultural amnesia.

### ***Grandsons and Frank Harris' The Bomb***

It is not coincidental, I argue, that the text responsible for igniting Peter's passion about his family's history is Frank Harris' *The Bomb*. Harris' fictional memoir of the Haymarket bomb

thrower, despite its relatively brief mention in Adamic's novel, catalyzes one of *Grandsons'* important themes: that of unearthing the working class, ethnic history of America—here encapsulated in one immigrant family's experience. *The Bomb* first appears in the novel when the narrator mentions reading it himself a few years after the war. Foreshadowing the connection between the Haymarket history and Peter, L. says *The Bomb* reminded him of his former fellow soldier, Gale, whom he had “practically forgot[ten]” by then (16). As we later find out, Peter himself read Harris' book around the same time as L. did. He read it in one night “and after finishing it [he] didn't sleep a wink till just before morning” (61). Reminiscing about his first encounter with Harris' novel at the time of his hospitalization, Peter says: “No book ever excited me so much at the time that I read it. In fact, it influenced my fever chart, and for a month after that I wasn't allowed to leave the hospital” (62). Impacting much more than Peter's medical history, *The Bomb* catalyzes Peter's preoccupation with the past and his plan to narrate his family's experience.

While I see Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* as the embodiment of the grand American narrative *Grandsons* challenges, I argue that Harris' *The Bomb* provides Peter—and L., who eventually becomes the real author of Peter's book—with inspirational zeal that they feel is missing from contemporary American life. Peter's excited initial reaction to Harris' book, which later leads to his life's new purpose, points to the illumination that *The Bomb* brings about for him. Its impassioned narrator and larger-than-life, revolutionary hero embody the fervor and commitment that Peter wants for himself, both as an American and as a writer of ethnic history.

Published in 1909, *The Bomb: The Classic Novel of Anarchist Violence* holds an anomalous status within the literary repertoire of Frank Harris—known mostly for his biographical work and especially for his 1922 scandalous, sexually explicit multi-volume

memoir that gained him the scorn and contempt of numerous literati, including Fitzgerald. *The Bomb's* first-person narrator claims responsibility for the 1886 bomb throwing in Chicago's Haymarket Square, a tragedy that killed and wounded many, and that led to a sentencing of five and execution of four wrongfully accused, mostly immigrant radicals. The thrower of the bomb remains unknown, but Harris' narrative takes the liberty of ascribing the role to Rudolph Schnaubelt, a German immigrant who, while initially indicted, was never actually brought to trial. Here, having escaped to Germany, Schnaubelt tells the story of not just his own involvement in the affair but also of another man who became a source of fascination to him: Louis Lingg, a revolutionary with a magnetic personality whose bold speech during the trial and suicide before the scheduled execution contributed to the Haymarket case's infamy. In its pairing of a fascinated narrator and captivating (anti)hero, Harris' text resembles Nick's chronicle of Gatsby's story and L.'s narration of Peter Gale's life. But while there are other parallels between *The Bomb* and *Gatsby*—the protagonists' romantic mysticism being the most prominent—I am mostly interested in the subtle yet numerous ways that Harris' text seeps into the pages of Adamic's *Grandsons*.

Initially thrilled by *The Bomb*, in his task of recovering his family's and America's history, Peter strives to emulate Harris' narrator's goals as a writer and Lingg's passion as a fighter for the cause of the marginalized. In fact, both Peter and L. reveal their enmeshment with the narrative of *The Bomb*. That can be explained by the fact that Adamic's narrator, L., is the one who presents to the readers the story that was originally supposed to be written by Peter and was later commissioned to L. *Grandsons*, in other words, is the outcome of L.'s completion of Peter's unrealized narrative mission. The sense of a storytelling mission that propels both Peter and L. echoes Harris' novel in *Grandsons*. Already in the third paragraph the narrator of *The Bomb*

diverts readers from his self-introduction to explain the real purpose of his narrative. Similarly to L.'s opening of *Grandsons*, Schnaubelt indicates that his focus is not his own story, despite what the first person narration may suggest. Instead, he writes, “there is one thing I must do before I go out, one thing I have promised to do. I must tell the story of the man who spread terror through America, the greatest man that ever lived, I think; a born rebel, murderer and martyr” (25). In *Grandsons*, Peter and L. both take on Schnaubelt's role of a witness burdened with the duty of telling.

Towards the end of Adamic's novel, Peter—having suffered from an amnesiac loss of identity—regains a sense of his own self just to remember that Peter Gale is a man haunted by an unfulfilled task. He writes in a letter to L.: “Believe it or not, I'm going to write *Grandsons*. I must write it” (361). But Peter's mental recovery is not matched by his physical health; a cold and overexertion cause his long-damaged lungs to fail, leaving him only days to live and no time to finish his book. He passes his mission down to L. in a letter written on his deathbed: “I wish that eventually you write *Grandsons*. You know the story. Handle it in your own way” (369). Thus, L. inherits the mission of documenting Peter's and his family's story. The directives Peter leaves for him resemble the ones that the imprisoned Louis Lingg sends to Schnaubelt in a coded letter written by Ida, the woman Lingg loves. Referring to Lingg's captivity on death row as sickness, Ida writes to Schnaubelt that Louis “hopes you will write the story of his illness and your exile. 'Tell him,' he says again and again, 'he was born a writer, and one good book is worth a thousand deeds. I rely on aim [sic] to write and do nothing else” (186). Therefore, the trust Peter Gale puts in L. as an apt bearer of his narrative mimics Lingg's reliance on the narrator of *The Bomb*.

Louis Lingg's passion about preserving the Haymarket tragedy in writing reflects his

devotion to the labor cause earlier in the narrative. Given Peter's and L.'s disillusionment with contemporary America's apathy and Americans' disconnectedness from one another and society at large, Lingg's fervor can be seen as a paragon of what they both wish to be. The Lingg of Harris' novel is a larger than life character who, upon their first encounter, leaves the narrator, Schnaubelt, with a sensation of having received “an electric shock” (65). After that first meeting, Lingg's magnetism, the source of which is his commitment to the workers' cause, has already left a lasting impression on Schnaubelt: “I could not help looking after him as he went. . . . I was never so impressed in my life by anyone” (65-66). The near-romantic passion Lingg inspires in the narrator only rises with time, and eventually does for Schnaubelt what reading *The Bomb* does for Peter Gale—it gives him a new purpose: “He [Lingg] brought me into a new atmosphere, a new life” (75).

In Schnaubelt's admiring eyes, Lingg is a romantic hero—not afraid to make himself an outcast in defense of a risky cause. He is above passivity and fear of consequences; he is all passion, all action, as Schnaubelt's account of Lingg's speech on the day of the riot illustrates: “The writer . . . tries to find a characteristic word; the painter some scene that will enable him to express himself. I always wanted a characteristic deed” (141). Schnaubelt further narrates: “‘I have had enough,’ he [Lingg] said, speaking with indescribable intensity, ‘of the whole damned hypocritical society, where the greedy thieves are exalted, and those that steal and plunder and murder, judge and punish their betters’” (141). Lingg's resolve and “intensity” that appeal so much to Schnaubelt are precisely the qualities that Adamic's narrator and protagonist see as lacking in America. Given that L. spends much of his narrative dwelling on what he calls America's “shadowiness,” and that Peter is one of that problem's victims, Lingg may be read here as an intertextual antidote to America's “intolerable emptiness and contraction of the soul”

(Adamic, *Grandsons* 83).

Throughout *Grandsons*, L.—alongside telling the story of Peter Gale and his family—works on developing his theory of American society that he bases on the notion that most Americans are “[s]hadows of what human life could be. Shadows of one another. They were not connected with any basic reality” (30). While “intense materialism,” “frantic go-gettism” (37) and “external jitteriness” (79) are manifestations of that condition, what underlies it, according to L. is a combination of spiritual apathy and ancestral rootlessness. In explaining his “shadow idea” to Peter, L. tells him “[t]hat we lived in a spiritually and culturally coreless, hollow world” and, most importantly, “that most Americans had no consciousness of any vital background, no sense of continuity in their lives, no roots, and were not geared to, or affiliated with, anything bigger or more important than their individual selves” (246). *The Bomb's* Louis Lingg too believes that, in America, “we are suffering from too much individualism” and that the country operates according to “the grab-as-grab-can principle of individual greed” at the expense of the “social organism” (82).

L. blames the tentacles of shadow America for Peter's problems. In witnessing Peter's struggle to recover his heritage, and his resulting mental breakdown, L. concludes that “[h]ysterical Peter was the shadow-person in anguish who couldn't come through as a poet and human being” in “his inadequacy to put the Haymarket tragedy into verse, or perhaps into any other literary form” (82). But L. himself is not safe from the grip of shadow America. While, as a foreigner, he separates himself from the problem by always speaking of “Americans” and “them,” he also—when describing the shadow “disease”—admits: “I had it, too” (30). To both Peter and L., then, Louis Lingg's romantic devotion and ardor appear as remedies and usable models.

In *The Bomb*, Schnaubelt meets Lingg soon after his arrival in the United States, at a point in his life when he may need a remedy as well. As a freshly arrived immigrant, he finds himself falling for the myth of America's liberty and equality: "Already in my thoughts I had begun to call myself an American, so strongly did the great land with its careless freedom and rude equality attract me" (51). Moreover, the attraction he feels persists despite the discomfiting qualities of "carelessness" and "rudeness" that he sees America as emanating. Similarly, *Grandsons'* L., also an immigrant, finds himself "fascinated by the country, starting to love it, identifying myself with it, calling myself an American" (29). He later connects that infatuation with the new culture with his "contraction" of shadow America's disease. Entangled in the American problem, he allows it to separate him from his roots: "I've become so interested in the United States, that I hardly remember my old country, except as a sort o'dream—long ago" (59). "I was caught in this America," L. confesses, implying the paralyzing effect of shadowiness. But *Grandsons'* narrator also believes that it is within his power to "fight" America's "disease" (30) and writing about it is his weapon: "I wanted to get into America, at America as a writer" (31). Few tasks could give him a better opportunity to put that plan to action than writing *Grandsons'*. Thus, Peter's last wish—itsself an echo of the legacy Lingg passed onto Schnaubelt—allows L. to commit his own "characteristic deed" in writing the novel.

While L.'s brush with shadow America causes him no major identity problem, Peter is less lucky. In his struggles to juggle his family's history and present, his own disconnectedness from his surrounding, and the apathy of the surrounding society, Harris' book appears as an illumination to Peter's exhausted mind. *The Bomb* not only sends him on a journey to recover his family's story but also seems to provide advice on how to do it. The charismatic Louis Lingg represents everything that Peter wishes to be. When—having temporarily lost his own identity—

Peter takes on the alter-ego of Jack, the worker, he is not only emulating the identities of his dead grandfather and cousin but also channeling the revolutionary presence of Louis Lingg. Like Lingg, who “was dressed like a workman, but neatly” when Schnaubelt first meets him (Harris 65), Peter “was dressed like a workingman in a pair of brand-new blue denim trousers and a cheap blue shirt without a tie” (292) when L. sees him for the first time after his transformation. In a way, Lingg, Peter's grandfather, and his cousin Jack are all one: they merge into a hero, an impassioned “doer” antithetical to the passive shadow American—history incarnate. Peter yearns to embody it all.

Before Peter takes on his worker persona, he spends most of his waking hours building it up by obsessively thinking about his grandfather and his working class cousin, Jack. In his grandson's retelling of history, Anton Galé is the like of Joe Hill and has the mythical salience of John Henry: “He lives in my mind with a strong unearthly life, not in the light of everyday existence but surrounded by and suffused in a curious glow. I suppose this is because I've invested him with significance and am inclined perhaps to romanticize about him a little; but he really is significant and romantic, don't you think so?” (97-98). In fact, his grandfather is to Peter a force as inspirational as Louis Lingg is to Schnaubelt. Peter's praise of his ancestor—“he impresses one if one just thinks about him a little” (98)—is reminiscent of Schnaubelt's claim that “[e]verything Lingg said impressed” him (75). The same analogy applies to Peter's idealization of his cousin Jack, especially given that—having never met his grandfather—Peter claims that “the Anton Galé in my mind looks very much like Jack” (177). In giving the account of Jack's funeral, Peter enters his deceased cousin into his familial pantheon of legendary working class heroes: “There was Jack—his bones in the coffin—but, somehow, I felt he wasn't dead. He lived in these people [workers]. Through them he had become something very real, and

they through him. His death, the brutality of his death, had made their struggle more poignant” (274). Peter's martyrological approach to the meaning of Jack's death recalls Schnaubelt's implicit invocation of Jesus Christ's death sentence in his description of the Haymarket trial. Referring to the judge presiding over the case, Schnaubelt writes: “Pontius Pilate was an infinitely fairer judge than Judge Gary” (179). Like Christ, then, Lingg and Jack are both wronged and bear the ultimate sacrifice for their commitment to the oppressed.

But Lingg is not only a fighter, a martyr, and a legend. He is also a speaker. *The Bomb*, a life-changing text in Peter's journey, highlights many qualities that would make Lingg an inspirational paragon in the eyes of someone like Peter, and Lingg's oratorical prowess is certainly not the least of them. Harris was not alone in ascribing rhetorical skills to Louis Lingg. The image that emerges from Lingg's actual court speech, preserved in the *The Haymarket Scrapbook* (1986)—an anthology titled and assembled in a manner closely resembling Peter's leather bag of Haymarket materials—confirms Lingg's rhetorical skills. The language in Lingg's address to his audience at the trial combines lyricism and no-nonsense directness to achieve a thrilling effect. Lingg's precision is enviable to anyone concerned with verbal expression. And who could be more concerned with verbal expression than Peter Gale?

Both the plot and the narrative structure of *Grandsons* reveal the challenges Peter faces in his aspiration to total it all in his writing. In his conversations with L., he often shows distrust in his own ability to put into words the haunting story he carries inside him. His grandfather's and cousin's admirable lives and tragic deaths, as well as the stifling, blasé climate of contemporary America call on him to produce a revisionist narrative of his immigrant family and of America's ethnic history, but the sense of pressure they also generate overwhelms Peter. In the section of *Grandsons* titled “From Peter's Notebook,” which simulates the notes Peter took in preparation

for writing his book and that L. later used, Peter thus reflects on his own anxiety about his task: “I must write it—and write it calmly—objectively. . . . But it's hard to be calm, when you have current, crazy, jazzy America roaring in your veins; when current America presses on you from all sides, beats on all your senses, dins in your brain; . . . when you are so much a part of this entire nightmare” (328). Peter's words reveal that the “roaring” of the Jazz Age makes focus on repressed history nearly impossible.

Peter's legacy to L.—including a complex family history, an even more difficult present, and Peter's tremendous struggle with his sense of identity—results in a narrative whose circularity and multiplicity of layers testify to the challenge of communicating a complex counternarrative in the midst of already accepted stories. *Grandsons* is a long and chronologically non-linear novel. Its length reflects Peter's obsession with filling the gaps in the past with the most complete and accurate account of events and emotions that composed that past. Both he and L. return to the same subjects over and over again; it seems that they are intent on not leaving a single aspect of shadow America and Haymarket unexplored, unsaid. The first-person narration is shared between the primary narrator, L., and Peter who takes over entire chapters to tell his own as well as his family's story, thus adding narration within narration to the already convoluted structure. As Peter—and L.—find out, there is no linear, transparent manner to verbalize the unexpected and dramatic turns in the lives of ethnic Americans and the blurry lines of American individual as well as group identities.

Peter's narrative, eventually finished by L., springs from his fascination with the past. The fact that Frank Harris's *The Bomb* begins his obsessive search of the past has multiple implications for Peter's and L.'s reflections on American reality and on the American approach to history, and for the text of *Grandsons*. Finally, *The Bomb*'s focus on the events of 1886, and

Peter's treatment of those events as the key to understanding his ethnic ancestry and America, shed new light on the notion of Americanness. 1886, the year of the Haymarket riot, is also the year of the Statue of Liberty's erection (Roediger 127), thus pointing to America's conflicted relation to the increasingly more visible numbers of its ethnic "others." The Statue's symbolism of freedom and the seeming protectiveness and welcome it is often said to emulate may have appeared like a bitter illusion to the observers of the Haymarket riot and executions. *The Bomb*, as *Grandsons'* intertext, stresses the necessity of generating narratives of ethnic presence in the United States that challenge both the myth of America as a haven for multiculturalism and the thesis of an ethnic multitude as a threat.

### **Haunting Past and Recovered Narrative**

The stories of his Slovenian roots, as well as his grandfather's labor and death, literally drive Peter insane. One can think of them as becoming locked within his body and mind, given his obsessive thinking and talking on the subject and his later transformation into a laborer, Jack McLeish. This powerful, haunting presence of his family's past in his life invites the reading of Peter's road to insanity through the lens of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's concept of transgenerational trauma. Their notion of the "phantom" applies to the ancestors whose experienced injustice or tragic death causes them to return to haunt their living relatives. This model seems particularly useful for discussing Peter's relation to his dead relatives is that Abraham and Torok's theory removes the usual psychoanalytic focus on the individual psyche and opens the sphere of psychical causes and effects to collective experiences. "The concept of the phantom brings the idea and importance of family history, in particular the secret histories of families, to the forefront of psychoanalysis" in its representation of "the interpersonal and transgenerational consequences of silence" (Rand 168). Thus, the phantom is a connective tissue

between Peter and the cultural history represented by his grandpa and cousin Jack.

In her analysis of ghostly presence in contemporary American ethnic literature, Kathleen Brogan argues that not all understandings of haunting in literature are equally helpful in recovering the denied past. Limiting her analysis to texts that feature ghosts as actual characters, she argues that “[i]n investigating history through supernatural means, the story of cultural haunting needs . . . to be distinguished from historical novels that 'bring the dead to life' without reference to any literal interaction between the living and the dead . . . or from fiction in which characters can be said to be 'haunted' by the past in purely metaphorical terms” (6). Given Adamic's engagement with the Haymarket history and his own biography in the novel, as well as the fact that no ghosts actually appear in the text, Brogan would probably consider *Grandsons* unfit as a story of cultural haunting. I do not. I see Peter's descent into depression and, eventually, psychosis—both centered around the figures of deceased relatives—as fulfilling the same narrative function that Brogan ascribes to the literalness of ghosts, emphasizing “the difficulty of gaining access to a lost or denied past, as well as the degree to which any such historical reconstruction is essentially an imaginative act” (Brogan 6). But while I do not follow the limits that frame Brogan's study, I want to illustrate that Adamic depicts Peter's struggle with the memory of his dead relatives as if Peter were haunted or even possessed. In other words, I will show that it is not the question of whether or not Peter is visited by a real ghost but rather the way he experiences his relationship with the dead family members that matters in this narrative of transgenerational trauma. We can see this significance of the ghostly presence by comparing the haunting in *Grandsons* with the return of the dead in Adamic's 1937 story whose title unabashedly announces its ghostly focus: “The Millvale Apparition” (1938).

The story chronicles a slice of time in Adamic's friendship with Maxo Vanka, a Croatian

painter who immigrated to the United States in the thirties and who also became the inspiration for the protagonist of Adamic's 1936 novel, *The Cradle of Life*. “The Millvale Apparition” describes the circumstances of Vanka painting his most famous work (at least in the American context), the murals in the Croatian Catholic Church of St. Nicholas in Pittsburgh's industrial suburb, Millvale, which he was commissioned to paint through Adamic's intervention. This short text—an excerpt from Adamic's book, *My America, 1928-1938* (1938)—was later published separately in *Harper's Magazine*. Because of its focus on the supernatural, it has since been reprinted and mentioned in many sources on regional ghost stories and haunted places, turning Vanka, his murals, and their location into a legend whose popularity does not wane even seven decades later.

Like most (if not all—according to Carey McWilliams) of Adamic's works, “The Millvale Apparition” is autobiographical. Writing in the first person, as in *Grandsons*, Adamic relates the events of 1937, when he visited Vanka in Millvale to view the new frescoes and how he came to hear the painter's story of “the extraordinary, really fantastic circumstances under which Maxo had worked” (477). Much of the text features narration within narration, again resembling the narrative structure of *Grandsons* where the narrator proper listens to Peter's story, with Vanka gradually revealing to Adamic that his work on the murals was accompanied by a ghost. The description of Vanka's demeanor in the moments just before he begins the account of the supernatural events parallels Peter's behavior and mental state in *Grandsons*' key scenes. That—and Adamic's closing of the Pennsylvanian ghost story—reveal crucial similarities in the haunting in the two texts.

In Adamic's rendition of their meeting after Vanka's completion of the frescoes, the painter's manner mixes excitement and neurosis. “He seemed half hysterical” (478), Adamic

writes. Then, in a sentence including multiple subordinate clauses that mimic Vanka's train of thoughts, he produces a lengthy list of the topics that the artist talks about. "He was repeating himself, just talking, talking, till it became a strain to be with him" (478). Both Vanka's behavior and Adamic's discomfort with it correspond to the narrator's description and reaction to Peter's demeanor in *Grandsons*. The first time Peter shows L. his Haymarket materials, the narrator notices Peter is trembling (54). Narrating the events that led to his grandfather's violent death, as well as talking about his plans to put the story into writing, excite and unnerve him. The narrator watches him "moving uneasily in his chair" (72), then "he rose abruptly, knelt down and, his long bony hands trembling violently, began to put the books, pamphlets, and photostats back in the big leather bag" (72-73). Much like Adamic's reaction to Vanka's talking, L. "felt very uncomfortable" (73). Peter's nervousness continues to escalate: "He paced up and down his room, pale and rigid. In an effort to keep himself from trembling, he clenched his hands before him" (73). Finally, it leads to a breakdown, when he starts "sobbing hysterically" (75).

Unable to explain to the narrator the source or the extent of his anxiety, and the reasons behind his inability to write his family's history, Peter says: "I'm too goddamn disorganized—unorganized—too goddamn rattle-brained—too full of all sorts of impulses and . . . and too close to things . . . all kinds of things you know nothing about" (73). This vague confession resembles Vanka's rambling talk and echoes Adamic's interpretation of the painter's near hysteria: "it occurred to me that he . . . wanted to tell me something and was trying just as desperately not to tell me" (Adamic, "Millvale" 478). While in "The Millvale Apparition," the "something" underlying Vanka's strange behavior turns out to be an encounter with a ghost, for Peter in *Grandsons*, "the things [the narrator] know[s] nothing about" are networks of nuanced family relations spanning three different generations, the living and the dead. The two figures that

continue to haunt him are his dead Slovenian grandfather, Anton, and Anton's contemporary analog, Peter's working class cousin, Jack. The haunting by familial history culminates in the literal taking over of Peter's mind and body by a schizophrenic persona, Jack McLeish, a character of his unwritten book based on his cousin and on his grandfather. He tells L., as he begins to lose his identity to the ghosts of Jack and Anton, "Every once in a while the last few days I get a funny notion that I don't exist" (294). Hence, Peter's entire being is consumed by his obsession—possessed by the dead relatives.

But even in "The Millvale Apparition," Adamic questions the relevance of the ghost at the end, suggesting that the story's real focus lies in the impact the encounter—real or imagined—has on Vanka. When the painter tells him about the ghost, Adamic's skepticism at first leads him to rationalize the story by joking about the painter manufacturing the tale and by ascribing the ghostly presence to the painter's unconscious's producing the phantom for inspiration. But by the end of "The Millvale Apparition," Adamic, while reserved, seems respectful of his friend's conviction: "I left Pittsburgh not as definite a skeptic or scoffer as I had come there, but certainly an agnostic. There seems to be '*something*' in that church, but what it is, I don't know. I can say this: if there was '*something*' to see and experience, Maxo Vanka, if anyone, would see and experience it" (486). This conclusion suggests that the story of the ghost is to Adamic not so much an account of objective reality as a testimony of Vanka's special quality and his relation to his work and its locale. Whether there was a ghost or not turns out to be a lesser question; the real legacy of the tale lies in that Vanka senses a presence in whose company he produces "work single-handedly and superbly accomplished in two months that, no doubt, would have taken most artists a year, except that very few could have achieved such artistic excellence even in that time" (Adamic, "Millvale" 477). Thus, the reality of the ghost matters only to the extent that it

mattered to Vanka.

The reality of Peter's—or Vanka's, for that matter—haunting is secondary to the forces that awaken in them as a result of their trauma. Vanka's spiritual encounter leads him to produce an inspired work of art that becomes the pride of the entire community. Peter—after an initial breakdown of identity as a result of the phantoms' presence—realizes that he has wrongs to right. Abraham and Torok write that “[r]educing the 'phantom' entails reducing the sin” associated with the ancestor's unhappy life or death (189). Thus, Peter undertakes his task of completing the book that will do justice to his grandfathers' and cousin's lives of labor and sacrifice. The common thread between Vanka and Peter, then, is not that the presence of “another” haunts them. It is rather the fact that through traumatic yet inspirational explorations of their consciousness they both produce cultural work that documents and celebrates their heritage.

### **Towards Cultural Pluralism**

Like Vanka and like Peter, Adamic felt the pressure and need to externalize his social and political concerns. His dear friend and fellow writer, Carey McWilliams, wrote in Adamic's obituary that “a story would dominate his imagination like a nightmare, demanding to be told” (McWilliams, “Louis Adamic, American” 230). It seems that the pioneering work of promoting cultural pluralism that scholars ascribe to him was a matter of urgency to this writer “haunted” by the awareness of inequalities and “other” Americans' barred access to the nation they had built. Although *Grandsons* is a novel about one Slovenian family, I close the dissertation with its analysis because it stands for much more than its an ethnically specific plot. Its broad implication is the possibility of making room for other Americans and acknowledging their contributions. It is possible to think of Peter's Slovenian family's past as one of the many recoverable histories.

Unlike Fitzgerald's book, *Grandsons*' first edition did not have a jacket destined for fame.

But it deserved one—as a novel that attempts to discard the received notions of American culture and history and write its own interpretation of that narrative. A fitting cover for Adamic's book would have been an illustration based on one of Maxo Vanka's frescoes in St. Nicholas Church in the industrial Millvale. Vanka dedicated one of the frescoes to Adamic. Like the writer, he was deeply concerned with the lives of immigrant workers. The frescoes, one of the main regional attractions until this day, portray a mixture of biblical scenes and secular images of working class people in contexts paralleling biblical stories. Thus, when Adamic's fictional counterpart of Vanka encounters his ghost, he is in the midst of a creative process whose fruit celebrates working-class, immigrant people in a medium normally reserved for divine subject matters.

The painting I see as a good representation of Adamic's novel's underlying philosophy, as opposed to *Gatsby's* individualistic philosophy of disconnectedness from others emulated by Cugat's dust jacket, is titled *Croatian Mother Raises Her Son for Industry* (See the link: [http://c10674700.r0.cf2.rackcdn.com/03-16-27\\_maxo-vanka-mural\\_original.jpg](http://c10674700.r0.cf2.rackcdn.com/03-16-27_maxo-vanka-mural_original.jpg)). It serves as a secular counterpart of another fresco in the series, *The Pieta*, in which Mother Mary weeps over the body of Christ. But unlike a viewer of *The Pieta*, the audience of this painful suffering finds no relief in the promise of Resurrection or Second Coming offered to the believers by Christianity. As the mother weeps over her son's body, other women wail around her—for, in the distance, already another group of potential victims of ruthless industry march off perhaps never to return to their wives and mothers. Adamic's romanticized Christ-like martyrs of Anton and Jack now find their visual representation here, in the working-class heroes who sacrifice themselves for others and who, despite their mortality, enjoy a lasting presence on the Church's ceiling. The somber subject matter reminds us and the visitors to the Church of the hardships borne by the immigrant laborer. But there is a glimmer of hope here, too. Up on the ceiling, away

from anyone's reach, the frescoes stage what a century ago was the “unrepresentable”—and nothing threatens their erasure.

### Afterword

In their contemporary reviewers' words, the novels analyzed in this dissertation portray “America's lost generation of youth” (Wright 74), “hostile city” and “the disorganizing effects of an urban environment upon the immigrant” (Petras 20), “the sordidness and the moral degeneracy one finds in the modern city slum, particularly in the black ghettos of these various slums” (Davis, “Hard Boiled” 648), and “naturalistic . . . protest against America's treatment of its black minority” (Davis, “Integration”142 ). It may seem, then, that the social realist ethnic literature of the thirties, forties, and fifties leaves little, if any, room for explorations of hope and resistance amidst the desperate struggle for survival. But it is in that very struggle that pockets of possibility lie and, as I have argued, a spatial reading of the novels allows us to locate those pockets.

If thought of as a series of maps, or road directions—a literary cartography—the social realist novels discussed here point to crucial landmarks in African American and new immigrant social and cultural presence in the United States. Those landmarks turn out consistently and simultaneously to involve sites of struggle and practices of transgression. Sometimes that means depicting real places and the seemingly ordinary practices associated with those places, to reveal the extraordinary meaning behind those practices. At other times, it means creating psychic and metaphorical spaces that allow the characters to interpret their own lives in a revisionist and transformative way. The geocritical approach becomes particularly useful, then, in exploring the worlds of fiction that so heavily rely on the representations of both real and imagined spaces and that suggest that space is both the context and one of the actors in ethnic characters' and peoples' negotiations of power and agency.

Imagining the books in these chapters as maps to spaces of hidden potential, I was aided

by the voices of Harlem Renaissance and immigrant fiction writers of the earlier decades which displayed the optimism and faith characteristic of the utopian impulse in literature. How, I have asked myself while reading these authors, do their works echo—in ever so subtle ways—the energy emanating from such earlier novels as McKay's *Home to Harlem* and Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements*? Supposing that anachronism may be productive when serving the purpose of utopia, in a flight of fancy, one may picture reading Ann Petry's *The Street* with McKay's Jake peeking over one's shoulder. Wouldn't he guide one to read the jazz-infused passages of communal solidarity just a little more loudly and clearly than the ones that describe the hopelessness of Lutie's circumstances? If Yeziarska's Sonya accompanied one in the journey through Algren's Triangle, with Bicek's seemingly futile and often demoralizing attempts at a better life, wouldn't she hold on to the fleeting moments of Lefty's possible access to the American Dream? In my readings, I have tried to do just that—not for the purpose of hyperbolic will to resist, but rather with hopes of unearthing the frequently muted yet present faith in the possibility of change that these novels bespeak.

By analyzing these novels in a variety of contexts, I also hope to have shown that a geocritical study of literary works—and especially a study of those literatures that portray the historical, albeit fictionalized, experience of marginalized social groups—needs to engage seriously not only with theories of spatiality and with human geography, but also with sociology and history. Histories of race, ethnicity, and the working class become an invaluable resource and an inseparable element of any thorough examination of those literary works. To historicize means to acknowledge the material dimension of those writings' inspirations and, in fact, to emplace these novels of space.

Not only our understanding of the past can be illuminated by combining the study of

ethnic literatures and spatiality, but also our critical examination of the present and our visions of the future. Taken together, these novels paint portraits of ethnic and racial groups that shared a similar social position then, yet occupy disparate social strata today: African Americans and people of south and east European origin. From our standpoint today, in the twenty-first century's second decade, we can and should draw on the portrayals of inter- and intra-ethnic relations in these social realist novels. On the one hand, those books foreshadow new immigrants' future social ascension and integration into the larger society—and African Americans' continued civic and social exclusion. Yet on the other hand, the novels also reveal potential sites of solidarity among those groups by collectively painting the scene of contemporary blacks' and new immigrants' parallel struggles, similar social positions, and embeddedness in the same oppressive environments. The novels' politicized approach to social concerns, as well as the many parallels between ethnic realities they describe and today's racism and xenophobia, make these works valuable progressive suggestions for our own time.

To be sure, not all of these books show meaningful interracial relations and some do not actively engage with the subject at all. But there is something to be said for reading all of them collectively—as one body of proletarian ethnic literature—and examining the ripples of meaning created by this multitude. I follow here Cary Nelson's use of Bakhtin's notion of mutivoicedness in Nelson's examination of American leftist poetry. Nelson points “both to an additive or echolalic quality in a certain discursive formation—a formation to which many writers contributed—and to multiple effects and meanings embedded in individual words that are part of a social conversation taking place in poetry” (254). After Nelson, I have assumed literary works' capacity to build a discursive space where themes of social change and radical possibility emerge from the polyphony, even if all the contributing voices do not articulate these themes in the same

way or to the same extent. This discursive space, in the case of the novels I analyze, emerges in the geographic and socio-thematic convergences among the books. Billie Holiday's jazz clubs make one's mind drift off into Attaway's blues-filled household of the Mosses; the "home" constructed by Adamic's Peter out of the Haymarket materials echoes the family values of Dobrejcaks and other laborers in Bell's novel; the streets of Petry's Harlem outline similar social boundaries to the ones defined by Motley's and Algren's Chicago. Thus, even if not all of these books call for multiethnic solidarity along class and anti-racist lines, read together they imply the need and potential for such unity. And therein lies the lesson for today's socio-political climate and potential interethnic allies.

One example of such sites of possibility is Chicago's previously dominantly Polish neighborhoods where the more recent—and steadily increasing—presence of Latino residents has met with racist hostility. But perhaps the avenue to harmony lies in the realization of community values on both sides of the clash. After all, on any given day, the Polish restaurant, Czerwone Jabluszko [Red Apple], on Milwaukee Avenue feeds Poles and Latinos alike. In what appears to be the most trivial of contexts, the tension loosens when people sit down under the same roof and eat together—a unity that transcends cultures, like the kind Mike Dobrejcak dreams of. On the other hand, today's American towns and cities see a rise in hostilities among African Americans and Latinos, too. Yet the recent killing in Florida of Treyvon Martin, an African American teenager, by George Zimmerman, a Latino man, vis-a-vis Arizona's Governor's Jan Brewer's 2010 Arizona Senate Bill 1070, one of the strictest and most evidently racially-motivated immigration laws in the nation's history, reveals the complex similarities between these groups' positionalities that need to be addressed in relation to their clashes. In Florida, a light-skinned Latino man shoots at an unarmed black youth, supposedly seeing the

African American as a threat to the neighborhood, at the same time as Arizona's police execute Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act by arresting people for “driving while Latino.” The ironies here are many, and they are bitter indeed.

The pages of novels written decades ago hold parallels for these situations. They could be seen as sources of insight and guidance—and perhaps that is the final and most crucial role of literary cartography. Such cartography—while it underscores both physical and symbolic boundaries—does so while challenging those dividing lines and imagining their end. The maps written in these books look to the future and a world with no need for maps. Such “horizontal space,” to use Bill Ashcroft's idea, is a “space of transformation” which the utopian quality of literature, and ethnic literature in particular, captures (Ashcroft). If in the process of following the characters who try to orient themselves in their social and geographic space we find our own way out of the modern world's entanglements—then we will be better for it. And if we can read not only what those writers wrote but beyond it—into our present and future—then the morning may come, after all.

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