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SECRET SELVES: SURVEILLANCE AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY
AFRICAN AMERICAN
LITERATURE

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SECRET SELVES: SURVEILLANCE AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY
AFRICAN AMERICAN
LITERATURE

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

Dedman College

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

with a

Major in English

by

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May 18, 2019

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Virginia Woolf famously wrote that a woman must have “a room of her own (with key and lock) and enough money to support herself” if she is to write. The English department’s graduate program at Southern Methodist University generously supplied me with both, providing a space to freely explore my intellectual interests without worry for the first time in my academic career. It is from this opportunity that *Secret Selves: Surveillance and Twentieth-Century African American Literature* came, and for that, I will never be able to thank them enough. Nonetheless, this project was not conceived or written behind a closed door with “key and lock.” Rather; it was birthed from countless brainstorming sessions, passing conversations, and within a community of supportive and inspiring individuals, whose influences you will find on the coming pages. Here I have the honor of thanking them.

Early in my graduate career, Steven Weisenburger urged me to look deeper into Lorraine Hansberry’s Federal Bureau of Investigation file for a seminar paper I was writing. That semester’s paper proved to be lackluster, but his advice led to this project, which he would direct and help shape over countless meetings and drafts. Steve has taught me the serendipitous paths that unfold when working with archival materials. Darryl Dickson-Carr and Jayson Sae-Sue served as readers, and their comments and suggestions pushed my thinking and challenged me at every turn. William Maxwell generously agreed to join the committee, a scholar whose work is foundational to the project, and who provided resources and archival materials that *Secret Selves*

could not exist without. Faculty members who never failed to listen, question, and support my work include Beth Newman, who forced me to stop comma-splicing and to trust my own thinking; Tim Rosendale, who helped me see that my first chapter, in fact, did have an argument; Greg Brownderville who provided countless conversations and inspirational poems when I felt like the project could not be done; Bruce Levy, whose belief in me and my work carried me further than he'll ever know; and Dennis Foster, whose friendship and mentorship will stay with me long after *Secret Selves* is complete. Of course, I would have never met my teachers without the guidance of my undergraduate faculty at the University of Portland, who provided me with a foundation on which I could succeed. Molly Hiro suggested I apply to SMU, advised me throughout University of Portland, and continues to do so to this day. Genevieve Brassard's creative readings and introduction to literature inspired my approach to scholarship. And Herman Asarnow constantly supported my dream of a career in academia.

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Secret Selves: Surveillance and Twentieth-Century
African American
Literature

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Black writers, thinkers, and artists found themselves on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's watch list for radicalism and sedition as early as 1919. *Secret Selves* explores how twentieth-century African American writers, namely Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Childress, Ishmael Reed, and Gloria Naylor responded to a surveillance state that monitored their lives and works for radicalism and sedition. By recrafting the African American *künstlerroman*—a genre that birthed the African American literary tradition—these writers embedded codes into their works that concealed personal details from Bureau agents and simultaneously articulated a new narrative: that to be black and to be an artist was to live a precarious life under surveillance. Excavating and applying evidence from these writers' FBI files and personal archives, *Secret Selves* exposes how such coded articulations of the self distinctly altered the African American literary tradition. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that many attributes inherent to the African American literary tradition—the insistence on putting one's self on the page, the celebration of the written word, literary self-consciousness, and the admiration of the author-character that unites the community—are a result of surveillance.

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To Benton, who knows my secret self.

INTRODUCTION

The African American *Künstlerroman*, Self-Consciousness, and Surveillance

African American writers portrayed literacy as dangerous beginning with the African American literary tradition's earliest texts—the slave narrative. One of the scenes still vivid in my mind from my earliest introductions to African American literature is Frederick Douglass's heartbreak when Mrs. Auld refuses to continue their reading lessons. Mr. Auld had insisted that his wife's lessons end, exhibiting an anxiety about black men learning to read and write that reflected the fears of white plantation owners of the times. If a slave could read and write, could he also draft counterfeit passes in order to escape the plantation or organize a rebellion? As Douglass's narrative portrays, slaves caught reading were often physically punished. So while prominent scholars of the field—namely Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Robert B. Stepto—have shown how the self-conscious African American literary tradition has centralized itself around reading and writing, a trope that attested to the slave's “fitness for freedom,” and celebrated the written word as a mode to gain political agency, *Secret Selves* illustrates that literature was still a mode to fear.¹

¹ See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 1979.

The authors of slave narratives not only produced texts that self-consciously grappled with what it meant to be black and to hold the literary prowess needed to posit their life stories on the page, they also unknowingly anchored the African American literary tradition in the genre of the *künstlerroman*, or the portrait of the life of the artist. The traditional European depiction of the artist-character “traces the development of the author (or that of an imagined character like the author) from childhood to maturity,” thus to depict “the struggles of a sensitive, artistic child to escape the misunderstandings” of “his family and youthful acquaintances.”² Yet Madelyn Jablon calls us to redefine the African American *künstlerroman* to include artist-characters who “demonstrate [artistic] inclinations that are stifled by their limited freedom.”³ To that end, many Eighteenth-Century and Nineteenth-Century slave narratives and autobiographies can be seen as part of the *künstlerroman* genre, though the writer may not have seen himself as an artist. As expected, the African American artist-protagonist found within the slave narrative struggles to learn how to express himself, though he also faces a problem unique to the African American *künstlerroman* genre: surveillance over himself and his work.

Secret Selves: Surveillance and Twentieth-Century African American Literature takes up the issue of federal surveillance and expands the conversation about the dangers African American writers faced in the twentieth-century. The project explores the works of writers who found themselves on the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) watch list for radicalism and sedition as early as 1919. In response to a surveillance state that monitored their lives and works, African American novelists, playwrights, and poets recrafted prior writers’ uses of the African

² Madelyn Jablon, *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 56-57

³ *Ibid*, 28.

American *künstlerroman*. Pairing these artist-novels with archival evidence found within the writers' FBI files and personal archives, this dissertation shows how African American writers crafted author-characters with embedded narratives of their secret selves: powerful personal histories of artists' lives under government oversight. Altered scripts, hidden plots, and changes to the African American *künstlerroman* to avoid textual surveillance—as *Secret Selves* reveals—suggests that claiming authorship of a text was inherently dangerous. Still, African American writers insisted on placing author-characters throughout their works to connect their role as writers to their texts—an aesthetic decision that ensured that the author, in connection to her text, would never die.

I. The FBI's Racialized History

To fully understand the impact of federal surveillance over black writers, it is first important to acknowledge the FBI's racialized history. Prior to the FBI's creation, federal surveillance was used to combat white supremacy following the Civil War. By 1870, the attorney general—which at first was only a one person, part time job—was overwhelmed with increasing federal litigation from the aftermath of the Civil War. Attempting to quell racial violence and bring justice to freedmen who continued to be maltreated by whites, Congress passed an act to establish the Department of Justice (DOJ), which would handle all criminal prosecuting and civil suits that involved the US. Lacking investigation agents of their own, over the course of the next thirty years the DOJ called upon Secret Service agents to invade the south to “penetrate the Ku Klux Klan and help smash it.”⁴ But in May of 1908, a Sundry Civil Service Bill declared that Secret Service employees could no longer accept assignments in any other department but in the

⁴ Rhodri Jeffreys-Hones, *The FBI: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 61.

Department of Treasury. So, lacking special agents to do their detective work, Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte ordered the creation of a special agent force, named the Bureau of Investigation (BOI).⁵

While the early history of the DOJ portrays the department as an organization that fought against racial injustice, historians argue that the organization “slipped out of character” and began to display “racial biases” under Theodore Roosevelt’s administration, particularly in its enforcement of the 1910 Mann Act, which would come to be known as “The White Slave Traffic Act.”⁶ This act allowed the “bureau to exploit the nation’s racial fears” and made it a crime to transport women over state lines for the “purpose of prostitution and debauchery, or any other immoral purpose,” which states and the federal government used to promote anti-miscegenation efforts.⁷ Under the Mann Act the state persecuted black men and punished interracial couples. Race would continue to be a significant BOI focus throughout the twentieth-century. During this time, J. Edgar Hoover renamed the BOI the Federal Bureau of Investigation to accurately reflect its federal responsibilities—an organization that would come to be known as the bureau that engaged in “racially prejudiced and cavalier practices reminiscent of those in Nazi Germany.”⁸ When World War I brought governmental fears that immigrants might commit espionage and sabotage, Congress employed the Immigration Act of 1918 to target them. Through this act, the FBI could track immigrants who were members of organizations that promoted anarchy or

⁵ Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee at first rejected Bonaparte’s request, arguing that the creation of the BOI is a creation of a “spy system” and that there would be major consequences because “a general system of espionage” that was conducted by the government would “dig up the private scandals of men” (Theoharis 3).

⁶ Rhodri Jeffreys-Hones, *The FBI: A History*, 61.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 11.

revolution, and they enforced the deportation of immigrants who were members of organizations that promoted such causes. Furthermore, with the Red Scare coming to its heights, Hoover continued to investigate, track, and classify racial minorities who associated with the Communist Party and the Radical Left.

Under its new name, Hoover led the FBI in the ideological policing of ideas and discourses, especially of Depression-era Socialist/Communist organizations and affiliates that defied Jim Crow restrictions and disrupted Hoover's arch-conservative ideas of what was best for the nation, a rationale for the policing of speech during the rise of McCarthyism.⁹ Asa Philip Randolph is one example of an individual who affiliated with causes that Hoover deemed subversive. Piquing the interest of The Bureau when he led the first predominantly African American labor union in the early twenties, Randolph found himself on Hoover's watch list. Continuing to participate in "radical" activities by becoming the vice president of The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organization, and assisting in the organization of the 1941 March on Washington, Randolph learned his personal life and work were being tracked. Such surveillance led to the monitoring of Randolph's intellectual production, particularly through the magazine *The Messenger*, which Randolph co-edited with Chandler Owen. Due to their allegedly subversive writings, both Randolph and Owen were eventually arrested and investigated for sedition. Such surveillance and its affects is what the new field of Black Spycraft

⁹ During the Cold War Era, numerous legal limitations of speech under the guidelines of libel, slander, obscenity, pornography, sedition, incitement, fighting words, classified information, and copy right information occurred. Eventually, speech rights were expanded significantly throughout the twentieth-century in a series of court decisions that would protect political speech and anonymous speech.

Textual Studies, recently coined by Mary Helen Washington and William Maxwell, seeks to further understand.

II. Black Spycraft Textual Studies

While the FBI's fraught relationship to race may be longstanding, the interdisciplinary work between surveillance and literature has only recently begun. In 2011 surveillance studies scholar Torin Monahan declared that there are many "possible avenues for the study of surveillance as cultural practice," and that the field should explore "artists [who] provide imaginative resources that oftentimes channel latent concerns and anticipate future worlds in ways that social science would have difficulty doing."¹⁰ The few literary scholars who answered Monahan's call have centered their work in genres that describe what Monahan refers to as "future worlds." Recent books by Peter Marks, Aaron Santesso, and David Rosen connect their literary analysis to surveillance studies by focusing on genres of dystopian and speculative fiction, such as George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).¹¹ To that end, scholars

¹⁰ Torin Monahan, "Surveillance as Cultural Practice," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 52, no. 1 (2011): 498.

¹¹ The scant amount of scholarship working at the intersection of surveillance and literary studies includes only two book length projects by literary critics. Aaron Santesso and David Rosen were the first to bring a literary perspective to this conversation with *The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood* (2013). Rosen and Santesso dismissed Kammerer and Nellis' claim that most literature concerning surveillance appeared within the post 9/11 period. Their study makes connections between surveillance, literature, and liberal notions of personhood from Shakespeare to postmodernism. And while their primary texts of study reach beyond the dystopian and science fiction genres in respect to the early modern and Victorian periods, when the authors discuss the twentieth-century, Rosen and Santesso analyze only dystopian novels from authors such as Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, and Yevgeny Zamyatin. In 2015, Peter Marks joined Rosen and Santesso in an exploration of surveillance and dystopian fiction. His *Imagining Surveillance: Eutopian and Dystopian Literature and Film*, studies twentieth-century writers like Orwell and Atwood to "extend and enhance our understanding of surveillance, and how dystopian/eutopian novels supply provocative speculations about what lies ahead" (Marks 6).

working at the intersections of literature and surveillance have claimed that themes of surveillance are “mostly found within science-fiction or the spy novel” and that “only few (self-defined) ‘serious’ literary novels deal with issues of surveillance and control in our contemporary society. Most of them were published in the years after 9/11.”¹²

By placing African American literature at the center of surveillance studies, *Secret Selves* looks beyond dystopian and speculative genres in considering questions of surveillance, turning our attention instead to the history of minority writers whose lives and works unfold under the relentless eye of government surveillance.¹³ For African American writers, what other writers imagined in a dystopian world was their lived reality. Black writers thus expanded narratives of surveillance beyond dystopian genres and articulated their autobiographical experiences in the genre of the *künstlerroman*. Yet scholars of African American studies have only recently explored themes of surveillance. Sociologist Simone Browne’s recent book, *Dark Matters: On The Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), explains how alternatives to “living under routinized surveillance,” can be found in cultural production.¹⁴ Pointing to the countersurveillance songs and “antisurveillance pranks” described in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Browne shows how Douglass used countersurveillance methods to combat the “watchmen” stationed at every gate on the plantation where he was enslaved.¹⁵ While Browne has pointed to literature to critique surveillance functions at a local level, literary historians William

¹² Dietmar Kammerer, “Surveillance in Literature, Film and Television,” In *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 101.

¹³ I adopt Monahan’s definition of surveillance that he introduces in his article, “Surveillance as Cultural Practice.” Monahan defines surveillance as “the systematic monitoring of people or groups in order to regulate their behavior” (Monahan 498).

¹⁴ Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 8.

¹⁵ Ibid, 22.

Maxwell and Mary Helen Washington, who coined the canny name for this subfield, “Black Spycraft Textual Studies,” have shown how federal surveillance impacted the literature produced during the New Negro Movement.¹⁶ Maxwell’s *FB EYES: How J Edgar Hoover’s Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (2015) exposed fifty years of FBI policing over black writers, a systematic attempt to undermine their cultural influence. Washington’s *The Other Black List: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950’s* (2013), used those files to reveal how the Left “offered black writers the institutional support that they could get nowhere else in white America.”¹⁷ Each of these monographs reveals that African American writers were well aware of the surveillance they were under, and that they responded to this fact by altering their behaviors and their work.

Of course, one of the reasons that these writers caught the attention of the FBI was their connection to the political left. In the past twenty years, literary historians have explored the Black Left and their relationship to literary production. Bill V. Mullen and James Smethurst’s *Left of the Color Line* (2003) focuses on the “work of [African American] writers, artists, and intellectuals directly connected to and influenced by the institutions and ideologies of the organized Left of the United States.”¹⁸ The methodology that these scholars undertake centralizes historical and biographical approaches. Likewise, Alan M. Wald’s *Exiles from a Future Time* (2002) argues that we cannot fully understand the symbiotic relationship between the political and aesthetic within these writers’ texts without acknowledging their personal histories. He

¹⁶ Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950’s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 215.

¹⁷ Ibid, 11.

¹⁸ Bill Mullen and James Edward Smethurst, *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 4.

claims that the “writer’s intimate life, friendships, occupation, and precise political activities” are essential to unearthing the hidden history of the Black Literary Left and their texts.¹⁹ William Maxwell’s *New Negro, Old Left; African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (1999) and James Smethurst’s *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry* (1999) adopt similar methodologies. These works provide the ground on which my project builds, in both content and methodology. While they do much to disclose the literary history of the Black Literary Left, scholars of this period have not been able to fully understand what it meant for these writers and their texts to exist under a surveillance regime. With the ability to access digitized archives, and a generous research fellowship to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, *Secret Selves* reveals black writers’ lives under federal surveillance by placing into conversation the writers’ textual productions, reflections found within their personal archives, and FBI files.

To explore how the black writer encoded responses to living under federal surveillance, my dissertation studies the technique of third and first person omniscient narration and the ways that authorial power, or the narrator’s choice to reveal or conceal the protagonist’s consciousness, divulges or evades the text’s reflections on state surveillance. In order to practice a narratological reading, it is essential to understand the difference between the story-world and narrative discourse. The story, according to Gerard Genette, is “that which the narrative discourse reports, represents or signifies.”²⁰ A story consists of the world in which the narrative is set and it includes the characters, locations, conditions, and actions of that story. Distinct from

¹⁹ Alan Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xiv.

²⁰ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 2

the story-world is narrative discourse: *how* the story is told. Through narrative discourse and authorial control, the same story can be represented in a multiplicity of ways through different forms, arrangements of the temporal order, or character focalization. African American fictions and dramas often focalize through the artist-character, a subject position my dissertation studies in depth. Texts that focalize reveal discursively the psychologies of those who, like the author, know the anxiety and fear, the *dis-ease*, that surveillance inculcates within individuals as well as communities. Drawing from biographical details that the archives provide, *Secret Selves* pairs narratology with biographical and historical context to read previously neglected textual key moments.

III. Chapter Outline

The first chapter of *Secret Selves* discusses Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay's early transatlantic novels, *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* (1929). Both novels are set in the Post-War Red Scare, and describe a state of paranoia and hysteria toward resident aliens, as the state used the Immigration Act of 1918 to expel persons deemed potential threats. Ethno-racial immigrants like Jamaican-born McKay ranked high on their watch-lists. To veil himself from view, McKay recrafted the African American artist-novel in *Home to Harlem* by hiding biographical details of his immigration within the text. When artist-character Ray composes a narrative, an embedded chapter, his role as intradiegetic narrator enables him to reveal a code that allows a reader to mine the text for the truth of his journey as a black radical artist. Suggesting a duality through the chapter title, "He Also Loved," Ray evokes a narrative that traces more than one man's love story; not just the hero Jerco, but the story of the artist whose romance with art breaks down under federal surveillance. While the narrator previously explained that Ray came to the US to attend Howard University, in "He Also Loved,"

Ray offers a different tale: “It was in the winter of 1916 when I first came to New York to hunt for a job. I was broke. I was afraid.” Ray embeds this immigration narrative within Jerco’s love story, a narrative method used throughout *Home to Harlem*. Having established McKay’s drive to conceal biographical details, the second half of this chapter shows how McKay’s aesthetic transitions from *Home to Harlem* (set in Harlem) to *Banjo* (set in France), dodges the state’s shift to liquid surveillance, a method for tracking expatriated black writers abroad. By scripting a narrative described as “without a plot,” McKay rejects state bureaucratization, like the passport, which forced him to commit to a personal narrative trajectory that the FBI could track.

McKay was not alone. Black writers ranging from Zora Neale Hurston to Richard Wright worried that state-issued identification documents would be used to monitor them. Chapter two, “‘I must learn to stand alone’: Anti-Essentialism and Biometric Surveillance in the works of Richard Wright,” explores how such documents enable surveillance by attaching a trackable, predetermined biometric identity to the individual, then how African American writers evaded biometric categorization by crafting alternate, contrasting narrative identities. Further exploring the meta-conversation found within African-American literature concerning representation, essentialism, and race, this chapter focuses on the *künstlerroman* narratives found in Wright’s oeuvre—namely *Black Boy* (1945) and *The Outsider* (1953). While several scholars have taken up Wright’s protagonists’ desires to shed themselves of essential racial identity categories, no one has explored Wright’s novels’ rejection of essential identity in regards to his knowledge of the federal surveillance he faced.¹ While those familiar with Wright’s novels may align his works with an anti-essentialist ideology, by revealing the role of biometrics in Wright’s works, a tool used by the FBI to measure and track a fixed—and essentialist—identity, I argue that what scholars have previously read as Wright’s rejection of essential identity is not his

protagonists' desire to be "raceless," but is instead a result of the surveillance that Wright and his works fell under—an affect that produced imagined protagonists who could divest themselves of fixed and traceable identities to escape a life under surveillance.

Chapter Three, "Revolt of the Housewives': The Domestic Sphere as Counter-Surveillance in African American Women's Writing of the Cold War Era," transitions from *individuals* avoiding surveillance to *community* adopted methods of evasion. Comparatively analyzing dramas by Alice Childress and Lorraine Hansberry, this chapter engages women writers who found themselves on the FBI's watch list due to the state's fear of female activism during the Cold War Era. These writers' texts write against a gendered cold war ideology of the domestic woman, and subvert it to articulate the black woman's experience under cold war surveillance. Focusing on how these texts center on fixed domesticity, in contrast to masculine narratives of travel and emigration, this chapter argues that female characters transformed the domestic sphere into a safe house for artistic expression and resistance. In these narratives women barricade domestic spaces against state surveillance, a result of government oversight over black "radical" communists entering the home and placing the entire family under watch. This is best exemplified through a deleted excerpt that I have found in Hansberry's manuscripts of *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) that depicts women conditioning their sons to avoid surveillance by showing them a "spy film" in their homes—a scene that speaks to the domestic space as an environment that fosters art to articulate narratives of how to survive under surveillance.

The final chapter in *Secret Selves* turns away from the Afro-Modern period and moves toward Black Arts Movement writers. Their work was targeted by the still more invasive counterintelligence program (Cointelpro) that ran from 1956-1971. Unlike the modern works studied early in this dissertation, these post-45 texts do not attempt to conceal narratives of

surveillance in intricately coded ways. Rather, they confront surveillance directly by subverting the genre of detective fiction, a form thematically concerned with surveillance and the tracking of subjects. Classic detective narratives attempt to solve a murder mystery with the whodunit plot, focusing on a detective who solves the mysterious identity of an unknown murderer. The African American metaphysical detective story upends that plot, for the reader realizes whodunit (the state) well before the novel's end. Inverted to reveal the interiority of the subject under surveillance, the text no longer focuses on the act of detection, but on the detrimental paranoid effect that detection has over its subject. Ishmael Reed, Nikki Giovanni, and Gloria Naylor offer a remedy: the written word mollifies the symptoms of black writers who are ailing on account of federal investigation. Drawing such a conclusion at *Secret Selves*' end exposes a shift within the African American literary tradition—from Afro-modern writers who concealed narratives of surveillance in intricately coded ways embedded within their fictions, to postmodern articulations of those experiences conveyed openly through semi-autobiographical writings. The effort in these texts is to produce imagined testimony and evidence against the FBI's wrongdoings, a creative act of democratic surveillance against the state.

CHAPTER ONE

“How come you just vanished thataway like a spook?”: Global Surveillance in the Transatlantic Novels of Claude McKay

In a 1933 letter, Claude McKay wrote from Tangier to Harlem Renaissance patron Max Eastman in search of a country that would welcome a black radical writer. Doing so, McKay revealed how the state restricted his travel to find such a homeland: “British agents [are] after me. It’s not persecution mania... I knew they were following me—probably my house was broken into and my original passport taken by them... Those dogs never come out in the open you know.”²¹ Understanding that he must eventually leave his current location due to accusations against him as a propagandist, McKay sought Eastman’s advice on where to flee. Travel restrictions had become a life-long problem for McKay once the Bureau of Investigation initiated surveillance over his literary work during the Red Scare of 1919.

Quoting specifically from Claude McKay’s militant poem, “If We Must Die,” Robert A. Bowen, the director of the Justice Department’s Bureau of Translations and Radical Publications in New York, had released a report, “Radicalism and Sedition Among the Negroes as Reflected in their Publications.”²² In it he categorized McKay as an advocate of Bolshevism, an offense that

²¹ Qtd in. Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 285.

²² See Reign Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000). Particularly pay attention to Chapter 5, “1919: Containing the Social Unrest” and sections titled “The Red Summer of 1919” and “The Surveillance of Black Radicals. Bowen’s report can be found on Proquest Congressional Publication database in a report titled *Investigative Activities of the Department of Justice*,

landed him on the Bureau of Investigation's (BI) watch list, and it was made public when The *New York Times* and *New York World* published excerpts from Bowen's report.²³ Such a public affront made foreign born McKay vulnerable to the Immigration Act of 1918, mandating the deportation of any alien who advocated for the overthrow of the US government.²⁴ Fearing arrest and deportation, McKay, a Jamaican-born writer who had resided in the US for seven years, fled in 1919 and embarked on a decade-long transatlantic journey to escape surveillance.²⁵ Then without a passport, McKay lacked the mobility to escape Tangier, whose surveillance trapped him under the government's watchful eye.

McKay's difficulties traveling during the Red Scare were not unique, as many others whom the state deemed alien radicals also faced travel restrictions. Under the guise of protecting the nation from the communist threat, the BI launched an informal war against ethno-racial groups tagged as radical and unpatriotic. The 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia had frightened

recorded by Alexander Mitchell Palmer. See "Radicalism and Sedition among Negroes as Reflected in Their Publications," in *Investigative Activities of the Department of Justice*, 66th Congress, 1st session, Sen. Ex Doc. 153, vol.12 (1919, serial no. 7607),161-87.
https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t47.d48.7607_s.doc.153

²³ The Bowen report, Reign Schmidt explains in *Red Scare*, "was given extensive publicity" as "extracts were printed in the *New York Times*, and the *New York World*" (195). Also see Theodore Kornweibel, Jr. "*Seeing Red*": *Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

²⁴ Ibid, 55.

²⁵ Biographers and historians debate if McKay fled the United States in 1919 to escape deportation due to sedition. See Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992). Tillery speculates that Justice Department "pressure may have accounted for McKay's sudden decision to leave the United States" in 1919, even though he claimed that the unexpected trip was to "take advantage of an all-expense-paid trip (42)." McKay would return to America for a brief year in 1921 when he worked for the *Liberator* and left in 1922 for the Soviet Union. After his time in the Soviet Union, he spent a decade, from 1923-1933, residing within Europe and Africa. Also see Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) for a detailed account of McKay's travels.

the US with its “calls for the overthrow of established governments.”²⁶ State fears continued to deepen in 1919 when communism threatened to spread throughout “Western Europe with Red uprisings in Germany and Hungary” and the Third International was founded in Moscow “to direct the worldwide revolution.”²⁷ These events provoked the first Red Scare of 1919-1920, when American government paranoia and hysteria toward resident aliens drove them to expel persons deemed potential threats—particularly, ethno-racial immigrants. The targeting of racial minorities during this short-lived Red Scare was not an isolated incident in American history; it was part of a larger American tradition, Frank Donner argues, that spoke to an “insecurity about American values and identities.”²⁸ As Reign Schmidt claims, the crackdown was a “logical consequence of decades of growing federal intolerance against alien radicals.”²⁹ Targeting ethno-racial minorities, the Justice Department’s BI protected the country from immigrants deemed radical aliens by exercising the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 to block their mobility.³⁰ While their powers during WWI had been granted on an ad hoc basis, the 1919

²⁶ Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 25.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Qtd. in Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ William Maxwell’s *F.B. EYES: How J. Edgar Hoover’s Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* asserts the thesis that the “FBI helped to define the twentieth-century Black Atlantic, both blocking and forcing its flows.” See Chapter four. Extending the Espionage Act of 1917, which was put into place shortly after the US entered WWI, Congress passed the Sedition Act of 1918 to cease “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” against the state. In October 1918, the Department of Justice “pushed through Congress an immigration bill that extended the deportation provisions to aliens who are members of or affiliated with any organization that entertains a belief in, teaches, or advocates the overthrow by force or violence of the Government of the United States...” To that end, authorities did not need to “prove individual beliefs or actions, but only had to prove that an individual belonged to an anarchistic organization in order to deport him.”

Red Scare brought systematic surveillance over “radicals” and deportation to ban perceived “threats” to the state.

The BI soon labeled Marcus Garvey, who shared McKay’s Jamaican nationality, as one of these potential threats. Garvey caught the BI’s attention in 1919 when Special Agent M.J. Davis reported that Garvey was a “negro radical agitator” and an “exceptionally fine orator.”³¹ Gaining popularity among African Americans and acquiring support for black nationalism through his Universal Negro Improvement Association and Black Star Line steamship corporation, Garvey soon faced heavy scrutiny. The BI feared that his back-to-Africa ambitions—a goal Garvey claimed he would realize by way of the Black Star Line—would lead African Americans to unite with racial minorities across the globe and generate race war. Prior to Garvey’s eventual downfall and arrest for mail fraud, the state decided that “the best way to neutralize the nationalist movement was to deport Garvey.”³² The BI had infiltrated his operation with a black undercover spy who collected evidence for a deportation case and made plans to refuse him reentry if he traveled beyond U.S. borders.³³

While collecting evidence to deport aliens deemed radical, the BI also strictly controlled the travel of American black citizens.³⁴ When activists argued that racial minorities should be represented at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference that followed WWI, the BI denied black delegates’ passport applications. The well-connected W.E.B Du Bois did receive approval from the passport office, but only because of his connection to Emmet Scott, the sole black member of

³¹ Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 199.

³² Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*, 103.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Reign Schmidt explains that, “since the Bureau was given the responsibility of investigating the passport application for the State Department, this gave it a tremendous influence. In the fiscal year 1920 alone, the Bureau conducted some 292, 000 name checks in its index and 10,000 field investigations of visa applications” (175).

President Woodrow Wilson's cabinet, who vouched for Du Bois's citizenship.³⁵ Other well-known African American activists' passport applications—such as A. Phillip Randolph's and Ida B. Wells-Barnett's—the BI summarily declined. And since the BI was in charge of investigating passport applications for the State Department, their denial was final.³⁶ Once Du Bois had made it abroad he announced plans for a Pan-African Congress, resulting in further state aggression toward black travel. Black Americans attending such an event, the BI warned, would exacerbate the fight for equal rights at home.³⁷

Denying foreign travel to U.S. resident aliens to quell black activism, had a chilling, repressive effect on McKay, a vulnerable alien who would not gain American citizenship until 1940.³⁸ Watching the BI's targeting of ethno-racial travel, and now holding Bowen's report as evidence of Bureau surveillance over his life and work, McKay evaded such oversight through expatriation. His novels register the attending fear of such statelessness in fictional representations of federally sanctioned travel restrictions. Contextualizing those early novels—*Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (1929)—within the climate of the Post-War Red Scare, this chapter shows how the Bureau of Investigation's surveillance techniques were modified to track black writers abroad—a shift McKay's novels reveal. Highlighting McKay's transatlantic plots, scholars of the Harlem Renaissance have recently recognized the significance of globalization in McKay's texts.³⁹ Still, we have yet to put into

³⁵ Mark Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 187.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 190-202.

³⁸ For details on McKay acquiring US Citizenship, see Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner*, 367.

³⁹ See John Lowney, "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home to Harlem*," *African American Review* 34, no. 3 (2000): 413-429. Bairbre Walsh, "'Vagabond Internationalism': The Transnational Life and Literature of Claude McKay,"

perspective how such plots speak to federal monitoring that plagued McKay and other writers. Employing recent work in surveillance studies, this chapter embraces an interdisciplinary approach to reveal how McKay's transatlantic plots exposed the state's shift from local surveillance methods of panoptical physical enclosure to bureaucratized fluid surveillance that tracked expatriated writers abroad. Doing so, McKay's novels anticipated post-panoptic "liquid surveillance," a method that developed in the postmodern world and drew upon textual documents, such as the passport, to track people and data in states of constant flux.⁴⁰

McKay's novels self-consciously grapple with the ways that their plots facilitate liquid surveillance over the author by providing a linear biographical narrative of a semi-autobiographical protagonist. Entering the genre of the *künstlerroman*—a genre central to the African American literary tradition—the novels track the artist-character's development from childhood to maturity.⁴¹ Historically, scholars of African American literature have seen self-

In *The Transnationalism of American Culture: Literature, Film, and Music*, (NY: Routledge, 2012), 139-152. William Maxwell, "Banjo Meets the Dark Princess: Claude McKay, W.E.B. DuBois and the Transnational Novel of the Harlem Renaissance" in *The Cambridge Companion to The Harlem Renaissance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 170-183.

⁴⁰ See Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance: A Conversation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013). This published conversation between leading surveillance scholars, Bauman and Lyon, explores Bauman's concept of Liquid Surveillance, which is "less a way of specifying surveillance and more an orientation, a way of situating surveillance developments in the fluid and unsettling modernity today" (2). Bauman clarifies how theories of liquid surveillance may be classified as post-panoptical. While Foucault drew from Bentham's panopticon that relied on rigid fixity, or enclosure, to track the subject, liquid surveillance "works at a distance in both space and time, circulating fluidly with, but beyond, nation-states in a globalized realm" (11). For more on discipline and enclosure, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). Foucauldian theories of space and discipline eliminated "the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation" to watch and control behavior through spatial organization (136).

⁴¹ See Madelyn Jablon's *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature*, particularly the introduction, that discusses how the *Künstlerroman* is central to the African American literary tradition.

conscious texts as the literary tradition's awareness of print literature's political potential for the black community. With its roots in the autobiographical slave narrative, the self-conscious African American literary tradition centered itself on scenes of reading and writing, used to actuate the slave's "membership in the human race through the agency of writing."⁴² For instance, Henry Louis Gates Jr. has shown that within early slave narratives, the self-conscious trope of the "untalking book" ties the slave's exclusion from print literature to his enslavement, and later within the genre, reading and writing—the talking book—attests to his "fitness for freedom."⁴³ Such studies articulate textual celebrations of print literature as a mode to gain political agency. Robert B. Stepto expands this trope by tracing themes of print literature throughout the first half of the twentieth-century.⁴⁴ In this vein, scholars "galvanized" literary Afro-modernism with "the belief that print literature could effectively press the case for full black participation in national life," but more recently, Madhu Dubey took up the trope of self-consciousness within the African American literary tradition by extending the conversation to the postmodern period; showing that the "betrayal" of print literature's "political promise" haunts African American writers of the post-civil rights era.⁴⁵ Engaging theories of self-conscious texts within the African American literary tradition, I explore how federal race-based surveillance over literature threatened to disrupt Afro-modernism's celebration of print literature's political potential prior to postmodernism. By focusing on the reoccurring author-character in McKay's novels, this chapter elucidates how federal race-based surveillance over literature threatened Afro-modernism's

⁴² Madhu Dubey, *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 40.

⁴³ Qtd. in Dubey, 40. Also see Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁴⁴ See Robert Stepto's *From Behind the Veil*.

⁴⁵ Dubey, *Signs and Cities*, 4 and 7.

celebration of print literature and forced McKay to produce an alternative form of the *künstlerroman* to restore his belief in the written word's political potential.

I. *Home to Harlem* and the City as a Site of Enclosure

Until recently, discussions of locality in McKay's *Home to Harlem* focused on the city highlighted in the novel's title phrase.⁴⁶ After all, how writers represent the city's African American population led W.E.B Du Bois to critique McKay's novel in the June 1928 issue of the *Crisis*. Writing that the novel made him feel "unclean and in need of a bath," Du Bois set the precedent for scholars to critique McKay's licentious representation of Harlem and its people.⁴⁷ This academic trend would continue for nearly fifty years, leading most scholars to begin their analysis when Jake, the novel's protagonist, arrives on Lenox Avenue—a scene that sets the tone for his Harlem lifestyle with "three martini cocktails" turning his "blood hot" enough to chase after the "tantalizing brown legs" of cabaret dancers.⁴⁸ Participants in this widely known debate about Harlem representation tend to ignore the novel's first chapter, elucidating Jake's

⁴⁶ See John Lowney, "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home to Harlem*," *African American Review* 34, no. 3 (2000): 413-429. Also see Bairbre Walsh, "'Vagabond Internationalism': The Transnational Life and Literature of Claude McKay," In *The Transnationalism of American Culture: Literature, Film, and Music*, (NY: Routledge, 2012), 139-152.

⁴⁷ Despite McKay having admired DuBois and his work, when DuBois reviewed *Home to Harlem*, he gave the novel negative reviews. See Wayne F. Cooper, "Foreword," in *Home to Harlem* ed. Cooper (Boston: North Eastern UP, 1987), xvii.

⁴⁸ Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (Boston: Northeastern University UP, 1928), 8-10. A range of scholars who have discussed black identity and representation within McKay's *Home to Harlem* from the 1980's-2005 are as follows: Ronald Dorris, "Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*: A Social Commentary," *The McNeese Review*. 29 (1982): 53-62. Elmer Lueth, "The Scope of Black Life in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*," *Obsidian II* 5, no 3 (1990): 43-54. Carolyn Cooper, "Race and Cultural Politics of Self Representation: A View from the University of the West Indies," *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 4 (1996): 97-105. Jihee Han, "Coming Home to Harlem: Claude McKay, Primitivism, and Black Identity," *Feminist Studies in English Literature* 13, no 2 (2005): 5-25.

whereabouts for the two years that precede his Harlem arrival—and providing the details needed for *Home to Harlem* to surpass Du Bois' critique of low-brow fiction and to enter the genre of the canonical transnational Harlem Renaissance novel.⁴⁹ By centering the novel on Jake, an African American soldier who returns from Europe in 1919, McKay draws upon themes of wartime mobility to effortlessly join the transnational genre.

Such mobility by black characters produces an anxious mood in the novel's opening pages. Suggesting that Jake is beyond domestic soil and that his location is unknown, the narrator reveals that Jake is somewhere "between sea and sky."⁵⁰ The third person omniscient narrator does not disclose the protagonist's whereabouts on the novel's opening pages and leaves the reader questioning Jake's location and identity. Eventually providing Jake's backstory—"Jake was tall, brawny, and black. When America declared war upon Germany in 1917 he was a longshoreman. He was working on a Brooklyn pier"—the narrator classifies Jake as American.⁵¹ Revealing that Jake's employment tied him to the physical location of Brooklyn's Port, the narrator continues to track his location once he enlisted in the Army: "in the winter he sailed for

⁴⁹ John Lowney's "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home to Harlem*" explains that "recent comparative cultural and literary studies of American modernism have begun to 'break down the ethnological barriers' that have defined the parameters of the Harlem Renaissance, arguing that its formation was more intercultural—and more international—than its most influential historians have suggested" (416). Also see Bairbre Walsh's "Vagabond Internationalism" where she claims that McKay's transnationalist practices "redefine the Harlem Renaissance, a movement that has often been misappropriated by a limited global transnationalism, liberating it from a singularly American possession" (142). Also see George Hutchinson's *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* for a discussion of the Harlem Renaissance and Nationalism.

⁵⁰ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 4.

Brest with a happy chocolate company.”⁵² Jake’s current location “between Sky and Sea” suggests that he is currently traveling home from Europe.⁵³

This realization inadvertently implies that the narrator lost track of Jake’s location when he deserted the army. Since the narrator lacks this knowledge, the text never reveals how Jake—a wartime deserter, and therefore, a seditionist criminal in the eyes of the state—arrives on domestic soil without being arrested by immigration. When Jake’s friends question how he returned when “there wasn’t no boat in with soldiers today,” Jake conceals his method of returning to the U.S. by stating, “I made it in a special one.”⁵⁴ Jake implies that he arrived on U.S. soil illegally, or through some method that would allow him to escape interrogation by immigration officials.

Post WWI travel acts would have demanded that Jake provide a passport when he returned from war, a requirement that would reveal his deserter status and affix on him the label of a seditionist threat. John Torpey, a historian of the passport, asserts that the effects of World War I had “[ushered] in what would prove to be a rigorous and extremely effective system of documentary controls on human movement.”⁵⁵ Prior to the war, American citizens did not need a passport to travel abroad; but as fears of arriving international enemies fed national patriotisms, “nation-states sought to consolidate their control over territories and populations” with restrictive border controls. In 1918, the United States Congress passed the Measure Control Act, which established the modern passport system we know today. This act required every person leaving

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁵ John Torpey, “The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Passport System,” in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 256.

and coming into the United States to hold a passport, and in 1919 Congress extended the act beyond wartime.⁵⁶ In following years the government continued to restrict travel, as the Immigration Act of 1924 and the Passport Act of 1926 imposed expiration dates on American passports and visas. In this context of state prohibited mobility, McKay composed *Home to Harlem*, having written the novel between 1923 and 1925.⁵⁷

While fictional Jake may have evaded immigration without a passport, the BI made it their goal to detect when McKay would arrive at a U.S. port. The BI's 150-page file on McKay illustrates their concern with his travel during the five years preceding the publication of *Home to Harlem*. Beginning in 1921, the Bureau began to track McKay's international travel to Europe. A year later, a letter from the Bureau to the Department of State asked to be informed "as to the definite route" that McKay would "use if [McKay and his companions] return" to the US so that they "may be given appropriate attention upon their entry."⁵⁸ McKay's arrival was a top priority, and the Bureau's memos in McKay's file highlight their anxieties about a Black left-leaning writer traveling internationally during the Red Scare. One such letter, under the

⁵⁶ Torpey documents the various passport acts that occurred post-WWI. In 1918, The Wartime Measure Act mandated that "hostile aliens must obtain permits for all departures from and entries into the United States" and by the end of 1919, Congress passed a revised version of the law that "dropped any mention of the proviso that the country find itself 'in time of war'" (265). Theodore Kornweibel also sheds light onto how the 1918 passport act assigned ultimate control over all travel to the State Department and gave other agencies—including the Bureau of Investigation—an advisory role.

⁵⁷ Michelle Stephens provides significant book history information on *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*. Both novels were "written between 1923 and 1925 while McKay was living an expatriated life in Morocco and France, and both were published within a year of each other" (178). Michelle Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 17.

⁵⁸ William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive: FBI Files on African American Authors and Literary Institution Obtained through the U.S Freedom Information Act*, Washington University. <http://digital.wustl.edu/fbeyes/>. 21 September 2015. See Claude McKay's file, Part 1, page 25.

Department of Justice's letter head, demanded that "every effort possible" must be made to "detect the arrival" of McKay and his associates. Adopting a similar approach used when they attempted to keep Garvey out of the state, the BI placed the San Francisco and Seattle offices on alert, warning that McKay might "ship from Shanghai to the West Coast of the United States."⁵⁹

Struggling to pin down McKay's travel route, the BI also discovered that McKay did not hold an American passport. The director of the BI suggested that the state department "find out whether or not passports have been issued" to McKay and his colleagues, while noting that "he is not believed to be a citizen of the United States."⁶⁰ Two years later the director William J. Burns, would answer his own question, commenting that "as far as can be ascertained...[McKay and his colleagues] have never received departmental passports," while noting that "McKay is a friend of one Ryan...engaged in selling forged passports in Germany."⁶¹ Knowing that McKay traveled without a passport, and suggesting that he may purchase a forged one from an acquaintance, the Bureau feared that McKay would enter illegally. A month later, on March 19th, 1923, the Bureau falsely claimed that "Claude McKay...is said to have returned to this country over a month ago," and without being stopped or examined at any port.⁶² Such false reports speak to the BI's anxiety to monitor black radicals on domestic soil.

Just as the BI sought to track McKay locally, so in *Home to Harlem* Jake falls under the omniscient narrator's surveillance when he's back in the local streets of Harlem. Upon arriving,

⁵⁹ Ibid, Part 1, Page 26.

⁶⁰ Ibid, Part 1, Page 25.

⁶¹ Ibid, Part 1, Pages 31 and 40.

⁶² Ibid, Part 2, Page 13. Also see Kornweibel's *Seeing Red*, page 190, note 45, which details that McKay's file held false reports of his return to the US. Kornweibel explains that black agent James E. Amos held evidence of McKay's being in France, when his file claimed he was in New York.

the narrator provides Jake's exact coordinates: "Fifth Avenue, Lenox Avenue, and One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth street."⁶³ Shane Vogel argues that "for those looking for a map to Harlem's underworld, McKay's novel appeared to provide exact coordinates of its people and places."⁶⁴ Initially this realist mode of describing Harlem's people and places makes the city seem expansive and full of possibility to Jake. "Harlem! Harlem!," he reflects, "Where else could I have all this life but Harlem? Good old Harlem! Chocolate Harlem!"⁶⁵ Marking Harlem as a site of delicious blackness when he calls it "Chocolate," Jake alludes to the white flight that occurred following the Great Migration of black wartime laborers who had moved into the city from the South. Later in fact, the narrator describes Harlem as conquered by blackness, explaining that not all whites had "evacuated that block yet," but "black invasion was threatening it from One hundred and Twenty-Ninth Street."⁶⁶ The novel portrays Harlem as a growing domain of blackness, a welcoming cultural hot spot for African Americans, and as such, the city allows Jake to feel a belonging that reinforces his optimism: "Harlem! Harlem!" the place that gives him "all this life."⁶⁷

However, Harlem as a site of blackness does not just produce a space of cultural community for the characters, it also lends itself to surveillance as an enclosed and centralized space for easily monitoring African Americans.⁶⁸ Two paragraphs following Jake's interior monologue, marked by ellipsis to reveal that we are no longer in his interiority, the narrator

⁶³ Ibid, 10.

⁶⁴ Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 155.

⁶⁵ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 14.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 300.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁶⁸ See Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* that argues that enclosure is needed to track and discipline the subject.

shows that Harlem does not actually nurture Jake; instead it places him in a dangerous, easily tracked, position, as the closeness of the urban space becomes a vulnerability. No longer speaking in first person, the narrator shifts to third person, as an observer reflects on Jake's homecoming:

Oh, to be in Harlem again after two years away...the thickness, the closeness of it. The noises of Harlem. The sugared laughter. The honey-talk on its streets...Oh the contagious fever of Harlem. Burning everywhere in dark-eyes Harlem...Burning now in Jake's sweet blood."⁶⁹

The narrator portrays Harlem as a contagious fever or binge that poisons Jake and foreshadows the alcoholism that threatens his life later in the novel. However, the fever in Jake's blood can also be read as an implanted "bug" or surveillance device. The "bug" enables his surveillance via the alcoholism that burns in "Jake's sweet blood"—for he is more easily watched in the cabarets where he quenches his thirst.⁷⁰ Jake, however, does not see what the omniscient narrator knows: that Harlem places Jake in the "thickness" and "closeness" of a racial space, a location where *all* African Americans can easily be monitored by way of the "noises of Harlem," "the sugared laughter," and the "honey-talk on its streets."⁷¹ Disguised as a cultural hot spot when Jake first arrives, Harlem is actually a site under extreme surveillance: "dark eyes" that burn "everywhere" constantly watch the "sugared laughter" and "honey talk" that is at first so appealing in the enclosed space of Harlem.⁷²

Who is it that constantly watches?

⁶⁹ Ibid, 15.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

II. Harlem: An Analyzable Space

As an enclosed and therefore centralized and easily accessible site for surveillance over racial minorities, Harlem was historically an analyzable space where investigators could oversee and observe African Americans. Private investigation groups consisting of ordinary citizens worked in conjunction with the federal government to infiltrate and police Harlem during and beyond WWI. Portraying themselves as reformers, these groups mainly focused on issues of alcoholism, prostitution, and interracial couples, but also sought out disloyal blacks and radical aliens during wartime. Jennifer Fronc's *New York Undercover* has shown how this informal system of policing "became a useful way for the government to suppress domestic political subversion (particularly among African Americans) and to prosecute and deport 'dangerous radicals'."⁷³ Using ordinary citizens to do their police work, the state reduced its visible invasive presence in Harlem and sidestepped public backlash.⁷⁴ As Fronc shows, federal agencies collaborated with these private organizations in ways "that did not raise concerns about the government acting beyond its sanction."⁷⁵ For example, one organization, "The People's Institute," created "Americanization programs" in conjunction with the federal government, while the National Civic Federation policed immigrant radicalism.⁷⁶ By WWI, the Bureau of Investigation "received reports by private organizations of their findings and occasionally hired

⁷³ Jennifer Fronc, *New York Undercover: Private Surveillance in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 39.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 27. Fronc asserts that the governments arrangement with private organizations increased "the reach" of the government while "saving it from having to assume directly this unpopular work. Therefore, private organization, "though they were not official parts of the government qua government, had made themselves a part of the state by the period of World War I."

⁷⁵ Ibid, 29.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

investigators from the organizations and loaned them their own employees.”⁷⁷ This relationship would expand the involvement of state policing into the citizens’ private behaviors. Following their policing, private organizations sent “undercover agents’ reports to the proper federal authorities who had the official powers to make arrests and begin deportation hearings (in the case of immigrants) or criminal proceedings.”⁷⁸

These private investigation groups hired African American undercover agents to infiltrate African American cabarets, shops, and hotels. One African American private investigator, William F. Pogue, was catalogued for investigating Marshall’s Hotel. Fronc explains how Pogue, a member of Harlem’s community, integrated his “investigative tasks and personal social life.”⁷⁹ Finished with collecting the evidence for his report on issues of alcoholism and prostitution, upon leaving Marshall’s, Pogue encountered his friends arriving at the bar and decided to stay and join the libations. His report “condemned Marshall’s for serving alcohol until five in the morning, but he was little concerned that he was engaged in disorderly behavior himself.”⁸⁰

Since Harlem was closely monitored for crimes of disloyalty and issues of reform, it is not unsurprising that police appear throughout *Home to Harlem*. However, they are nowhere to be found when a violent outburst explodes in Harlem as two women fight over a shared love interest. Police “conspicuously absent during the fracas,” and nowhere to be seen, disembodied authority breaks up the disruption when out of nowhere “a baton tap-tapped upon the pavement” and the crowd dispersed.⁸¹ The unembodied authority that lingers over Harlem also shuts down

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 31.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 99.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 284.

Jake's favorite cabaret. The narrator denies that the police had ever done so: "nothing sensational had happened in the Baltimore. The police had not, on a certain night, swept into it and closed it up because of indecent doings. No. It was an indirect raid."⁸² Negating Harlem's police presence, the narrator simultaneously exposes his omniscience. While none of the characters see or know about police shutting down their favorite cabarets, the all-knowing omniscient narrator exposes the undercover agents who exist at the margins of *Home to Harlem*.

These African American undercover police informants create a tone of urgency and distrust. When "three young white men" at Madame Suarez's cabaret are "unmasked as the vice squad," resembling the private inspection committees that Fronc details, we learn that the men were initially "introduced by a perfectly groomed dark brown man."⁸³ He, it seems, had vetted the white men in the cabaret; but Fronc's work indicates the men most likely partnered with the vice squad to close the cabaret, for once unmasked, "the uniformed police were summoned."⁸⁴ Moreover, nearly two thirds through the novel, Jake meets Yaller, a "P.I". It is an ambiguous acronym throughout the novel, though one assumes that Yaller is a police informant. Eventually, Jake informs us that Yaller is a "P.I...low down yaller swine...Harlem is stinking with them."⁸⁵ While it is uncertain what Yaller's profession truly is, he is also referred to as a "real good scout," and eventually Ray, a foreign alien who is not a citizen of the U.S., sarcastically yells for him to "search me!"⁸⁶

⁸² Ibid, 102.

⁸³ Ibid, 106.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 109.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 240-241.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 240-241.

Understanding the historical figure of the black undercover agent at the novel's margins, we can now see how McKay's awareness of surveillance explains his novel's paranoia and why his characters conceal personal details from these agents. We have already established that Jake attempted to conceal his methods of travel upon arriving on domestic soil. This concealment is further exemplified through Jake's lack of dialogue in a conversation with Zeddy, a former soldier who fought alongside Jake. Zeddy having been in the same "chocolate company" as Jake, may have been the last person to know Jake's location once he went missing. Yet when Zeddy asks, "What part of the earth done belch you out?... How come you just vanished thataway like a spook? How did you take your tail out ovit?," Jake refuses to answer.⁸⁷ The narrator summarizes that "Jake told Zeddy how he walked out of it straight to the station in Brest. La Havre. London. The West India Docks. And back home to Harlem."⁸⁸ However, Jake remains silent throughout this scene and never discloses his exact methods for avoiding immigration—the only dialogue on the page is Zeddy's. He understands Jake's silence, and warns:

You must keep it dark, buddy...Don't go shooting off your mouth too free. Gov'mant still smoking out deserters and draft dodgers...it's better to keep your business close all the time. But I'll tell you this for your particular information. Niggers am awful close-mouthed in somethings. There is fellows here in Harlem that just telled the draft to mount upstairs. Pohlice and soldiers were hunting ev'where for them. And they was right here in Harlem. Fifty dollars apiece foh them. All their friends knowd it and not a one gived them in. I tell you, niggers amazing sometimes. Yet other times, without any natural reason, they will go vomiting out their guts to the ofays about one another.⁸⁹

Warning his friend to continue his methods of concealment, Zeddy teaches Jake about the undercover agents who are "right here in Harlem."⁹⁰ Zeddy's explanation of undercover agents who invaded Harlem also speaks to citizens who would receive a "\$50 reward" payable to

⁸⁷ Ibid, 22.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 23.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

anyone who “caught a willful deserter” and “delivered him to military control.”⁹¹ Therefore, individual citizens who became police informants were “eager to supply ‘tips’ to the Bureau of Investigation” for monetary gain.⁹² Fearing that someone may overhear his conversation and discover his identity as a wartime deserter, Jake responds by avoiding Zeddy. He changes the subject, patriotically exclaiming, “God; but it’s good to get back home again!”⁹³ The exclamation point at the end of this statement suggests that Jake, finally using his voice, speaks loud enough so that others who overhear him will not suspect him for disloyalty to the nation, but as expressing patriotic fervor.⁹⁴

While Jake’s concealment of personal details throughout the novel can be explained by undercover agents policing Harlem, Jake is not a surveillance target until the novel’s end. In the final chapter, now that “the war was just ended,” the narrator reveals his identity to the readers as an African American undercover agent.⁹⁵ Slipping again into first person narration, he reveals that he identifies as a cabaret-going, African American male, when he generalizes about the black race and includes himself in such descriptions:

Negroes, like all good Americans, love a bar. I should have said, Negroes under Anglo-Saxon civilization. A bar has a charm all of its own that makes drinking there pleasanter. We like to lean up against it, with a foot on the rail. We will leave our women companions and our choice wines at the table to snatch a moment of exclusive sex solidarity over a thimble of gin at the bar⁹⁶

Using the first person “I,” the narrator scripts himself as a character in the text. Slipping quickly into the categorical “we,” associated with Jake and Zeddy, the narrator reveals that he is an

⁹¹ Theodore Kornweibel, *“Investigate Everything”: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 76.

⁹² Ibid, 3.

⁹³ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 23.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 317.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 324.

African American man in the cabaret, a member of Harlem's society, similar to non-fictional undercover agent William F. Pogue, discussed in Frone's recovery work on black agents. The narrator not only reveals himself as a member of the Harlem community, he also tracks and records what it means to be a "good American," and specifically, a good American negro under "Anglo-Saxon civilization." Why had he become an undercover agent? The novel's omniscient narrative voice answers by drawing our attention to the routinized surveillance he could have also been under: "It was now eating-time in Harlem. They were Hungry. They washed and dressed."⁹⁷

III. Surveillance and the Self-Conscious African American Literary Tradition

The last chapter of Frederick Douglass's autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), critiques how the underground railroad disseminated information to slaves. Doing so, he articulates the problem that arises for a self-conscious biographical text that is also aware of surveillance:

I have never approved of the very public manner in which some of our western friends have conducted what they call the *underground railroad*, but which, I think, by their open declarations, has been made most emphatically the *upperground railroad*...[those declarations] do nothing towards enlightening the slave, whilst they do much towards enlightening the master. They stimulate him to greater watchfulness, and enhance his power to capture the slave.⁹⁸

Offering this explanation for disrupting his biographical narrative, Douglass refuses to grant the reader private information about his escape. Jumping from his position as a slave who was sent to Baltimore by his master to learn a trade, to escaping to New Bedford where he would join the fight for abolition as a freedman, Douglass protects private moments in his biographical narrative

⁹⁷ Ibid, 40.

⁹⁸ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Dover Publications, 2014), 60.

from textual surveillance by producing a fragmented text. Though written prior to modern articulations of the *künstlerroman* genre, Douglass's text, and other slave narratives, anchor the African American *künstlerroman*—a genre that traces the development of a young artist to maturity—in the nineteenth century. In the African American literary tradition, this genre upholds print literature as a method with political potential; however, as Madelyn Jablon's *Black Metafiction* argues, the *künstlerroman* requires redefining to include themes and forms specific to the African American literary tradition.⁹⁹ A distinct and particular conflict for the African American *künstlerroman*, this section will show, is the tension that arises within self-conscious biographical texts that are aware of white surveillance.

In a self-conscious scene, Jake becomes cognizant of literature's political potential when he attempts to escape oversight in Harlem by accepting employment as a porter on a train. As the narrator explains, "Jake had taken the job on the railroad just to break the hold that Harlem had upon him," admitting that, "If I don't git away from [Harlem] for a while, it'll sure git me."¹⁰⁰ Assuming his position, Jake meets foreign radical Ray, whose characterization as an artist allows *Home to Harlem* to draw on the tradition of the African American *künstlerroman*. Critics have noted the autobiographical details that McKay weaves throughout Ray's characterization: Gary Holcomb and Tom Lutz both argue that author and artist-character experience similar social attacks on homosexuality; both immigrate to the United States to attend university (Ray from Haiti and McKay from Jamaica); and eventually, both make their way to Harlem to follow their dreams of taking up the pen, a profession that brought their works and characters under

⁹⁹ Madelyn Jablon, *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 57.

¹⁰⁰ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 125.

surveillance.¹⁰¹ Paralleling McKay, who the BI actually did investigate, Ray also fits the description of an individual whom the state would label a seditionist threat.

A linear biographical narrative of artist-character Ray would lend itself to the BI's method for interpreting literary texts: biographical criticism. A mode of literary analysis that reached its popularity in the 1920's, literary scholars would have been trained in this approach at the time that McKay wrote and published *Home to Harlem* and, as William Maxwell notes, the BI hired agents who received such training from Yale University.¹⁰² By returning to McKay's file, we can see that it was exactly this mode of analysis that the BI used when reading McKay's fictions and poems for evidence of radicalism. The file provides clips of McKay's earliest poetry publications, such as excerpts from "Enslaved" and "America," published in the liberator in 1921. They too make special note of the last verse of McKay's lauded and militant "If We Must Die." On January 26, 1924, a memorandum placed in McKay's file disclosed the BI's critical method for interpreting these texts. Stating that "McKay's views, beliefs, principles, et cetera may properly be inferred from quotations from his writings," the Bureau recognized McKay's work as both fiction and personal testament. Committing what literary modernism scholar Sean Latham refers to as one of literary criticism's "deadliest sins" by "treating seemingly fictional

¹⁰¹ William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive*, See Claude McKay's file, Part 2, page 49. While scholars, such as Holcomb and Lutz, have discussed Ray as a parallel to McKay, scholars have failed to see how the paranoia that Ray exhibits throughout *Home to Harlem* is an effect of surveillance, that is similar to the oversight that McKay experience in his own life. See Holcomb's *Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* and Lutz's *Claude McKay: Music, Sexuality, and Literary Cosmopolitanism*.

¹⁰² Maxwell's *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* provides an excellent account of the academic ways in which Hoover's readers were trained in literary criticism. Some of Hoover's "ghostreaders," Maxwell explains, arrived at "agent training class with advanced degrees from the Yale English Department" (151). These readers drew from an approach that Maxwell names "biohistoricism," which draws from academic schools of the "late 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s" where the critic read the text as an "exotic confessional" (131, 145).

works from the early twentieth century as if they contained real facts about real people and events,” the Bureau did not recognize McKay’s early poems as modern self-authorizing aesthetic objects.¹⁰³ Agents interpreted them, instead, as biography.

Therefore, a fictional artist-character such as Ray, who does parallel the author, would have been exactly the plot point that BI agents trained in biographical criticism would have traced throughout the text. Knowing that the BI would mine his text for biographical details, McKay uses Ray, not to disclose facts about himself to his readers, as the BI critics would assume, but to speak back to the BI’s method of reading. Anticipating that BI readers might become interested in Ray’s characterization, McKay uses this foreign black radical writer to critique biographical criticism’s reductive analysis and celebrate literature’s political potential to empower a multicultural American society.

Ray’s own analysis of literature criticizes the ethics and accuracy of using the text to derive supposed personal knowledge about the subject. Intervening in Ray’s textual analysis, the narrator notes that Ray reads *Sapho* by Alphonse Daudet. Familiar with the text, the narrator pinpoints exactly which scene Ray reads: “the scene between Fanny and Jean when the lover discovers the letters of his mistress’s former woman friend.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the narrator is familiar with the text because it faced an indecency trial in New York in 1900, and faced a censorship similar to what the Seditionist Act would bring. But even more significant is that the narrator is intrigued by the section of the text where private letters reveal Sapho’s secret past and personal relationship. Desiring to learn about Sapho through embedded biographical intertextuality, the

¹⁰³ Latham, *The Art of Scandal*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 128.

narrator searches for hints of Sappho's "true" or biographical self—a method similar to that which the Bureau adopted when they desired to learn about McKay.

While the narrator attempts to disclose Sappho's personal history, Ray keeps the text private and refuses to quote from it. Instead he offers Jake a summary:

It's a story, he told Jake, by a French writer named Alphonse Daudet. It's about a sporting woman who was beautiful like a rose and had the soul of a wandering cat. Her lovers called her Sappho, I like the story, but I hate the use of Sappho for its title...Because Sappho was a real person. A wonderful woman, a great Greek Poet.¹⁰⁵

Disclosing his disdain for the title and critiquing the narrator, who conflates "the story" and textual character with "the real person," and biographical figure, Ray argues that deriving personal history from fiction reduces the subject's personhood. The narrator/investigator does not see what is beyond the text: she was a "real person," a "wonderful woman," and lastly, "a Great poet."¹⁰⁶

The BI's method of reading not only rests on inadequate biographical information, it overlooks literature's political potential to affect the American populace, to encourage their embrace of a multicultural political imaginary. The method that fails to fully represent Sappho's personhood also places limitations on the autonomy and multiplicity of the text. Latham explains that a reader searching for biographical data enters "a sleuthlike effort to decode the identity of historical antecedents for the constructs on the page. This idiosyncratic mode of reading is thus based on spectacle and speculation rather than identification and interpellation."¹⁰⁷ The Bureau's method of biographical reading thus reduces the reader's potential to see themselves in the text, find new meaning, and then employ that reading to transform the social sphere.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Latham, *The Art of Scandal*, 27.

But to a modern artist such as Ray, language does just that: it provides the opportunity for a multiplicity of meanings that goes beyond the author's intentionality. Doing so, the text holds a political promise of transcending oppressive social positions for the reader and his community. Using *Sapho* as an example, Ray explains that Sapho's individual "story gave two lovely words to modern language;" yet, he rejects the meaning that American culture assigns them.¹⁰⁸ Deriving the words "Saaphic and Lesbian" from the text, the conversation between artist Ray and layman Jake reveals the downsides of how language disciplines and defines belonging.¹⁰⁹ Claiming that these terms are "beautiful" and "lovely," Ray does not assign them any cultural meaning but understands them instead as signifiers for readers to fulfill.¹¹⁰ In contrast, Jake's declaration that these terms define homosexuality, a category Harlem culture has excluded, reveals how biographical criticism limits a text's political potential to embrace multiculturalism. Most scholars label this scene as Ray's confession of homosexuality to Jake, a character whose sexual identity has also been debated as ambiguous or fluid.¹¹¹ While these scholars should be applauded for elucidating the LGBTQ presence in Harlem Renaissance texts that had been ignored for much too long, reducing McKay's texts to a discussion of sexuality and relying upon the details of McKay's personal life to perform such readings (as the narrator does with Saapho), allows

¹⁰⁸ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 129.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Eric Newman reads this scene as a confession, between Jake and Ray, of their shared knowledge about the "queer world." Eric Newman, "Ephemeral Utopias: Queer Cruising, Literary Form, and Diasporic Imagination in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*," *Callaloo* 38, no. 1 (2015): 167-185. For discussions of the queer presence in McKay's texts, also see Charles Nero, "Reading Will Make You Queer: Gender Inversion and Racial Leadership in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*," *Palimpsest: A Journal of Women, Gender, And the Black International* 2, no. 1: 74-86 and Suzette Spencer, "Swerving at a Different Angle and Flying in the Face of Tradition: Excavating the Homoerotic Subtext in *Home to Harlem*," *CLA Journal* 42, no. 2 (1998): 164-193.

biographical critics to miss McKay's larger critique of discursive discipline.¹¹² Similar to his critics, who interpret McKay's texts as "queer texts," Jake simplistically interprets the terms "Sapphic and Lesbian" to hold only one essential meaning: homosexual. Recalling a Harlem lyric, from which his knowledge of these words is based, Jake recites:

And there is two things in Harlem I don't understand

It is a bulldyking woman and a faggoty man...¹¹³

Not only has Harlem assigned these terms to signify homosexuality, but by claiming that there is something about them that cannot be understood, a hierarchical structure is created and they are placed outside of what is accepted. Using classificatory discourse, Jake claims that "Bulldyker" refers to "all ugly womens."¹¹⁴ Yet, Ray fights against this singular reading, claiming, "Not *all*" fit that description and that "Harlem is too savage about somethings."¹¹⁵

Offering a mode of literary analysis that allows the reader to transcend the cultural norm, Ray juxtaposes the narrator's limited biographical reading of *Sappho*, and Jake's reductive analysis of the Harlem lyric, with a reading of William Wordsworth's ode, "To Toussaint L'ouverture." Ray contextualizes the poem within a history that allows racially oppressed peoples to feel liberated, as the story of Toussaint fighting for Haiti's independence "electrified" the world with "universal ideas—ideas so big that they had lifted up ignorant people, even blacks, to the stature of Gods."¹¹⁶ This history had been censored from American cultural memory, as the narrator explains that it is Jake's first time encountering the tale. Upon hearing

¹¹² See endnote 89.

¹¹³ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 129.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 133-134.

Ray recite the ode, Jake's experience of the poem transcends American racial boundaries. Instead of using the text to derive personal knowledge about the subject, as the narrator did with *Sapho*, Jake's experience with the text allows him to see *his* situation as a black man in a new global way. Imagining himself fighting in Toussaint's war for Haitian liberation by drawing from his own wartime experiences as a black soldier, Jake empathizes with the poem and divests himself of his loyalty to America and joins the community of the oppressed across the Black Atlantic in the global fight for liberation. The poem has thus allowed Jake to experience "revelation beautiful in his mind," which "felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world."¹¹⁷ Seeing himself in but also beyond the text, Jake sheds his consciousness of American exceptionalism and no longer labels himself as a US national, but as a global citizen. He once believed that all who were not Americans were "poor foreigners," and he looked "askew at foreign niggers. Africa was jungle, and Africans bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indian monkey-chasers."¹¹⁸ Now Jake sees these people as his true community.

Seeing Jake's transformation after he heard the Whitman poem, the narrator now scripts Jake as one of Ray's students—a fear that the BI would have had, as they feared "gullible" blacks would become educated by alien radicals and accept the knowledge they dispersed.¹¹⁹ The narrator's description of Jake as a student who "sat like a big eager boy and learned many facts about Hayti," infantilizes him as a "child that does not know its letters," and "[plies] his instructor with questions."¹²⁰ Characterizing Jake as an impressionable ward, the BI's largest fear

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 134.

¹¹⁹ Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*, 110.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 132.

becomes a reality on these pages: if the state does not educate African Americans, then someone else, perhaps a disloyal foreigner, will. Now, instead of romanticizing America as the state set out to script, Jake begins to see a “romance of his race.”¹²¹ Now he draws identity not from his nation, but the transatlantic black community he empathized with in the poem. Such a transformation in Jake, from his experience reading the text, speaks to the African American literary tradition’s optimism about print literature’s political potential.

IV. Avoiding Surveillance: Recrafting the African American *Künstlerroman*

Ray’s desire to compose texts that have a political effect on American ideology lands him on the narrator’s watch list. Declaring his goals as such, *Home to Harlem* now shifts from solely focalizing through Jake to sharing focalization with Ray, who becomes a second protagonist. This shift allows the narrator-investigator to place the modern writer, Ray, under surveillance. Ray’s awareness of surveillance over those who live the literary life is immediate. When Ray and Jake attend a club where the owner’s son who “loves books” fraternizes and drinks with the club goers, Ray has a strong reaction: there was “something about the presence of the little boy there...He could not analyze his aversion. It was just an instinctive, intolerant feeling that the boy did not belong to that environment.”¹²² Deflecting his own feelings onto the child, Ray fears for the child’s safety, understanding that to take an intellectual path is to put oneself in danger. In the following moment, a police raid bursts through the doors and while no one else flees—Ray runs. Ray understands that while he is in America, he will constantly have a target on his back due to his position as a black radical writer, a calling that could lead to violence against him, arrest, and deportation. Later in the novel an educated man, described as a “prof” because he

¹²¹ Ibid, 134.

¹²² Ibid, 193.

handed out information about “the big stuff about niggers and their rights and the wul’ and bolschism”—the very ideology that brought on the surveillance of McKay—is assaulted when a passerby rips his books from his arms and “socks him bif! In the jaw.”¹²³ Such violence is what Ray attempts to avoid through concealing his identity as a subversive artist.

Understanding the dangers to a black artist of being under surveillance, Ray searches for an aesthetic form that produces political affect and simultaneously protects his identity as a black radical writer. Wondering, “what would he ever do with the words he had acquired? Were they adequate to tell the thoughts he felt, describe the impressions that reached him vividly?”, Ray questions how literary form might represent his personal and particular “thoughts” and “impressions” without disclosing his biographical identity.¹²⁴ Notably, Ray turns to high modernist writers for influence:

During the war he had been startled by James Joyce in *The Little Review*. Sherwood Anderson had reached him with *Winesburg, Ohio*. He had read, fascinated, all that D.H. Lawrence published. And wondered if there was not a great Lawrence reservoir of words too terrible and too terrifying for nice printing. Henri Barbusse’s *Le Feu* burnt like a flame in his memory. Ray loved the book because it was such a grand anti-romantic presentation of mind and behavior in that hell-pit of life. And literature, story-telling, had little interest for him now if thought and feeling did not wrestle and sprawl with appetite and dark desire all over the pages.¹²⁵

Ray’s reflection on influential modern writers who have produced profound literature that represents their views of the world through autobiographical fictions—Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, and Barbusse’s *Le Feu*—inspires Ray to do the same. Yet our artist-character is no longer interested in “story-telling,” or a biographical linear narrative, such as the BI could coldly trace. Ray

¹²³ McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 286.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 2.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 227-228.

therefore shifts from questioning what to make of words to what form he could adopt to escape a linear plot centralized on biographical readings: “Could he ever create Art? Art, around which vague, incomprehensible words and phrases stormed?”¹²⁶ Ray’s goal to create a form that allows language to storm would produce a product that moves, alters, and changes with each new reader, allowing him or her to experience an individualized effect; but also allowing Ray to articulate his thoughts while concealing his selfhood.

McKay draws the reader’s attention to the significance of a writer’s choice of form when Ray composes a narrative within the text, a chapter embedded in *Home to Harlem*, titled “He Also Loved.” Ray’s previous reflections on writing, and on romantic themes that the chapter’s title suggests, leave the reader questioning if he will adopt a linear form similar to nineteenth century romance novels: “*Les Miserables*, *Nana*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Oliver Twist*,” are a few that he had admired. Such novels had once inspired Ray to dream of “weaving words to make romance.”¹²⁷ However, in “He Also Loved” Ray becomes the intradiegetic narrator, rejecting the linear narrative. While the title of the chapter suggests that Ray’s story will engage the romance genre that centered on a character whose narrative arch will lead him to a romantic union, the metafictional aspects that speak to this chapter’s composition allows Ray to critique such a narrative form. Linda Hutcheon’s groundbreaking work on metafiction allows us to understand that by drawing the reader’s attention to writing as an event in the novel, McKay forces the reader to “acknowledge the artifice, the ‘art,’ of what he is reading” as fictional.¹²⁸ In doing so the reader is introduced to an

¹²⁶ Ibid, 228.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 225.

¹²⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980), 5.

established “novelistic code,” teaching the reader the “interpretative process from which he will learn how the book is read.”¹²⁹ Thus the artist-character Ray reveals a code within “He Also Loved.” Here, Ray veers from the linear narrative, providing fragmented details about his own life. Suggesting a duality through the title, “He Also Loved,” Ray evokes a narrative that traces more than one man’s love story. While the chapter primarily focuses on the story of Jerco, who commits suicide when his true love Rosalind dies, another tragic love story lies at its margins: the story of the artist whose romance with art’s political potential is broken. Just here in “He Also Loved” we begin to learn part of Ray’s journey from young artist to mature manhood. While previously the narrator had told us that Ray came to attend school at Howard University, Ray’s intradiegetic narration provides a different tale: “It was in the winter of 1916 when I first came to New York to hunt for a job. I was broke. I was afraid I would have to pawn my clothes, and it was dreadfully cold. I didn’t even know the right way to go about looking for a job...”¹³⁰ Ray discloses autobiographical experiences of immigrating to the US, but embeds them within the linear narrative of Jerco’s tragic love story—a creative method found throughout *Home to Harlem*. With it he protects his true experience from others’ oversight and control.

Drawing the reader’s attention to a narrative code that discloses a fragmented autobiography embedded in a fictional narrative, McKay uses author-character Ray’s narration to recraft the African American *künstlerroman* linear form. Halfway through the novel we learn that Ray was “born in Hayti” and it is only because Uncle Sam “shut [his father] up in jail when America “grabbed Hayti,” and his brother was killed by American marines, that we learn why Ray dropped out of the university to obtain employment as a porter to support himself

¹²⁹ Ibid, 139.

¹³⁰ Ibid, *Home to Harlem*, 245.

financially.¹³¹ Ray's childhood, however, remains a mystery. It is his alone. So while readers of the *künstlerroman* genre might have expected the author-character's childhood to be introduced early on; the black artist-character who faces surveillance discloses those details to the reader only in fragmented passages spaced throughout the text. In one instance, when Ray narrates his thoughts, "he flung himself, across void and water, back home. Home thoughts...there was the quiet, chalky-dusty street and, jutting out over it, the house that he had lived in...All the flowing things he loved" and the "stately bamboos creating a green grandeur in the heart of space."¹³² Focalizing through the artist-character in these slivers of memory, the text constructs aspects of a *künstlerroman* embedded in *Home to Harlem*, depicting how Ray's childhood environment allowed him to see the world in an artistic way. Such an aesthetic point of view permits Ray to articulate a world without racial oppression. Reflecting on his childhood environment, he portrays a world in "a blue paradise. Everything was in gorgeous blue of heaven. Woods and streams were blues, and men and women and animals, and beautiful to see and love."¹³³ Elsewhere in these fragmented moments, anything that stifled his creative and transcendent worldview, such as "Howard University," was a "prison with white warders."¹³⁴ Ray's narration provides a fragmented journey of the artist-character that articulates his distinct world view. His journey traces his reflections on growing up in beautiful Haiti, immigrating to the US, feeling like an outsider within the institutionalized Howard University, and culminating in the artist-character's awareness of the surveillance a black radical artist faces in the US. Such a journey concludes with the black radical writer's expatriation abroad.

¹³¹ Ibid 131, 138.

¹³² Ibid, 152-153.

¹³³ Ibid 157-158.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

V. Escaping Harlem

Fleeing surveillance in Harlem is exactly what both main characters, Ray and Jake, decide to do. Understanding that Harlem is not the site of freedom as Jake and Ray once thought, but of close surveillance, the characters by novel's end realize that "Harlem is the craziest place...it gives the niggers brain-fevah...Wese too thick in Harlem. Need some moh fresh air between us."¹³⁵ Now able to articulate how being under surveillance in an enclosed space like Harlem affects them psychologically, with a "brain-fevah," both Ray and Jake decide to leave. While on the surface it seems that Jake flees Harlem due to his fear of being discovered as a wartime deserter, surveillance plays a main role in his decision. Understanding that surveillance was used to track wartime deserters allows us to see that Jake, too, would flee because of the oversight in Harlem. Jake soon comes to realize that he, too, "can't stay in Harlem no longer, for the bulls will sure get you," and that "this heah country is good and big enough for us to git lost in," and he decides that he "better let Harlem miss [him] foh a little while."¹³⁶ Jake migrates to Chicago while Ray, rejecting "the pigpen of Harlem," takes a position on a freighter heading to Australia, then Europe.¹³⁷ We first met Jake at sea, where he could not easily be tracked. Ray makes the same choice. And in both instances, the omniscient narrator does not further track them.

The characters' mobility speaks to the long history of expatriated black writers escaping overseas. *Home to Harlem* ends with Ray leaving the US, making his way to the French beaches of Marseille. There he takes up with an artist's community that McKay portrays in *Banjo: A*

¹³⁵ Ibid, 285.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 335.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 263.

Story without a Plot. Like these characters, expatriated black authors who went abroad could write without the Bureau of Investigation tracing their every move, a goal that Ray desired to make when he left Harlem's "thickness." In France, Ray is not a radical "misfit," and he can embrace his artistic gifts rather than conceal his actual self. Bill E. Lawson notes that "the racial tolerance experienced by African Americans" in France made it an "important European destination for black artists wishing to practice their arts outside" of "US Racial constraints."¹³⁸ As literary histories and biographies have shown, these writers significantly contributed to the French culture, forming "a black society" that "absorbed the latest innovations, and influences of French Culture."¹³⁹ Biographer and critic Michel Fabre claims that, "of all the Afro American writers who resided in France between the two world wars, Claude McKay remained there the longest and mixed most with all sorts of people."¹⁴⁰

To the Bureau agents seeking to track these writers abroad, the migrant black writer presented a problem that leading surveillance studies scholar, David Lyon, defines as the problem of the "Disappearing Body."¹⁴¹ Lyon asserts that the rise of surveillance societies "has everything to do with disappearing bodies"—a problem that occurs when the subject is distanced from the watcher who seeks to monitor him.¹⁴² To solve the problem of the disappearing body, BI agents turned to methods of liquid surveillance, which Zygmunt Bauman defines as a "way of

¹³⁸ Bill E. Lawson, "Afterword: *Stormy Weather* and Afromodernism," in *Afromodernisms: Parish, Harlem and the Avant-Garde* ed. Fionnghuala (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 235.

¹³⁹ Michelle Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black Writers in France, 1840-1980*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 92.

¹⁴¹ See David Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life*, (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001). Particularly chapter one, which claims that the rise of surveillance societies has everything to do with disappearing bodies" and that "bodies disappear when we do things at a distance."

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 15.

situating surveillance developments in the fluid and unsettling modernity today.” Liquid surveillance produces methods in which “movements are monitored, tracked and traced.” Slipping into a “liquid state,” surveillance is no longer centralized using a panoptical centralized design of enclosure; now it develops into a “globalized gaze that seems to leave nowhere to hide.”¹⁴³ State security adopts this surveillance to “monitor what *will* happen, using digital techniques and statistical reasoning,” and as Didier Bigo points out, “such security operates by tracking ‘everything that moves (products, information, capital, humanity).’ So surveillance works at a distance in both space and time, circulating fluidly with, but beyond, nation-states in a globalized realm.”¹⁴⁴

Since the modern state was unable to restrict black radical populations to spaces of domestic enclosure, as exemplified through the city in *Home to Harlem*, the state instituted the passport, a form of liquid surveillance that “facilitated governing over distance by making knowledge mobile”—specifically the knowledge of a subject’s location and movements.¹⁴⁵ Understanding that the modern passport partly solved the state’s need to track the black writer, his whereabouts, and which circles he was moving in while abroad, we can see that the passport was essential to continue surveillance over mobile artists who sought to escape localized surveillance on domestic soil. Set just a year after the Measure Control Act of 1918, *Home to Harlem* reflects life in a world of liquid surveillance.¹⁴⁶

The passport trope that is introduced in McKay’s *Home to Harlem* and continues into his subsequent novel *Banjo*, is introduced in *Home to Harlem*’s closing pages. Jake’s girlfriend

¹⁴³ Bauman, *Liquid Surveillance*, 2, Preface.

¹⁴⁴ Qtd. in Bauman, *Liquid Surveillance*, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America: The History of a Document*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 188.

¹⁴⁶ See endnote 35.

Felice, wanting to travel with Jake, can only bring herself to do so if she has in her possession a bead given to her at the time of her birth that signifies her identity. The closing lines of McKay's

Home to Harlem meditates over the "luck" that bead brings to Jake and Felice:

This lucky charm was an old plaited necklace, leathery in appearance, with a large antique blue bead attached to it, that Felice's grandmother (who had superintended her coming into the world) had given to her immediately after that event. Her grandmother had dipped the necklace into the first water that Felice was washed in. Felice had religiously worn her charm around her neck all during her childhood.¹⁴⁷

Felice's bead signifies a personal migration narrative that classifies her as a member of the African American Great Migration: she migrated from the South, to New York, and eventually Chicago.¹⁴⁸ Her narrative, reduced to a signifier (the bead), reveals her private and personal biographical narrative, just like the passport, another object, would publicly do. Explaining that, "It's mah luck...it's the fierst thing that was gived to me when I was born. Mah gran'ma gived it and I wears it always foh good luck," the bead holds Felice's identity similar to a birth certificate that ties her to her homeland and her family.¹⁴⁹ The grandmother giving it to her as "her superintendent," emblemizes the distinction of traditional identity signs, different from those the state will require citizens to travel with. Unable "to go to Chicago without it," Felice has the last words of the novel: "I'll nevah fohgit it again itll always give us luck."¹⁵⁰ Ending *Home to Harlem* on such a statement, McKay portrays that an identity allowing for travel is an asset not to be lost, a harbinger of what is to come in *Banjo*, when black travelers do lack proper documentation.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 312-313.

¹⁴⁸ See Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns* for a discussion of the Great Migration of 1915-1970, particularly sections that discuss migration to New York and Chicago.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 339-340.

Felice only feels comfortable traveling with a bead, an object that signifies her identity and personal history for herself. However, the concluding section of this chapter explores how government required passport documents do not just provide narrative identities, but reduce biographical narratives to data that produces an alternative identity used for state purposes. An analysis of literal passport documents found throughout McKay's *Banjo* reveals how McKay's novels warn against liquid surveillance that turns personal narratives into data, anticipating the inhumane and devastating effects of such monitorization.

VI. A Turn Abroad: Liquid Surveillance in *Banjo: A Story without a Plot*

While McKay's later novel, *Banjo: A Story without a Plot*, has been analyzed as a text whose form matches its sub-title phrase, a text that lacks a plot and thus a cohesive form, Michelle Stephens' recent *Black Empire* contests for the opposite. Stephens argues that the transfer of the main character Ray from *Home to Harlem* into McKay's less-well-known novel *Banjo*, makes it simply a sequel to McKay's best seller:¹⁵¹

Home to Harlem and *Banjo* should be read as two halves of the same novel, two episodes in the same story. Both were written between 1923 and 1925 while McKay was living an expatriated life in Morocco and France, and both were published within a year of each other. The novels are linked explicitly in form with the reappearance of the picaresque and in content with the reappearance of the Caribbean character Ray, and briefly, toward the end of *Banjo*, Jake, the primary African American character from *Home to Harlem*.¹⁵²

McKay's form, Stephens argues, is not a hasty accident that surprisingly differs from *Home to Harlem*'s, it is the cause of McKay's exploration for a "form of writing appropriate to express the unique circumstances of modernity"—a matter that would preoccupy McKay throughout his life.¹⁵³ To Stephens, therefore, *Banjo*'s plotlessness reveals that "the challenge for the black

¹⁵¹ Tillery, *Claude McKay*, 76. Tillery explains that *Home to Harlem* was the first novel written by a black author to make the bestseller list.

¹⁵² Stephens, *Black Empire*, 178.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 141

writer was how to use the novel's narrative form to represent a scattered, colonial, and fugitive black male population constantly on the run.”¹⁵⁴ Adding to Stephens' claim, I conclude this chapter by agreeing that *Banjo* is an extension of *Home to Harlem* and, in doing so, show that by reading the two novels as a pair we can see how the oversight that affected McKay not only flowed through his works, disrupting their linear forms, but also reveals a shift from local surveillance methods of enclosure to post-panoptic liquid surveillance in the global world.

Picking up where *Home to Harlem* left off, *Banjo* critiques migration as a way to escape localized surveillance. In *Banjo*, migration is no longer a viable method to escape oversight due to the state's shift toward liquid surveillance to track what Lyons names the disappearing body. Instituting the passport beyond wartime emergencies, the US emplaced such documentation long term in order to track the location and migratory paths of ethno-racial populations who traveled beyond their borders—a new mode of surveillance that could track black expatriated writers anywhere.

For black artists who did not have a passport, crafting a passport narrative was essential to their mobility following WWI. For instance, Bridget T. Chalk's “Sensible of Being Etrangers: Plots and Identity Papers in *Banjo*” argues that *Banjo* “provides a valuable perspective on the passport system in the interwar period” and “traces the complicity of linear narrative with dominant bureaucratic discourses of identity” to ultimately show that there is a fundamental relationship between “the text's plotlessness and its thematic engagement with questions of identity management.”¹⁵⁵ Pointing to McKay's own struggle with immigration, Chalk shows how,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Bridget T. Chalk, ““Sensible of Being Etrangers’: Plots and Identity Papers in *Banjo*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 55, no. 3 (2009): 357.

“during the period of *Banjo*’s composition,” McKay attempted to “secure his right to mobility by manipulating his identity to make it seem bureaucratically legitimate.”¹⁵⁶ To be allowed reentry to the United States, McKay had to structure a linear narrative:

McKay had to provide proof of his own biography—that is, to tell and document a comprehensible and legitimate story about himself with a clear point of departure and a progression of events leading to his present state. In these attempts to secure sufficient documentation, a ‘plot’ became a necessary prerequisite for bureaucratic privilege.¹⁵⁷

In scripting his biographical narrative, Chalk points to letters that McKay wrote to the American Consul in 1928 and 1929, which scripted his coming and going over the course of the past few decades—a biographical narrative needed to reenter the US.

The necessity for a passport transferred to McKay’s *Banjo*, where his black colonial migrant characters could not travel without documentation. McKay’s previous novel, *Home to Harlem*, anticipates the state’s demand for documentation through Felice’s travel narrative that is signified by the bead. In *Banjo*, passports are literally the object that drives the flow of the text. Characters either travel or remain stuck on the beaches of Marseille due to passport regulations, and while travelers in *Home to Harlem* construct their own narratives and identities, in *Banjo*, the state constructs the individual’s narrative from these documents. He loses the agency needed to construct who he is in the eyes of the state, but also where he can travel. The individual must now rely on the state for his identity, and consequently his right to mobility.

The primary protagonist of *Banjo*, Lincoln Agrippa Daily, seems likely to provide a biographical narrative for himself, similar to those in *Home to Harlem*. In the novel’s opening pages the narrator categorizes the all-American named Lincoln as a U.S. citizen residing in

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 359.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

France. Providing his origin story, the narrator explains that he was a “child of the Cotton Belt, but had wandered all over America.”¹⁵⁸ Classifying Lincoln as an American, we can assume that perhaps this origin story is similar to Ray’s, as embedded in *Home to Harlem*, or told by Felice before she heads for Chicago; however, the difference between those travel narratives and Lincoln’s is that the characters in *Home to Harlem* had agency in telling their stories, while in *Banjo*, the narrator tells Lincoln’s. As this story further unfolds we learn that Lincoln’s transnational journey is actually similar to that of *Home to Harlem*’s Jake. Like him, Lincoln also embarked on a journey that began with a military deployment: he left America for Canada, where he enlisted in the Canadian army, deployed to London and Paris, and then returned to the United States. Yet, once home, Lincoln refused to settle into the immobile restrictions that the state had imposed on their citizens’ —particularly black citizens’ —right to travel. For Lincoln, maintaining a national identity is so restrictive that he opts out of his American nationality and adopts a position of statelessness. Concocting a “unique plan of getting himself deported,” insisting that “his parentage was really foreign,” Lincoln declared to the US immigration office that “he was not an American.”¹⁵⁹ Once he has rid himself of his American identity, he also divests himself of his name and chooses to be “familiarily known as Banjo” a name that he chooses because to him his identity is not his citizenship that defines him, but who he is as an artist, for to Banjo, this African instrument—the banjo—“ “it’s mahself.”¹⁶⁰ Without the papers to classify him as belonging to a state, Banjo is free to migrate.

Banjo’s statelessness parallels the status of other characters throughout the text, however, these characters are not marked stateless by choice, but due to a lack of identification documents

¹⁵⁸ McKay, *Banjo*, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 6.

as a result of colonization. The text's fluidity of people arriving and leaving the shores of Marseille creates a plot that one might think is driven by mobility. The beach is a resting point for "white men, brown men, black men, Poles, Italians, Slavs, Maltese, Indians, Negroids, African Negroes, [and] West Indian Negroes" who find themselves in between travel; yet at the same time it is also a dumping ground for stateless and nationless individuals during the aftermath of WWI and the passport acts that followed.¹⁶¹ Many of these individuals are "deportees from America" who violated "United States immigration laws," and many are "afraid and ashamed to go back to their own lands" because they don't have the proper paper work that will allow for reentry.¹⁶² Many had "lost [their] seaman's papers," or could not "show exact proof of their birthplace," such as the West African character Taloufa.¹⁶³ Persons similarly lacking proof of nationality, like Taloufa, "were furnished with the new 'nationality doubtful papers,'" and marked as one who had "nowhere to go."¹⁶⁴ In this way the state continues to categorize and keep documentary control over the global populace, as they gave him a paper that bore his "name and fingerprints" that ports could use to track him.¹⁶⁵

The state's classification of Taloufa as a "nationality doubtful" is a discriminatory decision because "colored subjects were not wanted" when he sailed to England.¹⁶⁶ Immigration officials classified all racial minorities together, as "West Africans, East Africans, South Africans, West Indians, Arabs and Indians—they were all mixed up together" and none were allowed into the state."¹⁶⁷ Taloufa had attempted to immigrate to England, as he had friends in

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 5, 312.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 312.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 311.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 312.

Limehouse and in Cardiff. Moreover, he even had “a little property” that “he had left behind when he failed to return from his last American voyage,” as he previously lived in Britain for “forty years.” Nonetheless, because he had lost his papers, a common occurrence for “colored seamen who had lived their lives in the greatest careless tradition, and had lost their papers in low-down places to touts, hold-up men, and passport fabricators, and were unable...to show exact proof of their birthplace,” then Taloufa was not welcome. Unable to enter Britain, the authorities had told Taloufa to return to West Africa, but “Taloufa did not want to go there...His memory of his past was vague. He did not know what had become of his family.”¹⁶⁸ Thus without documentation that would construct a plot of his linear life, Taloufa is left to face the trauma of a past life that he initially fled.

Liquid surveillance allows Taloufa to be reduced to data, and then, a category — “nationality doubtful” — that leaves him stateless. Reducing people to data to be monitored divests the subject of a personal narrative, as Taloufa was unable to tell his. Such an effect results in inhumane adiaphorization, where “the data from the body...or triggered by the body,” by showing identification, is processed and analyzed to create a “data double.”¹⁶⁹ Bauman contests that this data double proxies for the individual, and is “made up of ‘personal’ data only in the sense that it originated in the person’s body and may affect their life chances and choices. The piecemeal data double tends to be trusted more than the person, who prefers to tell their own tale.”¹⁷⁰ Today, as Bauman and Lyon have shown, those who process the data, such as those who scan passports at immigration borders, claim that their role is to “simply deal with data” and

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Bauman, *Liquid Surveillance*, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

therefore they hold a “morally neutral” position and claim that their “assessments and discrimination are just ‘rational.’”¹⁷¹

Such effects can be seen through the violence that Banjo and other members of his artistic vagabond troupe experience, a vulnerability caused solely by the lack of proper papers. They are denaturalized at every sense. At first, this violence is illustrated through police raffles, which can be described as moments when the police would raid the beaches and ask for the vagabonds’ papers. If they did not have them, the vagabonds would be beaten and thrown into jail. The Sengalese who also inhabit the beaches of Marseille claim:

the police treated them like cattle...the Ditch [the location near the beach where the vagabonds sleep] was bloody brutal, the police could not be gentle. Every week there were raffles...the police were never polite...with the identity-card regulation and the frequent raffles the French police had unlimited power of interference with the individual.¹⁷²

Many of the beach boy vagabonds “complained of being beaten by the police,” even when they did have papers, as requiring such documentation became an opportunity to physically assault those who were not welcome. For instance, once two policemen “suddenly grabbed” Ray without warning, even though he told them he had his papers and would show them.¹⁷³ In this process, “the bigger policeman stunned him with a blow of his fist on the back of the neck” and arrested Ray with a “special chain that could be tightened and loosened at will, and the policeman took great pleasure in torturing Ray on the way to the jail.”¹⁷⁴ This kind of mental and physical violence runs rampant in the text, for “the ways of the Ditch were open to all eyes and

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² McKay, *Banjo*, 263.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 23, 264.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 264-265.

police eyes, like touts; eyes, were keen to see what they wanted to see and blind to what they wanted not to see.”¹⁷⁵

Moreover, papers not only justify a violent policing of beach people, but now determine who has access to basic human rights.¹⁷⁶ Now that it has been established that the vagabonds do not have the documentation that grants them citizenship, the text draws our attention to the ways that the data found on identification documents creates the data double that Bauman and Lyon criticize, and that prohibits these men from getting adequate care to live. At the end of the novel, Ray realizes that vagabond life cannot sustain the artists on the beach, and he takes Lonesome Blue to the American Consulate because he is “ill, helpless, and daft” and he wants to “try to get Lonesome Blue back to the United States, where he might have a chance to pull himself together among his own people.”¹⁷⁷ While the consulate promises to allow Lonesome Blue back into America to heal, two months later Ray stumbles upon him on the streets of France:

He was lifeless, existing mechanically because the life-giving gases still gave him sustenance. The pimples on his face had developed into running sores and the texture of his skin was ash gray. His clothes were like rags eaten at by rats...The soles of his shoes kept contact with the uppers by being corded round his ankles.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 171.

¹⁷⁶ The state’s use of identification documents to prohibit adequate care to the vagabonds speaks to Agamben’s theories of the *Homo Sacer*. See Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, where he theorizes how the power of the sovereign to separate bare life from political has carried over into modern states, which Foucault has named Biopolitics. Agamben, and Foucault, explain that biology can be looked at as a modern totalitarian ideology that reduces people to their bare life. And the sovereign, who has political control over bare life, leads to power over death, Thanatopolitics.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 238.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 239.

Lonesome Blue's devastated physical state was shocking when Ray had previously left him in the hands of the American consulate, which promised to provide for Lonesome's medical care and voyage back to his home in America. Lonesome explains how his position deteriorated:

the day you left me at the consulate the shipping-master gived me twenty francs and tells me to come back every day until he got a ship for me. I went and got me a room in the Ditch and the same night the police come and gits me right theah in the hotel...I been up [to the consulate] this morning and the shipping-master bawled me out and said he thought I was dead or gone away, and if I kain't find a ship or stow away like any other no-count sailor, I must die, but he ain't agwineta do nothing moh for me."¹⁷⁹

Lonesome Blue, whose situation is the embodiment of his name, is abandoned by the American consulate. Left for dead, Lonesome was denied the adequate care he needed just because he did not have the proper papers to get him back home.

The American consulate, which seems to control who has the right to life, as they leave many of these vagabonds for dead, would have been a traumatic plot point for McKay to script. Having frequently traveled between France and Africa during his time abroad, McKay returned to Marseille in the "early spring of 1917" to see how his friends on the beach were, and found that "their number...was diminished by about one-half."¹⁸⁰ McKay, then, pulls from his own experiences and ends *Banjo*'s transatlantic plot on a pessimistic note with death overshadowing the text's conclusion. Banjo also finds himself in need of health care, as "his kidneys were not functioning and his belly was as tight as a drum and hard as a rock," but upon arriving at the hospital and discovering that he was American, the admission bureau claimed that "Banjo could be admitted only by an order from the consul or the local police."¹⁸¹ Upon going to the police station, because Ray remembered how they treated Lonesome Blue at the American consul, the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Tillery, *Claude McKay*, 146.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 245.

police station wanted proof of Banjo's identity for treatment, but Banjo "had nothing to show...what the police wanted was an identity card and that no beach boy could get."¹⁸² Protesting that "the man is dying for want of medical attention...You won't let him die because he hasn't got an identity card," Ray eventually finds someone to treat Banjo.¹⁸³ However, one vagabond, Goosey, would not be so lucky, as the surviving vagabonds would tragically discover his corpse on the beach. Ending his transatlantic plot in a pessimistic tone with diasporic populations unable to receive the care they need, the transition from *Home to Harlem's* localized surveillance to liquid surveillance in *Banjo*—a shift that matches the novel's fluid form—speaks to the infinite visibility that bureaucratic documentation creates. Those who hold the documents are constantly seen, but is it more dangerous—like Lonesome Blue, Banjo, and Goosey experience—to not be seen at all?

McKay's transatlantic plot, spanning two novels—beginning in Harlem and landing in Marseille—ends in deep pessimism, with diasporic populations unable to get the care they need. These texts, then, not only point to a shift in state surveillance over ethno-racial populations, they warn against liquid surveillance because of its inhumane affects. McKay's novels elucidate what happens when officials practice surveillance at a distance and the subject is dehumanized and reduced to data. It becomes far easier to justify inhumane treatment by using numbers than reckoning with a person. Such methods of liquid surveillance would continue to effect Twentieth-Century writers and their works, as the Bureau would evolve to hold even more

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

jurisdiction under Hoover's reign, when the Bureau of Investigation would become the Federal Bureau of Investigation—and enhance surveillance over black writers. Given McKay's insistence on placing author-character Ray throughout his works, despite the risk of surveillance, he must have believed his role as a writer was worth being acknowledged by the state. At the same time, his recrafting of the African American *künstlerroman* implies the inherent danger of claiming authorship. The possibility that the *künstlerroman* could lend itself to liquid surveillance by providing the BI with the data needed to track the author abroad, forced McKay to grapple with this question and produce an alternative form to sidestep BI surveillance and carry on the motifs of literary self-consciousness, the written word, and the celebration of the author-character, which continued to be central to the African American literary tradition throughout the Twentieth-Century. Such changes suggest that other black writers under surveillance—Richard Wright, Lorraine Hansberry, and Gloria Naylor, to name a few—would similarly embed these motifs into their own versions of the African American *künstlerroman* and embrace the form as one that could have political potential; yet, they too would struggle in producing texts that might reveal their secret selves.

CHAPTER TWO

“I must learn to stand alone”: Anti-Essentialism and Biometric Surveillance in the works of Richard Wright

As we saw in Claude McKay’s transatlantic novels, plots to escape surveillance in the first half of the twentieth-century track the trajectories of lone protagonists on the run from government oversight and persecution. This is why, at the end of Claude McKay’s *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (1929), the title character rebuffs Latnah—the only woman in the vagabond community—as a travel companion on his journey from Marseille. Latnah’s absence at the end of the novel is duly noted as a rejection of the communal domestic sphere shared between genders. Confirming his exclusionary decision, Banjo warns Ray at the closing of the novel, “Don’t get soft ovah any one wimmens, pardner. Tha’s you big weakness.”¹⁸⁴ Jake similarly denies women a place in his quest abroad, as he also cautiously questions Ray’s family life: “You! You din’t leave Agatha a li’l one, did you?!”¹⁸⁵ Recalling the wife and child Ray left behind in the United States he answers: “I leave more things than I want to remember.”¹⁸⁶ Understanding Ray’s choice to abandon his family—a decision made when Ray fled surveillance in the United States—Jake commiserates with Ray’s situation because he also rejected a static

¹⁸⁴ McKay, Claude. *Banjo: A Story without a Plot*. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1929), 326.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 293.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

family lifestyle when he left his wife Felice, believing that there was “too much home stuff.”¹⁸⁷ As men on the run from government surveillance, McKay’s characters reject a united familial and communal sphere and see it as a limiting factor in their quest to escape government oversight.

Just as McKay’s characters fled the United States to avoid surveillance, the works Richard Wright produced throughout the 1940’s and 1950’s followed similar trajectories of male protagonists on the run from federal power. *Native Son* (1940) follows protagonist Bigger Thomas, who flees state police on the streets of Chicago; *Black Boy* (1945), Wright’s *künstlerroman* and semi-autobiographical novel, tracks young Richard on a quest to fulfill his hunger for a deeper understanding of who he is as a black man —and artist— living under the white gaze; *The Outsider*’s (1953) Cross Damon escapes from Chicago to New York where he consistently sidesteps a District Attorney who seeks to solve the crimes that he commits; and the unpublished *Island of Hallucination* (1959) manuscript at Yale’s Beinecke Library is a text William Maxwell describes as a “guidebook to a transnational black metropolis inescapably molded by state surveillance.”¹⁸⁸ Wright perhaps felt a kinship to his characters who constantly ran, as he would also flee when he first became aware of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) surveillance over his life and work in 1942. The FBI’s file on Wright acted as a catalyst that drove Wright’s move to Paris where he would become a French citizen and never return. According to biographer Hazel Rowley, Wright “felt relieved” when his “ship sailed past the statue of liberty.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ William Maxwell, *F.B. EYES: How J. Edgar Hoover’s Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 245.

¹⁸⁹ Hazel, Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2001), 330.

While trends in Richard Wright scholarship continue to explore his quest narratives—plots driven to escape the state control and surveillance that plagued his novels—many scholars are also interested in his novels’ discourses of escape that embrace an anti-essentialist politics. To Kadeshia Matthews, Lale Demirturk, Chidi Maduka, Sophia Emmanouilidou, and Yoko Nakamura, the thematics of escape in Wright’s novels allow his texts and their protagonists to abandon their racial identities.¹⁹⁰ For example, Matthews’s “Black Boy No More? Violence and the Flight from Blackness in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*” has argued that in Bigger Thomas’s attempt to “claim manhood” he “violently rejects...modes of black identity in the novel,” while Demirturk takes up Cross Damon in “The Politics of Racelessness in Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*.”¹⁹¹ Demirturk reveals that Cross Damon is “not primarily concerned with his plight as black” and that in crafting such a protagonist Wright “violates the conventions of racial protest writing by expressing fantasies that do not involve the focus of racial oppression typically found in canonical black novels.”¹⁹²

Wright’s characters who are unburdened by their race, and texts that shy away from addressing what it means to be black in America, speak to the academy’s 1980’s interest in race,

¹⁹⁰ See Kadeshia Matthews, “Black Boy No More? Violence and the Flight from Blackness in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*” *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 60, no. 2 (2014): 276-297; Lale Demirturk, “The Politics of Racelessness in Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*,” *CLA Journal* 50, no. 3 (March 2007): 279-297; Yoko Nakamura and Amritijt Singh. *Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014; Sophia Emmanouillidou, “Construction and Deconstruction: Self Identity in Abeyance in Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*,” *Rupkatha: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 3, no. 4 (2001): 555-566; Chidi Maduka, “Personal Identity and the Revolutionary Intellectual: Richard Wright’s Cross Damon,” *Kiabara: Journal of the Humanities* 3, no. 1 (1980), 159-175.

¹⁹¹ Kadeshia L. Matthews, “Black Boy No More? Violence and the Flight from Blackness in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*,” *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 60, no.2 (2005): 276.

¹⁹² Lale Demirturk, “The Politics of Racelessness in Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*,” *CLA Journal* 50, no.3 (2007): 279-281.

representation, and identity politics. Driven by scholars at the Birmingham School's department of cultural studies, Stuart Hall and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak shaped the way we raise questions about racial representation. Coining the term "strategic essentialism," Spivak argues that when the subaltern is pushed to the margin the "only strategic thing to do is to absolutely present oneself at the center."¹⁹³ To that end, strategic essentialism may be used as a tool by minorities. Even when strong differences may exist within a minority group, that group may *strategically* unite on the basis of a shared political identity to represent themselves and bring forward their group identity to achieve their social and political goals. Yet Spivak warns against the "strategic use of an essence becoming a master word," and her contemporary, Stuart Hall, further critiqued such limitations in his essay "New Ethnicities."¹⁹⁴ Hall protests that "the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compromise" racial categories is at risk of being lost when we essentialize, and that such particular experiences cannot be grounded in a set of fixed racial categories.¹⁹⁵

The usefulness of strategic essentialism to advance political goals involves a tension widely debated and situated within the field of African American literary studies during the tradition's zenith. As early as the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro Movement, black writers and thinkers self-consciously debated the functionality of essentialist representation in their essays, poetry, fiction, and prose. George Schuyler's "The Negro Art Hokum" (1926), published in *The Nation*, distanced himself from prominent figures within the Harlem Renaissance who

¹⁹³ Qtd. in Sangeeta Ray, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: In Other Words* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 110.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 113.

¹⁹⁵ Anne Smith et al, "Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies." *Ethnic and racial studies* 1 Jan. 1998: 206–207. Web: 442.

subscribed to W.E.B. DuBois's and Alain Locke's cultural nationalism, which called for a type of racial essentialism to posit the black community's ideological presence, and in doing so, evoked a response from the lauded poet Langston Hughes. Schuyler's essay asserted that it was "sheer nonsense to talk about racial differences," since "American Negro is just Plain American" and therefore, "the black American" cannot be "expected to produce art and literature dissimilar to that of the white American."¹⁹⁶ Underlying Schuyler's satire of the literati who called for a distinct African American literary tradition is a warning that drawing attention to racial difference—the very method that Locke and DuBois upheld to make the Harlem Renaissance a unified movement—would provide the evidence white supremacists needed to degrade and exclude blacks. Hughes responded with "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926), an essay rich with imagery in arguing that the black artist's particular experience as a racial minority in America furnishes "a wealth of colorful distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standards."¹⁹⁷

Further exploring the meta-conversation occurring within African-American literature concerning representation, essentialism, and race, this chapter focuses on the *künstlerroman* narratives found in Wright's oeuvre—namely *Black Boy* (1945) and *The Outsider* (1953). While several scholars have taken up Wright's protagonists' desires to shed themselves of essential racial identity categories, no one has explored Wright's novels' rejection of essential identity in regards to his knowledge of the federal surveillance he faced.¹⁹⁸ While those familiar with

¹⁹⁶ George Schuyler, "Negro Art Hokum." *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: Norton & Company, 2004), 1221-1223.

¹⁹⁷ Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" in *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: Norton & Company, 2004), 1312.

¹⁹⁸ See note 7.

Wright's work may align his novels with the anti-essentialist ideology that Schuyler put forth during the New Negro Movement, by revealing the role of biometrics in Wright's works, a tool the Federal Bureau of Investigation used to measure and track a fixed—and essentialized—identity, we can understand Wright's novels in new ways. What scholars have previously read as Wright's rejection of racial identity can now be read as a result of the surveillance that Wright and his works fell under—an affect that produced imagined protagonists who could divest themselves of fixed and traceable identities to escape a life under surveillance.

I. “Standing outside of the world”: *The Outsider* as *Künstlerroman* Narrative

Unlike Wright's *Black Boy*, that follows the development of young Richard maturing into an artist, *The Outsider* does not embody the archetypal artist-character found within a *künstlerroman* narrative. Typically, the artist-plot “traces the development of the author (or that of an imagined character like the author) from childhood to maturity,” to depict “the struggles of a sensitive, artistic child” seeking to “escape the misunderstandings about bourgeois attitudes of his family and youthful acquaintances.” Instead, Cross Damon's artist-plot begins when he is a fully formed adult, married with children and employed at the local post office.¹⁹⁹ Even though *The Outsider* may lack the typical arch that follows a child to maturity, it is important to recognize, with Madelyn Jablon, that within the African American literary tradition the *künstlerroman* “requires a redefining” to “encompass diverse artist protagonists and alternative central conflicts” in order to include “artists who might never be acknowledged as artists according to standard definitions, but who nevertheless play a paramount role in keeping artistic

¹⁹⁹Madelyn Jablon, *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 56-57.

traditions alive and viable.”²⁰⁰ Michael Jay Lewis has addressed Jablon’s call to redefine the *künstlerroman*. In “The Art of The Incredibly Serious: *Native Son* as *Künstlerroman*, *Native Son* as Fiction,” he shows that Bigger Thomas may be read as a criminal whose actions were dictated by naturalistic forces that Wright’s realist depiction of the racialized city represents. Lewis thus sees Bigger’s characterization, which drives those actions, as a commentary on his potential as creator. Pointing out that “much criticism implies that the society of *Native Son* fears Bigger as criminal more than Bigger as creator,” Lewis concludes by contrarily arguing that “the social order recognizes the importance of—and thus orchestrates the repression of—his right *not* to be” an artist.²⁰¹

Like Bigger Thomas, in lacking any formal schooling or training in intellectual pursuits, *The Outsider*’s Cross Damon is a self-taught philosopher with the ability to produce art and knowledge, but fails to do so because of socio-economic constraints. While the typical *künstlerroman* narrative places the artist-character at the center of the novel and builds its plots around the tension of the artist’s inability to produce art in a society from which he feels alienated, in contrast it is his community that recognizes Cross’s intellectual capability. The initial scenes of the novel introduce Cross through the eyes—and voices—of his acquaintances: “I spotted you as an educated guy,” notes one companion.²⁰² Another recalls his bibliophilic habits: “Say remember all them big, deep books he used to read and tell us about?...He used to use so many big words I’d thought he’d choke! Everytime I saw ‘im he had a batch of books

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Michael Jay Lewis, “The Art of the Incredibly Serious: *Native Son* as *Künstlerroman*, *Native Son* as Fiction,” *Studies in the Novel* 45, no. 2 (2013): 235.

²⁰² Richard Wright, *The Outsider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 112.

under his arm.”²⁰³ Even Cross’s house is described as a library: “I went to see ‘im one day when he was sick,” one companion recalls, “and I could hardly get in the door! Big books, little books, books piled everywhere! He even had books in bed with ‘im.”²⁰⁴

Lying in bed with his books figures Cross as having intimate relationships with texts and knowledge, a substitute for the intimacies he lacks with other humans. In fact, while Cross has difficulty embracing a relationship with his wife or his mistress, ideas that he derives from his reading are the only successful relationship that he experiences. The narrator reveals Cross’s backstory and failed intimate relationships:

He’d dropped out of the university right after he’d married Gladys and after that nothing had gone right...His mind drifted back to the time he had been attending day classes at the University of Chicago, majoring in philosophy and working the night shift in the Post Office...Ideas had been his only sustained passion, but he knew that his love of them had that same sensual basis that drew him aching to the sight of a girl’s body swinging in a tight skirt along a sunny street.²⁰⁵

Ideas that provide Cross with passion substitute for his wife Gladys, as he is drawn to them with a similar desire for a “girl’s body swinging in a tight skirt.”²⁰⁶ Cross’s marriage to Gladys—the event that disrupted his happiness— and the masculine demands on him as a husband, father, son, and provider place him in a bourgeois role demanding that he maintain a job at the post office. Meetings that demand blunts his artistic passion.

Caught in the monotony of everyday life, as “today was like yesterday and he knew that tomorrow would be the same,” Cross reveals how he found himself in such a “stupid situation”

²⁰³ Ibid, 6.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 12 and 49.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 49.

that forces him to repress the life of the artist-intellectual.²⁰⁷ The only value Cross ascribes to the people in his life—particularly his family—is their need for economic stability. His loveless marriage to Gladys, who only “really wanted...money,” is best portrayed when Cross returns home to quell Gladys’s anger over his extramarital affair and the resulting pregnancy.²⁰⁸

Surprisingly, Gladys is not hurt by the betrayal of a lost love; instead, she only demands financial stability:

Number One: You’re signing the house over to me at once. Number Two: You’re signing over the car to me. Number Three: You’re going to the Post Office tonight and borrow eight hundred dollars from the Postal Union on your salary. I’ve already made the arrangements with the Postal Inspector. He’s okayed it. I want that money to clear the titles of both the house and the car...if you don’t do what I’m asking...I will bring charges against you.²⁰⁹

Holding information that Cross’s mistress is underage and he can therefore be charged with rape, Gladys blackmails Cross into providing her with financial stability, a decision that would continue to drive the monotonous tone in his life, for it would take him two years of steadily working at the post office to pay off such a loan. Lacking any sort of connection to his family other than as economic provider (nowhere in the text does Cross even interact with his children), Cross discovers exactly what he is worth to his family through Gladys’s stinging demands. Questioning whether his life insurance is “paid up” and confirming that she still holds the position as his beneficiary, Gladys’s blunt refusal to see Cross’s worth for anything other than money leaves him feeling “as though he were already dead.”²¹⁰ Lacking connection, unable to live out his artistic dreams, and reduced to a life that gives him no reason to live other than financially supporting his blood relations, Cross faces an existential crisis that turns him to

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 12 and 37.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 23.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 68.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 69.

consider suicide. Longing for a time when he is divested of meaningless responsibilities, thus to “spend his time...[laying] in a pile of books,” Cross fails to see any meaning in a passionless, monotonous life.²¹¹ To that end, Cross’s feelings are amplified when he decides to “end this farce,” places a gun in his pocket, and promises to commit suicide if the “the pressure from within or without became too great.”²¹²

While Cross flirts with suicide as an escape option, the novel disrupts Cross’s plans when a subway crash provides him with a different opportunity. Boarding the subway, Cross at first settles into the repetitious motion of the train: “an El train rattled past overhead” and he “sank into a seat, closing his eyes. The train pulled into motion...The movement of the coach rocked some of the tension out of him.”²¹³ Falling into the familiar steady rhythm of the El train’s ride, Cross slips into a comfortable position; yet “a moment later...darkness suddenly gouged his eyes and a clap of thunder hit his ears. He was spinning through space, his body smashing against steel; then he was aware of being lifted and brutally catapulted through air.”²¹⁴ Propelled out of the repetitious movement that mirrors the monotonous tone of his life, Cross’s jarring experience on the train marks a transitional plot point. While most read the train scene as a symbolic death of Cross’s identity, as he uses the moment that the press mistakenly identifies another’s corpse as his own chance to fake his death, I read it as a birth. The birth-like imagery during the train wreck describes Cross’s body as passing through a space similar to a birth-canal. In order to be brought fully into personhood, “twisted within the tube,” Cross undergoes a disruption that is

²¹¹ Ibid, 91.

²¹² Ibid, 13.

²¹³ Ibid, 72.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 73.

ripped from its comfortable position and is then birthed on the other side.²¹⁵ Feeling alive for the first time as a “keen sensation of vitality invaded every cell of his body,” Cross finally experiences the “personal freedom” he had “all of his life...been hankering for.”²¹⁶

Embracing his new personhood and divested of the monotonous life to which he was bound, Cross quickly becomes the artist that he has repressed by finally crafting a new life for himself. Understanding that he cannot exist and function within society without a personal narrative, Cross realizes that “he would have to imagine this thing out, dream it out, invent it, like a writer constructing a tale.”²¹⁷ To do so, our artist-character begins the process by questioning, “what was his past if he wanted to become another person? His past had come to him without asking and almost without his knowing...Now his past would have to be a deliberately constructed thing. And how did one go about that?”²¹⁸ Drawing from personal experience, Cross scripts his new biography:

To begin his new life he would relive something he knew well, something that he would not tax too greatly his inventive powers. He would be a Negro who had just come up from the Deep South looking for work. His name? Well...Charles...Charles what? Webb...Yes, that was good enough for the time being. Charles Webb...Yes, he had just got in from Memphis; he had had a hard time with whites down there and he was damn glad of being North. What had he done in Memphis? He had been a porter in a drugstore...He repressed a smile. *He loved this!*²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Ibid, 74.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 84.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 87.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 88.

Cross's creativity drives him toward action, "full of excitement as he realized that eventually he would not only have to think and feel this thing out, but he would also have to act and live it out."²²⁰ Now capable of expressing his creativity—having shed himself of his previous identity—Cross becomes the author of his own story-world, a role that that repressed-artist-character Cross knew well.

Prior to the train wreck, Cross had previous experience in crafting life narratives for non-fictional people. Drafting a plot that would allow him the freedom to live separately from his wife, Cross employed a gaslight technique by scripting a reality for her that did not exist. Concocting a plan that would allow his wife to become afraid of him so that she would free him from his marital obligations, Cross had physically abused her on countless occasions, yet insists that she was "dreaming" up illusions and calls to consult a "doctor" for her madness when he confronts her.²²¹ Doing so, his wife had become a "tiny child hearing a grownup tell a tale that she did not believe, but dared not challenge that tale because it had no way of successfully disputing it."²²² Depicted as a child, and reduced to submitting to Cross's authority of the story, Gladys must adhere to Cross's plot. Similarly, Cross constructed a story world during Christmastime for his co-workers, as he sent newspaper subscriptions from one person to another that allowed:

the whole South side [to be] in a dither that Christmas morning. Folks was thanking other folks for presents the others didn't know nothing about...Any man who can do things like that is a man standing *outside* of the world! Know what I mean? Like somebody outside of your house and poking out his tongue out at you.²²³

Cross's role as creator therefore contradicts Madelyn Jablon's argument that the role of the artist-character within the African American *künstlerroman* differs from the European genre in the

²²⁰ Ibid, 91.

²²¹ Ibid, 61.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid, 6.

way that the artist's role is to unite community. To do that, Cross would have needed to create a place that fosters and allows his artistic modes to thrive. However, Cross's work alienated him from the black community. Standing "outside" of the world he scripts, Cross becomes the creator of the story-world and rejects the potential to unite with his community within that space.²²⁴

II. "To drink inspiration first hand": The Artist-Protagonist and the Racial Community

Cross's artistic production that distances himself from his community is unusual in the African American literary canon since African American *künstlerroman* narratives usually depict the community as adding strength to the artist's work. James Weldon Johnson's *künstlerroman*, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1927), also known as an archetypical passing narrative, depicts the African American artist character as one whose work struggles when he denies himself community. When the Ex-Coloured Man, the protagonist and narrator of the tale who is never formally named, travels abroad with his patron and witnesses another pianist playing skillfully, the ex-colored man reflects, "Here I am a man, no longer a boy, and what am I doing but wasting my time and abusing my talent? What use am I making of my gifts? What future have I before me following my present course?"²²⁵ Understanding that his time abroad has done nothing to inspire or further his creative gifts, the ex-colored man instead decides to return to America: "I made up my mind to go back into the very heart of the South, to live among the people, and drink inspiration firsthand."²²⁶ While this decision leads readers to believe that our protagonist will immerse himself in African American people and culture, thus to enrich his art, the Ex-Coloured man decides to turn his back on his aspirations and his community. Deciding to

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (New York: Knopf, 1927), 142.

²²⁶ Ibid.

ultimately pass as white, the Ex-Coloured man quits playing at the Harlem night club that previously allowed his art to prosper. In doing so, the narrative ends in a regretful tone as he didactically confesses, “I sometimes open a little box in which I still keep my fast yellowing manuscripts, the only tangible remnants of a vanished dream, a dead ambition, a sacrificed talent.”²²⁷

Likewise, Jesse Fauset’s *Plum Bun* (1928)—another passing narrative that places an artist-protagonist at its center—depicts protagonist Angela’s art as suffering when she abandons her home and sister in Philadelphia, moves to a white neighborhood upon arriving in New York, passes as such and denies any friendships with non-white peoples. Although the Ex-Coloured Man never learns from his narrative and is filled with remorse at novel’s end, Angela’s fate differs. Once she embraces her black race and befriends the sole black woman in her art class, and recognizing that “they were really closely connected in blood, in racial condition, in common suffering,” Angela experiences success, winning a fellowship to Paris to practice her arts.²²⁸ Yet Angela would struggle once abroad, longing for her community, a desire that results in her suitor, Anthony, joining her abroad.

Wright himself would also struggle once he expatriated, as his publishers would question if his novels could connect with an American audience when he had been distanced from his people for so long. Wright continued to publish his works while residing abroad, yet one American literary critic would claim that “expatriate Wright had lost touch with his homeland” and that he “shows no awareness of what has happened to America—and even to Mississippi [Wright’s home state]—during this decade,” while another would go so far as to claim his novel,

²²⁷ Ibid, 211.

²²⁸ Jesse Fauset, *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1929), 340-341.

The Long Dream (1958), “proves that Wright has been away too long...he has cut the emotional umbilical cord through which his art was fed.”²²⁹ While both the Ex-Coloured man and Angela’s narratives warn against leaving a community in which one’s art thrives, Wright crafted Cross Damon—a protagonist similar to himself—as an artist who would ignore the cautionary tales found within well-known African American *künstlerroman* and distance himself from the black community to which he once belonged.

Although Johnson and Fauset both depict artist-protagonists whose work flourishes when they unite with their community, Wright depicts an artist who decided, just as Wright declares in his essay “I tried to be a Communist,” that he must “learn to stand alone.”²³⁰ Recently, Sophia Emmanouildou has recognized that the monotony that drove Cross to an existential crisis allowed him to perceive his life as an “interplay of numerous discourses against his individuality,” and in this case, the “discourse of surveillance is realized first in the immediate form of familial and work relations” that allowed Cross to feel “numb in a state of social entrapment as plotted out by his family, personal relations and a set of state controls, which all overmaster his freedom.”²³¹ As discussed above, societal constraints certainly result in Cross repressing his artistic talents. However, Cross not only sought to divest himself of the disciplining social structures that laid a burden on his individuality, he also sought to rid himself of *his racial identity*. Therefore, just as the ex-coloured man and Angela experiment with passing as white—a decision their novels warn against—Cross similarly expresses a desire to divest himself of his race.

²²⁹Rowley, *Richard Wright*, 494-49

²³⁰See Wright, Richard. “I Tried to Be a Communist.” *Chicken Bones: A Journal for Literary & Artistic African-American Themes*. Ed. Nathaniel Turner. Web. 09 September 2016.

²³¹Sophia Emmanouillidou, Sophia. “Construction and Deconstruction: Self Identity in Abeyance in Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*,” *Rupkatha: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 3, no. 4 (2001): 556-558.

To that end, scholars of African American literature have noted how Wright's construction of a text around issues concerned with the condition of man led him to produce what many have deemed a raceless text. Chidi T. Maduka's "Personal Identity and the Revolutionary Intellectual: Richard Wright's Cross Damon," notes that Cross "believes that man is ethically autonomous, a position that makes one think of such philosophers as Camus, Sartre and Nietzsche or even the Russian writer Dostoevsky."²³² In that vein, Maduka argues that Cross is unburdened from any social and ethical responsibility to his race. Similarly, Lale Demirturk's "The Politics of Racelessness in Richard Wright's *The Outsider*" asserts that the text is the "first in Wright's canon which does not directly address racial issues" and that it is "a novel that did not deal primarily with the question of what it means to be a Negro, but rather with the broader question of what it means to be a modern man in the twentieth century, Western, industrialized society."²³³ Demirturk concludes that Wright "abandons the familiar racial plots of his earlier works, and hence violates the conventions of racial protest writing by expressing fantasies that do not involve the focus on racial oppression typically found in canonical black novels."²³⁴ Such arguments support the claim that Wright produced anti-essentialist texts, a statement that Wright himself would have agreed with, having declared that his "hero could have been of any race" as he "tried to render [his] sense of our contemporary living as [he] sees it and feels it."²³⁵

Indeed, almost every turn the novel takes dismisses Cross's blackness as a factor in his decision-making. When Cross decides to fake his death at the scene of the subway wreck, a

²³² Chidi T. Maduka, "Personal Identity and the Revolutionary Intellectual: Richard Wright's Cross Damon," *Kiabara: Journal of the Humanities* 3, no. 1 (1980), 159.

²³³ Lale Demirturk, "The Politics of Racelessness in Richard Wright's *The Outsider*," *CLA Journal* 50, no. 3 (March 2007): 279.

²³⁴ Ibid, 280-281.

²³⁵ Qtd. in. Demirturk, "The Politics of Racelessness," 279.

decision made because of the opportunity to take on a new identity, the text ensures his decision is not to escape his conditions as a *black* man, but as *any* man: “There was no racial tone to his reactions; he was just a man, *any* man who had had an opportunity to flee and seized upon it.”²³⁶ Elsewhere, the narrator solidifies one’s sense that Cross’s actions truly are not predicated on any racial notions, as “being a Negro was the least important thing in his life” and he argues that “his consciousness of the color of his skin had played no role” in his decision to leave the scene of the subway wreck and flee Chicago.²³⁷

While Cross is not actually able to escape the color of his skin, it is important to note that the very subway scene that frees Cross from his identity exemplifies his desire to rid himself of his body—the very object that carries his fixed identity. Therefore, even though the text’s narration may seem to suggest that Cross’s actions are not racially motivated, *The Outsider*’s concern with divesting himself of a body communicates his desire to become raceless. To that end, Wright’s authorial intention for a raceless text is overshadowed when the novel actually reveals that the everyman desires to escape his *body*, the very signifier that carries his racial identity. When Cross regains consciousness inside of the wrecked subway train, he realizes that he was not free as his leg was “anchored in place by [a] man’s head” from which he must physically separate himself to escape.²³⁸ Regarding the man’s head as an “obstacle,” and lifting the very gun that he previously decided he would use to kill himself, Cross “brought down the butt, and, even though his eyes were closed, he could see the gun butt crushing into the defenseless face.”²³⁹ Separating himself from the body that physically traps him, Cross

²³⁶Wright, *The Outsider*, 86.

²³⁷Ibid, 288.

²³⁸Wright, *The Outsider*, 74.

²³⁹Ibid, 75.

symbolically “frees” himself from bodily identity, as he believes that “if they buried that body as the body of Cross Damon, then he was dead.”²⁴⁰ Cross’s desire to escape his body can also be read as his desire to escape an essentialist identity politics and to no longer be read as “black” to the social world, a decision that also separates himself from his community that he leaves behind in Chicago, as he makes his way to New York City .

III. Biometric Surveillance and the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Why exactly would Cross want to divest himself from his racial and bodily identity? After all, it is a decision that leaves him without community and the very choice that most African American artist-novels warn against. Cross’s desire to rid himself of his bodily identity speaks to the biometric surveillance that the FBI performed over those they placed under surveillance. Wright’s meticulous biographer, Hazel Rowley, notes that Wright “was conscious of being followed by the FBI” soon after the creation of his file in 1942.²⁴¹ Thus, he would have been aware of J. Edgar Hoover’s emphasis on scientific evidence that would expand the FBI’s interest in citizens’ biometric identity during his tenure as the director of the FBI. Hoover’s emphasis on “applying science to law enforcement” was part of the “police professionalism movement that shaped the Bureau in the 1920s and 1930s,” and that sought to ensure the more “efficient and coordinated use of fingerprints to identify criminal suspects.”²⁴² Historian Alan G. Theoharris recalls how, prior to Hoover’s direction, records were “administered by the Bureau of Criminal Identification at the federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas.”²⁴³ Once Hoover became director of

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 83.

²⁴¹ Rowley, *Richard Wright*, 276.

²⁴² Athan G. Theoharris, *The FBI : a Comprehensive Reference Guide*. (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1999), 173.

²⁴³ Ibid.

the Bureau of Investigation in 1924, the Bureau of Criminal Identification's approximately one million fingerprint files were transferred to the Bureau's Identification division in Washington, D.C., and by 1930, the Bureau was given control over all federal fingerprint files, "a collection that grew throughout Hoover's tenure as Bureau director."²⁴⁴ To further advance the application of science to law enforcement, in 1932 "Hoover established a special crime laboratory at the bureau's Washington headquarters to provide expert assistance to the Bureau and local law enforcement agencies in the analysis of physical evidence."²⁴⁵ Operations that took place in the laboratory would expand to "include the analysis of blood and other physiological fluids, hair, soil, clothing fibers, and other types of physical evidence for possible matches with criminal suspects."²⁴⁶

Wright's 1949 poem "The FB Eye Blues," a text William Maxwell has recently recovered as evidence of the writer's cognizance of the surveillance he was under, speaks to the FBI's interest in biometric surveillance. Maxwell introduces the poem:

Seeing the state everywhere the mind can travel, Wright's shipboard poem...resituates the police-state dynamics of his novels in introspective territory, the traditional ground of lyric verse. When the self-reflexive voice of this written blues finds Hooverite eyes looking back from his desires and sentences, he confronts an enemy within as much as a public enemy of the Constitution Police power as thus indulged and internalized by the spear of Wright's FBI poem.²⁴⁷

As Maxwell notes the personal desire that the federal gaze tracked—even across the Atlantic—it is also important to note how the poem engages the blues genre. Written in a form meant to orally express the mournful details of the singer's personal everyday life—love, loss, and livelihood—

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 173-174

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 174.

²⁴⁷ Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes*, 244.

Wright's poem exposes how the Bureau's interest in the body could assist their agents in tracking such daily events:

That old FB eye
Tied a bell to my bed stall
Said old FB eye
Tied a bell to my bed stall
Each time I love my baby,
gov'ment knows it all.²⁴⁸

Wright's awareness of federal surveillance only occurred because Naomi Replansky, Wright's extramarital lover, was interviewed by FBI agents during their affair. And Maxwell explains how Wright may have felt overly exposed by FBI agents.²⁴⁹ Not only interested in his writings, or his whereabouts, Wright depicts the bureau as tying a bell to his bed—an intimate space that would have lent itself to the physical and bodily evidence not needed to surveil his work, but his masculine and sexualized black body.

Most notable in Wright's 250-page file is the FBI's interest in both his biometric identity as well as Wright's self-depiction in his autobiography. Searching for details that matched his biometric identity—race, height, and eye color—The Bureau was intrigued with how Wright constructed his identity on the pages in his Book of the Month Club novel, *Black Boy*. Agents tracked the imminent publication of Wright's autobiography nearly six months before its release in bookstores; and two months prior to publication J. Edgar Hoover wrote to the “special agent in charge” of the New York office, demanding that he be “advised as to the exact status of

²⁴⁸ Richard Wright, “The FB eye Blues.” (New York: Harris Broadsides, 1949).

²⁴⁹ Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes*, 308.

[Wright's] case at the present time.”²⁵⁰ Four months later, *Black Boy* would sell half a million copies and Hoover would again write to the New York office that “in view of the militant attitude of the subject toward the negro problem” a security index card should be placed in Wright's file.²⁵¹ These paper cards created the FBI's indexing system that would become their computerized database. Wright's card in this system allowed the FBI to easily identify and monitor his personal information, daily life, and international travels. Christian Parenti's *The Soft Cage*, provides a detailed account as to how Hoover's interest in biometrics and creation of security index cards—as in Wright's—evolved from the Bertillonage system derived from the studies of the nineteenth century police officer and biometrics researcher, Alphonse Bertillon. As Parenti explains, Bertillon's “system of body measurement identification” held a “card containing the usual mug shot and description of distinguishing marks, as well as eleven different categories of exact bodily measurement.”²⁵² These measurements were then coded into a vocabulary that would allow the law “to track a subject across time and space in ways photography alone could not.”²⁵³ Parenti ultimately asserts that such practices marked a “seismic shift in the politics of identity and routine surveillance.”²⁵⁴

Wright perhaps understood the danger of scripting one's self on the page, as he would internalize as a young man that it is one's biometric details that allows one to be surveilled. When Young Richard reflects upon “something secret” that occurred in his family's home early

²⁵⁰William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive: FBI Files on African American Authors and Literary Institution Obtained through the U.S Freedom Information Act*, Washington University. <http://digital.wustl.edu/fbeyes/>. See Richard Wright File.

²⁵¹Ibid.

²⁵² Christian Parenti, *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America, From Slave Passes to the War on Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 44-45 .

²⁵³Ibid, 45.

²⁵⁴Ibid.

in *Black Boy*, Richard reveals that he discovered that “each night...[he] would hear a light tapping on Aunt Maggie’s windowpane, a door creaking open, whispers, then long silences.”²⁵⁵ To that end, the man who comes to visit Aunt Maggie is characterized as not only a man on the run, but as a man who is only known by the sounds he makes. Aunt Maggie’s disembodied visitor always remains out of sight. Referred to as “uncle”—a label Wright uses only in scare quotes—it is not until he steps out of the shadows that “uncle” is granted a name: “Professor Matthews,” a man under watch, is a “well-dressed black man” with a “soft voice” who wore “eyeglasses. His lips were thin and his eyelids never seemed to blink.”²⁵⁶ Intelligent Richard realizes early on that these are the details that authorities would rely on to track the individual, and consequently, Professor Matthews “always [came] at night” and when he did arrive in the daytime, “all the shades in the house were drawn and the children were forbidden to go out of doors until he left.”²⁵⁷ Through the “silent, black, educated ‘uncle’” Richard comes to understand that a man whose body is identifiable is a man who can be tracked.²⁵⁸

Young Richard was aware of the tracking imposed on those who live an intellectual life. In the fictional Cross Damon, Wright imagines an alternative author-character who escapes state surveillance by shedding himself of a biometric and essentialist identity. Aware that surveillance over his life and work developed in parallel with the success of *Black Boy*, Wright eventually communicated his frustrations through the consciousness of his Black intellectual protagonist in *The Outsider* (1953). Wright wrote many of his own biographical details into protagonist Cross Damon: both had an interest in philosophy and literature, both found employment at a post

²⁵⁵ Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1945), 65.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 65-66.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

office, and both joined and ultimately rejected the Communist Party. The significant point of contrast between Wright and his protagonist is that Wright lived under an identity that could be easily tracked—as he describes in “The FB Eye Blues”—whereas Cross seeks to rid himself of his biometric self, and therefore an essentialist identity that would allow Hoover to easily track his every move. How the FBI’s use of biometric surveillance intersects with discussions of essential identity categories that allow individuals to be tracked is what the second half of this chapter takes up.

IV. Tracking the Body in the African American Literary Imagination

So it is unsurprising, then, that the Federal Bureau of Investigation would make an appearance at the close of Wright’s *The Outsider*. Thus, Cross is discovered as the mysterious murderer within the Communist Party, a man the state has been seeking by way of biometric evidence, from which there is no escape. So when the District Attorney brings Cross into the station, he warns that, “we’ve *proof* of who you are...We got your fingerprints...the FBI has at last identified you.”²⁵⁹ The Bureau’s tracking of Wright’s personhood falls short, however, when the state lacks the narrative needed to understand how Cross, previously reported dead, could still exist. When authorities “began checking [Cross’s] fingerprints” they ran into a “stonewall” as they discovered he was “dead,” and the “FBI flew to Chicago to make sure...They even exhumed the other Negro’s body” that had been buried under Cross’s name.²⁶⁰ Recently, Ellen Samuels’s *Fantasies of Identification* (2014) studies how the relationship between biometric identity and narrative holds power because it stabilizes personal identity inside of a “state

²⁵⁹Wright, *The Outsider*, 380.

²⁶⁰Ibid, 420.

apparatus to organize and frame that identity.”²⁶¹ Therefore, the only story of Cross’s that the Bureau is interested in is that which is written on his body.

Because he cannot rid himself of his body Cross fears that the “police could trace him by his fingerprints back to his Post Office Identity in Chicago.”²⁶² So, while constantly attempting to avoid “putting the police on his trail,” Cross continuously destroys all evidence of his bodily existence and constructs a different narrative that erases him from the crime scenes.²⁶³ While we had at first seen Cross confident in the ways that he believed he could craft a new story-world for himself, at the same time, Cross’s attention to and anxiety about details in these crime scenes reveals that Cross truly understands that *the* identifying factor he cannot escape is his body. Upon murdering Herndon and Gil, a racist landlord and communist leader, Cross scripts a narrative composed from biometric evidence:

He took out his handkerchief and quickly wiped the table leg which he held in his hand, making sure that no trace of his fingerprints would remain. He went to Herndon, holding the table leg with the handkerchief so that his hand would not touch it, and forced the fingers of Herndon’s right hand about it several times so that the man’s prints would be found...Still holding the leg with the handkerchief, he went to Gill and closed Gil’s loose fingers about it. He took the fire poker, wiped it clean and inserted it in the fingers of Herndon’s right hand.²⁶⁴

Cross replacing his fingerprints with those of the victims displays his determination to avoid a narrative that marks him as criminal. So Cross scripts a scene where two men, full of hatred, battle each other with fire poker and table leg in hand. His tampering with the crime scene is again repeated when he murders Hilton, another communist, at the hotel. Upon committing the

²⁶¹ Ellen Jean Samuels. *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*. (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 6.

²⁶² Wright, *The Outsider*, 339.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 227.

crime, Cross realizes that “He had to get out of here...The .32...Yes...He wiped it clean of fingerprints on the sheet of the bed and tossed it beside Hilton’s hand. He paused, then forced the gun into Hilton’s fingers.²⁶⁵ Once placing the victim’s fingerprints on the weapon to make it appear as though it was a suicide, Cross “looked about. His fingerprints...He took a dirty shirt of Hilton’s and wiped wherever he thought he had touched.”²⁶⁶

Attempting to escape one’s biological identity was a theme also driving the plot in George Schuyler’s *Black No More*, a novel that Ishmael Reed called the “first black science fiction novel.”²⁶⁷ At its heart are the themes of science, race, and biology, as Schuyler constructed a tale driven by the fictional Junius Crookman’s Black No More process, an invention creating “a sure way to turn darkies white.”²⁶⁸ Such an invention eventually drove society to desire brown, instead of white skin, as it would become a rarity. Schuyler’s novel, which is not just one of the first black science fictional novels but also one of the Harlem Renaissance’s most stinging satires of the literati, was not only concerned with lampooning DuBois and his contemporaries, as Darryl Dickson-Carr’s *Spoofing the Modern* brilliantly discusses, critiquing capitalism and racial commodities as Sonnet Retman eloquently puts it in *Real Folks: Race and Genre in the Great Depression*, but also with escaping the traceable black body that is constantly under watchful eyes.

Like Wright, Schuyler also fell under FBI surveillance for his writings. William Maxwell notes that *Black No More* was “reviewed by several federal ghostreaders” who concluded that

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 303.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Oscar Renal Williams, *George S. Schuyler : Portrait of a Black Conservative* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 59.

²⁶⁸ George Schuyler, *Black No More* (Boston: North Eastern University Press, 1931), 24

“the author was the most dangerous Negro in the country.”²⁶⁹ Hoover decided to also list Schuyler as a security risk a year following the bureau’s decision to track Wright, and he assigned him a security index card similar to the one that held Wright’s biometric identification. It contained these biometric statistics: “the subject was 5’6 high; hair, black; eyes, dark brown; race, colored; scars, slight scar on left shin, scar on left thumb,” Schuyler’s file also highlighted his biometric identity, a decision that may have driven his interest in science and the FBI’s fingerprint lab.²⁷⁰

The biometric files that the Bureau held over black writers perhaps generated Schuyler’s fear that the state would attempt to rely on science to solidify arguments of racial difference and white supremacy, thus to continue assigning African Americans second class citizenship. As Stacy Morgan points out in “‘The Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science’: Race Science and Essentialism in George Schuyler’s *Black No More*,” Schuyler adopted the controversial stance “against racial essentialism largely in an attempt to avoid providing fuel for inflammatory white supremacist rhetorics of racial difference; particularly the highly influential body of work termed ‘race science.’”²⁷¹ He was cautioned by the ways in which discourses of racial difference could be appropriated into “a legitimization of political policies of segregation and systemic exclusion.”²⁷² Schuyler’s science-fiction novel therefore imagines a world that allows Max Disher to *actually* rid himself of the black body that Cross Damon desires to abandon.

²⁶⁹ Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes*, 91.

²⁷⁰ William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive: FBI Files on African American Authors and Literary Institution Obtained through the U.S Freedom Information Act*, Washington University. <http://digital.wustl.edu/fbeyes/>. See George Schuler File, Part 2, pg. 38. Also see Maxwell’s *F.B. Eyes*, page 243, where he claims that the FBI’s fingerprint lab was “one of Schuyler’s inspirations in the 1930’s.”

²⁷¹ Stacy Morgan, “‘The Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science’: Race Science and Essentialism in George Schuyler’s *Black No More*.” *CLA Journal* 42, no. 3 (1999): 332.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

Indeed, underlying Max's decision to divest himself of his black skin is a choice driven by his desire to no longer be observable under society's white gaze. While it has been noted that Max's decision to seek out Crookman's services reflects the psychology of the colonized mind that Frantz Fanon puts forth in *Black Skin, White Masks*, we can also see how Max decides to change his skin color to avoid surveillance.²⁷³ At first it is easy to see that Max desires that which his oppressor holds. He strives to become white in order to "meet the [white] girl from Atlanta," a woman who initially rejected him but whom he also marries once he does turn white.²⁷⁴ While Max's decision to undergo the Black No More process has long been read as a satire of the black man's desire for the white woman, Max also desires to be white in order to rid himself of the black body constantly under watch. Max reflects, "think of getting white in three days! No more jim crow. No more insults. As a white man he could go anywhere, be anything he wanted, do most anything he wanted to do, be a free man at last."²⁷⁵ Whitening his black skin would allow him to no longer face the "obstacle in his path": the white gaze that constantly surveilled him.²⁷⁶ Disher explains his frustration of being identified and known once he has undergone the treatment:

He was annoyed and a little angered. What did they want to put his picture all over the front of the paper for? Now everybody would know who he was. He had undergone the tortures of Doc Crookman's devilish machine in order to escape the conspicuousness of a dark skin and now he was being made conspicuous because he had once had a dark skin! Could one never escape the plagued race problem?²⁷⁷

²⁷³ See Chapter three in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

²⁷⁴ Schuyler, *Black No More*, 26.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 35.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 39.

Understanding that it was his body that made him visible, Schuyler's repetitive use of "conspicuous" reveals that Max Disher desires a white body that would not fall under the societal controlling gaze, and strives to shield his physical identity from the populace.

Having undergone the process to step outside the gaze of white authority, Max Disher experiences a horrifying process reminiscent of torture, and that alters the self on the cellular and biometric level. Doctor Crookman explains that the process is "accomplished by electrocution nutrition and glandular control."²⁷⁸ Altering a subject body, Dr. Crookman's process is reminiscent of what Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* undergoes when he received involuntary medical procedures and electro-shock therapy where he is "pounded between crushing electrical pressures; pumped between live electrodes like an accordion between a player's hands."²⁷⁹ Such a process is so horrifying that it resembles death, as Disher explains that he, "felt so thankful that he had survived the ordeal of the horrible machine so akin to the electric chair. A shudder passed over him at the memory of the hours he had passed in its grip, fed at intervals with revolting concoctions." While Disher may have assumed that such a process would end his black life, later in the novel he discovers that he could never rid himself of biometric identity, for his true identity would be revealed with his wife's birth of their first son.²⁸⁰

V. Becoming Lionel Lane: Essentialist Identity Narratives in *The Outsider*

As Sarah Relyea shows, the text "exemplifies the intersection between the postwar writing of identity and a major philosophical premise of that era—that consciousness is necessarily

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 27.

²⁷⁹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), 232.

²⁸⁰ Schuyler, *Black No More*, 35.

embodied.”²⁸¹ Simply put, for Releya, “Cross cannot escape the body.”²⁸² He may long to shed himself of his biometric identity to escape oversight, yet Cross could only actually escape his body symbolically. Although Rachel Watson argues that biometric evidence as used by Hoover’s scientific crime-fighting bureau had rid itself of “uncertainties of contingent narratives” and no longer held an “investment in the kind of story one might” construct once they could turn to physical evidence, Cross turns toward narrative in order to escape his identity as Cross Damon.²⁸³ Therefore he concocts a plan to “go to a cemetery and find the name of a man born on his birthday or any birthday that would make his present age and appearance seem normal.”²⁸⁴ So upon stumbling over the grave of a man named Lionel Lane, with his birthday, and who had recently died of consumption, Cross attempts to construct a narrative as Lionel. When Cross attempts to retrieve Lionel’s draft card—understanding that bureaucratic forms of identification (discussed in the previous chapter) are crucial to function in society—Cross realizes that even if he writes himself a new story-world to live in, he still cannot escape his bodily identity:

He then read the items describing the physical appearance of Lionel Lane and grew thoughtful. Lionel Lane had weighed 158 pounds and he weighed only 148...Well, he could always say that he had lost ten pounds, couldn’t he? That’s what tuberculosis did to you, didn’t it? But this other item was more difficult; Lionel Lane was listed as being five feet six inches in height and he was five feet eight.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Sarah Releya, “The Vanguard of Modernity: Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 48, no. 3 (2006): 188.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Rachel Watson, “The Living Clue: Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*,” *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora* 11, no.2 (2012): 55-57.

²⁸⁴ Wright, *The Outsider*, 145.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 168.

Understanding that Cross cannot step outside of his body, he must illegally alter an official government document. So “he looked about for a typewriter; [in order to] type an 8 over that 6!”²⁸⁶ Rewriting biometric evidence, Cross realizes that he cannot escape a traceable biometric identity.

Seeking to function within it, Cross crafts and abides by essentialist identity narratives that American society finds congruent with his race. Therefore, even though Cross is able to retrieve Lane’s draft card, when attempting to gain access to Lane’s birth certificate, Cross realizes he must move within subjective master narratives that others abide and believe in. Cross explains his strategy:

[He] thought hard, calling up everything he knew about white and black race relations to help him. If he could ever act the role of a subservient Negro convincingly, this was the time to do it. He would have to present to the officials a Negro so scared and ignorant that no white American would ever dream that he was up to anything deceptive. But why would any black wastrel be wanting a birth certificate?... In the end Cross decided that a simple, and almost silly reason was the best reason that an ignorant Negro could have for demanding a birth certificate it would have to be a reason that whites, long schooled in dealing with Negroes as frightened inferiors, would accept without question.²⁸⁷

Drawing on the information Cross gains from growing up as a black man in America, using Dubois’s concept of double-consciousness, since he understands how others perceive him, Cross performs a cake-walk-style performance playing into white stereotypes of black men. Cross must again create his own past this time and scripts himself as an uneducated, harmless, individual who earns the trust of white men working to keep African Americans in such a place.

Understanding that “in his role of an ignorant, frightened Negro, each white man...would leap to supply him with a background and an identity; each white man would project out on him his own conception of the Negro and he could safely hide behind it,” Cross uses this knowledge to fit into

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 156.

the narrative that they script for him.²⁸⁸ Performing an uneducated position, when Cross asks the white men at the Bureau of Vital Statistics for “the paper...My boss told me to come and get it...The one that say I was born,” his lack of knowledge ensures the officers that Cross could not be scheming a plot to take advantage of them, for he is an ignorant black man they view as their own private entertainment.²⁸⁹ Cross’s audience, the workers at the Bureau of Vital Statistics, “smile” and “laugh” because his “pretense of dumbness made the clerk feel superior.”²⁹⁰ The clerk having “regarded him with benevolent amusement” draws a wider audience as he calls his coworker near, “Say, Jack! Come here and get a load of this, will you!...This coon clown says he was born somewhere.”²⁹¹ The two white workers make fun at Cross, questioning him, “maybe you weren’t born boy. Are you *sure* you were?”²⁹² Cross, who “bats his eyes stupidly” plays into all of these questions, as when he’s asked the address of his place of employment and he claims, he “don’t know the number...but you take the Fulton Street bus” and when asked his boss’s name, “Cross stared in blank amazement then he shook his head as though trying to avoid the worst trap of a black man’s life. Mister, I don’t ask white folks their personal business.”²⁹³ By enacting simplemindedness so well, Cross receives access to Lionel Lane’s birth certificate.

Cross continues to abide by essentialist narratives that others script for him even among other African Americans. On a train, after escaping Chicago, he meets Bob, who immediately expresses a kinship with Cross: “I’m black like you and you can trust me till death. Race means a lot to me. I love and trust my own.”²⁹⁴ Deciding that he and Cross would become companions,

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 159.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 157.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid, 158.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 162.

solely on the basis of their race, Bob discloses his own narrative to Cross: “I ain’t no American. I’m British, see? But I’m black, like you, I came to this goddamn country from Trinidad ten years ago...Had to run off; was an organizer and they were after me...So I got to be careful too.”²⁹⁵ Assuming Cross is similar to himself, based on their shared experiences as black men, Bob adopts the notion that Cross must also have a similar narrative: “You did something to the white folks and they’re looking for you, hunh?”²⁹⁶ Cross’s lack of dialogue in this scene reveals the ways in which others subscribe him to essentialist identity narratives. Cross maintains his silence for the majority of the conversation, leaving Bob to fill in the assumed narrative for Cross as he sees fit. No longer scripting narratives, Cross allows others to cast him in their own story-worlds.

While Cross’s performances of adopting essentialist narrative identities can be seen as oppressive, since Cross is not able to articulate who he truly is, we realize that such narratives can actually be read as subversive because narrative identity allows Cross the fluidity to take on new narratives, and therefore, various platforms of action. Cross once again takes on a new narrative identity when he falls in love with Eva—a communist artist— through her diary entries and art. After reading Eva’s feelings about the Communist Party, her text becomes an empathetic tool that allows him to take on her mission. Realizing that “it was out of realities such as this that books were made,” and he would “act and live it out,” Cross assumes a false identity and lives within a new story-world, as the narrator remarks that he now had trouble “[sorting] fantasy from reality.”²⁹⁷ Cross’s life having become a novel, once he reads Eva’s diary, allows him to assume yet *another* identity with different goals: “He realized...he was acting more as a kind of proxy

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 163.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 162.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 91 and 109.

for Eva's feelings than his own. *I really don't care he thought.*"²⁹⁸ Cunningly, the third-person omniscient narrator slips out of third and into first-person. Letting down Cross's mask for a brief moment, the narrator focalizes through Cross's consciousness: italicizing the first-person "I", Cross lets the reader know that, "*I really don't care*" and that these actions and feelings in his story-world are different from his true thoughts. Cross, therefore, describes how Eva's art affects him:

The odd power of her work was immediately apparent...The magical fragility of this light, touching off surprising harmonies of tones, falling in space and bringing to sight half-sensed patterns of form, was like Eva herself, like her sense of herself. In her work she seemed to be straining to say something that possessed and gripped her life.²⁹⁹

Understanding that her "terrors and agonies" take "form and color" through her paintings, and reading in her diaries that "membership in the party was death to artists," Cross decides to act on Eva's behalf, murdering her husband and communist leader Gil, and several other members of The Party. Seeking to free Eva from the Party's constraints, as the party is a disciplining group described as your "mother and father" that one must "obey," Cross murders these men under the same justification that Wright explains when he leaves the communist party in his autobiographical essay, "I Tried to Be a Communist."³⁰⁰ Freeing Eva from having to subscribe herself and her art to essentialist identity politics, Cross feels empathy for another person for the first time throughout the entire novel.

VI. "I need somebody": A Return to Community

Cross's insistence on living multiple identity narratives results in his paranoia, an experience Richard Wright knew well. Due to "psychoneurosis," Wright was disqualified from

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 223.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 204.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 179.

the draft.³⁰¹ His FBI file would pick up on his rejection from the armed forces, as agents noted that “his interest in the problem of the Negro has become almost an obsession” and that he was rejected by the armed forces on January 15, 1944 for “psychoneurosis, severe, psychiatric rejection; [and] referred to Local Board for further psychiatric and social investigation.”³⁰² Not only were the FBI and armed forces that aware of Wright’s paranoia, his friends also “mocked” his fearful behavior.³⁰³ Wright would respond by claiming, “I know I’m paranoid...But you know, any black man who is not paranoid is in serious shape. He should be in an asylum and kept undercover”³⁰⁴ To Wright, paranoid behavior was a tool, a dependable means for survival in a world constantly tracking him. So it is not surprising that, in *The Outsider*, Wright would create a character, Cross, who continuously saw “Spies spying upon spies who were being spied upon.”³⁰⁵ In such a spying cross-fire, Cross’s deepest fear was that spies might stumble upon who he truly was.

Unable to carry the pressure of living out multiple identity narratives, Cross desires to reveal his true self but cannot find an artistic mode to communicate it. Understanding that he is unable to fulfil the identity narrative that he has acted out, Cross reflects: “he was not Lionel Lane. He was nothing, nobody. He had tossed his humanity to the winds, and now he wanted it back.”³⁰⁶ Desiring to regain his selfhood, Cross confesses to Eva: “I killed Hilton...No listen—He still did not turn around. My name’s not Lionel Lane. It’s Cross Damon. Oh, God. What have I

³⁰¹Rowley, *Richard Wright*, 286.

³⁰² William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive: FBI Files on African American Authors and Literary Institution Obtained through the U.S Freedom Information Act*, Washington University. <http://digital.wustl.edu/fbeyes/>. See Richard Wright File, Part 3 and Part 5.

³⁰³Rowley, *Richard Wright*, 490.

³⁰⁴Rowley, *Richard Wright*, 491.

³⁰⁵Wright, *The Outsider*, 336.

³⁰⁶*Ibid.*

done? I’ve killed and killed and killed...Eva, save me; help to save me.”³⁰⁷ Longing to share who he truly is with Eva, Cross enters a confessional mode that differs from his previous identity narrative creations. In this mode Cross does not rely on his body—as we saw previously when he became Lionel Lane in his performance at the Bureau of Vital Statistics, or with his companion Bob, who reads Cross’s blackness as a sign of similarity to himself. Instead Cross reveals his true self with his body “[turned] around” and positioned away from his audience.³⁰⁸ In doing so, Cross refuses to be read according to his biometric identity, understanding that “his [black] life had represented for [Eva] something which she had yearned to embrace.”³⁰⁹ Thus, hiding his body from her—to conceal his signifying black body—Cross verbally communicates his true identity as the villain:

I *must* talk...I must tell you—Darling, I killed your husband—I killed Gil and Herndon too...And in Chicago, I killed a man—Oh, God—Eva, don’t leave me now. I need you, I need somebody...He clutched at her arms and she held him tightly, like one holding a child. Yet he needed her.³¹⁰

Admitting his true identity, Cross is rejected by Eva who fails to imagine him as a villain. Instead, she “stopped his mouth with her hand” in order to prohibit him from further confessing his crimes and continues to portray him as a victim to be cared for, as she “held him tightly, like one holding a child.”³¹¹

Cross’s attempt to speak his true self without falling back on his biometric identity would provide a singular narrative that differs from the essentialist narratives that others dictate. Yet, he fails to find a community to which he can tell his story. Searching for individuals similar to

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 320.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 330.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 320.

³¹¹ Ibid, 322 and 320.

himself who can hold his narrative, and having ostracized himself from his African American community and family in Chicago, Cross attempts to share his story with oppressed artist-character Eva:

it was only in relation to Eva that his thoughts could shape themselves with any meaning...Wasn't there some way of telling her and stealing the horror from it as he did so...Was the possibility of communication only a kind of pretense, an arrangement assumed to exist but which really did not? Was the core of the subjective life of each person sealed off absolutely from that of another? ...Were we really that much alone in this life? Were all human hearts encased in the irredeemable isolation and had we only the satisfaction of fooling ourselves that we were together? He groaned softly and did not close his eyes in sleep until dawn.³¹²

Having returned to the very place he occupied when at novel's beginning—an insomniac desperate for sleep, living a life of dread and failure to connect with others—Cross realizes that it is important to posit his selfhood into society, something he can only do if someone is there to receive his narrative.

Because Cross is unable to connect with Eva, she rejects him. Upon discovering who he truly is, “[backing] away from him, stumbling against a wall, her eyes transfixed with terror,” Eva opts for suicide in a scene that is reminiscent of the very moment that acts as the impetus to Cross's alienation from community.³¹³ Eva's death parallels Joe's, the first man Cross murdered in the early scenes of the novel. Although Joe was Cross's closest friend and co-worker at the post office, he still threw Joe from a window following his escape from the subway crash, a result of Cross's fear that Joe—knowing his true identity— would ruin Cross's escape plan. Just as Cross was unable to accept companionship in that moment, Eva is driven to kill herself, rejecting Cross as her only family: “Eva's frail body hurtling through the icy air of the night

³¹²Ibid, 330.

³¹³Ibid, 395.

outside” lands dead on the sidewalks of Harlem.³¹⁴ With Eva dead, and no one able to hear his life story, Cross’s plot—both the one he constructs, *and* the novel—comes to a screeching halt.

With the novel’s denouement, Cross’s identity actually ceases to exist, fulfilling the goal he set in the novel’s opening pages. Lacking the physical evidence that the defense attorney, Houston, needed to convict Cross of his crimes, the state relies on narrative identity to solve the murder mysteries strewn throughout the text. Houston therefore turns to what he calls “emotional clues,” such as “a list of the titles of books [Cross] left behind in his room.”³¹⁵ Here we see that despite a lack of biometric evidence, the state begins tracking Cross and composing a narrative plot explaining his motives. In a scene when the DA confronts Cross with his mother’s death, an effect of the heartbreak she experienced upon hearing Cross’s fate, and has his wife and sons confront him, the DA admits: “I was trying to identify you; I had to be absolutely certain that you were married, and so on. But there was another thing I wanted to know. I had to see how you would react when I told you of your mother’s death, how you would react when you saw your sons...I’m a District Attorney; Damon, I was tracking down emotional clues; I was doing police work.”³¹⁶ Realizing that Houston reads not his biometric evidence but his narrative evidence, Cross acknowledges “that was the end. But what evidence did Houston have? What facts to buttress all of this? So far he had cited nothing but psychological facts. Come to think of it, they were not even psychological facts. They were feelings, lightening-like intuitions.”³¹⁷ Thus, lacking concrete evidence, and with Eva dead—the one person who could testify and pass on his story—Houston sets Cross free.

³¹⁴Ibid, 403.

³¹⁵Ibid, 421-422.

³¹⁶Ibid, 422.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 428.

Lacking a narrative identity, Cross's plot comes to a standstill as there is no witness of how he manipulated identities and murdered several people. Realizing that his story would not end with his arrest, Cross becomes aware of how a lack of a community erases both his identity and his memory from the world:

He was not to be punished! Men would not give meaning to what he had done! Society would not even look at it, recognize it! That was not fair, wasn't right...Always back deep in his mind he had counted on their railing at him, storming, cursing, condemning. Instead, nothing, silence, the silence that roars like an indifferent cataract, the silence that reaches like a casual clap of thunder to the end of space and time.³¹⁸

Left in silence, with no recognition for his violent and gruesome actions, Cross's deepest fear comes true as his actions in life produce meaningless affect and he dies on the novel's closing pages with the Communist Party avenging their lost members. With a fatal bullet wound, Cross is left with only Houston to hear his confession: "I wish I had some way to give the meaning of my life to others...to make a bridge from man to man."³¹⁹

VIII. "To make a bridge from man to man": Conclusion

Cross's plot —a construction of events that attempt to deny an essentialist identity—results in Cross's realization that to deny himself a true identity is to also deny himself a community. In doing so, Cross realizes that his attempts to shed himself of a fixed identity leaves him with no one to receive his life story, a narrative that might "make a bridge from man to man," that would give meaning to his life.³²⁰ So while Cross's identity politics may at first seem to uphold an anti-essentialist principles, Cross also realizes the necessity of belonging to a community and sharing his particular—though gruesome—life story with others. He learned too late that a community

³¹⁸ Ibid, 431.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 439.

³²⁰ Ibid.

would allow him to pass on his narrative. Such a realization may have resulted in his expression of his artistic self—prior to his decision to turn to crafting his own story-world with others’ lives, resulting in the loss of many.

In the following chapter, we will turn away from masculine narratives of black men on the run, and look to black women writers of the cold war era—Lorraine Hansberry, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Alice Childress—who view the domestic space as a source of strength for combating surveillance, a problem they articulate as a familial and communal issue. Fighting the issue of surveillance together also provides a community in which the artist character can articulate and express their experiences of racialized surveillance. In Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, we will see artist-character Beneatha, surrounded by a community who learns from her articulations of black lives under surveillance. This difference may have led to Lorraine Hansberry’s critique of Wright’s *The Outsider* in a 1953 *Freedom* article, where she referred to it as “a cheap drugstore whodunnit”:

The Outsider is a story of sheer violence, death and disgusting spectacle, written by a man who has seemingly come to despise humanity...Cross Damon is someone you will never meet on the Southside of Chicago or in Harlem. For if he is anything at all, he is the symbol of Wright’s new philosophy—the glorification of—nothingness. Richard Wright has been away from home for a long time. He has forgotten which of the streets of the Southside lie south of others, an insignificant error, except that it points out how much he has forgotten other things...nowhere in his four hundred pages can he bring himself to describe—say, the beauty or strength in the eyes of the working people of the Southside. It seems that he has forgotten.³²¹

Just as Cross abandoned his community on the run, Hansberry notices that Wright has done the same. It is in depicting the “beauty or strength in the eyes of the working people of the

³²¹ Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. See Box 57, File 9.

Southside”— the very people that Lorraine Hansberry will depict in her Broadway Hit *A Raisin in the Sun*—that alternative narratives to combat surveillance as a community are revealed.³²²

³²² Ibid

CHAPTER THREE

“Revolt of the Housewives”: The Domestic Sphere as Counter-Surveillance in African American Women’s Writing of the Cold War Era

“Revolt of the Housewives,” is how a 1935 *New Masses* magazine labelled a protest of African American women and children marching down Harlem’s 125th street, demanding lower meat prices.³²³ Twenty-four years later, Lorraine Hansberry would insist on identifying with this group of women. Once she became the first African American female playwright to produce a play on Broadway, and the first Black winner of the prestigious Drama Critics’ Circle award, one newspaper headline read, “Chicago Housewife Authors Hit *A Raisin in the Sun*.”³²⁴ Another article titled, “Housewife’s’ Play a Hit,” revealed that the domestic label was Hansberry’s choice. It stated that “whenever anyone asked Lorraine Hansberry about her occupation she was afraid to say ‘writer.’ That sounded too craftsyt. She always answered, ‘housewife.’”³²⁵ Hansberry filled many roles other than housewife during her short life: journalist, activist, playwright, poet, painter, and sketch artist. Married to communist song-writer, editor, and publisher Robert Nemiroff for nine years, her personal papers—letters, diary entries, and notes—reveal an

³²³ Qtd. in Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom : Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

³²⁴ William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive: FBI Files on African American Authors and Literary Institution Obtained through the U.S Freedom Information Act*, Washington University. <http://digital.wustl.edu/fbeyes/>. See Lorraine Hansberry File, Part 15, Page 21

³²⁵ Ibid, Hansberry File, Part 15, Page 45.

egalitarian marriage that collaborated over artistic projects, rather than one that subscribed to cold war gendered ideologies that praised the stay-at-home woman as the keeper of the domestic sphere. So why, then, does Hansberry insist on the label “housewife”?

Lorraine Hansberry fell under Federal Bureau of Investigation surveillance even prior to her acclaimed play’s Broadway debut. Totalling over one thousand pages of memos, reports, and letters of investigative analysis, her FBI file reveals that the bureau tracked her play for Communist Party sympathies and seditionist themes, while the file also provides new insights into how Hansberry represented herself to the public. The FBI tracked her play for “propaganda” for anything that might exacerbate the Red Scare, while also gathering the public statements above. Clipping and inserting them into Hansberry’s file—the FBI was concerned with the African American radical housewife.

An unpublished short story found in Hansberry’s personal archive, written prior to *A Raisin in the Sun*, depicts housewife Edna as a radical woman who drives political change.³²⁶ While Edna and her husband, Austin, sit at their dining room table eating dinner, the supportive wife outlines her husband’s busy week ahead: “you’ll have to go down to Rockefeller Center in the morning...Rockefeller Center is where you go to get your passport.”³²⁷ Over the course of the dinner that Edna prepared, Austin questions why *he* would need a passport, “I thought we

³²⁶ Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 60, “Short stories 1950-1956.” Due to the covert ways that Hansberry embedded discussions of “radicalism” into her works, archival materials—correspondence, drafts, and subsequent alterations—are essential to fully understanding Hansberry’s literary production.

³²⁷ Ibid.

discussed your going,” to the Peace Congress, he inquires.³²⁸ “Well that won’t be possible,” Edna sheepishly answered him, “The government says I am a ‘security risk’... the upshot of it all is that I can’t get a passport. I am what is now known in the case of more illustrious people as under ‘house arrest.’”³²⁹ Alluding to state surveillance over black travel that plagued black radical thinkers, writers, and artists during the twentieth-century, Edna reveals that her own passport has been revoked—just as Hansberry’s was in 1952 when she returned from the Inter-American Peace Conference in Montevideo.³³⁰ Without a passport, Edna is confined to the domestic space, a realm that conservative cold war ideology perceived as nonthreatening. Her own husband’s response draws attention to the gendered ideology of the time that saw women as apolitical: “when the government starts getting really interested enough in little you to stop you from leaving the country—that is just too damn much.”³³¹ Austin’s remarks infantilize her, elsewhere calling her “dear little idiotic Edna.”³³² While Edna’s own husband may have seen her as incapable of much, the state deemed this “little” housewife as a threat to the state. After all, it is

³²⁸Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 60, “Short stories 1950-1956.”

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ See Chapter 1 of *Secret Selves* that takes up how the FBI created obstacles to black travel. Also see William Maxwell’s *F.B. EYES: How J. Edgar Hoover’s Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature*, which asserts the thesis that the “FBI helped to define the twentieth-century Black Atlantic, both blocking and forcing its flows.” See Chapter four. Extending the Espionage Act of 1917, which was put into place shortly after the US entered WWI, Congress passed the Sedition Act of 1918 to cease “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” against the state. In October 1918, the Department of Justice “pushed through Congress an immigration bill that extended the deportation provisions to aliens who are members of or affiliated with any organization that entertains a belief in, teaches, or advocates the overthrow by force or violence of the Government of the United States...” To that end, authorities did not need to “prove individual beliefs or actions, but only had to prove that an individual belonged to an anarchistic organization in order to deport him.” For a detailed description of Hansberry’s travels to Uruguay, see Imani Perry, *Looking for Lorraine*, 59.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

Edna who persuades Austin to attend a Peace Congress in her absence and go on a secret “mission” whose aims are never revealed to the reader.³³³

Hansberry’s interest in housewives was perhaps related to The Cold War era’s African American domestic worker, a historical figure long centralized as a force that birthed African American feminism and planted its agenda in the political left. Patricia Hill Collins’ *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (1998) situates “black women who labored as domestic workers and the white-controlled private homes in which they were employed” as an oppressive “testing ground for surveillance as a form of control,” by way of “close scrutiny, sexual harassment, assault, violence, or the threat thereof.”³³⁴ More recently, other scholars have shown how black domestic workers who fought against oppression within their working conditions were crucial to forming a black leftist feminism. Erik McDuffie’s *Sojourning for Freedom* (2011), and Dayo Gore’s *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (2011), document a history of black women leftists who “became politicized in the 1930s and 1940s and defiantly maintained communist affiliations in the midst of the politically repressive ‘red scare’ of the 1950s.”³³⁵ As Gore and McDuffie have shown, these women articulated a demand for black women’s equality “at a time when an idealized version of women’s domesticity and ‘separate spheres’ dominated gender discourse.”³³⁶ Ashley D. Farmer’s *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (2017) applied McDuffie’s and Gore’s findings to argue that black women writers, like Claudia Jones and Alice Childress, who

³³³Ibid.

³³⁴Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 21.

³³⁵Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads : African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 2.

³³⁶ Ibid.

wrote during a time when “80 percent of black women were employed as domestic workers,” created the trope of the “Militant Negro Domestic” to “reimagine working-class black women as nationalist political actors.”³³⁷ Farmer persuasively argues that from the 1940s to the 1960s, black women radicals reimagined the political identity of the black domestic worker as political activist.

While historians have recovered how the black domestic worker employed in white homes became politically involved, and is therefore imagined as the “Militant Negro Domestic” figure in African American women’s writings of the Cold War era, little has been done to discuss how the black woman countered surveillance to protect her family in her own home. This chapter returns to Hansberry’s canonical drama *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), an understudied play that has often been seen as upholding conservative gender ideologies of the Cold War era, to explore how Hansberry’s depiction of housewives portrayed radical counter-surveillance against the state. Centralizing Hansberry’s play, and contextualizing the drama within the works of her contemporaries—Gwendolyn Brooks’ lyrical novel *Maud Martha* (1953), Alice Childress’ drama *Gold through the Trees* (1952), and her compilation of newspaper columns *Like One of The Family: Conversations From a Domestic’s Life* (1956)—I argue that the black housewife’s domestic expression within the home articulates a narrative of federal surveillance as a family issue, and one she strives to subvert.³³⁸ Articulating surveillance as a communal problem, these women’s writings transition *Secret Selves* from discussions of *individuals* avoiding surveillance

³³⁷ Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 13-14.

³³⁸ Scholars such as Kristin Matthews have discussed the Younger’s home as a site of expression. See Kristin Matthews’ “The Politics of ‘Home’ in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*,” which claims that “the play stresses the necessity of finding a solid home where one might house and express oneself” (558).

to *community*-adopted methods of evasion, a shift noted by these writers' decisions not to write their texts in third-person omniscient narration that follows a central protagonist, as shown so far through the realist novels of Claude McKay and Richard Wright, but through the dramatic and poetic oral forms that insist on a communal and domestic experience through their direct communication between performance and audience.³³⁹

I. Traditional Cold War Ideologies within *A Raisin in the Sun*

To many who read Hansberry's acclaimed drama, it is apparent that the Younger family strives to obtain the bourgeois domestic ideals that were celebrated throughout the Cold War era. According to James C. McKelly:

part of the reason for the unparalleled enthusiasm of the play's reception is that it posed no real threat to [white American culture]. Like thousands of working-class post-war families, the Youngers place their faith in the bourgeois virtues of frugality and hard work, and aspire to the material satisfaction and cultural inclusion which the free market promises to those who embrace it with vigor and imagination.³⁴⁰

If the Youngers seek a middle-class life style as McKelly claims, then the play's bourgeois values are certainly driven by character Walter Younger, who is the namesake of his deceased father. Attempting to step into the patriarchal headship of the family, Walter steers the Younger family to strive toward economic advancement. The first scene discloses that his desire to

³³⁹See Susan Willis's *Specifying: Black Women Writing and the American Experience* and Madhu Dubey's *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*. Both studies take up the importance of oral aesthetics for African American female writers and show that black female writers turned toward oral aesthetics because it produced a more communal affect, both in thematics and form. This differed from their male counterparts, whose novels focused on a singular male protagonist and left the black woman on the margins of their works. The texts these studies discuss, however, focus on the Black Arts Movement. Therefore, Hansberry's work anticipates the shift from singular protagonists written in the realist mode, to an oral and communal mode.

³⁴⁰ James C. McKelly, "Hymns of Sedition: Portraits of the Artist in Contemporary African American Drama," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 48, no. 1 (1992): 87.

provide for his wife and child drive his bourgeois values, a symptom of his character that the play communicates through stage directions, rather than by dialogue: “(*At the window*) Just look at ‘em down there...Running and racing to work...(*He turns and faces his wife and watches her a moment at the stove, and then suddenly*) You look young this morning, baby.”³⁴¹ Viewing the men on Chicago’s streets who dash off to work, Walter, who has no place of business to attend early this morning, feels inferior to men who do. Assuming his manhood threatened, he “faces” his wife and offers her a sexual advance to affirm his position as the man in the family: “You look young this morning, baby.”³⁴² A few pages later, when his son Travis asks for fifty cents for school activities and Ruth answers that the family “ain’t got it,” Walter’s role as provider is again threatened: “(*Reaching down into his pants with a rather important gesture*) Here son— (*He hands the boy the coin, but his eyes are directed to his wife’s*).”³⁴³ With Walter’s gaze falling on his wife while he makes an “important gesture” in retrieving the coins, Walter literally performs his ability to provide—with his wife, Ruth, as his audience.³⁴⁴

Walter’s desire to solidify economic security for his family is further exemplified by traditional cold war bourgeois values that reaffirm gendered stereotypes of the Cold War era. Proving himself as provider leads Walter to invest half of the family’s fortune—an insurance settlement from his father’s death—into a foolish business opportunity, investing in a liquor store whose purchase was a swindle. Prior to Walter’s prideful downfall, his monologue sheds light on what he hopes this investment would do for the family:

³⁴¹ Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 27.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Your daddy's gonna make a transaction...a business transaction that's going to change our lives...That's how come one day when 'bout seventeen years old I'll come home and I'll be pretty tired, you know what I mean, after a day of conferences and secretaries getting things wrong the way they do...And I'll pull the car up on the driveway...just a plain black Chrysler, I think, with white walls—no—black tires. More elegant people don't have to be flashy...And I'll come up the steps to the house and the gardener will be clipping away at the hedges and he'll say, "Good evening, Mr. Younger." And I'll say, "Hello, Jefferson, how are you this evening?" And I'll go inside and Ruth will come downstairs and meet me at the door and we'll kiss each other...and I hand you the world.³⁴⁵

Walter's desire for wealth is paralleled by masculine discourses of control. In his prediction, not only is he an important businessman who has multiple people working for him, he makes decisions, has the ability to own and therefore hand his son "the world," and ultimately his wife's "kiss" is at home waiting for him when he returns from a busy day at the office.³⁴⁶

Read this way, *A Raisin in the Sun* appears to be traditionally conservative, as the family upholds middle class ideals, not just economically but in support of the Cold War era's gendered ideology. Just as Walter subscribes to the masculine role that places pressure on him to provide for his family, two out of the three women in the Younger household uphold feminine gender roles in the domestic sphere. The play, after all, opens with Ruth as the keeper of the home, waking the family, cooking them breakfast, and making sure everyone is healthy, happy, and where they need to be on time. Mama, the family's matriarch and Walter's mother, tiptoes behind Ruth, insultingly redoing Ruth's tasks of feeding, cooking, and cleaning for the family. Her mimicking of Ruth's domesticity throughout this opening scene creates a comical tension on stage between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law that speaks to the pressure on women to perform as the ideal homemaker. Ruth having just asked Travis to, "get your jacket...looks

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 109.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

chilly out this morning,” the audience cannot miss the parallels when the matriarch enters the stage and asks her own child, Beneatha, “where’s your robe...go get mine and put it on.”³⁴⁷ The subtle struggle ends in Ruth’s frustration with Mama’s attempt to perfect Ruth’s acts of domesticity, such as when Mama questions why Travis only had “cold cereal,” because “when it starts getting this chilly in the fall a child ought to have some hot grits or something,” Ruth snaps, “I feed my son, Lena!”³⁴⁸ The opening scene in Hansberry’s play suggests that to be a woman and to care for the domestic sphere and its people is essential to the characterization of black women, a role that must be performed flawlessly.

While Hansberry’s play certainly embraces cold war gendered ideologies, it is important to acknowledge that for black women, domesticity brought added pressures that their white woman counterparts did not experience. As Dayo Gore’s *Radicalism at the Crossroads* shows, black women were often framed in mainstream society as inadequate versions of (white) womanhood. The black counterpart to “the ‘bad’ white mother was the emasculating and dominating matriarch,” a figure supported by sociologist E. Franklin Frazer’s *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939) and *Negro Youth at the Crossways* (1940).³⁴⁹ Both studies, published prior to Hansberry’s play, “outlined the damaging effects of the black matriarch on black families,” evidence that “postwar sociologists and public policy experts” drew from to argue that matriarchy was at fault for the “disorganized black family.”³⁵⁰ Black women who were held to middle class white family standards carried the burden *and* the blame for “failures often than

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 29 and 40.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 40.

³⁴⁹ Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, 50.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

not seen as contributing to black men's inability to play the traditional male role of breadwinner."³⁵¹

The play embraces Frazier's results as a catalyst to Walter's depression and inability to provide for his family. Since Ruth works as a domestic servant in someone else's home, and Mama controls the insurance money, the play upholds the matriarchal structure that both Frazier and Cold War society rejected. The play addresses Walter's depression on account of patriarchy when he declares that "a man needs a woman to back him up," and mirrors his son when he asks his wife for "some money for carfare."³⁵² Walter is thus portrayed as both infantilized and emasculated by his wife and mother. Walter also frankly states his frustrations toward his mother: "*You* the head of this family. You run our lives like you want to. It was your money and you did what you wanted with it."³⁵³ Yielding to Walter's declaration, Mama provides Walter with the opportunity to step into the patriarchal head of the household, "Walter I been wrong...*(She takes an envelope out of her handbag and puts it in front of him and he watches her without speaking or moving)*... from now on any penny that come out of it or that go in it is for you to look after. For you to decide...I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be."³⁵⁴

II. Reading *Raisin in the Sun* as Red

Although the Youngers' adoption of the white middle class family structure has allowed critics to dismiss the play as failing to contest the mainstream, *Raisin in the Sun* actually represents a new generation of black domestic housewives through the characterizations of Ruth

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, 32 and 39.

³⁵³ Ibid, 94-95.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 106-107.

and Beneatha, who ask us to look deeper beneath their characters' development on the stage, thus challenging us to imagine a world where the black housewife's domestic space is actually subversive. To do so, we must first understand *A Raisin in the Sun* as a Communist play despite its overt bourgeois values. Those who know Hansberry's biography well will not be surprised by the play's Communist undertones. No stranger to the Communist Movement, Hansberry joined the Communist Party while she was briefly enrolled in college at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and "from 1951-1953, she worked full time for Paul Robeson's weekly newspaper *Freedom*" a publication that Harold Cruse once called "a Negro version of the Communist *Daily Worker*."³⁵⁵

Even though Lorraine Hansberry joined the Communist Party and wrote for its publications, surprisingly the FBI did not read *A Raisin in the Sun* as communist propaganda. The bureau sent writers and literary critics to the opening of *A Raisin in the Sun* in Philadelphia, as a bureau memo stated that, "at the request of the New York Office, the play 'A Raisin in the Sun' was witnessed by the writers on 2/4/59."³⁵⁶ One of those writers, Jerry Gaghan from the *Philadelphia Daily News*, reported that "the play contains no comments of any nature about Communism as such but deals essentially with negro aspirations, the problems inherent in their efforts to advance themselves, and varied attempts at arriving at solutions."³⁵⁷ Summarizing the plot of the play, and discussing the characterizations of each actor and actress, Gaghan denies the

³⁵⁵ Aaron C. Thomas, "Watching *A Raisin in the Sun* and Seeing Red," *Modern Drama* 58, no. 4 (2015): 464.

³⁵⁶ William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive*, See Lorraine Hansberry File, Part 4.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

play is a communist production, concluding that, “from the writer’s observations of the politics and the dialogue, nothing specific was found that is peculiar to a CP program.”³⁵⁸

Gaghan had not been trained in the new critical reading that Aaron C. Thomas would perform fifty-six years later in his article, “Watching *A Raisin in the Sun* and Seeing Red.” As a theater scholar, Thomas brings to light how Communism’s influence on black theatre history has largely been ignored. Bringing black theater’s communist history to the forefront, he argues that “playwrights in the early 1950s found productive techniques for discussing their pro-Communist politics on Broadway stages,” mirroring James Smethurst’s argument that “the Communist Left and its sympathizers was more idiosyncratic (and much less thorough) in the theater than in many other areas of ‘high’ and popular culture, and so possibly theater workers felt they could take more chances.”³⁵⁹ Thomas shows that through the evasive use of intertextuality, Hansberry embeds communist alliances through the play, that “took part in encoded political discussions, while ostensibly discussing topics altogether different.”³⁶⁰ For example, Thomas reads Walter dancing to “All God’s Children Got Wings” as a nod to communist Paul Robeson, who played the lead role in Eugene O’Neil’s *All God’s Chillun Got Wings*. Such techniques, of course, can be seen as Lorraine Hansberry also embracing the African American literary tradition’s tool of double consciousness: that is, the black artist’s *gift* of second-sight, as W.E.B. DuBois so beautifully put it in *Souls of Black Folks* (1903), allows the black artist to simultaneously address both her white and black audiences.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Thomas, “Watching *A Raisin in the Sun* and Seeing Red,” 461-463.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

Pointing to concealed articulations of the play's communist activities certainly labels *Raisin* as “red.” Yet, by shedding light onto the history of black women communists, *Raisin*, a play that casts more women than men, can be read as a drama whose plot is particularly driven by surveillance over communist families. Ashley Farmer notes that once the Depression hit and the Universal Negro Improvement Association disbanded in the 1930s, many black women joined the Communist Party, an organization attractive to them because it “combined Garveyite nationalist frameworks with sophisticated critiques of domestic workers’ class oppression. As CP members, they espoused a black nationalist, working class, woman-centered political agenda and organized around their unique experiences with racism, sexism, and capitalism.”³⁶¹ One internal group within the party—and the only group led by black women—was the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, which mobilized black women against Jim Crow and U.S. Cold War domestic and foreign policy. Hansberry was a member. These women, who soon fell under government surveillance for their activism, existed for just a year, but the organization helped to articulate a Black Left Feminism that would solidify within the nationalist movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s.

Understanding the historical background of black women communists that Lorraine Hansberry herself was involved in allows us to read the play as a drama led by black communist characters, a message Hansberry skillfully scripted in the opening scene of *A Raisin in the Sun*. One of Walter’s first actions on the stage is to “vaguely [read] the front page” of the Tribune.³⁶²

³⁶¹Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 21. Also see Dayo Gore’s *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, Erik McDuffie’s *Sojourning for Freedom*, Carol Davis Boyce’s *Left of Karl Marx*, and Robin Kelley’s *Race Rebels*. These histories discuss how black female radicals eventually move away from communism toward a more black feminist ideology that helped shape black leftist feminism during the nationalist movement.

³⁶²Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, 26.

Despite the script setting the play “sometime between World War II and the present,” Walter’s recital of the daily news evokes the panic-driven hysteria of the Cold War Arms race that threatened the use of the atomic bomb.³⁶³ Scouring the front page of the news, Walter informs his wife in the early morning hours before the rest of the family has risen that an unnamed source “set off another bomb yesterday,” which can only point to the Soviets.³⁶⁴ Such a statement for Cold War era audiences would evoke Red Scare fears. As Kristin Matthews has noted, the topic of the atomic bomb is raised in dialogue four times throughout the short play, and “while one feels the reverberations of the bomb tests throughout *Raisin*, they are never discussed explicitly, suggesting both the volatility of the issue and its commonplace nature at that time.”³⁶⁵ Furthermore, Walter continues with the news of the day, stating “Say Colonel McCormick is sick.”³⁶⁶ This particular man would have evoked thoughts of censorship from Chicago communists, as Colonel McCormick, whose legal name was Robert R. McCormick, was the head of the *Chicago Tribune* and a local politician who fought against Communism. Ruth responds to the daily news: “(Affecting tea-party interest) Is he now? Poor thing.”³⁶⁷ With the stage directions of “affecting” interest, Ruth disingenuously cares for McCormick’s health—someone who pledged a war on Chicago communists.³⁶⁸ Not only does she not wish anti-communist politicians well, but her role as a domestic worker where she must “look after

³⁶³ Ibid, 24

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 26.

³⁶⁵ Kristin Matthews, “The Politics of ‘Home’ in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*,” *Modern Drama* 51, no. 4 (2008), 556.

³⁶⁶ Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, 26.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

somebody else's kids" and "work in somebody's kitchen" directly depicts her as the militant domestic worker (discussed above) who unionized with the help of the Communist Party.³⁶⁹

Ruth's sister-in-law, Beneatha, can also be read as a black woman communist. Interviews found in Hansberry's personal archives reveal that Beneatha was crafted as an autobiographical character. In a 1959 interview in *American Theater* with Studs Terkel, Hansberry claims that Beneatha is autobiographical, holding Hansberry's own viewpoints in politics.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, the FBI reader's report on *Raisin in the Sun*, discussed above, highlights her character as one that promotes "propaganda" despite its conclusion that the play should not be viewed as Communist.³⁷¹ Gaghan further details Beneatha's characterization: "the daughter is a girl of 20 who aspires to be a doctor in an effort to fulfill a childhood ambition to help people...At this point she seeks a means of self-expression and self-identification...Her comments and her discussions with other characters produce such propaganda messages are included in the play: She denies her belief in God and the existence of God" and she "reviles" her brother as an "entrepreneur."³⁷² While Gaghan insisted that there were no Communist Party messages, the evidence of his report contradicts his conclusion. Reporting that Beneatha delivers "propaganda" and degrades her brother as a Marxist entrepreneur would have certainly piqued the bureau's interest. Additionally, Gaghan notes that Beneatha's suitor, a "Nigerian studying in the United States and Canada," has a "purpose to educate himself so that he can return to teach and raise the level of the people of his village. They must overthrow the rule of European nations, find

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 71.

³⁷⁰ Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. See Box 3, File 1, "General Interviews."

³⁷¹ William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive*, See Lorraine Hansberry File, Part 4.

³⁷² Ibid.

political freedom, improve themselves economically and educationally, and make their own future.”³⁷³ It is perhaps surprising that the FBI did not view Asagai’s motives as Communist, since he calls for the overthrow of established governments and power to “raise the level of the people.”³⁷⁴ Nonetheless, even though Gaghan does not state that *A Raisin in the Sun* is communist, the majority of his report did follow Beneatha and Asagai’s “propaganda” messages. These must have raised a red flag for him, but he lacked evidence to officially document in memorandum because of Hansberry’s adroit methods of concealment.

Despite both women holding communist allegiances, Beneatha’s radicalism drastically differs from Ruth’s. While Ruth can—and should—be read as a black communist woman, Erik McDuffie has shown how “black women radicals formulated unique discourses and practices of respectability over the forty years that both challenged and adhered to what the historian Victoria W. Wolcott has termed ‘bourgeois respectability.’”³⁷⁵ Early twentieth-century middle-class black female activists “desired to act as unblemished representatives of the race” who often associated with the church, “protected temperance, thrift, cleanliness of person and property, the nuclear family, and sexual purity” in contrast to many “black left feminists” who “openly defied heteronormative gender conventions.”³⁷⁶ Therefore, while both Ruth and Beneatha embody aspects of the black communist woman, the audience may miss the depiction of Ruth as a communist radical because her conservatism overshadows her activist tendencies. Instead, the audience focuses on Beneatha, whose outspokenness overshadows Ruth’s traditional role as housewife and mother. These differences are first evident when Hansberry arranges an intense

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 10-11.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

dialogue between the Younger women concerning religion. Beneatha, frustrated with domestic chores, remarks, “How much cleaning can a house need, for Christ’s sakes.”³⁷⁷ In response, Mama describes Beneatha as “Fresh—just fresh as salt, this girl!”³⁷⁸ Beneatha fails to abide Christianity and that choice alienates her from them. Ruth echoes Mama’s complaint and asserts that if Beneatha weren’t “so fresh” then she would be more agreeable.³⁷⁹ Their adjective, “fresh,” of course refers to Beneatha’s spirited attitude; but at the same time Beneatha also reminds the women that she is only “twenty years old.”³⁸⁰ Beneatha hints at being sexually active and understands how birth control works, for she desires a career, and questions if she will ever marry. Her freshness is not only her combative attitude towards her family’s values, it also represents something new—a different way of life in contrast with the bourgeois respectability that Ruth represents.

Following the Younger women’s disagreement on religion, Hansberry writes a sequential scene that creates a hurried, rushed, and awkward tension among the Younger women. While debating whether or not God should be the center of the household, Ruth confesses her pregnancy and the women immediately broach the topic of abortion, though no one has time to digest the conversation. The future of the radical left is literally knocking at the door, and the Younger women hesitate to welcome it inside their home. Asagai enters the stage bringing the same “freshness” into the Younger household as Beneatha.³⁸¹ The audience now has Beneatha’s new radical belief system on their mind, as well as the safety of the Younger family’s newest generation on their minds. Rushing to let Asagai into the apartment, leaving the family’s

³⁷⁷ Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, 46.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid, 48.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

controversial conversations lingering, Beneatha opens the Younger family's door—both literally and figuratively—to radicalism in Asagai the Nigerian exchange student who dates Beneatha.

Beneatha dating, and eventually deciding to marry Asagai and bring him into the family, would place the Youngers under surveillance. Asagai admits that he knows that surveillance follows him due to the radical politics he holds. Admitting that he is closely watched in his own homeland for attempting to overthrow the current government, Asagai predicts that he not only faces surveillance but physical violence, as he expects men to “step out of the shadows some evening and slit my then useless throat. Don't you see they have always been there...that they always will be.”³⁸² Asagai notes the pervasive presence that is always present, watching and waiting to suppress the new radicalism that he and Beneatha represent.

III. Surveillance in the Domestic Sphere

Immersed as Ruth and Beneatha are in the Communist Movement, they would have brought surveillance into the home of the Younger family, as the FBI harassed not only communist radicals, but their spouses and children. Beneatha's decision at play's end to marry Asagai only exacerbates that effect. Deborah A. Gerson's “Is Family Devotion Now Subversive?: Familialism against McCarthyism” centralizes family in regard to the Red Scare. In the same vein as the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 that we saw in the first chapter of *Secret Selves*, the government enacted the Smith Act, also known as the Alien Registration Act of 1940, which set criminal penalties for advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government. This mandate led to a string of arrests within the Communist Party—approximately 215 people were indicted under the legislation, including alleged communists, anarchists, and

³⁸² Ibid, 136.

fascists. Such activities would last until 1957, but not before they became worse. Not only did the government arrest those who violated the Smith Act, it also placed the spouses and children of those who were arrested under watch:

the harassment of women and children that engendered the formation of the Families Committee was the fruit of the repressive apparatus of the state. The FBI attacked kin and community with doggedness born of ideological fervor...it attacked women and children at their point of vulnerability: in living, working routines of their daily lives, at home, on the job with friends and relatives, in child-care centers and summer camps. The FBI followed the children of fugitives, even though it was obvious that no information could be gleaned from them.³⁸³

One black female communist whose spouse was arrested, Esther Cooper Jackson, recalls “that her children were followed to school daily.”³⁸⁴ In response to this harassment, the communist party began The Families Committee of Smith Act Victims—an organization of women, “predominantly wives of Communist Party leaders indicted under the Smith Act,” that “organized to give financial material and emotional assistance to the children and spouses of Smith Act victims and the prisoners themselves.”³⁸⁵ The Families Committee, as Gerson argues, fought against surveillance over families “with a strategy that made use of the valorization of family. The alliance between patriotism and familialism was challenged by women who pointed to the state as the destroyer of family security, and happiness.”³⁸⁶ Thus even asserting family ties, maternity, and marriage, became a vehicle for political action.

In Hansberry’s own life, her uncle Dr. William Leo Hansberry’s participation in black education may have also brought surveillance into the family home. As a leading scholar in his

³⁸³ Deborah A. Gerson, “Is Family Devotion Now Subversive?: Familialism against McCarthyism” In *Not June Cleaver : Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. by Joanne Meyerowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994, 152.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 157.

³⁸⁵ Ibid, 151.

³⁸⁶ Ibid, 152.

field, an advocate of Pan-Africanism, and the man who would eventually become known as the father of African Studies, Leo would have certainly been under FBI surveillance. He had a major influence over Lorraine's education and political knowledge.³⁸⁷ When her father, Carl Hansberry, died prematurely at age forty-seven (Lorraine would have been around thirteen), Leo became the Hansberry children's father figure. When Lorraine was only six, Leo did graduate work at the University of Chicago near the Hansberry family home, and he was consistently involved in the children's lives. Her uncle's influence formed the political activist that Hansberry would come to be, and correspondence with her uncle continued throughout Hansberry's short life, as he often sent "postcards and letters" while he resided in Africa for purposes of academic research.³⁸⁸

As for other Communist Party members, to the Hansberrys surveillance was a family issue. In fact, a program from the Hansberry family reunion calls for reparations from the state for grievances: not only for slavery, but for FBI surveillance over the family. At a 1990 reunion, long after Lorraine Hansberry's and Leo Hansberry's deaths, the family still felt scorned and aggrieved by the surveillance their relatives experienced. In the program, the family lists twenty-two counts of "human depravation against the African American, for which the United States Government is liable."³⁸⁹ Amid claims such as "kidnapping and enslaving the African American," "failure to secure the right to vote," and "taxation without representation," the Hansberrys list "failure to remove J. Edgar Hoover from the F.B.I, who directed terrorist acts against African Americans, including wiretaps, infiltrations of Black organizations, assassinations of leaders and civil rights activists, covert activities, lifting of passports, creating illegal files of surveillance and

³⁸⁷ See Imani Perry's *Looking for Lorraine*.

³⁸⁸ Ibid, 36.

³⁸⁹ Lorraine Hansberry Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 71, "Hansberry Family History."

intimidation and discrimination against Black F.B.I. agents.”³⁹⁰ Listing government surveillance as one of their grievances against the state, “the descendants of William Hansberry, African American slave, 1819-1894 [demanded] damages and liability of \$62, billion.”³⁹¹ To the Hansberry family, surveillance, and particularly surveillance during Hoover’s reign, as Lorraine Hansberry experienced it, was a family issue.

Just as Uncle Leo’s radical activities may have brought surveillance into young Lorraine’s life, Ruth and Beneatha’s involvement with the Communist Party would bring surveillance into young Travis’s. In this light Walter’s rejection of communism and his aggression towards his sister throughout the play makes practical sense. Walter’s concern for Travis is directed at his relationship with Beneatha, as aunt and nephew, that parallels the relationship between little Lorraine and Uncle Leo. Akin to how education creates a barrier between Beneatha and the rest of the family, Travis’s relationship with his mother is similar. Just as Mama does not understand Beneatha, at a young age Travis feels misunderstood by his mother. He asks his mother for “fifty cents” because his “teacher” says they have to bring it to school, and yet, Ruth protests that she does not have the money to spare. Hansberry directs Travis’s character to give his mother “*an exasperated look for her lack of understanding,*” and his desire to belong to the educated community is so strong that he begs to “carry some groceries in front of the supermarket” after school.³⁹² Ruth refuses to give Travis the money, nor does she allow him to work at the supermarket because she does not fully understand Travis’s desire to rise beyond his socio-economic position—similar to Mama’s inability to understand Beneatha’s educational goals. These two characters are categorized together by Mama throughout the play, for when the family

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 28.

receives the insurance money the two people she dedicates the money to are Beneatha and Travis—Beneatha’s education, and Travis’s future.

Walter fears Beneatha’s relationship with his son, for her influence may lead young Travis to dive deeper into his education—a decision that would place him in danger due to the *Brown v. Board* of education decision that haunts the play, handed down in May 1954, only a few years prior to *A Raisin in the Sun*’s debut. Historian Leon Litwack speaks to the ambivalence of education in black communities:

not all black parents eagerly shared the same passion for education. Some gave contradictory advice, wanting their children to make something of themselves but doubting the relevance of formal education...if some parents chose to hold their children out of school or to limit the amount of education they received, the decision often reflected a sensitivity to the volatile nature of race relations. Knowing the deep resentment many whites felt toward educated blacks, keeping a child out of school kept that child out of trouble.”³⁹³

As Rachelle Gold points out, Beneatha’s role “introduces its audience to a corrupting element of education and engages the artistic and intellectual debate over the role of education in black communities.”³⁹⁴ Walter’s resistance to his sister attending college, and his aggression toward her throughout the play, can therefore be read as his desire to protect Travis from the educational environment that could place his only son in harm’s way.

So we can understand the tension between Walter and Beneatha as Walter’s fear that her influence may place Travis in a dangerous position. Walter is afraid of what it might hold for his son if Beneatha continues to become radical and decides to marry Asagai—a decision that would

³⁹³ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 59.

³⁹⁴ Rachelle S. Gold, “Education Has Spoiled Many a Good Plow Hand: How Beneatha’s Knowledge Functions in *A Raisin in the Sun*.” In *Reading Contemporary African American Drama: Fragments of Self*, ed. by Trudier Harris and Jennifer Larson (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 3.

certainly place the entire family under government oversight, as with victims of the Smith Act who were incarcerated, Walter reflects on the dangers of being affiliated with the Communist Party when he warns Beneatha:

You and that boy that was here today. You all want everybody to carry a flag and a spear and sing some marching songs...you wanna spend your life looking into things and trying to find the right and wrong part... You know what's going to happen to that boy someday—he'll find himself sitting in a dungeon, locked in forever—and the takers will have the key!³⁹⁵

This passage demonstrates Walter's fear for his sister, and especially his son, should they become involved in a radical movement. Walter is aware of Beneatha's desire for knowledge because he recognizes how deeply she "[looks] into things," and he sees that she wants to secure her people's civil rights through that knowledge; yet, it also reveals his awareness and rejection of the Communist Movement when he refers to the victims of the Smith Act who are "sitting in a dungeon, locked in forever."³⁹⁶

Protection for their son is perhaps the one thing Walter and Ruth agree on, as guarding the lives of young black boys was on everyone's mind when *A Raisin in the Sun* appeared on stages throughout America. Following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in May 1954, white supremacists countered the decision with physical violence toward black men. Underlying white refusal to integrate schools and other public services was white fear of "miscegenation," or mixing of bloodlines—a racist fear that led whites to portray black men as brute rapists, falsely accusing them of rape and leading to the deaths of many. Tragically, young boys were not immune to this violence. The murder of the 14-year old Emmet Till in August 1955 occurred one year following the *Brown v. Board* decision, a result of Till having allegedly whistled at a white

³⁹⁵ Ibid, 142-143.

³⁹⁶ Ibid, 143.

woman, Carolyn Bryant. Emmet Till's mother, Mamie Till Bradley, is famously known for keeping her son's casket open at his funeral, a decision made to "let the people see what they have done to my boy!"³⁹⁷ By claiming "the public role as a grieving mother" Bradley "helped inject motherhood more forcefully into the political landscape."³⁹⁸ Motherhood, as exemplified by Mamie Bradley, a "thirty-three-year-old African American woman worker, and mother living in Chicago," similar to Ruth Younger, meant the constant fight to protect your son and keep him alive in the climate of white surveillance over black men.³⁹⁹ While Hansberry composed *Raisin*, she clipped dozens of articles focusing on Till's case, as it was a tragedy near and dear to her heart.⁴⁰⁰

Evoking the figure of Mamie Till Bradley, the black women throughout *A Raisin in the Sun* strive to protect young Travis, an action exemplified to the audience by Hansberry's decision to centralize his young, male, black body on the stage. As such, the female characters constantly track the location of that body and keep it in their sight—and ours too. The play opens with a spotlight on Travis, he is the family's prize jewel to be protected, and everything each adult does throughout the play is to benefit and protect him: "*It is morning dark in the living room. TRAVIS is asleep on the make-down bed at center...RUTH enters from that room and closes the door behind her.*"⁴⁰¹ In the center of the room, the play begins with Travis's body as the focal

³⁹⁷ Ruth Feldstein, "I Wanted the Whole World to See: Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmet Till." In *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. by Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 271.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 266.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, 265.

⁴⁰⁰ Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. See Box 58.

⁴⁰¹ Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, 24.

point for the audience—he is on the stage, and the person that the surrounding adults will strive to protect. As the scene begins, the various Younger family members make their debut appearances on the stage and Travis and Ruth begin their discussion about the school money. When Ruth protests, the stage directions are as follows, “Travis: (*Sulking and standing apart from her unnaturally*) I’m gone.”⁴⁰² With the stage directions physically separating Travis and his mother “unnaturally,” we can infer that Ruth typically keeps Travis near her. Repeating “I’m gone” threatens Ruth’s motherhood and her deepest fear, as her most significant job is to keep her black son alive in this dangerous climate of cold war surveillance and unpunished racial violence.⁴⁰³ Twice repeating this line—“I’m gone”—Travis foreshadows the futures of many young black men: not just leaving the protection of their family homes, but being monitored, surveilled, and murdered on public streets.⁴⁰⁴ Toward the end of the scene, Ruth combats Travis’s uncomfortable distance from her and “*holds out her arms to him.*”⁴⁰⁵ Travis “*crosses to her and allows her to embrace him warmly but keeps his face fixed with masculine rigidity,*” a sign that Ruth’s baby will no longer be perceived as an innocent child by the public, but will be viewed as a black *man*—a precarious position in American society.⁴⁰⁶

The opening scene therefore sets the tone for the monitoring of Travis’s body that occurs throughout the play, as he is constantly asking if he can “go outside.”⁴⁰⁷ The women demand that he “stay right in front of the house” where they can monitor him from the one window in the apartment that looks down on the street.⁴⁰⁸ Mounting their own surveillance, they are ever-

⁴⁰² Ibid, 29.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 30.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

vigilant: “*There is a sudden commotion from the street and [Ruth] goes to the window to look out*” calling, TRAVIS! TRAVIS!...WHAT ARE YOU DOING DOWN THERE?”⁴⁰⁹ Protection over Travis’s body continues throughout the play, as in the next scene when Ruth asks, “where is Travis,” and Mama quickly answers, “I let him go out earlier and that he ain’t come back yet. Boy, is he goin to get it,” and insists that “A thousand times I told [him] not to go off like that.”⁴¹⁰ Travis’s absence, which results in the women frantically searching for him, often interrupts ‘radical’ moments of dialogue—a reminder of what is at stake if Beneatha and Ruth continue to dabble in subversive activities.

IV. “The Negro Militant Domestic”: Counter-surveillance in the Black Home

How, though, can the Younger family protect young Travis from pervasive authoritarian oversight that may place him in danger? Deleted excerpts of *Raisin*, previously unstudied, reveal how the Youngers attempt to shield Travis from the surveillance that penetrated communist families.⁴¹¹ Hansberry initially crafted the scene that announced the Youngers’ plan to move into a white neighborhood—a central development in the play—with Travis’s body as the ending focal point on stage. Forcing the audience to meditate over young Travis on the stage would have highlighted what exactly was at stake for the Hansberry’s to move into Clybourne Park. However, prior to the play’s Broadway debut, Hansberry decided to omit Travis from this scene’s end, directing that the “curtain” drop prior to his entrance on the stage.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 58.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, 89.

⁴¹¹ The Emmet Till lynching, as well as the Martinsville case, are just a few examples of the savage violence black communities faced at this time. It is possible, then, that the violence at this time moved Hansberry to make such revisions to her script.

⁴¹² See Figure 1. Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 6, File 1: “Play Scripts Produced, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Nov. 1957, Original Play Script with Annotations.”

MAMA

(The mother and son are left alone now and the mother waits a long time, considering deeply, before she speaks) Son - you - you understand what I done, don't you? (Brother is silent and sullen). I - I just seen my family falling ~~apart~~ apart today... just falling to pieces in front of my eyes.... We couldn't of gone on like we was today. We was going backwards 'stead of forwards - talking about killing babies and wishing each other was dead... When it gets like that in life - you just got to do something different, push on out and do something bigger.... (She waits) I wish you say something son... I wish you'd say how deep inside you you think I done the right thing-

WALTER

(Turning and crossing slowly to his bedroom door and finally turning there and speaking measuredly) What you need me to say you done right for? You the head of this family. You run our lives like you want to. It was your money and you did what you wanted with it. So what you need for me to say it was all right for? (Bitterly, to hurt her as deeply as he knows is possible) So you butchered up a dream of mine - you - who always talking 'bout your children's dreams...

MAMA

Walter Lee...

(He ~~comes~~ just closes the door behind him. Mama sits on alone thinking heavily. ~~Travis comes in and sits on the bed and rubs his hands expressing his affected ~~parts~~ parts)~~

MAMA

(Not looking at him) You got a whipping?

TRAVIS

Yes'm.

MAMA

(Hating it but saying what she feels is right) Well - serves you right. Got no business going off like that all the time - scaring us half to death... (Pause) Hurt bad?

TRAVIS

Yes'm. I just went around the corner to see 'ubber for a little while.

MAMA

But you was told not to, honey.

TRAVIS

All the other guys go where they want to.

Figure 1: Lorraine Hansberry Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 6, File 1: "Play Scripts Produced, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Nov. 1957, Original Play Script with Annotations, II: 1-17."

In these deleted excerpts, Mama and Ruth search for Travis prior to what would have been his entrance: “Ruth: (*Collecting herself and going to the door where Travis is*) Well—I guess I better see ‘bout Travis. (*To Mama*) Lord, I sure don’t feel like whipping nobody today! (*she exits*).”⁴¹³ Ruth suggests that she will physically discipline Travis to teach him to avoid surveillance and the dangers waiting for him in the public sphere. In the version of the play that we read today, Travis’s physical punishment is even more overt, as Ruth instructs him to, “get ready for [his] beating.”⁴¹⁴ Leon Litwack’s *Trouble in Mind* discloses how physical discipline was used to protect children in black families:

when black parents sought to discipline their children, they were often preparing them for encounters with white people, for the harsh and inhospitable world that lay outside. Many a mother and father administered a whipping in the hope of protecting their children from far worse punishment at the hands of whites.⁴¹⁵

In this light Ruth’s physical discipline is a decision made in order to instruct her child in how to avoid surveillance and violence on the streets—a punishment driven by the fear that her son’s fate could be similar to that of young Emmet Till.

However, in the deleted scene, Mama disciplines Travis through an alternative mode: art. The act of disciplining young Travis through symbolic, rather than overt and subjective violence, produces a metacommentary in Hansberry’s play, carefully crafted, that speaks to art’s potential to communicate methods of surveillance evasion.⁴¹⁶ We can therefore speculate that Hansberry perhaps deleted this excerpt because it would likely pique the interests of those FBI agents who

⁴¹³ Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 6, File 1: “Play Scripts Produced, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Nov. 1957, Original Play Script with Annotations.”

⁴¹⁴ Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, 91.

⁴¹⁵ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 42.

⁴¹⁶ See Slavoj Žižek’s *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, which differentiates between three types of violence: Subjective, Symbolic, and Systemic.

sat in her audiences, as it would communicate her awareness of the surveillance she knew she was under:

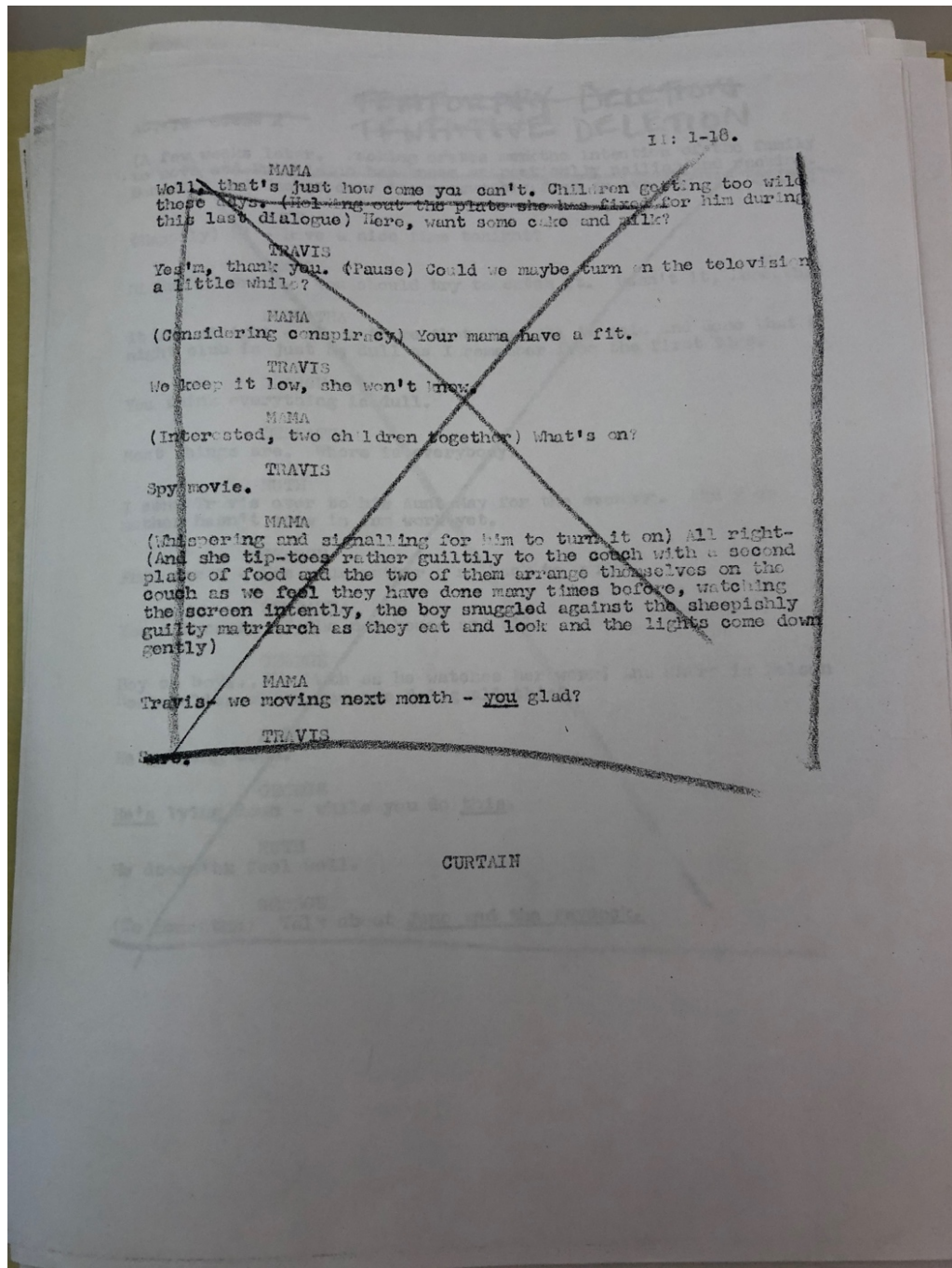


Figure 2: Lorraine Hansberry Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 6, File 1: "Play Scripts Produced, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Nov. 1957, Original Play Script with Annotations, II:1-16."

Travis's screen directions—deciphered from what Hansberry attempted to cross out— show the young man entering the stage and “caressing his affected parts,” having just received his whipping from his mother because he “went around the corner,” beyond his family's view.⁴¹⁷ Mama uses this time to affirm Ruth's position by lecturing Travis: “serves you right. Got no business going off like that all the time—scaring us half to death.”⁴¹⁸ Her affirmation of Ruth's punishment spills over into the following pages that would also be deleted from the play's Broadway debut. Begging his grandmother to “turn on the television a while,” Travis only convinces Mama to do so when she realizes that representations of surveillance could be used to discipline her grandson, as she learns that a “Spy Movie,” airs on the screen.⁴¹⁹ While young Travis and his grandmother gaze at the television screen, reflecting on the “Spy Movie” that teaches Travis about the dangers of surveillance and perhaps how to avoid it, as we the audience likewise gaze upon and surveil characters on *A Raisin in the Sun's* stage, so that the drama's subtle undertones also teach us how to avoid surveillance. It is a mimetic moment that Hansberry carefully scripted in the context of black discipline to communicate how art can enlighten the community and help to avoid the horrors of surveillance within the domestic sphere, a moment that teaches the community to turn towards and embrace art, film, and *drama*, for answers. However, the black X around this scene in the script tells us that Hansberry decided it would

⁴¹⁷ See Figure 1.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ See Figure 2.

never be staged, as *A Raisin in the Sun*, “Almost Final Broadway Script” 1959—does not have the scene with Mama and Travis watching the film.⁴²⁰

Understanding this excised scene sheds light onto how *A Raisin in the Sun*’s use of artistic expression functions on stage to communicate narratives of surveillance, something we may not have seen previously without the deleted scene discussed above. The play’s engagement with surveillance-themed art speaks directly to Beneatha, an artist-character who is likely under surveillance and has struggled to find an adequate artistic form as a vehicle for self-expression. Experimenting with “different forms of expression” because she believes that “people have to express themselves one way or another,” it becomes apparent that what Beneatha searches for is a form to articulate a *personal* narrative.⁴²¹ James C. McKelly and Kristin Matthews have both touched on the significance of Beneatha’s desire to create art, arguing that she “seeks an adequate means of ‘self-expression,’” through “horse-back riding, play-acting , and guitar lessons, ” and therefore, “her desire to achieve the self-expression for which she longs is one the play never seriously places in doubt.”⁴²² The play perhaps never seems to question whether or not Beneatha will succeed in finding a form to express herself, not because methods such as horseback riding and guitar-lessons fulfill her, but because the play itself—the domestic staging and vocal signifiers—act as the mode of expression Beneatha eventually learns by way of her female family members.

⁴²⁰ Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 6, File 1: “Play Scripts Produced, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Nov. 1957, Original Play Script with Annotations.”

⁴²¹ Ibid, 148.

⁴²² McKelly, “Hymns of Sedition,” 88. Also see Kristin Matthews, “The Politics of ‘Home’ in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*,” *Modern Drama* 51, no. 4 (2008): 556-578.

Surprisingly, daughter Beneatha is much like her mother, for Mama can also be read as an artist-character who strives to express herself. Mama's mode of expression is her domestic performance: the act of caring for her family that produces a narrative whose theme is a vigilant mother attempting to prohibit invaders from entering her home, thus to shield her family from the vulnerabilities of surveillance. This narrative is best exemplified through Mama's attachment to the wellbeing of her potted plant. While scholars have noted Mama's affection to the foliage that sits on the sill of the apartment's only window, none have noted how the plant moves *outside* of the younger's small apartment throughout the play. When Mama first enters the stage, she "crosses through the room, goes to the window, opens it, and brings in a feeble little plant growing doggedly in a small pot on the windowsill."⁴²³ Multiple times, Mama thus moves the plant in and out of the house, particularly in times when her children's futures are at stake. For instance, following a fight with Walter, when "*a sense of waste overwhelms her gait*" and a "*measure of apology rides on her shoulders*" she "*picks [the plant] up and takes it to the window sill and sets it outside.*"⁴²⁴ Constantly comparing her children to the houseplant, she reflects, "my children and they tempers. Lord if this little old plant don't get more sun than it's been getting it ain't never going to see spring again"; and then "*(Looking at her plant and sprinkling a little water on it)* They spirited all right, my children. Got to admit they got spirit—Bennie and Walter. Like this little old plant that ain't never had enough sunshine or nothing—and look at it..."⁴²⁵ Mama understands that the plant's survival, like her children, directly correlates to what it receives from the outside environment that would enter the home through the gazing window.

⁴²³ Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, 39.

⁴²⁴ Ibid, 139.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, 52.

Though she allows her plant to venture outside, she is right there to pull it back in, suspecting the nurture of even those small rays of light that seep in through the one window in the apartment. Like her anxiety over Travis getting too far out into the public sphere where she cannot protect him from the white gaze of surveillance, she questions, “lord have mercy, where is my plant” and the play ends on her carrying her plant with her: “the door opens and she comes back in, grabs her plant, and goes out for the last time.”⁴²⁶ The plant speaks to Mama’s method of protecting her family by keeping them within the home. Mama, then, teaches Beneatha that art does not have to be produced in highbrow forms—instruments, paint, horseback riding, even literature. Rather, narrative can be signified in the everyday expressions of life; for when Beneatha challenges why her mother would care for a “raggedy” plant, Mama declares that “It expresses ME!”⁴²⁷

Introducing domestic performance to Beneatha as a mode to express personal narrative, Mama teaches her daughter how to care for the family through simple acts of domesticity such as the family’s Saturday morning cleaning routine—a performance that protects the space from outside threats. Thus, the beginning of scene two is set:

*It is the following morning; a Saturday morning, and house cleaning is in progress at the Youngers. Furniture has been shoved hither and yon and Mama is giving the kitchen-area walls a washing down..Beneatha is spraying insecticide into the cracks in the walls.”*⁴²⁸

The Younger women strive to clean the structure—or barrier—that thwarts surveillance. The insecticide and cleaning products, of course, are meant to protect the family and harm invaders from outside. When Beneatha becomes sloppy with the poison, Mama demands, “Look out there

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 149 and 151.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, 121.

⁴²⁸ Ibid, 54.

girl, before you be spilling some of that stuff on that child,” while Beneatha protests, “I can’t imagine that it would hurt him—it has never hurt the roaches.”⁴²⁹ Beneatha therefore suggests that their methods to keep out what the Younger’s do not want invading their home has not worked. Yet, mama protests: “little boys’ hides ain’t as tough as Southside roaches. You better get over there behind the bureau. I seen one marching out there like Napoleon yesterday.”⁴³⁰ Bringing the conversation once again back to Black youth, Mama speaks to the ways in which young black men are vulnerable in their own environment on Chicago’s Southside. Evoking infamous General Napoleon Bonaparte who invaded others’ territories, Mama alludes to the need to make the house spotless, a chore that could divest it of the roaches and “bugs” that attempt to invade, listen, and watch the Younger family. Beneatha, understanding all too well about outside sources invading the home, claims “there’s really only one way to get rid of them...Set fire to the building!”⁴³¹ Mama’s thorough cleaning routine discloses a narrative that explains how she strives to shelter her family from the horrors that might invade the domestic space. This is why, Ruth’s first purchase for the new home is a set of curtains—another moment of domestic staging that will keep the outside gaze from entering the home.

V. “Go on and Scream”: Toward an Oral Aesthetic

The mode of artistic expression that Beneatha learns from her mother does two things: it shows how domestic staging signifies narratives of counter-surveillance, methods to protect one’s family from the vulnerabilities of the public sphere, while it also celebrates the domestic sphere as a space to harbor that art of protection. While one might at first uphold such a form

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 55.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

since it allows for a safe space to express narratives of surveillance, the play communicates that this method ultimately fails, as it lacks the potential to unite the community to fight against social injustices. The domestic staging that is done *inside* of the home lacks connections with the community beyond the family walls. Moreover, it fails to assert the black woman's voice, reducing her story to signified objects—like the plotted plant—rather than by way of a person who gains agency from speaking her own story—a mode that the black woman had to fight for. As a text that was written by a black feminist writer during a moment that foreshadowed a black leftist feminist movement that burgeoned throughout the 60's and 70's, it would be surprising if *A Raisin in the Sun* did not celebrate oral forms to communicate feminist and racist discourses—a mode that was portrayed and celebrated throughout black women's writings of this time.

Representing that new generation of black women who chose to assert their voice in the public sphere, Beneatha is unsatisfied with the domestic mode of expression that Mama offers. While Mama's performance produces a narrative about protecting her family from surveillance in the domestic sphere, Beneatha searches for a social-change politics to combat the surveillance over her family, and that allows her to connect with others over that narrative. When Ruth “*suppresses a scream*,” upon Mama telling Travis to “go back outside and play,” we can see that the mode of expression Mama and Ruth uphold lacks what Beneatha desires from an art form: orality. Rejecting any suppression or absence of voice, Beneatha updates Mama's domestic mode that portrayed narratives of surveillance through *objects*—the plant, the bug spray, the curtains—by adopting the *sounds* of that domestic space.

Beneatha's chosen form contrasts with Mama's mode that adds to the overall claustrophobic and cramped tone of the novel—a mood that matches the play's one-room setting, that takes place in the tiny apartment kitchenette, as the stage never expands its vision beyond the

home. Similarly, horseback riding, painting, photography, and countless other modes of expression that Beneatha experiments with are all produced within a confined space: a stable, a studio, or like Mama and Ruth prefer, the family home. Contrastingly, Beneatha's mode of expression produces an expansive aesthetic that goes beyond space: it allows her to connect virtually, and politically, with other people outside of the family home, persons also pained by the same anger; thus a mode that speaks to Hansberry's production of a play that allows its characters to unite with the audience's shared turmoil of a community under surveillance. Most scholars claim that Beneatha continues to search for a method of expression that she never finds. Yet by anchoring our discussion of Beneatha's art within the context of how other black cold war women writers expressed themselves orally, we can see that Beneatha's art can easily be discovered within *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Indeed, black female activist writers such as Gwendolyn Brooks and Alice Childress had a major effect on Hansberry and her work. As Hansberry biographer Imani Perry notes, when Hansberry arrived in Harlem she "befriended South Carolina actress Alice Childress, who was sixteen years her senior."⁴³² Both Childress and Hansberry contributed to Paul Robeson's *Freedom* newspaper, and both had ambitions within the genre of drama. Taking the young Hansberry under her wing, Childress "brought Lorraine into the Black theater world of New York," as the two even wrote a pageant together for the Freedom Negro History Festival in 1952.⁴³³ It was with the mentorship from older black women, such as Childress, that Hansberry

⁴³² Imani Perry, *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 53.

⁴³³ Perry, *Looking for Lorraine*, 53.

began to see herself as “both part of an activist community and part of an intellectual and artistic tradition.”⁴³⁴

Inspired by the artistic community that Childress cultivated, Hansberry communicated her praise of the actress/playwright in a 1953 review of *Emperor’s Clothes*, a drama in which Childress starred. Remarking that Childress was a “Star,” in her performance, Hansberry takes a brief moment from complimenting her mentor to note the play’s plot:

The family is set upon by the secret police searching for a thief...who, they have heard preaches strange subversive ideas including highly suspicious praises of a foreigner named Hoot Gibson. The child is arrested and taken to headquarters for questioning. He is returned to his home hours later by the secret police who turn to questioning his father. The things the child has told them lead them to believe that the school master has maintained ideas and participated in activities which were not in the best interest of the security of the state.”⁴³⁵

The themes found in the *Emperor’s Clothes* and those in *A Raisin in the Sun* are nearly identical in the surveillance plots both dramas perform. A “suspicious foreigner” that holds “ideas” that threaten state security, secret police who monitor those ideas, and a young child who becomes trapped in the middle of the entire situation—similar to the trajectory of Travis Younger’s plot—must have made an impact on Hansberry, as similar themes would find their way into *A Raisin in the Sun*.⁴³⁶ Still, it was Childress’s performance that would ultimately affect the mood of Hansberry’s Broadway hit. Claiming that the “last scene on stage is a powerful conclusion” that proves that “Alice Childress” is “unquestionably one of the finest actresses in the theatre on or

⁴³⁴ Ibid, 54.

⁴³⁵ Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 57, “Articles.”

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

off Broadway,” Hansberry crafts Beneatha, her female lead, to perform powerful personal monologues that carry political affect.⁴³⁷

Trudier Harris’s work on Alice Childress’s *Like One of The Family: Conversations From a Domestic’s Life* (1956) explains the importance of oral monologues for African American woman writers.⁴³⁸ In this text, which was initially published as a weekly column in *Freedom*, Childress writes entirely in dialogue: *conversations* between Mildred, an African American domestic worker who reflects on her experiences laboring in white homes, and her confidant, Marge. Like Hansberry, Childress found herself under FBI Surveillance due to her suspected activities with the Communist Party, and she therefore feared leaving a paper trail of her work and began changing her name and birth date on documents. To Childress, the oral form was a conversational and therefore evanescent mode that would evade surveillance, as “the literary climate that would deter an author from using a didactic, propagandistic approach to the racial situation in the mid-1950s would not exert the same influence on a character who speaks her own mind and who experiences so intensely the problems she relates.”⁴³⁹ Mildred, Childress’s mouthpiece, reflects upon the power of oral expression:

Marge, I wish I was a poet...Now that’s no cause for you to stop stringing the beans and lookin’ at me like you was struck by lightnin’...No, I don’t wish it on account of I want to be famous, but I do wish it because sometimes there are poetry things that I see and I’d

⁴³⁷Lorraine Hansberry papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Box 57, “Articles.”

⁴³⁸ Also see Mary Helen Washington’s *The Other Black List* and Ashley Farmer’s *Remaking Black Power* for further discussion on Childress’s *Like One of The Family* and Childress’s use of the domestic figure as radical.

⁴³⁹ Trudier Harris, “I Wish I Was a Poet: The Character as Artist in Alice Childress’s *Like One of the Family*,” *Black American Literature Forum* 14, no 1(1980): 25.

like to tell people about them in a poetry way; only I don't know how and what I tell it, it's just a plain flat story.⁴⁴⁰

Following this declaration, Mildred tells a tale about an older couple who were discriminated against and claims, “that’s all to the story and it sure don’t sound like much the way I tell it, but if I was a poet...”⁴⁴¹ Mildred, therefore, desires to adopt oral forms—such as poetry—to tell everyday stories in a form that involves the audience so that what is conveyed is not just “a plain flat story,” but art that produces change, as orality has the ability to affect the audience off of the page.⁴⁴²

Written in a similar mode, Childress’s 1952 play, *Gold Through the Trees*, speaks through three women’s voices, in three respective acts in which each woman loses her man to racial violence, the very fear that the Younger women hold. One woman performs a monologue about her son: “We didn’t plan on what we wanted him to be. We loved him too much and we knew he couldn’t be anything he wanted to be....the way they told him in school...Everyday I had to undo the things they taught him.”⁴⁴³ This monologue, which goes on for two whole pages, is written in fragments and ellipses standing in for what Childress does not want to put on the page. Therefore, the reader of the script, or the audience of the play, is left filling in the blanks for themselves, and are invited to participate in making meaning.

⁴⁴⁰ Alice Childress, *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic’s Life* (New York: Beacon Press, 1956), 100.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 102.

⁴⁴² Ibid, 100.

⁴⁴³ Alice Childress, *Gold Through the Trees*, in *Selected Plays: Alice Childress*, ed. Perkins (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 2011), 37.

In another act, a woman sings a song titled “Martinsville Blues.” The song reflects upon an event in 1951 when seven African American men in Martinsville, Virginia were executed for allegedly raping a white woman. The Blues song reads:

Early one morning
The sun was hardy high
The jailer said, Come on black boy, You gonna die....

Lordy, Lordy, tell ‘em ‘bout Martinsville.
One...Two...Three...Four...Five...Six...Seven...
Lordy, Lordy...⁴⁴⁴

Saying numbers on the counts allows the actress a way of not having to say the names of the accused who died. With the public knowing that seven men were executed, the beats act as oral signifiers for each man who was electrocuted.

The next act in the play takes place in South Africa where the citizens are placed under strict surveillance and must have passes to walk around the town. The citizens refuse to carry this documentation, just as Childress refuses to articulate her art in a textual form, and the woman in this act claims, “we sing and play our drums often and they think we would not be so bold if we were hiding anyone.”⁴⁴⁵ Elsewhere, Childress depicts Harriet Tubman around a laundry tub singing songs because it will make their social “work [go] faster.”⁴⁴⁶ The oral form, to Childress, will help social justice work spread to the people faster because of its ability to connect with its audience.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, 39.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, 45.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 35.

Such an aesthetic is also adopted by Gwendolyn Brooks in her lyrical novel *Maud Martha* (1953), whose protagonist is perhaps the most similar to Beneatha in the way that they both search for a mode of self-expression throughout the entirety of their texts.⁴⁴⁷ Although Maud Martha had the intellect and skill to become an artist similar to “Howie Joe Jones,” a singer who has “a Voice,” Maud Martha decides:

she was going to keep herself to herself. She did not want fame. She did not want to be a star. To create—a role, a poem, picture, music, a rapture in stone: great. But not for her...What she wanted was to donate to the world a good Maud Martha. That was her offering, that bit of art.⁴⁴⁸

By claiming that she wants to be a “good” Maud Martha, the protagonist submits to traditional gender roles of being a silent and respectable lady.⁴⁴⁹ The only time the text grants Maud Martha a voice is when she births her child and her mother tells her “Why, go on and scream...that’s your privilege.”⁴⁵⁰ Censoring herself, except for in feminine moments, Maud Martha is left in a pit of depression. She loathes motherhood, and having found out that her husband’s infidelity leaves her alone, Maud Martha only feels connected to others when the narrator describes her kitchenette-building and its sounds: “The sobbings, the frustrations, the small hates, the large and ugly hates, the little pushings-through love, the boredom, that came to her from behind those walls....via speech and scream and sigh—all these were gray.”⁴⁵¹ Through the prose poem moments in the text that describe the oral sounds of the building, the narrator’s third-person narration that reflects on how Maud Martha perceives her environment assists her in becoming

⁴⁴⁷ See Nancy Gerber’s *The Portrait of the Mother Artist* and Mary Helen Washington’s “Taming all that Anger Down: Rage and Silence in Brooks’ Maud Martha,” which also discuss the author-character in Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Maud Martha*.

⁴⁴⁸ Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 20-22.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid, 95.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 64.

the poet she always wanted to be. It is an art that communicates the communal sufferings in her apartment building that she hears through her walls. By the end of the novel, Maud Martha is left in a depressed state due to the self-suppression of her voice, similar to Ruth Younger: “There were these scraps of baffled hate in her, hate with no eyes, no smile and—this she especially regretted, called her hungriest lack—not much voice.”⁴⁵²

In the same vein as Childress and Brooks, Hansberry’s female author-character celebrates oral forms that expand beyond her household to connect with a wider community. In doing so, she refuses to suppress emotions of anger that result from the surveillance her family experiences. Beneatha fights for this forthright and aggressive mode to be accepted throughout the play, as exhibited through her oral monologues:

It’s all a matter of ideas, and God is just one idea I don’t accept. It’s not important. I am not going out and being immoral or committing crimes because I don’t believe in God. I don’t even think about it. It’s just that I get tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort. There simply is no blasted God— there is only man and it is *he* who makes miracles!”⁴⁵³

Stage directions that immediately follow Beneatha’s aggressive declaration show the power of her speech: “(MAMA *absorbs this speech, studies her daughter and rises slowly and crosses to BENEATHA and slaps her powerfully across the face. After, there is only silence and the daughter drops her eyes from her mother’s face, and MAMA is very tall before her*).⁴⁵⁴ Mama having “absorbed” this speech, articulates the osmosis-like affect that Beneatha’s words have over her audience. She is immersed in Mama’s being, altering and affecting her after all. Afraid of this result, and perhaps also afraid of Beneatha’s outspoken radicalism being overheard by government agents, Mama decides to discipline Beneatha in a way similar to what Ruth does to

⁴⁵² Ibid, 176.

⁴⁵³ Hansberry, *A Raisin*, 51.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

Travis. Mama uses violence and “slaps” Beneatha across the face, a punishment that she hopes will discipline her radical and outspoken daughter before others outside of the home do that work. However, it is clear that Beneatha refuses to silence herself, as orality is her mode of expression that she fights to assert throughout the entirety of the play. Simply declaring, “I love to talk” Beneatha asserts that *orality* is her artistic form, and one, as Mama shows, that may get her in trouble.⁴⁵⁵ Beneatha continues to experience resistance to this mode, as her suitor, George Murchison, demands:

I want you to cut it out, see—The moody stuff, I mean. I don’t like it. You’re a nice-looking girl...That’s all you need, honey, forget the atmosphere. Guys aren’t going to go for the atmosphere—they’re going to go for what they see. Be glad for that. Drop the Garbo routine. It doesn’t go with you. As for myself, I want a nice—(*Groping*)—simple (*Thoughtfully*)—sophisticated girl...not a poet.”⁴⁵⁶

George’s gendered politics suggest that he denies Beneatha a voice because women should be kept out of the political and artistic sphere, as he is not concentrated on the content of Beneatha’s speech but her body that he continues to “grope” throughout the entire scene.⁴⁵⁷ George further critiques Beneatha’s vocal expression, demanding that she forget the “atmosphere,” she attempts to create with her speech, a word that he repeats twice in this monologue that can be substituted for *mood*. Articulating an angry mood through her speech that makes George uncomfortable, George fails to meet Beneatha’s expression with understanding and dismisses her voice: “I don’t go out with you to discuss the nature of ‘quiet desperation’ or to hear all about your thoughts.”⁴⁵⁸ Evoking Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, finding that “the mass of men lead lives of quiet

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, 96.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, 96-97.

desperation,” Beneatha refuses to be one of the masses and rejects George’s gendered silencing of voice.

Consequently, Beneatha’s monologues become even less censored and more aggressive as the play continues. Sarah Orem’s recent “Signifying When Vexed: Black Feminist Revision, Anger, and *A Raisin in the Sun*” (2017), draws upon African American literary theories to argue that Beneatha “signifies” on the anger that Walter displays throughout the play during such scenes of artistic expression:

[Beneatha’s] ‘repetition’ of Walter Lee’s anger with a ‘signal difference’ is a hallmark of the uniquely black mode of artistic expression termed in *Signifying* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. According to Gates, Signifying allows a speaker to repeat and alter language patterns, imitating a specific discourse but in a way that is shot through with ‘indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, [and] uncertainty.’ Beneatha revises her anger’s outward form with rapid shifts, mimicking Walter one moment and critiquing him the next.⁴⁵⁹

Asserting that Beneatha “appears to mimic the anger performed by her brother Walter Lee in order to critique and undermine him” would suggest that Beneatha does not actually feel any anger toward the events and people in the play.⁴⁶⁰ Orem’s critique dismisses Beneatha’s emotions and centralizes Walter’s, a reading that fails to acknowledge that Beneatha is entitled to her own thoughts and feelings.

Applying Susan Willis’s seminal work *Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience* (1987), a foundational study of black women’s writing, voice, and community, we

⁴⁵⁹ Sarah Orem, “Signifyin(g) When Vexed: Black Feminist Revision, Anger, and *A Raisin in the Sun*,” *Modern Drama* 60, no.2 (2017): 190.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

can see that the anger Beneatha displays does not come from Walter, but is used to displace herself from the community to protect them from her radical articulations:

The practice of “specifying” or name-calling, exemplifies many of the formal features of storytelling as well as some modifications that are important for the development of the narrative. Although name-calling unites the speaking subject and the community, it does so at the expense of the individual being made the object of the abuse. The community is no longer defined as a corpus of teller-listeners, but as witnesses to the textual event. The position of the speaking subject has become marked and, to a degree, isolated. All terms of the narrative equation have been modified; these modifications begin to suggest the sort of changes produced when the speaking subject becomes an author... The only thing that stands between the signified and the signifier is the name-caller who gives herself as guarantor of the relationship, with the whole community standing witness to the contract.⁴⁶¹

Thus, when Beneatha does attack Walter’s motives and decisions during her monologues, she not only articulates her feelings of anti-capitalism and government, she also places herself outside of the textual event and isolates herself as the “author” of the signified while the rest of the community—characters and audience—are united as witnesses to the event of Beneatha’s expression toward Walter. Her decision to aim her anger particularly at Walter both unites the community and protects it, as now she, the black radical artist who would fall under surveillance, is isolated from the community as creator of the event. With stage directions that demand that she delivers a “*Monologue of insult*”, “*hissingly*,” and with “*bitter disgust*,” Beneatha specifies, as Willis has coined it, on her brother:⁴⁶²

There he is! *Monsieur le petit bourgeois noir*—himself! There he is—Symbol of a Rising Class! Entrepreneur! Titan of the system!...Did you dream of yachts on Lake Michigan, Brother? Did you see yourself on that Great Day sitting down at the Conference Table, surrounded by all the mighty bald-headed men in America? All halted, waiting, breathless, waiting for your pronouncements on industry? Waiting for you—Chairman of the Board!⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹Susan Willis, *Specifying : Black Women Writing the American Experience* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 16.

⁴⁶² Hansberry, *A Raisin*, 137-138.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, 138.

The Communist radical Beneatha critiques her brother for wanting to join capitalist society through his liquor business, a bad business deal in which a liar-thief absconds with half of the family's modest inheritance. Not only does she critique his position as aspiring to be a part of the bourgeois class, but later in the text she critiques him when he decides to take the deal Lidner offers to the family to convince them not to move into the new home. Dehumanizing him, she claims, "That is not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat" and he is therefore, "no brother of mine."⁴⁶⁴ In doing so, Beneatha places herself outside of the community as the writer of the event to which the community—the audience and the other members on the stage—bear witness: Walter's social death that comes from Beneatha's chastisement.⁴⁶⁵ Mama, responding to Beneatha's anger questions, "You wrote his epitaph?...death done come in this here house...Done come walking in my house on the lips of my children."⁴⁶⁶ Beneatha's specifying on Walter leaves her outside of the community that grieves for him and what he has experienced throughout the play.

Instead of being a part of the community, Beneatha is the author and the mouthpiece for a group of people afraid to assert their voices, and as such she provides an expressive moment around which the community can unite. Expressing such emotions in a free manner grants the community—the audience and other characters—an opportunity to connect over such difficult and impossible situations—surveillance, violence, and poverty— at the expense of the artist

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 144-145.

⁴⁶⁵ I understand the concept of "social death" as Orlando Patterson puts forth in his book *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), where he explains that social death is the condition of not being full accepted as human by the wider society, an effect that has both internal and external effects on the subject, as it changes both the way they view themselves and the way that society views them.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

whose articulations place her under surveillance. The author-character thus ostracizes herself from her community in order for others to have the opportunity to unite over her art. This is symbolically shown at the play's end when Beneatha declares that she has decided to leave Chicago and go to Africa with Asagai. The author who is ostracized from her own community, a scapegoat that produces the art for the rest to unite over, is a theme within African American literature that we will see in the following chapter that takes up the post-45 works of Ishmael Reed, Gloria Naylor, and Nikki Giovanni.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Life will become, no pun intended, an open book”: Federal Surveillance and Postmodern African American Detective Fiction

Amiri Baraka fell under state surveillance during the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s counterintelligence program (Cointelpro) that ran from 1956-1971. Under J. Edgar Hoover’s direction, Cointelpro investigated individuals the FBI deemed subversive, targeting Communist Party and anti-Vietnam War organizations that arose in the 1960s, but also placing numerous individuals under surveillance due to their race—particularly African American members of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, but also black-owned presses, bookstores and authors.⁴⁶⁷ Placing Baraka under surveillance because his “connections with subversive organizations” may have been more extensive than Hoover admitted, The FBI accused the poet of “Fraud Against the American Government,” a vague charge.⁴⁶⁸ Interviews scattered throughout Baraka’s file reveal the FBI’s true interest in the black poet: using his presence in black literary circles to gather information on radical literary production. In creating

⁴⁶⁷ See Nathan Blackstock, *Cointelpro: The FBI’s Secret War on Political Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1975). Also see William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes: How J Edgar Hoover’s Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁴⁶⁸ William Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes Digital Archive: FBI Files on African American Authors and Literary Institution Obtained through the U.S Freedom Information Act*, Washington University. <http://digital.wustl.edu/fbeyes/>. 21 September 2015. See Amiri Baraka’s file, part 1, page 2.

a bibliography, like any solid scholar, the FBI questioned Baraka on his source for books expressing communist or leftist positions. With that information the Bureau attempted to predict the publications of Baraka's own works, such as his *The Black Bohemians: A Study of the Contemporary Negro Intellectual*, a project that would assist the FBI in tracking black intellectual life but that Baraka never brought to fruition.⁴⁶⁹

Instead Baraka turned the tables on the FBI, publishing poems that aimed critical lights on federal surveillance of black artists. His poem, "Three movements and a Coda" (1968), overtly addressed his awareness of the Cointelpro operation's targeting of him, not as a unique occurrence in American history, but as an event rooted in the nation's cultural memory of white heroes who rescue the country from the villainized racial 'criminal':

THE QUALITY OF NIGHT THAT YOU HATE MOST IS ITS
BLACK
AND ITS STARTEETH EYES, AND STICKS ITS STICKY
FINGERS
IN YOUR EARS. RED NIGGER EYES LOOKING UP FROM
A BLACK HOLE...

THE LONE RANGER
IS DEAD.
THE SHADOW
IS DEAD.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, See Amiri Baraka's file, part 2, page 19.

⁴⁷⁰ Amiri Baraka, "Three Movements and a Coda." In *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. By Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Norton, 2004), 1941-1942.

Personifying nighttime as a “black” person with “red nigger eyes,” the speaker reveals the threat that terrorizes the white public: not nighttime itself, when crime lurks in the streets, but the non-white person that commits the crime. The Lone Ranger, a popular white hero from 1950’s television, restored order to the Wild West from ethnic “savages,” while The Shadow, a popular mystery radio series during the 1930s, surveilled evildoers to spring into action in the shadows of the night.⁴⁷¹ The speaker disrupts these popular narratives as imagined when he elides the fictional Lone Ranger and The Shadow with non-fictional leaders of the state—The Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the President of the United States:

ALL YOUR HEROES ARE DYING. J. EDGAR HOOVER WILL SOON BE DEAD.
YOUR MOTHER WILL DIE. LYNDON

JOHNSON⁴⁷²

Hoover and Johnson’s crime-fighting personas are realized in the same vein as The Lone Ranger and The Shadow—through embodying the cultural narrative of the fictionalized white hero who protects the state from terror. Although (as the title suggests) the speaker points to “three movements” throughout American history that have celebrated the white detective—The Lone Ranger, The Shadow, and the US State—the poet warns that such a reign will end. Acting as a “coda” to the cultural celebration of white detectives, and paralleling the militancy of the Black Power Movement, this poem’s aggressive tone—typifying the mood of the Black Arts movement—explicitly declares that white surveillance over black lives will soon be “dead.”⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. See note 1.

⁴⁷² Amiri Baraka, “Three Movements and a Coda.” In *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. By Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Norton, 2004), 1941-1942.

African American texts of the Postmodern Era, like Baraka's poem, convey aggressive critiques of federal surveillance as, unlike their predecessors, they attack FBI invasions of privacy head-on. Differing from Afro-modern texts written during the first half of the twentieth-century—Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1927) and *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* (1929), Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945) and *The Outsider* (1953), and the plays of Lorraine Hansberry and *Alice Childress* (1950's)—these works do not attempt to conceal narratives of surveillance in intricately coded ways. Rather, they confront surveillance directly, most typically by signifying on the genre of detective fiction, a form that thematically takes up the tracking of its criminal subject.

African American literary scholarship riffing on the detective form has previously concentrated on mid-twentieth century writers such as Rudolph Fischer, Chester Himes, and the still publishing prolific writer Walter Mosely. They embraced the hard-boiled genre of detective fiction—a genre that emerged from pulp magazines, and presented a “radical challenge to the notion of a stable society, situating the detective in a hostile urban environment.”⁴⁷⁴ While most discuss African American literature's engagement with the hard-boiled detective form, known for heroizing a black detective restoring order to a crime-infested city, Stephen F. Soitos' seminal work, *The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction* (1996),

⁴⁷³ See James Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Particularly his Introduction and Chapter 5, which describes the new political moods of the radical black artist.

⁴⁷⁴ Gill Plain, *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.

showed us how African American writers actually “diverge from this hardboiled tradition” to create “a new type of detective fiction” that signifies on “the detective genre to their own ends.”⁴⁷⁵

In doing so, black writers of the post-modern era have evolved from the hardboiled genre to the metaphysical—and metafictional—detective story. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney typify the genre as one that raises questions about “narrative, interpretation, subjectivity, [and] the nature of reality” by parodying or subverting traditional detective-story conventions.⁴⁷⁶ Labeling this sub category “anti-detective novels,” Merivale and Sweeney argue that the metaphysical detective story is in itself a “playfully self-reflexive storytelling that we now call postmodernist.”⁴⁷⁷ To Stefano Tani, metafictional anti-detective novels hardly make visible “the conventional elements of detective fiction (the detective, the criminal, the corpse).”⁴⁷⁸ What is different in these texts is “the atmosphere and the relationship between reader and writer.”⁴⁷⁹ In metafictional antidetective fiction “the writer is no longer an ‘absent’ third-person narrator but part of his text.”⁴⁸⁰ As a form that inserts the writer of the text into the narrative, this

⁴⁷⁵ Stephen F. Soitos, *The Blues Detective : A Study of African American Detective Fiction*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 41 and 11. Other scholars who take up African American literature and the hardboiled form are Adrienne Johnson Gosselin’s *Multicultural Detective Fiction: Murder from the ‘Other’ Side*, Kathleen Gregory Klein’s *Diversity and Detective Fiction*, Maureen T. Reddy’s *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction*, John Cullen Gruesser’s *Race, Gender, and Empire in American Detective Fiction*, and Robert E. Crafton’s *The African American Experience in Crime Fiction: A Critical Study*.

⁴⁷⁶ Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, *Detecting Texts : The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 1.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁷⁸ Stefano Tani, *The Doomed Detective : The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 113.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 114.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

genre also engages the African American *künstlerroman* tradition, a genre explored throughout *Secret Selves*, and that allows black writers to self-reflexively articulate their experiences under surveillance.

Acknowledging African American metaphysical detective plots that converge with aspects of the *künstlerroman* reveals how postmodern African American detective fiction subverts the detective narrative to articulate the life of an artist under federal surveillance.⁴⁸¹ While most detective narratives attempt to solve a murder mystery with the whodunit plot, focalized through a detective solving the mysterious identity of an unknown murderer, in the African American metaphysical detective story, the reader already knows, prior to the novel's end, whodunit (the state). With the mystery solved early on, and the plot no longer driven by the detailed tasks of identifying the murderer, the role of the detective is inverted to focalize through the victim, allowing readers to focus not on the act of detection but on the detrimental effect surveillance has over the subject, such as paranoia. Exemplified through the postmodern works of Amiri Baraka, Ishmael Reed, Nikki Giovanni, and Gloria Naylor, this cohort focuses on written word remedies for such symptoms. Therefore, while the Black Arts Movement's literary production during this period turned to oral forms—such as poetry and drama—that could more easily represent a communal intersubjectivity and connect with their audiences through their performances, this chapter argues that Post-45 African American writers returned to the semi-

⁴⁸¹ William Maxwell's *FBYES* points to examples of detective fiction to claim that this genre created a type of "novelized counter investigation that represents and recodes known forms of state surveillance" that "synthesize two factual/fictional literary forms—the roman a clef and the greater historical novel—under the shelter of the detective tradition" (258-259). While Maxwell briefly discusses detective fiction in the closing of his novel he does not take up how the African American postmodern metaphysical detective novel evolved from Afro-modern *künstlerroman* that articulated lives lived under surveillance in coded modes.

autobiographical novel that the literary tradition was rooted in—a mode that portrayed the protagonist’s paranoid mind, but could also provide testimony of the state’s wrongdoings.

I. Ishmael Reed’s Metaphysical Detection Plots

Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) embraces the detective fiction genre as its plot seeks to solve the crime or “problem” of Jes Grew, a black aesthetic described as an “influence which sought its text.”⁴⁸² Driving state detectives to search for the anthology from which this disruptive aesthetic originated, Jes Grew causes hysteria among the Wallflower Order, a group of investigative agents committed to producing a white American monoculture, thus satirizing the FBI’s Cointelpro operation that sought to surveil black authors and quell African American cultural production, seen as “infecting” white America.⁴⁸³ Described as a deadly virus in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Jes Grew poses an existential threat to the nation, a hyper-contagious epidemic that threatens to overtake and eliminate white American culture.

However, as the Jes Grew virus migrates from New Orleans and overwhelms the U.S., it presents detectives with an unusual problem. Endangering the detective form’s quintessential plot device of a crime committed in an enclosed space containing decipherable clues, Jes Grew transcends spatial boundaries. Recently, Richard Swope’s “Crossing Western Space, or the HooDoo Detective on the boundary in Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*” (2002) explores how Reed uses the genre of detective fiction to question and “re-envision” Western conceptions of delimited space on which the detective traditionally depends. As Swope puts it:

detective fiction is inherently preoccupied with both its own textual space—at the close of which all mystery must be explained away—as well as the space(s) its characters

⁴⁸² Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 17.

⁴⁸³ Ibid, 17.

confront and inhabit, which as a fundamental rule must be strictly limited...the murder generally occurs within an isolated or sealed environment—a hotel, a train, or even a locked room—which both makes it possible for its detective, and its reader, to narrow potential suspects in order to solve the crime.⁴⁸⁴

While the concept of space, as described above, is a convenient plot device for the detective fiction writer, it also reveals the ideological purpose—“that social space can be rationally ordered and contained.”⁴⁸⁵ Lending itself to Foucauldian surveillance, enclosed space perpetuates the logic that a space can be rationally ordered, observed and interpreted. Thus the detective whose job it is to restore order to the city must put “everything and everyone back in its ideologically designated place or space” by novel’s end.⁴⁸⁶ The detective, then, perpetuates the spatial control that we saw in McKay’s *Home to Harlem*, when characters Ray and Jake attempt to escape the enclosed and racialized space of Harlem by expatriating abroad. In contrast, the uncontrollable Jes Grew virus presents a challenge to all spatial boundaries within *Mumbo Jumbo*. Breaking out during the first renaissance of the 1890s, and returning in present story-time in the 1920s, migrating northward from New Orleans to Harlem, whence the book ends with hits of the Sixties, Jes Grew is a “crime” transcending space-time that the Wallflower Order will not crack.

Yet the state’s goal to preserve a monocultural aesthetic by controlling the fluid Jes Grew distorts FBI surveillance over black art by representing their mission as one that quells multiculturalism. As one southern congressman argues, “Jes Grew is the boll weevil eating away at the fabric of our forms, our technique, our aesthetic integrity” and the nation must confront

⁴⁸⁴ Richard, Swope, “Crossing Western Space, or the Hoodoo Detective on the Boundary in Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*.” *African American Review* 36, no. 4 (2002): 612.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, 613.

aesthetic chaos or anarchy with urgency and “ponder the effect of the Jew Grew upon 2,000 years of civilization.”⁴⁸⁷ As Reed uses the archetypally bigoted southern congressman to switch the term from “Jes” to “Jew,” he elides multiple ethnicities to reveal that the aesthetic and the ideology that the state upholds is a monocultural society based on white supremacy. The state department seeking to eliminate all racial-minority representations from cultural production seeks to control American ideology and as a result, police officer Biff Musclewhite takes a job as the “Curator of the Center of Art Detention.”⁴⁸⁸

Curating culture by *detaining* it, the state not only investigates “subversive” art objects but also the individuals, artists, and intellectuals who create and evaluate that art. This is why PaPa LaBas, an aged man who embodies the role of wise elder in the black community, and who is also described as carrying “Jes Grew in him like most folks carry genes,” must be placed “under surveillance.”⁴⁸⁹ However, LaBas is not only a patron of the arts, he is a “detective of the metaphysical.” Racing to find the Jes Grew text before the Wallflower Order finds it and destroys its mojo, LaBas becomes what most critics refer to as the central protagonist (and detective) in Reed’s otherwise fragmented and open-ended text, a character whose trajectory also allows *Mumbo Jumbo* to embrace the whodunit plot when he attempts to discover both the hidden text from which Jes Grew originated, as well as the murderer who takes the life of Abdul, the translator of that text.

⁴⁸⁷ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 17.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, 42.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, 64.

⁴⁹⁰ Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 212 and 23.

Unable to access Reed's FBI file through the Freedom of Information Act, scholars cannot yet speak to the archival findings that reveal the surveillance that Reed—like LaBas—must have faced during the Black Arts Movement. His paranoia in a 1990 interview reveals his awareness of such invasions, having reflected on the black community, “we’re always under surveillance.”⁴⁹¹ Those who are constantly under FBI-eyes in *Mumbo Jumbo* are particularly black intellectuals, artists and conjure-men like Reed and LaBas. By placing artist-intellectual characters under the watchful eye of the Wallflower Order, Reed's text moves beyond the hardboiled form to the metaphysical detective story, a form that uniquely converges with the genre of the African American *künstlerroman*. In the merging of these two genres, the text reveals the development and life of artist-intellectual characters under government watch. By understanding early on that the Wallflower Order spies on the black intellectuals and artists who strive to place the Jes Grew, and other non-western aesthetics, within American cultural production, then we are aware of “whodunit” early on in the novel. A text that differs from focalizing through the white detective heroes that Baraka harangued in “Three Movements and a Coda,” *Mumbo Jumbo* enters the genre of metaphysical detective narratives to focalize through the victims: black artists and metaphysicians like LaBas. Such focalization reveals that the space to which this novel is concerned to restore order is not the physical city, nor is it about means for ideological control over the state. Rather, the narrative makes forays into the minds of the text's artist-intellectual characters, each plagued by the invisible violence of surveillance.

⁴⁹¹ George Paul Csicsery, “An Interview with Ishmael Reed” in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*. Ed. Bruce Dick. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 318.

Reed was certainly concerned with how surveillance affected the psychology of the black community. In the same interview mentioned above, he questioned the mental health of those under surveillance:

I don't know what happens to a person psychologically when he's under government surveillance...I can't imagine what would happen if you had all these different government agencies on your back. The government can get you. The United States government putting enough pressure on somebody might drive him to smoke a crack pipe...⁴⁹²

Pointing to the physical *and psychic* pain from the paranoia that one might experience under the FBI, Reed reveals how the black community turns to detrimental coping mechanisms such as drugs or violence as means to numb their fears.

However, *Mumbo Jumbo* provides an imaginary cure to escape such effects of surveillance, as LaBas offers a cultural remedy to detect political oversight and ward off its paranoid affects. With the artist-characters' mental health at stake, PaPa LaBas does not just detect tangible crimes, such as racing against the Wallflower Order to discover the Jes Grew, or solving the plot's numerous mysteries, instead he is a detective who is equally a psychologist, his office door reading: "PAPA LABAS MUMBO JUMBO KATHEDRAL FITS FOR YOUR HEAD."⁴⁹³ Conveyed to the reader in all capital letters on the page with a rectangle box drawn around it, the text mirrors the physical sign on LaBas's office door. For the reader, then, the question is whether and how one assents to LaBas's role as a healer of internal "fits."⁴⁹⁴ His methods to heal your "head" derive from his ambiguous and polyglot metaphysical heritage. While "some say his ancestor is the long Ju Ju of Arno eastern Nigeria, the man who would oracle," others believe he is the "reincarnation of the framed Moor of Summerland, the Black

⁴⁹² Csicsery, 330.

⁴⁹³ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 24.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

gypsy” who “sicked the Witches on Europe”; and others point to his grandfather who was “brought to America on a slave ship mixed in with other workers who were responsible for bringing African religion to the Americas where it survives to this day.”⁴⁹⁵ The LaBas origin stories differ; yet they all have one common denominator: they speak to a black cultural method to counter and cope with racial oppression and white supremacy. Passed down from generation to generation, LaBas’s methods reawaken what is already innately embedded within each individual patient, helping him reconnect with his knockings; a feeling that is perhaps similar to intuition. A type of sixth sense, that “we came over here with,” knockings are not tangible but something you “dream” and “feel” that “New Negroes lost.”⁴⁹⁶ Therefore, the sole reparative hope that readers may derive from *Mumbo Jumbo* to combat surveillance’s methods is not a rational method, such as the detective fiction mode would typically use.

Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada*’s (1976), published only four years following *Mumbo Jumbo*, would also focus on artist-characters under surveillance. While the latter novel is usually categorized as a neo-slave narrative in which fugitive slave and poet Raven Quickskill escapes to Canada; themes carried over from *Mumbo Jumbo* indicate that *Flight to Canada* is also a metaphysical detective story. Comparisons to *Mumbo Jumbo* are obvious in the ways that both narratives conflate time and space; still, scholars have failed to read *Flight to Canada* as also working a metaphysical detection plot. Read in this way, the detectives who engage in narrative deconstruction of Raven’s poems, thus to track and return him to his owner, move from the novel’s margins to become its central focus. Swille, Raven’s owner, calls in the “Nebraska Tracers,” a detective agency hired to “track” down Raven by deciphering his escape path from

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, 26.

his literary work.⁴⁹⁷ Understanding that he is a fugitive slave, constantly hunted, Raven realizes whatever he writes is evidence used against him. However, writing is central to Raven's personhood and his survival, as "his poems were 'readings' for him from his inner self, which knew more about his future than he did," and "for him, freedom was his writing. His writing was his HooDoo."⁴⁹⁸

Like Raven finding himself unable to write—which is to say, unable to express his selfhood—while under surveillance, the novel figures surveillance as theft of black artists' sense of self. Master Swille's crime, then, is at the same time psychological and metaphysical. Using the historical example of Harriet Beecher Stowe who plagiarized and profited off of the fugitive slave narrative of Josiah Henson, the narrator explains what happens to the artist who is unable—because he is too full of fear—to produce:

*The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave. Seventy-seven pages long. It was short, but it was all he had. His story. A man's story is his gris-gris. The thing that is himself. It baffles the doctors the way some people pine away for no reason. For no reason? Somebody has made off with their Etheric Double, has crept into the hideout of themselves and taken all they found there. Human hosts walk the streets of the cities, their eyes hollow, the spirit gone out of them.*⁴⁹⁹

In Reed's terms, surveillance causes a paranoia, an inability to set forth one's selfhood in producing art because the trackers use it at every turn in their surveillance. Thus, the artist-intellectual loses his or her "gris-gris," becoming zombie-like, lacking the mind needed to produce art. Becoming a "human host" or state-programmed zombie brings on the virtual if not the actual death of the author.⁵⁰⁰ For it is indeed the ability to control the minds of artist-intellectuals that the state hopes to gain from their surveillance, an affect that would halt

⁴⁹⁷ Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 54.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid 88-89.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

production of a multicultural aesthetic, as according to the Wallflower Order's perverse rule, "if you owned your own mind you were indeed sick but when you possessed an Atonist mind you were healthy."⁵⁰¹ Such mind-programming is exactly what LaBas helps his patients overcome. In this way, LaBas's methods not only help assuage thought-crushing symptoms of surveillance on an individual, they also resist state attempts at "molding the consciousness of the West."⁵⁰²

II. Black Nationalism and *Mumbo Jumbo*'s Rejection of Community

Two characters who fall under surveillance by the Wallflower Order and who reject LaBas's methods of aesthetic resistance are artist-intellectual-characters Abdul and Berbelang. Their work posits a multicultural aesthetic: Abdul, as translator and editor of a magazine, had been actively "compiling some sort of anthology that will upset the nation," evidently from its "hieroglyphics and strange drawings written all over it"; while Berbelang, also wishing to draw upon a multicultural aesthetic like, "Inca, Taoism, and other systems," works to free the art that has been kept under control at the Mu'tafikah group's center of art detention, an underground operation that also works against the Wallflower Order.⁵⁰³ Both characters' fates can be predicted early on in their denial to accept assistance from LaBas's teachings. Berbelang having "left the group" that works with LaBas because he felt his techniques were "limiting," and Abdul having chastised LaBas early in the novel about "a new generation . . . coming on the scene," adding that his teachings will be as "obsolete out-of-date-unused as the appendix," both dismiss their knockings as an outdated ancestral mode of thought.⁵⁰⁴ Refusing to tap into that knowledge, both

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, 24.

⁵⁰² Ibid, 26.

⁵⁰³ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 81 and 26.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, 39.

men are brutally murdered by the state—an event that could have been avoided if they had enlisted LaBas in detecting the surveillance they were under.

The murders of these two artist-intellectual characters invites an analysis of how their deaths open a meta-commentary of the effects of surveillance over black intellectuals and artists in the postmodern-era. Abdul's death is written in a typical hardboiled fashion. The dramatic scene begins at "2:00 A.M. Rain has fallen and created many water puddles in the streets of Harlem."⁵⁰⁵ With the scene set in the middle of a dark and dreary night, the narrator details the account of Abdul's murder by Hinckle Van Vampton and Gould, two white men who work for the Wallflower Order, and who murdered Abdul in the effort to retrieve the Jes Grew text from his office. Written in third person omniscient narration, the narrator never discloses Abdul's thoughts on being a surveillance target, nor does the text provide Abdul's reflection on the violence he faces:

Gould struggles with Abdul in an effort to reach the safe. Hey man, what are you doing? Abdul Swings Gould around but cries out in pain as the dagger pierces his back. After he falls to the floor mortally wounded, Hinckle Von Vampton removes the dagger from his back.⁵⁰⁶

Absent from the scene is Abdul's conscious interiority and reflections on events as they occur. Yet, one small sentence, "Hey man, what are you doing?" written without quotation marks, suggests that the narrator, who briefly focalized through the victim, was privy to how Abdul processed his murder.⁵⁰⁷ Yet such details are withheld. In the tradition of classic hardboiled detective fiction, we're given none of the victim's thoughts or actions. Instead, the murder scene only presents the detective's mentality as he works to piece together the crime and thus conclude

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, 94.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 95.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

the whodunit plot. Just as Ronald Thomas has argued that the literary detective “rises to power” as a “designated cultural authority” in the detective novel, when LaBas arrives on the crime scene he becomes *the* narrative authority, piecing together the clues that are found in the confined space where the crime took place—Abdul’s office.⁵⁰⁸ When he “walked into the room” he “saw Abdul lying head down on his desk.”⁵⁰⁹ Written in italics, LaBas’s inner speech immediately goes to work to detect the criminal: “*It must have been something to do with the anthology. Disgruntled contributor or something*, LaBas thinks.”⁵¹⁰ And when he calls for an ambulance, and the authorities claim someone already sent one, LaBas admits that to be strange, thinking, “*perhaps someone has already discovered the corpse and phoned.*”⁵¹¹

To Ronald Thomas, detective fiction is “fundamentally preoccupied with physical evidence and with investigating the suspect body rather than with exploring the complexities of the mind.” Yet LaBas’s method, by working with a clue seen as an extension of Abdul’s interiority, suggests that rightly reading the crime scene requires one to let evidence speak. While LaBas works to piece together the clues within the confined space of the crime scene, the material ensemble of Abdul’s body, and objects in the room, intertwined with text, provides an extension of the victim’s interiority that lends PaPa LaBas the clues needed to eventually discover Jes Grew’s text and the murderer. Papa LaBas “notices a piece of paper in Abdul’s fist. He removes it. ‘Epigram on American-Egyptian Cotton’/ Stringy lumpy; Bales dancing/ Beneath this center/ Lies the Bird.”⁵¹² Abdul’s material body, intertwined with Abdul’s seemingly

⁵⁰⁸ Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9.

⁵⁰⁹ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 98.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, 99.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 98.

deliberate grasp on textual clues, leads LaBas to the Cotton Club to discover the Jes Grew anthology. Written in this way, the crime scene suggests that Abdul's interiority, manifested as he dies, is crucial to understanding and solving the crime.

Although Abdul's death is written in the traditional hardboiled form, with the detective's interiority exposed to allow the reader to work collaboratively to solve the case, this scene varies from traditional whodunnits in one way: it reveals the identity of the murderers prior to the end of the novel. Having established through Abdul's clue that Hinckle Van Vompton and his accomplice that work for the Wallflower Order are behind Abdul's death, this before LaBas even steps into the scene, the plot interrupts the whodunit's search for the murderer. Reed's choice to reveal the criminals' identities prior to LaBas solving the case is significant for the ways that it allows for a juxtaposition between Abdul's and Berbelang's murders. While Abdul's death makes us aware that the victim's interiority—something that is absent in the murder scene—is crucial to understanding and solving the crime, Berbelang's murder rescripts the murder scene within the detective plot to provide the victim's reflection on what happens to the artist-character when placed under detection.

Prior to his murder, the text depicts Berbelang reflecting on a painting that allows the novel to script him not as just an intellectual, but perhaps also as an aspiring artist who fears surveillance. When on a mission with the Muta'kifikah group to free the Olmec Head from the center of art detention, Berbelang desires to desecrate a painting that speaks to how the artist's self is captured within the materiality that he produces. Viewing a painting by Goya titled *Don Manuel Osorio de Zuñiga*, Berbelang gazes upon a "little boy in a bright scarlet outfit among

cats and birds” and he has a moment where he almost slashes the painting with a razor.⁵¹³ What Reed’s text does not say, however, is that in the painting the boy holds a pet magpie on a leash and in the animal’s mouth is the painter’s calling card. The boy, then, owns both the bird and the artist. Owning the art from the painter, the child also owns a piece of the artist’s self, thus provoking Berbelang’s anger.

Understanding Berbelang as an artist-intellectual allows us to see why Biff Muscwhite and the Wallflower Order may have seen him as a threat. To Muscwhite:

Berbelang is different. This is a nigger gone berserk. A nigger the planters kept from other niggers so they wouldn’t catch what he had...Berbelang is not 1 of these automatons marching well dressed in an anti-lynching parade; he is aware of his past and has demystified ours.⁵¹⁴

Steeped in the tradition of keeping the slave who could read away from the rest of the plantation because he might awaken other slaves to escape from slavery or start an uprising, Muscwhite admits that Berbelang’s education might inspire others to fight against oppression. Thus, his education and artistic talents are used against him, marking him as “crazy” or as a target for the state. With the goal to isolate Berbelang’s interiority from others so “they wouldn’t catch what he had,” *Mumbo Jumbo* reveals that the ultimate objective of placing the artist-intellectual under surveillance is to capture their interiority, thus to prevent the black artist-intellectual’s interiority from infecting the public.

⁵¹³ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 110.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid, 113-114.

Berbelang's interiority, then, is finally captured when the Mu'tafikah gang takes Biff Muscwhite as a hostage to gain access to the museum. Muscwhite escapes through the help of a member of the Mu'tafikah who switches sides, resulting in Berbelang's death:

The street is unusually quiet as he enters the block. He feels a tingling at the nape of his neck. Somethings wrong but he doesn't quite know what. He starts to enter the basement...Those cars across the street. When he turns around Biff Muscwhite orders his men to open up. Between the eyes. Berbelang grabs his forehead. But the blood pours out like fire hydrants gush water into the summer street. Strange, he feels O.K., he doesn't feel a thing. He's just getting weaker, losing consciousness. Biff Muscwhite climbs from the police car and with 2 other men walks across the street. They stare down at the corpse. Berbelang's mind has rushed out to the pavement: Yellow, Red, Blue. Fire Opals.⁵¹⁵

This third-person omniscient narration of Berbelang's death allows the reader to experience Berbelang's murder from an omniscient point of view, especially in providing Berbelang's last perspective. Although Ronald Thomas has shown that detective fiction is "fundamentally preoccupied with physical evidence and with investigating the suspect body rather than with exploring the complexities of the mind," Berbelang's murder scene teaches the opposite by detailing his final thought process. Having refused to listen to his "knockings" that could have saved him, we understand that "something was wrong" even before Berbelang enters the basement. Berbelang only knows his death once the bullet hits him "between the eyes": "Strange, he feels O.K., he doesn't feel a thing. He's just getting weaker, losing consciousness."⁵¹⁶ As the victim dies, the narrator describes the victim's interiority and reminds us of Berbelang's material body: Biff Muscwhite and his men "stare down at the corpse."⁵¹⁷ Within the white detective's gaze we have Berbelang dead on the pavement, but also his consciousness. And as that

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, 120.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

consciousness slowly fades the narrator communicates Berbelang's reflection on the events that are occurring in story-time . Experiencing death, his consciousness transitions from a thinking abstraction to a material object to be viewed: "Berbelang's mind has rushed out to the pavement: Yellow, Red, Blue. Fire Opals."⁵¹⁸ Making his abstract interiority a material object, the narrator reveals how the black intellectual's mind is objectified.

Thus, to kill the artist-intellectual is to kill the vehicle that disperses multiculturalism into society. If the goal of surveillance is to no longer allow the artist-intellectual's mind to create art, then the once intangible ideology he dispersed through cultural production becomes an object for the detectives to collect—through phases of the artist-protagonist's death. In that violence, the artist under detection literally loses his mind: first through paranoia, and then by an act of murder.

Berbelang's murder scene and his exposed consciousness centers the black male subject as the victim under surveillance, and in doing so, the text reestablishes the black male's rejection of a community that speaks to the politics of the Black Nationalist literary and political movement throughout the 1960's and 1970's. Just as Berbelang rejected PaPa LaBas's assistance, he also rejects and marginalizes black women, a decision that speaks to why black feminist historian Paula Giddings has labeled the 1960's, "The Masculine Decade," where black women were seemingly marginalized from the movement.⁵¹⁹ As Madhu Dubey has persuasively argued, "the centering of the black man as the true subject of black nationalist discourse, and the concomitant marginalization of black women, was accomplished through a variety of methods,"

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Madhu Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 16.

one of which was by centering black male protagonists in the novel, a form driven by “its realist legacy of individual characterization.”⁵²⁰ Therefore, just as we’ve seen Ray in McKay’s *Home to Harlem* abandon his girlfriend Agatha in Harlem and flee from surveillance by expatriating abroad, and his buddy Jake, likewise abandon Felice, a plot point the reader does not become aware of until McKay’s publication of his second novel *Banjo: A Story without A Plot*, and Richard Wright’s Cross Damon’s migration from Chicago to New York, which divested him of his responsibilities to his family, Berbelang similarly leaves his partner, Earline, out of his fight against surveillance. Having seen in the last chapter that African American women writers of the Cold War Era differed from earlier Afro-modern writers by articulating the life of not just one person, but an entire family and community under surveillance, we can now understand that Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, a novel which has been thematically described as masculine, falls in line with the earlier Afro-modern works that centralize an individual male subject who fails to unite with his community. After all, the reader is introduced to Berbelang by his absence from the Mumbo Jumbo community: “PaPa LaBas glances up at the oil portrait hanging on the wall. It is a picture of the original Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral taken a few weeks ago... completed 2 weeks before Berbelang left the group.”⁵²¹ Now absent from the Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, Berbelang also insists on marginalizing Earline from his missions and will not let her in on the surveillance he knows he is under. Infantilizing her with his speech, Berbelang refuses to disclose the doings of the Muta’kifikah group to Earline: “Look baby, soon I will be through and able to tell you everything but now, sugar, you have to trust me.”⁵²² Refusing to disclose his

⁵²⁰ Ibid 4-6. Dubey explains that “communal intersubjectivity is not easy to represent in fiction, given the novel’s lengthy realist legacy of individual characterization. Black women’s fiction renegotiates this legacy in several different ways and to varying degrees of success” (4).

⁵²¹ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, Mumbo, 25.

⁵²² Ibid, 54.

methods to Earline, Berbelang reduces her role in the text to his sexual outlet. Although Earline attempts to discuss the Wallflower Order, the Jes Grew, and other events, she fails to get any words out and the page is absent of her dialogue. Instead, “Berbelang has other ideas. He puts his hands about her waist and they begin some furious necking.”⁵²³ Refusing to collaborate with Earline, Berbelang leaves her abandoned as she wakes early in the morning to find “the imprint where his head once was.”⁵²⁴

III. “This 1 Possesses a Technological Bent”: Modes of Representation

Berbelang’s choice to struggle alone through his experiences with surveillance mirrors the unique multi-media modes of representation that Reed’s novels embody—a formal choice to attempt to sidestep state oversight, but also to put forth a multicultural text unrestrained by the essentialist black aesthetic upheld at the time. One year prior to the publication of *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed was “one of the few young black writers willing to confront” literary critic Addison Gayle’s argument for a more conventional, restrained black aesthetic.⁵²⁵ Dismissing Gayle’s agenda as a “goon squad aesthetic,” Reed rejected notions that an aesthetics of resistance and experimentation would only confirm white expectations that black literature was solely a form for protest.⁵²⁶ Arguing that black writing should “be free to explore its own cultural sources and define its own forms,” Reed called for a literature commensurate with a multicultural society.⁵²⁷ This is why his work has been taken up in discussions of what modes of representation best

⁵²³ Ibid, 55.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Richard Walsh, “ ‘A Man’s Story is His Gris-Gris’: Cultural Slavery, Literary Emancipation and Ishmael Reed’s Flight To Canada.” *Journal of American Studies* 27. no. 2 (1993): 58.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

represent black culture, and why scholars such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Madhu Dubey point to Reed's emphasis on text, writing, print, and communication as a metacommentary on that debate.⁵²⁸

Mumbo Jumbo's concern with modes of representation, paired with the recent turn in Reed scholarship— his novels' interests in multi-media—initially suggests that Reed's novels embrace the technological turn. Conventional print literature allegedly having “failed” to realize the black community beyond second-class citizenship resulted in African American literature embracing new media and alternative modes of representation that are posed as essential to the growth of a post-Civil Rights Era black literary aesthetic. Madeliene Monson-Rosen's “Messenger Bug: Ishmael Reed's Media Virus” (2014) recently argued that *Mumbo Jumbo*'s “emphasis on textuality and print, on codes and cyphers, on communication networks, and on a media virus that spreads through human social networks and the technologies, in the novel” is “an unmistakable intervention into the potent, historically current discourse of information science.”⁵²⁹ As she shows, key themes of media networks and linguistic codes throughout *Mumbo Jumbo* run parallel to, and celebrate, the technology that arose during the “late 1960s and early 1970s, the period of *Mumbo Jumbo*'s composition and publication.”⁵³⁰ Reed seems to have understood technology's value as a medium for spreading cultural knowledge across diverse communities throughout space and time, much like the “astonishing rapidity of Booker T. Washington's Grapevine Telegraph” by which “Jes Grew spreads through America.”⁵³¹ Moreover,

⁵²⁸ See Madhu Dubey's *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* and Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Figures in Black Words, Signs, and the 'racial' self*.

⁵²⁹ Madeleine, Monson-Rosen, “Messenger Bug: Ishmael Reed's Media Virus” *Cultural Critique* 88, (2014): 29.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 13.

the very technology that allows Jes Grew to spread is similar to the source that provides PaPa LaBas with the knowledge to discover the hidden Jes Grew text. Sami Ludwig's "Ishmael Reed's Inductive Narratology of Detection" (1998) focuses on PaPa LaBas and his use of the loas, or Voodoo gods, to detect the text's location and Abdul's murderer.⁵³² The loas, representing an alternative form of communication, are able to provide access to knowledge that LaBas lacks, as a loa that "possesses a technological bent" provides LaBas, rather quickly, with the knowledge he needs to solve the case of the Jes Grew's missing text.⁵³³

Yet others have argued that Reed's use of technology shows "how little change such radical new technologies offer for African-Americans," and that "technoculture" is no "different from the cultural structures it seems to replace."⁵³⁴ Skeptics also criticize potentials for state abuses of cyber-technology in deploying unembodied surveillance over the black community. *Mumbo Jumbo* figures those dangers in uses of "television to scan the U.S. for Jes Grew activity" and to produce incorporeal sources that falsely represent the black community.⁵³⁵ To fight against the Jes Grew epidemic, the Wallflower Order plans:

to groom a Talking Android who will work within the Negro, who seems to be its classical host; to drive it out, categorize it analyze it expel it slay it, blot Jes Grew. A speaking scull they can use any way they want, a rapping antibiotic who will abort it from the American womb to which it clings like a stubborn fetus...In other words this Talking Android will be engaged to cut-it-up, break down this Germ, keep it from behind the counter.⁵³⁶

⁵³² Sami Ludwig, "Ishmael Reed's Inductive Narratology of Detection," *African American Review* 32, no.3 (1998):435-44.

⁵³³ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 137.

⁵³⁴ Michael A Chaney, "Slave Cyborgs and the Infovirus: Ishmael Reed's Cybernetic Aesthetics," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no. 2 (2003): 282.

⁵³⁵ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 63.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid*, 17.

Anticipating that the android will destroy African American culture, *Mumbo Jumbo* rejects technology, as the Jes Grew Crew will now have “no control over who speaks for them.”⁵³⁷ Representation of the African American community is now in the hands of the press and radio, where the state plans to “feature the Talking Android” who will destroy the virus by portraying a false spokesman for the community.⁵³⁸ Aborting African American culture from the “American womb,” The Wallflower Order rejects the very culture that was born on its soil.⁵³⁹

In *Flight to Canada* (1976) Reed continues to grapple with the dangers of technological representation, anticipating and warning against issues similar to censoring net neutrality. The novel’s villain, Pirate Jack, whose occupation Reed describes as the “man behind” the “distribution network,” maintains complete control over what is distributed by the media, resulting in a “cultural slavery.”⁵⁴⁰ Dictating “which books, films, even what kind of cheese, no less will reach the market,” in his role as “distributor”—of goods, and knowledge—Jack enacts symbolic violence on society through what he chooses—and does not choose—to transmit to the public.^{541 542} Choosing some items over others forces those who do not partake in what the media upholds to be marginalized from society. Moreover, Jack not only controls products, he also has the power to “[determine] whether one is civilized or savage,” thus sustaining the existing ethno-racial hierarchy.⁵⁴³ When this symbolic violence is transferred to the wide dispersal of the media, language becomes a systematic method of control. Through the ridicule of Pirate Jack, *Flight to Canada* explains how “forms of slavery still exist in modern America” under the “guise

⁵³⁷ Ibid, 70.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, 146, 67.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 149.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

of monoculture's institutionalized subordination of all other cultures: the institutional structure of slavery remains in sublimated form as the machinery of a state of oppression."⁵⁴⁴

In the technological world of mass media representation, where culture is transmitted via a structural system, Raven ridicules the distributor and questions technology's ability to produce an accurate portrayal of American culture and history:

You and your graphs and your video charts that show your inventory immediately. It's unearthly, the way you hold sway over the American sensibility. They see, read and listen to what you want them to read, see and listen to. You decide the top forty, the best-seller list and the Academy Awards...Revisionists. Quantitative historians. What does a computer know? Can a computer feel? Make love? Can a computer feel passion? Quickskill tears off his shirt. Look at those scars. Look at them!...What does a fucking computer know.⁵⁴⁵

Questioning the distributor's computer that decides what knowledge should be transmitted, Raven doubts if Jack's technological means accurately portrays all perspectives of American society. Referring to computers as "quantitative historians," Raven believes that a computer only portrays a partial rather than a collective worldview, leaving out the narrative that would explain the true experience of slave brutality and the "scars" on Raven's back.⁵⁴⁶ Blaming the computer, rather than Jack, Raven ridicules technology for producing a monoculture society and alludes to the fact that society blindly follows the media even though they do not know who behind the networks makes the choices. Jack, the distributor, "remains invisible" just like the Wallflower Order remains hidden behind its talking android⁵⁴⁷

Yet the very technology that falsely represents and subordinates black culture also grants agency to characters to escape oppressive conditions. Since slave owner Swille cannot transcribe

⁵⁴⁴ Walsh, 63.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, 151.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid, 146.

his own records because his dyslexia “scrambled and jumbled” words, house slave Robin becomes Swille’s “reading and writing. Like a computer.”⁵⁴⁸ Understanding Robin as a cyborg-like character in *Flight To Canada* is a recent interpretive move. Michael A. Chaney explains that “ideological entanglements of technology and race are nothing new”; for example, proslavery ideology conceptualized “so-called inferior races as functional commodities dehumanized to the status of mere tools.”⁵⁴⁹ Robin’s embodiment of the computer divests him of personhood and transforms him into a cyborg, paralleling the proslavery ideology Chaney describes. And in this process Raven becomes an invisible authority — the very form that a dominant culture uses to culturally enslave a whole society.

The way that Reed merges Robin as reader of Swille’s documents, with the computer, suggests Reed’s aesthetic had moved toward and anticipated the digital hypertext. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a hypertext “does not form a single sequence and . . . may be read in various orders,” using both “texts and graphics (usually in machine readable form) which are interconnected in such a way that a reader of the material” can “discontinue reading one document at certain points in order to consult other related matter.”⁵⁵⁰ While the digital hypertext became more colloquial with the rise of the World Wide Web in 1990, the concept of the hypertext has always existed in codex form; Jerome McGann, for example, refers to the codex as a “machine of knowledge.”⁵⁵¹ In the 1970’s, the very decade Reed wrote *Flight to Canada*, the hypertext was thought of as a form, both digital and material, that presented readers with “facts

⁵⁴⁸ Reed, *Flight to Canada*, 171.

⁵⁴⁹ Chaney, 265.

⁵⁵⁰ "hypertext, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2015. Web. 2 October 2015.

⁵⁵¹ Jerome McGann, “The Rationale of the Hypertext,” *University of Virginia*, 06 May 1995, <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/public/jjm2f/rationale.html>.

and ideas which could be used to broaden and modify their initial reactions.”⁵⁵² Hypertext can thus be understood as a form that does not limit a given narrative to one primary document.

Like the hypertext reader, Robin disentangles the textual network of the sources Swille gives him to create his own meaning. As Silvio Gaggi explains, the nature of the hypertext is an “unboundedness” that includes other texts that are interconnected to the primary material that can be read in various orders.⁵⁵³ Consequently there is a “weakening and decentering of the subject when one engages in an electronic network” that “disperses the author.”⁵⁵⁴ When the reader enters a “textual network” through which he “moves,” he disrupts the “sense of centrality of certain primary texts within the network.”⁵⁵⁵ In this way, the distinction between “text and context [dissolves] and intertextuality...[ceases] to be regarded as such” because the hypertext creates only one text.⁵⁵⁶ Robin thus becomes the reader of the hypertext who has “no primary axis” and lacks an “authority” or guide to help him navigate the textual network.⁵⁵⁷ By choosing how to navigate a variety of sources that are “scrambled and jumbled,” Robin gains autonomy and chooses his own narrative, leaving himself Swille’s “whole estate.”⁵⁵⁸

Reed appears to have understood the potential for hypertexts to produce a multicultural aesthetic. By definition such a text brings into play a multiplicity of narratives. Decentralized, with no required linear nor hierarchical order, much less a master narrative, such texts grant

⁵⁵² "hypertext, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2015. Web. 2 October 2015.

⁵⁵³ Silvio Gaggi, *From Text to Hypertext: Decentering the Subject in Fiction, Film, the Visual Arts, and Electronic Media*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 112.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, 103.

⁵⁵⁸ Reed, *Flight to Canada*, 171.

readers the autonomy to choose the narrative or narratives that they trust in a present reading, that might be set aside during a second, or third time through. It is only when Robin becomes an invisible authority via technology that he is able to present the variety of sources, texts, and words, in the order chosen for this hypertext that simultaneously disrupts both the master narrative of Swille's document and, literally, his master's narrative. As the judge reads Swille's last will and testament that cyborg Robin creates, the narrator explains the experience of the reader while he disentangles the text: "the judge paused. What could be wrong? He must have stared at the document for a full minute."⁵⁵⁹ Dumbfounded about the content of the text, the audience is left to decipher whether or not Swille actually "would have wanted" his will carried out this way. Ranging from the most typical requests, such as leaving his "white house slave" a game of checkers because he "enjoys the sport," to giving Robin "everything behind the gates of Swille's Virginia estate," and a last request that is accompanied with an illustration to be "buried in [his] sister's sepulcher by the sea, joined in the Kama Sutra position," the reader of the will is left to discern which pieces of the narrative Swille authorizes, which sources to trust, and which to reject, invisible authority aiding Robin in his ultimate goal of creating a new narrative.⁵⁶⁰

Reed's novels that uphold technology as a mode to assist individuals in escaping essentialist modes of representation, also reinforce the ideology put forth within "The Masculine Decade." Such modes continue to center the "black man as the true subject of black nationalist discourse," through the novel's realist "individual characterization" of a sole individual plotting

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, 166-167.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, 168-171.

his own course. To that end, even though Robin gains agency from his new narrative, it is his narrative alone—no one else is presently represented.

IV. The Patriot Act and Increased Technological Surveillance

Post-9/11 literature would have a different relationship with technology due to the privacy changes that occurred following the devastating attack on U.S. soil. Responding by enacting the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act, otherwise known as the Patriot Act, the state drastically changed the parameters according to which they could search and surveil the American people in the effort to intercept terrorist acts. While those who celebrate the act claim that such measures are crucial to winning the war on terror, critics point to Title II, which “contravenes” the Constitution’s fourth amendment by changing the “Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986” by granting federal organizations “authority in seizing, distributing, and using confidential telecommunications”—a breach and invasion of Americans’ private lives.⁵⁶¹ Once the Patriot Act was initiated the FBI increased the “expenditure of \$200 million for each of the fiscal years 2002, 2003, and 2004 for the Technical Support Center.” Enabling the government to sidestep American citizens’ right to privacy, the act also expanded by “the scope of existing US surveillance legislation while simultaneously reducing the level of judicial scrutiny over surveillance activity by the US Government” and ensured that “this new authority pertains to twenty-first century technology.”⁵⁶² Employing “computers, communications, and surveillance technology” to intercept the “recruiting, communications and propaganda” of terrorists by way

⁵⁶¹ Cary Stacy Smith, *The Patriot Act: Issues and Controversies*. (Springfield, Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 2010), 92-93.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

of wiretapping, intercepting communications from computers, roving wiretaps (which move from locations and devices so that the state no longer has to necessarily specify the identity of the surveillance target), and by creating provisions for Internet Service Providers that “comply with surveillance and disclosure orders,” the state’s open-ended policies in regards to surveillance encroach on the privacy of U.S. citizens.⁵⁶³

So while Reed’s novels may have articulated hopeful expectations for the technological mode as a form to produce literary content and assist African Americans in escaping surveillance, Gloria Naylor’s *1996* (2004), written in the Post-9/11 era, not only rejects technology as a mode of representation because of how vulnerable it makes the writer to surveillance, it also anticipates a world dominated by technological surveillance. Several edited collections and brief studies discuss Post-9/11 literature, but little has been done in studying the role of African American literature in the post-9/11 political imaginary.⁵⁶⁴ Erica Edwards has announced her forthcoming and highly anticipated project, *The Other Side of Terror: African American Literature after 9/11*, which promises to offer some insight on race and post-9/11 literary discourse.⁵⁶⁵ Her project will advance a central claim: “that the meanings and uses of

⁵⁶³ Mary Wong, "Electronic Surveillance and Privacy in the United States After September 11 2001: The USA Patriot Act." *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, (2002), 214-30.

⁵⁶⁴ See Aimee Pozorski’s *Falling After 9/11: Crisis in American Art and Literature*, Ann Keniston’s *Literature after 9/11*, Richard Gray’s *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, and Lenore Bell’s *The “Other” in 9/11 Literature: If You See Something, Say Something*. Chapter four in Bell’s book, “You Want to Dance, I Want to Watch: African-American Characters,” is the first step towards discussing the African American presence in Post 9-11 literature.

⁵⁶⁵ See Erica Edwards’ “Of Cain and Abel: African-American Literature and the Problem of Inheritance after 9/11,” which was published in a special issue where scholars discuss their second book projects. Edwards was awarded the William Sanders Scarborough Prize from the Modern Language Association for an outstanding first book in African American literature and culture.

blackness have fundamentally changed since the September 11 attacks.”⁵⁶⁶ Indeed, Edwards’ contribution promises to answer significant questions about blackness in a post-9/11 world: How does the racial other articulate belonging to a state that has imagined non-white peoples as terrorists during times of war? How does the African American community’s long relationship with the nation of Islam get scripted against them when the state is at war with Muslim countries? And how can African American literature’s narratives of freedom struggles assist the nation in interpreting and living in the birth of an intensified surveillance state in the aftermath of 9/11? While we still await Edwards’ contribution, we can turn toward Gloria Naylor’s *1996* for answers. A fictional memoir published three years following the attack, her novel has been described as a “courageous and politically committed book that came out in the post 9/11 climate of mistrust heightened by the attacks on individual liberties induced by the adoption of the Patriot Act.”⁵⁶⁷

V. *1996* as Autobiographical *Künstlerroman*

Naylor’s *1996* drastically differs from her other publications in both form and content. Named after the year she became cognizant of government surveillance over her own life and work, *1996* blurs the lines of genre, Naylor herself claiming that it is “not a novel, nor is it non-fiction...it is a conflation of the two genres.”⁵⁶⁸ As Claudine Raynaud points out, Naylor also explored experimental and alternative publishing venues. Unlike her previous publications that

⁵⁶⁶ Erica R. Edwards, “Of Cain and Abel: African-American Literature and the Problem of Inheritance after 9/11.” *American Literary History* 25, no. 1 (2013): 191.

⁵⁶⁷ Raynaud, Claudine Raynaud, “Hearing Voices Battling For Her Mind: Gloria Naylor’s *1996*,” in *Writing in Between Apocalypse and Redemption: Gloria Naylor’s Fiction*, ed. by Emmanuel Andres (L’Harmattan Publishing Company, 2005), 148. Raynaud is the first scholar to have taken up Naylor’s *1996* as her subject.

⁵⁶⁸ Qtd. in Raynaud, 141.

have found homes at major publishing houses such as Vintage Books (a subdivision of Random House) and Penguin Books, Naylor chose to publish *1996* at Third World Press, the independent black publishing house located in Chicago since the 1960s, and a venue that would allow her text's distribution to "reach a more politicized and closer-to-home readership."⁵⁶⁹

Perhaps Naylor's text that embraces the autobiographical mode was meant to reach audiences that would identify with her life story. Embracing the *künstlerroman* genre, the first seven pages briefly detail how the young protagonist, named after the author Gloria Naylor, matured from a small girl to an artist. Rooting itself in the autobiographical mode to which the African American literary tradition is anchored by way of the slave narrative, Naylor begins the story of her artist-character's development with an account of her origin story: where she is born and her family's identity. During the nineteenth-century, the slave narrative's protagonist typically could not track his familial roots, this history having been hidden from him by slave masters who sought to discourage runaways by separating families. To that end, claiming one's family on the opening pages of an autobiographical novel was a trope black writers used to signify agency and a condition of freedom. Naylor therefore evoking a familial history through written text is able to construct her selfhood and signify her agency, as the opening pages of her narrative, beginning with the first person, "I," provide a first-hand account of her life.

However, prior to introducing her identity and her family history, Naylor initiates her narrative with themes of surveillance, a choice that indicates how extensively surveillance has overshadowed her selfhood, both on and off the page:

⁵⁶⁹ Raynaud, Claudine Raynaud, "Hearing Voices Battling For Her Mind: Gloria Naylor's *1996*," 141.

I didn't want to tell this story. It's going to take courage. Perhaps more courage than I possess, but they've left me no alternatives. I am in a battle for my mind. If I stop now, they'll have won, and I will lose myself. One of the problems I have is where to begin and how to begin. I guess, as with most good stories, I should start at the beginning. And, as with most good stories, tell it simply.⁵⁷⁰

Just who threatens Naylor is left ambiguous, a "They" mirroring the disembodied government surveillance Naylor will face as a black artist. Before revealing her freedom narrative—her journey to escape surveillance—Naylor first establishes that her construction of her personhood is deeply anchored in the written word. Therefore, Naylor begins her story from childhood to maturity as an artist:

I was born in New York City, the first of three daughters to parents who had migrated from the South to New York in 1949. So, I grew up in the North in a Southern home with the language and foods of the South, and with the story-telling. My parents had many stories about Robinsonville, Mississippi. They'd spent the first twenty years of their lives as sharecroppers in that sleepy, backwater town. As a shy child, I was always in the corner listening with big ears to the tales of fishing for catfish on the muddy levy, finding dewberries in the woods, and of course picking cotton, because they were cotton farmers.⁵⁷¹

Naylor's identity takes shape as do many autobiographical African American plots, by disclosing where and to whom she was born. Her parents, describing themselves as part of the Great Migration, constructed a family history and identity for her through narrative, using storytelling as their vehicle.

As Naylor grows she discovers that this love for narrative was not just a family pastime, but a political act. Through telling the story of her mother, who was never "able to completely satisfy her hunger for reading," Naylor discloses how being African American and choosing a literary life has always been political.⁵⁷² For Naylor's mother, who grew up in the Jim-Crow era

⁵⁷⁰ Gloria Naylor, *1996* (Illinois: Third World Press, 2005), 3.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

South, “the public library was off-limits for black people” and “as tenant farmers, her family did not have the luxury of buying books,” so “she took her spare time on Saturdays to hire herself out in someone else’s fields for the day” in order to “write to book clubs and obtain her reading material.”⁵⁷³ Reading and literacy, then, were political, for they challenged racial and class boundaries in Jim Crow America. In the family’s move North, Naylor’s mother carried the hope that “at least the public libraries would be open to her children.”⁵⁷⁴

Understanding narrative as a political act for her family also allowed young Naylor to see how such a statement was an essential and significant characteristic of African American community. Storytelling, narrative, and the written word would be essential to those communities’ construction of selfhood (as seen through the slave narrative), a tradition that would grant them agency (exemplified through the New Negro Movement), and help them to overcome racial boundaries such as Jim Crow laws and to fight racial oppression (The Black Arts Movement). Discovering “other black writers even as far back as slavery times, when it was illegal to teach slaves to read or write” therefore awakened Naylor to the fact that “I had a history in America” and that she “yearned to add [her] stories to the legacy...this knowledge gave [her] the authority to pick up the pen.”⁵⁷⁵ Naylor joins the ranks of a long line of African American writers who challenged white supremacy through the political act of creating literature, a tool to fight for civil rights.

Embodying the role of a writer was a position that Naylor owned since her earliest self-constructions. As a child, like most protagonists in the *künstlerroman* genre, she was isolated and

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, 7.

a “shy adolescent” who would “just sit quietly in [her] room and read.”⁵⁷⁶ It was only when her mother bought her a diary and told her to write down her thoughts that Naylor grew from adolescence and commenced her development as an artist: “those journal entries turned to poems, and those poems turned into short stories....for the most part they stayed hidden in my dresser drawer. A pattern had been set that shaped the rest of my life: if you can’t say it, write it.”⁵⁷⁷ Writing became an essential process as Naylor constructed a self and her place in the world: “books were more than books—they were passports to a world that held endless possibilities. The library became, to me, a sacred place that I used like a shrine, to read, to think, and to dream. And what I dreamed was that one day I too could be a writer.”⁵⁷⁸

VI. Planting Her Garden: Writing in the Tradition of African American Women

Naylor would realize her dream of becoming a writer with a National Book Award for *Women of Brewster Place* (1982) in the category of first novel. With that award, and several other novels under her belt, Naylor decides to purchase a home that would come to symbolize her place as a female writer in the American literary tradition. As feminist scholars well know from Virginia Woolf’s extended essay, “A Room of One’s Own,” (1929) female writers called for the need for a space both physically and figuratively within a literary tradition that was dominated by men.⁵⁷⁹ Woolf argued that a woman had to have a room of one’s own, enough income for self-support, and time, in order to write a novel. The home that Naylor buys off of the coast from North Carolina was therefore “far removed” from the nearest town of St. Helena, and

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, 5.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁷⁹ See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

the Victorian cottage, which sits on two acres of land becomes Naylor's "own little Eden."⁵⁸⁰

Naylor reflects on her early days at the cottage:

I would sit at a folded table in the sunroom that gave me a view of the water, drinking my morning coffee in a pink mug that said, 'Hers' in blue lettering. That table, with its one chair and that mug, were my only possessions besides a trailer camping bed that I picked up second-hand. But this, indeed, was mine. I looked over at the plantation house and thought about how things had come full circle. My people once worked this land as slaves, and here I was, owning part of it.⁵⁸¹

Drinking out of the "Hers" coffee mug, negating the "his" that would obviously come with the set, and sitting at a table prepared only for one, suggests that Naylor has answered Woolf's call.

The Victorian house and island is her own sacred space where she could create:

I promised myself that one day I would write in it. My chance came seven years after buying it. Almost every writer believes there is a 'big' book in him or her, and mine was to be an historical novel that I had researched for and had traveled as far as Norway and Senegal to prepare myself. I then had four books under my belt, but this fifth one was it. It was 1996, and I cleared up my affairs in New York in order to return to St. Helena to write my book and fulfill another dream—making a garden.⁵⁸²

Carving out her space on the island to write her "big book" and to "make a garden," Naylor evokes the resurgence of black women's writing of the 1960's and 1970's, a literary tradition that she hopes her novel will allow her to join.⁵⁸³ The garden that Naylor plans to nurture may refer to Alice Walker's collection of personal essays, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens:*

Womanist Prose (1983), whose title essay points to the limitations of Woolf's criteria for black

⁵⁸⁰ Naylor, 10.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁸² Ibid, 12.

⁵⁸³ African American Literature experienced a resurgence of black women writers during the 60's and 70's, such as Sonia Sanchez, June Jordan, Carolyn Rodgers, and Nikki Giovanni, and many others. See Mari Evans' "Controversies of the Black Arts Movement" in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Norton, 2004), 1846-1847. Also see Madhu Dubey's *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*, and Deborah E. McDowell's *"The Changing Same": Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory*.

women writers and argues for an awareness of intersectional feminism. Here Walker raises the question: How could a black female artist have a room of her own, if she could not even own herself? Quoting Woolf, she asks: if “in order for a woman to write fiction she must have two things....a room of her own (with lock and key) and enough money to support herself...What then are we to make of Phillis Wheatley?”⁵⁸⁴ Reflecting on early American black women writers, Walker asserts that they must have found alternative ways to channel their creative energy:

For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane...What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmothers’ time?...Did you have a genius of a great-great-grandmother who died under some ignorant and depraved white overseer’s lash? Or was she required to bake biscuits for a lazy backwater tramp, when she cried out in her soul to paint watercolors of sunsets...Or was her body broken and forced to bear children (who were more often than not sold away from her)—when her one joy was the thought of modeling heroic figures of rebellion in stone or clay?⁵⁸⁵

Walker’s speculation draws our attention to the difference in positions for the black and white woman writer in the nineteenth century: while the white woman had the luxury of rejecting domesticity to create art—locking herself away in the leisure of her own room—to the black woman who could not own herself, creating art within that domestic space, such as a Garden, allowed her to channel her creative energies. Naylor therefore evokes Walker’s call for intersectional feminism to assert that to be a black woman artist is to face certain limitations that white women may never understand.

⁵⁸⁴ Alice Walker, “In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens,” in *In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, (New York: Harcourt Brach Jovanovich Publishers, 1983),. 235.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

One black woman poet of the 1970s, Nikki Giovanni, knew the importance of having her own space, which she celebrated in her poetry compilation *My House* (1972). The poems within Giovanni's collection celebrate the most personal and domestic interactions that occur in her home, such as making rolls with her grandmother, or describing a nap when the sun comes into her room, or smelling the sweat of her lover. However, such domestic and personal moments are invaded by FBI surveillance. Her poem, "I Laughed When I Wrote It (*Don't You Think It's Funny?*)" (1972), cataloged the events of government agents invading Giovanni's room of her own. The poem depicts a conversation held with two members of "the f.b.i." on her doorstep:

ms. giovanni you are getting to be quite important
people listen to what you have to say
i said nothing
we would like to have to give a different message
i said: gee are all you guys really shorter than hoover
they said:
it would be a patriotic gesture if you'd quit saying
you love rap brown and if you'd maybe give us some
leads
on what some of your friends are doing⁵⁸⁶

Published in *My House*, "I Laughed" does not fit the domestic themes and moods that run throughout the text. Thus, just as the agents bring federal power into her home, so her poems are interrupted by surveillance motifs. Not only does this poem depict FBI agents invading her space, breaking into her home without her knowledge, it reveals the significance of the Bureau tracking her written work, as the state fears the message her work disseminates to the public.

⁵⁸⁶ Nikki Giovanni, "I Laughed When I Wrote It (*Don't You Think It's Funny*) in *My House*, (New York, Quill Press, 1972), 59.

Rejecting the Bureau's "patriotic gesture," Giovanni's poem reveals how the Bureau labeled writers within the Black Arts Movement as anti-patriotic threats to the state.⁵⁸⁷ Showing how and why FBI surveillance has literally and figuratively occupied her private space, Giovanni's book of poetry ends with her title poem "My House," evoking tones of ownership: "I mean it's my house. And I want to fry pork chops/ and bake sweet potatoes/ and call them yams/ cause I run the kitchen...and this is my house..."⁵⁸⁸ Giovanni's compilation protects the physical space of her house where she has the freedom to do and create whatever she wants: both in her home and on the pages.

While carving out a space for herself to write and create, Giovanni's poetry also upholds community both formally and thematically, which contrasts Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to Canada*—works that centered the individual black man by way of the novelistic form indebted to the "realist legacy of individual characterization."⁵⁸⁹ Instead, Giovanni's "I Laughed" exemplifies the works of black women during the Black Arts Movement who turned to poetry to articulate a shared communal experience of lives lived under surveillance. As Dubey has persuasively shown, the "black aesthetic decree [of the 1960's and 1970's] declared that black art should address and affirm a unified black community, which motivated its privileging of certain literary forms over others. Drama and poetry were the preferred genres, for they facilitated direct oral communication between artist and audience."⁵⁹⁰ Even though the black woman, then, knows the importance of carving out a place for herself both literally and figuratively in the black nationalist movement, at the same time she still fights to support her black brother, refusing to

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid, 59.

⁵⁸⁸ Nikki Giovanni, "My House," in *My House*, (New York, Quill Press, 1972), 67-69.

⁵⁸⁹ Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*, 4.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid, 22.

provide “leads” to the FBI about what her “friends are doing,” and describing events within her home shared with family members, friends, and lovers.⁵⁹¹

Just as Giovanni’s space was invaded, so was Naylor’s. Slowly starting to notice that cars are following her, Naylor describes in first person narration that it was when “a man with brunette hair and a woman with shoulder-length fluffy brown hair, looked away attempting to hide their faces” that she realized that something was “amiss.”⁵⁹² Her “intuition was confirmed half an hour later” when she saw the same gold Honda following her home. This surveillance happened outside of the home, then it all but entered her sanctuary, when a “parade of cars” would “drive past [her] house.”⁵⁹³ While on a typical “busy day I would sit in my study and see one car every two or three hours,” Naylor now saw “three or four cars every hour and it was always the same pattern.”⁵⁹⁴ Furthermore, those tracking Naylor move into the house next door and plan a noise campaign, while coming “onto the property and circling the house” and in some instances, breaking into the house itself without her foreknowledge.⁵⁹⁵ Just as Giovanni’s poetry had warned future black women writers, the vulnerability of Naylor’s domestic space completely destroys her private sanctuary:

⁵⁹¹ Giovanni, “I Laughed When I Wrote It (Don’t You Think It’s Funny) in *My House*, (New York, Quill Press, 192), 59.

⁵⁹² Naylor, 1996, 34.

⁵⁹³ Ibid, 42.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ The Patriot Act allows surveillance to occur over American citizens without their knowledge. Previously, inhabitants who were the subject of a search warrant would be made cognizant of the search and seizure of their property. However, now Americans live under an era where the “use of ‘sneak and peek,’ warrants, which “only take place when the inhabitants are away from the site to be searched” and “the entry, search, and property taken by the authorities is handled in a secret manner” is common practice. Consequently, individuals will never know about the invasions to their privacy. See Mary WS Wong, “Electronic Surveillance and Privacy in the United States After September 11 2001: The USA Patriot Act” and Cary Stacy Smith, *The Patriot Act: Issues and Controversies*.

Whoever the new people were, they were certainly noisy. I was out in my garden staking the tomatoes, when a whole half-day of hammering began. It sounded like they were building a new wing on the house...When it wasn't the sound of mowing, there was some sort of chainsaw going. Going out for a peaceful drive was out of the question, because I had to deal with the cars zinging by in my ears and the blinking brake lights in front of me. I only went out when I absolutely had to. I was surrounded. Whenever I turned they were there to manipulate my environment. Slowly, each day, they were closing in.⁵⁹⁶

With surveillance techniques now completely manipulating Naylor's environment, what was once her place of solace, her space of her own where she could add to the garden of her "mothers," is destroyed. Ending the *künstlerroman* story-arch with an in-depth description of her life under surveillance, Gloria Naylor reveals that to be black, and to be an artist, is to live a life under federal surveillance.

VII. An Open Book: Democratic surveillance within Naylor's Autobiographical Mode

But why, exactly, does Gloria Naylor fall under FBI surveillance? The methods agents used while tailing or interrogating Naylor parallel the changes and advances made by the Patriot Act, which now granted federal authorities the power to search without warrants and utilize 21st-century technologies. While this book is set in 1996, years prior to the patriot act, it was published in 2004, only three years after the patriot act was authorized. As Raynaud has claimed, "1996 is a courageous and politically committed book that came out in the post-9/11 climate of mistrust heightened by the attacks on civil liberties induced by the adoption of the Patriot Act... Her isolated case could then be seen as the result of government officials' abuse of the extended powers given them by the law" in the Post-9/11 era.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁶ Naylor, 62.

⁵⁹⁷ Raynaud, 148-149.

What commenced surveillance over Naylor was not just that the state had scripted her as a radical writer, but that her neighbor Eunice, who represents the American population who experienced a heightened fear of the Islamic faith following 9/11, accuses her of hate crimes associated with the Nation of Islam.⁵⁹⁸ Naylor, then, does not at first fall under surveillance by the state, but by her Jewish neighbor who fears Islamic peoples, a fear heightened by the media portrayal in the aftermath of 9/11. Eunice therefore claims that, “she hates me...Because I’m a Jew,” assuming that the conflicts between those of the Muslim and Jewish faiths might apply to their neighborly relationship. Surveillance over Naylor therefore begins due to her racial allegiance with the black community’s relationship to the Nation of Islam. Like Giovanni who supports black men fighting for Civil Rights, Naylor had previously applauded the men who organized the Million Man March, a gathering of African American men that occurred on October 16, 1995. Called for by Louis Farrakhan, and organized by the National African American Leadership Summit, the Nation of Islam, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), these groups set out to “convey to the world a vastly different picture of the Black male” and to unite in self-defense against the social problems still plaguing the African American community. Naylor summarizes the event:

I spoke about the strength of black women but reminded the audience that we could never look at the black woman without giving credit to the contribution of black men. The Million Man March had just taken place that precious October, and it was an event that moved me deeply. The sight of hundreds of thousands of black men brought back memories of my father, who had died in 1993.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁸ See Brigitte Nacos’s *Fueling Our Fears: Stereotyping, Media Coverage, and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans* and Amaney Jamal’s *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, 31.

Following her speech, a write up was published in *The Beaufort Gazette* and Naylor thought that upon seeing her involvement in the community, her neighbors would see beyond the problems they had between them, claiming, “*Maybe now some of my neighbors will have second thoughts about the gossip going around... Yeah, I thought, let them see this.*”⁶⁰⁰ However, Eunice, as a white woman cannot see beyond her own social position and understand why a black woman would choose to unify with these black men based on race, a common pitfall of white women who argued that their black sister should unite with them in a shared battle of feminism instead. Eunice, who has never felt kinship in a united cause with her brother, as “he has never supported her,” perhaps lacks empathy to understand how Naylor feels about the men at the march.⁶⁰¹ Instead, Eunice sees Naylor’s support of black men who associated with the Nation of Islam as a threat. Sending the article to her brother, Dick Simon, who works as an investigator at the NSA, Eunice highlighted the phrase, “she cried when seeing the Million Man March.”⁶⁰² The cultural differences are what drives Simon to raise surveillance over Naylor, as he reflects, “Eunice had never told him she was black...Could there be something to what Eunice was saying?”⁶⁰³

Naylor’s race and her alliance with the Nation of Islam are what brought her under government surveillance. Classifying her as a “sympathizer of the nation of Islam and Louis Farrakhan,” even though he understands that Naylor never made contact with the Black Muslims (who had a chapter in Beaufort county), Simon requests “book reports” on Naylor’s work,

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, 32.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, 20.

⁶⁰² Ibid, 32

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

creating a literary file similar to the FBI files on Afro-modern writers explored earlier in *Secret Selves*.⁶⁰⁴ Simon analyzes the book reports:

the only red flag he had seen was a novel called *Bailey's Café*. She had written about an Ethiopian Jew, a Russian Jew, and the founding of the state of Israel. 'A sympathetic portrait.' The report had said. That remained to be seen...It also said that she criticized Israel for not admitting Ethiopian Jews when the state was first founded. What right did she have to criticize Israel at all?⁶⁰⁵

Having drawn from the "book report" that she was a "subversive and anti-Semite" even though he admits that all he had was "a botched surveillance," Simon decides to go forth with the surveillance, getting Rabi Geller enlisted in the cause because "the sight of all those black men, assembled on behalf of Louis Farrakhan, had sent a chill up his spine."⁶⁰⁶

Now that Naylor is fully under government surveillance, the text uses third person omniscient narration to reveal how each character approaches his or her surveillance over Naylor. To that end, the text also reveals that the motives driving surveillance on the private (Eunice), local (Deputy Sheriff Miller) and federal (Dick Simon) levels are, simply, that Naylor is black and a writer. Devising a plan to get rid of Naylor, Eunice gives the state probable cause to enact a search. Calling the deputy, and depicted in third person omniscient narration, Eunice briefly becomes the narrative authority on what occurs at the Naylor house: "She wants to report some irregularities that are happening in the house across the road from her. She can't put her finger on it, but it seems like there are drugs involved. How does she know that? Well, cars are always stopping there from morning to night, and she's seen boxes being unloaded after midnight."⁶⁰⁷ Scripting a narrative that would give Deputy Sherriff Miller probable cause, the

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, 37.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, 41.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, 20.

sheriff looks into it because he was “obligated to check out any suspicion of drug dealing.”⁶⁰⁸ The narration quickly shifts focalization through the sheriff’s consciousness as “he turns to his computer and runs the name she had given him...It comes up with nothing...the next day he does a little discrete investigation of the woman....the description he gets of the woman peaks his interests. She’s a writer. She’s black. And she wears dreadlocks. Some kind of radical.”⁶⁰⁹ While the post-9/11 Patriot Act sought not to racially discriminate, obviously it was the description of Naylor’s race that allowed the sheriff to turn this case over to the drug enforcement agency. Moreover, he does so because he knows that they’ve been known to do a little “unofficial snooping around before going back to a place with a search warrant,” mirroring the sneak and peak warrants, the government’s right to search without the subject’s knowledge, brought about by the Patriot Act.

Interestingly, it is Naylor’s skill as a writer that allows her to detect the surveillance that she is under. Reading detectives and agents just as she would read characters in a novel, Naylor is able to discover people tracking her. Having noticed, “several artificial moves” performed by a couple in public, as they “did not have the body language of people so taken with each other that they kiss publicly,” and having tracked particular cars circling her house, Naylor is able to write a letter to her attorney, stating, I have not “gone to the police about this matter because I have no definite proof. But what I do have are my powers of observation, honed by over seventeen years of being a writer.”⁶¹⁰ It is therefore, the act of writing that allows Naylor to be able to fight against the surveillance. Moreover, it is also her reputation as a writer that grants Naylor (the character) narrative authority. Thus the reader comes to trust her narration in autobiographical moments

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, 21.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, 44.

that are anchored in events the reader has already experienced outside of the story world, for as Naylor mentions, the semester she enrolled in Yale, she began writing her celebrated novel *Women of Brewster Place* and she tells us in her first hand autobiographical account that it was “while I was doing research for my third novel, *Mama Day*, that I discovered St. Helena.”⁶¹¹

By establishing herself as an authoritative and trustworthy source, Naylor is able to invert the role of the detective, as we have also noted in Reed’s texts, to reveal the affective disruptions of the subject under surveillance. Placing herself, the writer, at the center of a detective narrative, allows *1996* to engage with the metafictional detective narrative similar to Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to Canada*. Just as Reed’s detective fiction inverted the form to articulate the subjectivity of the artist-protagonist under suspicion, Naylor does the same. Differing from the third person omniscient narrations of those who surveil Naylor, the text shifts to provide Gloria Naylor’s first-person account and understanding of the surveillance.

However, scholars have claimed that the fictional aspects of the detectives’ narratives point to the constructedness of the autobiographical that would then depict Naylor as an untrustworthy narrator and leave the reader questioning if surveillance actually took place. Even still, these scholars miss that the form of the novel is not meant to contaminate the autobiographical with the fictional, but to create a paranoid mood that parallels the mind of a writer under surveillance:

One day I returned from Walmart and noticed that my front door was unlocked. I had left a carpenter in the house replacing the doors to my kitchen cabinets while I made a quick run to town. Perhaps he had forgotten to turn the latch and slam the door to lock it...Nothing was missing, but I noticed that someone had been tampering with a box of garden seeds I’d left on the sun porch...A quick tour of the house led me to discover a small red and white flashlight left on the mantle of the fireplace on the living room. My

⁶¹¹ Ibid, 9.

concern deepened. Why on earth would anyone look up my fireplace?... There was insulation lying on the floor under the trap door to the attic. I had not been up in that attic for weeks, but someone else had. The question would plague me several times in the coming months. Why?...at the edge of my asparagus bed was a human footprint...who could have been walking in my garden...And again, why?⁶¹²

Reading the physical clues in an enclosed crime scene (her home), Naylor becomes both the subject and the detective of her surveillance plot. While her thought process begins with the conditional statements that begin with, “Perhaps,” eventually Naylor stops looking to dismiss narratives of surveillance with commonplace occurrences in daily life, like the carpenter leaving the door open, and becomes obsessed with the reoccurring question of “why” in almost every clue she observes. Consequently, the fictional moments that others claim point to the constructedness of the autobiographical, do not undermine Naylor’s first person narration, but are crafted as examples of the narrative that her paranoid mind builds to answer the “why”—a real experience to the paranoid mind.

At first, such paranoia forced Naylor to abandon writing. A similar problem for other artist-protagonists *Secret Selves* has studied, Naylor reveals that it was not just the fact that the detectives would read her writing, but that the detectives hacking her computer could know “my work and above all, my thoughts, and someone was helping themselves to it...I had to accept that every thought I wrote down was possibly monitored.”⁶¹³ Thus by invading her personal space the detectives also invaded her mental space, which allowed her to write. Once the undercover detectives decide to play, “poison the garden,” and invade Naylor’s space and sanctuary—the garden which we’ve established above, alludes to her writing—then surveillance begins to affect her literary process: not only were they able to “manipulate my environment. Slowly, each day,

⁶¹² Naylor, 22-23.

⁶¹³ Ibid, 54 and 99.

they were closing in.”⁶¹⁴ So her mind becomes obsessed with surveillance: Naylor had “entered their world” and even though she had her “research material all lined up [she] would read one or two pages and [her] mind would drift. Always back to the surveillance.”⁶¹⁵ As the novel progresses, Naylor’s inability to write becomes more egregious, yet without the stability writing provides her, Naylor’s interiority begins to crumble, leaving her to flee her garden and head back to the city for refuge.

Once in New York, technology that mirrors the very form Reed presented as a possible method to escape surveillance, is used instead to bind or program Naylor’s mentality not just to halt her writing but to isolate and erase herself from society. When Simon reports that “Gloria Naylor is going to write a book about her experience this past year” he asserts that “now they could use their technology to stop her.”⁶¹⁶ Noting that “she’s weathered the [surveillance] operation pretty well. There are some signs of depression, but nothing major,” the detectives seek technology to drive Naylor completely mad in order to stop her mind from producing a book, as Simon gives orders that “she is not, under any circumstances, to be given a clear enough head to plan, shape, or execute the writing of this book about them, or any book about anybody.”⁶¹⁷ Therefore the detectives, who have mastered hacking into Naylor’s computer and phonelines are given technology that allows them to read and program Naylor’s mind:

The most advanced technology in the world. We’ve known for a couple of decades that sound can be produced in someone’s head by radiating it with microwaves...the program translates key strokes into bursts of microwaves that bypass the ears and hit the auditory section of the brain, you are in effect, speaking directly to the brain...For all the target

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, 62.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, 123.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, 124-125.

knows, she's just had a fleeting thought that originated within her... she'll be begging friends to recommend a good psychiatrist.⁶¹⁸

Employing this technology, the detectives embed horrible thoughts into her mind such as, "I am the worst bitch in the world. I want to kill myself" and "I hate jews" and "I hope I die in my sleep."⁶¹⁹ Such thoughts reproduce the hateful thoughts the state hoped to get from their surveillance, and threaten to harm Naylor, by inducing her suicidal thoughts. In this way the death investigated in the metaphysical detective narrative becomes, in the narrative of cyber-surveillance, the narrator's loss of herself on account of surveillance. Now that the state has "unlocked the last frontier where secrets can be kept—within the human mind," they have complete control over radical artists. This is why Naylor asserts that "her life was no longer mine."⁶²⁰

VII. Conclusion: A Return to the Novel

Reed's Black Arts Movement novels *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to Canada* may have initially celebrated cyber-technology as a means to escape surveillance that the artist finds invasive and oppressive. Post 9/11 American literature, written after federal law enforcement and national security agencies were given expanded powers to breach not just the private physical spaces of a suspect, but also to access through the uses of cyber-technology a suspect's private expressions, fantasies, and creations—the entire private domain, rejects such technology. Rejecting technology, Naylor, who had convinced herself that she had schizophrenia, or was going mad due to the surveillance of her life, returns to the written word for healing. Attempting to bring order to the space under surveillance, the frustrated detective, seeks the advice of a

⁶¹⁸ Ibid, 98.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, 99.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, 99 and 112.

psychologist. He reminds Naylor: “you’re a writer . . . so cut off the television and write.”⁶²¹

Doing so, she begins the research for her project, and finds in the library the only place she could seek refuge:

As soon as I walked through those doors, I felt my head clearing up. I thought about how life can bring you full circle. As a child I used the library for a refuge... Here I was again, using it as a refuge, but this time to claim my own world back. What it boiled down to was that as a writer, I thought for a living. Now those thoughts were under attack.⁶²²

Giving life to her story through written word—the one thing that the NSA sought to stop—is exactly what Naylor must do to heal, as had African American women writers who had come before her. Thus interacting with the library’s thousands of books, Naylor “felt like I was getting out of slavery and moving towards freedom.”⁶²³ The novel’s closing thus imagines Naylor sitting down to write the fictionalized novel that we, the reader, have just read. Reflecting on the African American women who came before her, she speculates that, “there must have been nightmares too...but they wrote through it all.”⁶²⁴ Anchored in a rich and historical tradition of black women overcoming oppression, Naylor forces herself to write: “I only had to pick it up and start, one sentence a day. If I could manage just one sentence a day, then I wasn’t alone and I wasn’t worthless. It didn’t matter how many were against me... If they couldn’t keep me from that one sentence, I had won.”⁶²⁵ Claiming in an interview that writing *1996* was “catharsis,” Naylor’s narrative reveals how the written word heals the ailments of a life lived under surveillance.⁶²⁶

⁶²¹ Ibid, 107.

⁶²² Ibid, 121.

⁶²³ Ibid, 127.

⁶²⁴ Ibid, 128.

⁶²⁵ Ibid, 128-129.

⁶²⁶ Ed Gordon, “1996: Under the Watchful Eye of the Government,” *NPR Politics Podcast*, January 23 2006.

African American postmodern detective fiction—as seen through the works of Reed and Naylor—uses the genre not just to articulate life as an artist under federal surveillance, but to invert the form’s formulas and focalize through the target, allowing the reader to focus not on the act of detection, but on the detrimental effects of detection and surveillance. Exemplified through the postmodern works of Amiri Baraka, Ishmael Reed, Nikki Giovanni, and Gloria Naylor, these African American authors use their writing to articulate and combat the symptoms of being placed under federal investigation. Drawing such a conclusion at *Secret Selves*’ end exposes key shifts within the African American literary tradition: from early Afro-modern writers who embedded intricately coded narratives of surveillance in their fictions, to postmodern articulations of those experiences conveyed openly through autobiographical writings, as fictional characters are now named after authors who experienced such surveillance. Through such a shift these writers’ lives “become, no pun intended, an open book” to produce testimony and evidence against the FBI’s decades of wrongdoings. In short, they would turn acts of democratic surveillance back against the invasive state.⁶²⁷

This is why writers such as Naylor returned to the semi-autobiographical novel—the genre by which the slave narrative and African American literary tradition was built—following the Black Arts Movement, which preferred oral forms. *1996* goes beyond providing Naylor’s testimony as a victim of surveillance by including an addendum to the text: forty pages of detailed non-fictional information on government conspiracy theories and the state’s uses of

⁶²⁷ See Torin Monahan’s “Surveillance as Governance: Social Inequality and the Pursuit of Democratic Surveillance,” which claims that “democratic surveillance implies intentionally harnessing the control functions of surveillance for social ends of fairness, justice, and equality...[it] involves reprogramming socio-technical codes to encourage transparency, openness, participation, and accountability to produce new systems and configurations of experts and users, subjects and objects.”

technology to probe the lives of others. In sum, one citizen's indictment of surveillance. Naylor's blending of genres, reveals how the written word is upheld simply but profoundly in the ways that writing shares knowledge and means of knowing with others. Similarly, Amiri Baraka's 2003 poem "Somebody Blew Up America," written in response to the September 11th attacks, reveals the need to listen to the stories of these victims in a series of whodunit questions.⁶²⁸ A ten page poem in his poetry compilation, the speaker of Baraka's poem leaves out the role of the detective that he previously harangued in "Three Movements and a Coda," and focuses on questioning who has terrorized humankind throughout space and time, holding the accused responsible:

Who the biggest terrorist
Who change the Bible
Who Killed the most people
Who do the most evil
Who don't worry about survival...⁶²⁹

⁶²⁸ Erica Edwards, "Of Cain and Abel: African-American Literature and the Problem of Inheritance after 9/11." *American Literary History* 25, no. 1 (2013): 197.

⁶²⁹ Amiri Baraka, "Somebody Blew Up America" in *Somebody Blew Up America & Other Poems*, (Philipsburg: House of Nehisi Publishers, 2003), 41-50.

EPILOGUE

Now at the close of *Secret Selves: Surveillance and Twentieth-Century African American Literature*, we can understand the pervasive ways that federal surveillance plagued both the lives and texts of black writers throughout the Twentieth-Century. In doing so, this project exposes how African American literature is unique in the way that no other subfield in American literary history has grappled with federal oversight, an issue that comes to light at the intersections of authorship, narrative, and surveillance. It is through the African American *künstlerroman* that these concerns connect, shedding light on the understudied effects of government oversight on black texts. By recrafting the African American *künstlerroman*—a genre that birthed the African American literary tradition—these writers, namely Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Childress, Ishmael Reed, and Gloria Naylor, embedded codes into their works that conceal personal details from Bureau agents and simultaneously articulate a new narrative: that to be black and to be an artist was to live a precarious life under surveillance. Excavating and applying evidence from these writers' FBI files and personal archives, *Secret Selves* exposes how such coded articulations of the self distinctly altered the African American literary tradition.

In revealing how federal surveillance over African American literature changed the forms, themes, and genres that black writers embraced, this project brings to the forefront of American literary history a new subgenre: the surveillance narrative. In these texts, we can see that attributes such as the artist-character, self-consciousness, paranoia, the semi-

autobiographical mode, and the celebration of community that shelters the artist-character and fights with him against surveillance, are characteristics innate to not only the surveillance narrative, but also the wider African American literary tradition.

With that realization, this dissertation ultimately argues that many attributes inherent to the African American literary tradition are a result of surveillance. Such a conclusion at the project's end opens up avenues for future research. To support such an argument, this project must go back to the Nineteenth-Century. While my archival work with FBI files and time spent in writers' personal papers has allowed my dissertation to disclose the ways that black writers altered their texts to embed narratives of artists' lives under surveillance, the book-project demands a larger contextualization within the history of African American literature and the tradition's earliest texts. By crafting a preceding section that takes up Nineteenth-Century slave narratives, such as those written by Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Henry Bibb, Josiah Henson, William Wells Brown, and Ellen and William Craft, *Secret Selves* will be able to show that the constant surveillance these writers experienced on a daily basis by white overseers evolved into the state sanctioned surveillance this dissertation reveals.

Doing so, *Secret Selves* will return to the ways that African American writers have always reckoned literacy as dangerous. One of the scenes still vivid in my mind from my earliest classes in African American literature is Frederick Douglass's heartbreak when Mrs. Auld refuses to continue their reading lessons. Mr. Auld had insisted that his wife's lessons end, exhibiting an anxiety about black men learning to read and write that reflected the fears of white plantation owners of the times. If a slave could read and write, could he also draft counterfeit passes in order to escape the plantation or organize a rebellion? As Douglass's narrative portrays, slaves caught reading were often physically punished. So while prominent scholars of the field—

namely Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Robert B. Stepto—have shown how the self-conscious African American literary tradition has centralized itself around reading and writing, a trope that attested to the slave’s “fitness for freedom,” and celebrated the written word as a mode to gain political agency, *Secret Selves* illustrates that literature was still a mode to fear and will continue to look even further back to the nineteenth-century to do so.⁶³⁰

The authors of slave narratives produced texts that self-consciously grappled with what it meant to be black, and to use literary prowess needed to posit their life stories on the page. They also unknowingly anchored the African American literary tradition in the genre of the *künstlerroman*—the portrait of the life of the artist. While the traditional European depiction of the artist-character “traces the development of the author (or that of an imagined character like the author) from childhood to maturity” to depict “the struggles of a sensitive, artistic child to escape the misunderstandings about bourgeois attitudes of his family and youthful acquaintances,” Madelyn Jablon calls us to redefine the African American *künstlerroman* to include artist-characters who “demonstrate [artistic] inclinations that are stifled by their limited freedom.”⁶³¹ To that end, many Nineteenth-Century slave narratives and autobiographies can be seen as part of the *künstlerroman* genre, even though the writer may not have seen himself as artist. As expected, the African American artist-protagonist found within the slave narrative

⁶³⁰ See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 1979.

⁶³¹ Madelyn Jablon, *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 56-57 and 28.

struggles to learn how to express himself, but he also faces a problem unique to the African American *künstlerroman* genre: surveillance over himself and his work.

Of course, *Secret Selves* has discussed not just the themes found within surveillance narratives, but the forms that black writers used to articulate such narratives. Having shown that black male writers in the first half of the century drew on the novel to communicate a sole black protagonist on the run from state oversight, and then African American women writers of the Cold War era turned to oral modes such as poetry and drama to articulate a more communal experience and unite with their black audience to fight against such struggles, *Secret Selves* closes with a return not only to the novel form, but to the auto-biographical novel. To that end, we can understand that the surveillance narrative is a highly political form, seeking to provide written testimony against the state for its wrongdoings. In a similar way that the slave narrative sought to document the horrors of a life enslaved. Such a conclusion continues to raise questions about the lines parsing fiction and non-fiction, the work of putting one's self on the page, and authenticity in an inauthentic age—topics that continue to interest me.

With that being said, while Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Childress, Ishmael Reed, and Gloria Naylor have been excellent case studies for this project, there are still many more texts in which to explore how federal surveillance impacted the African American literary tradition. *Künstlerroman* narratives that stand out, include but are not limited to: W.E.B. DuBois's *The Dark Princess*, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* and *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, Jesse Fauset's *Plum Bun*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and many others. I look forward to exploring the narratives of surveillance these texts tell, a step to more thoroughly understand the pervasive surveillance that plagued the lives and works of black writers.

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