

THE UNITED STATES SOUTH AND LITERARY STUDIES DURING THE COLD WAR

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2011

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To Jessica Peek Dominy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Coming from rural Georgia, I speak with an accent that once led a student of mine to interrupt one of my lectures with the question, “I’m sorry, but where are you *from*?” For this reason and others, I did not see myself writing a dissertation focusing on southern literature. While I enjoyed reading southern authors, as a new graduate student actually researching and writing about them did not cross my mind right away. I suppose subconsciously I worried that if I pursued its study I would become the real-life walking, talking stereotype of the southern scholar, accent and all. However, the community of scholars that I am grateful to be a part of at the University of Florida helped me to see a place where I could make a needed, and what I hope is, a useful intervention in southern studies. I thank my advisor, Susan Hegeman, for being an encouraging and supportive teacher. She provided valuable feedback from our very first conversations about potential dissertation projects and pointed me in the new directions southern studies is taking. Also helpful early in the project was Phillip Wegner, one of my readers, whose seminar first got me thinking a lot about late modernism. I also thank Marsha Bryant and William Link, also readers on my committee, for taking an interest in my project and providing their feedback on it at various stages of the process.

My research in the Lillian Smith Papers for this project was my first foray into archival research. Given the sheer amount of material in the Smith collection, half the battle was determining the best strategy for working my way through items ranging from invoices to personal correspondence. Florence Turcotte of the Department of Special and Area Studies Collections in the Smathers Libraries here at the University of Florida

aided in that strategizing. She also provided advice on working with and the citing the collection; I thank her for her assistance.

Moreover, my studies in graduate school and work on this particular project have been supported by individuals who have been caring, reassuring colleagues and even better friends. Some have read drafts of chapters; many have talked with me about my project and shared professional advice; and most have had to listen while I droned endlessly about it. I owe deepest thanks to Wesley Beal, Amber Pearson, Gordon Johnston, Christina Van Houten, Patrick McHenry, Regina Martin, Mike Mayne, David Austin, Sara Austin, Jim Liner, and David Davis.

In what I am sure was a burdensome labor of love, my brother, Kyle, proofread the first complete drafts of this project as I was preparing it for defense. I thank him and his wife, Lana, for their love and the time they spent helping to make this project better. I also thank my parents, Tom and Karen, who put a book in my hand from an early age. It probably seems to them that I never put it down, but it is because of their cultivation of my curiosity about words and language that my life has taken the course it has. I owe many thanks, as well, to my in-laws, Leon, Sandy, Eric, and Melanie, for their support and interest in my project, which they have lovingly termed “the white pages.”

My greatest debt of gratitude is owed to Jessica: my best friend, my partner, my fellow traveler—no one has been more supportive of my career. I thank her for allowing this project to be a sojourn in the voyage we share together. I look forward to many more adventures with her.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKM	<i>All the King's Men</i> by Robert Penn Warren
CS	<i>The Complete Stories</i> by Flannery O'Connor
ID	<i>Intruder in the Dust</i> by William Faulkner
IM	<i>Invisible Man</i> by Ralph Ellison
LR	<i>Love in the Ruins</i> by Walker Percy
M	<i>Meridian</i> by Alice Walker
MM	<i>Mystery and Manners</i> by Flannery O'Connor
SP	The Lillian Smith Papers. Department of Special and Area Studies Collections. George A. Smathers Libraries. University of Florida. Gainesville.

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2011

Chair: Susan Hegeman

Major: English

This dissertation argues that Southern literature as an academic discipline begins as a direct result of the political, social, and cultural contexts of the United States' newfound hegemony in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It considers how southern writers' concerns for political issues—local and global—occur in their writing as concerns for traditional values and morals. These writers also frequently addressed poverty and racism, two weighty flaws of American society. These authors' literary expressions match the terminology of intellectuals, who were framing the tenets of American democracy as a system of values. These authors' southern settings and themes allow their work serve a paradoxical purpose. At once these works compartmentalize America's social ills to a single region of the country while universalizing the notion of racism and poverty as moral problems best dealt with by intellectuals, not political problems under the purview of governments, national or otherwise.

To argue this account of southern literature's development as a formal, institutionalized study, this project addresses through close reading and contextualization a variety of literary texts—periodicals, essays, novels, and short

stories—from the 1940s to the early 1970s. Rather than focusing on how these texts are portrayals of the US South, I explore how these authors' representations of political anxieties related to communism, totalitarianism, racism, and poverty reflect their political sympathies and how their work is compatible with or challenges late modernist aesthetics. The consequences can be either canonicity or obscurity. This project's consideration of both literary texts and literary criticism serves to connect the functions of ideology with the ways intellectuals have thought about literature. Understanding southern literature through this context is significant because it clarifies the political function of literature in the mid-twentieth century United States; it also reveals that the southern canon began as the American literary canon, suggesting the US South as a cultural unit has little meaning as connected to geography and is a product of the Cold War.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: WE HAVE NEVER BEEN SOUTHERN

In *The Southern Mystique* (1964) historian Howard Zinn writes about segregation and racism in the United States South, demonizing the politicians and business leaders who ceaselessly work to preserve the system he witnessed first-hand in the seven years he spent working at Spelman College. He identifies a “southern mystique,” a special quality within white southern prejudice that “has become a canon of American thought that is deep in our consciousness and our literature” (6). Near the end of his book, he concludes that in its racially motivated politics, nativism, and conservatism, the South is “really the essence of the nation.” He goes on, claiming “Those very qualities long attributed to the South as special possessions are, in truth, *American* qualities, and the nation reacts emotionally to the South precisely because it subconsciously recognizes itself there” (218).

Essentially, Zinn suggests a conservative identity for America during the Cold War that has foundations in the social mores of the US South. The project of this dissertation is to determine the role of literature and literary studies in this transformation. In *The United States South and Literary Studies During the Cold War*, I offer an intervention in the fields of southern literary studies and the study of American Cold War literature in general by proposing that the institutionalized, formalized study of United States Southern literature and subsequent conventional understandings of the South and its literature are possible only because of the peculiar conditions of American victory in the Second World War and the dawn of the Cold War. I argue that southern literature as an academic discipline and its formal practice among writers begins as a direct result of the political, social, and cultural contexts of the United States’ newfound

hegemony in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and I suggest that the ultimate ramifications of the codification of southern literary traits and values is the emergence of a kind of post-South—a new conservative cultural identity with roots in the ideals prized most by Cold War intellectuals as American ones, but divested of geographical place.

The project takes as its guideposts two historical contexts of the postwar period, both with domestic and international implications for the success of what I will call American-style democracy marked by firm commitments to a consumer-capitalist economic system. The first of these is the compulsion among American intellectuals to define the parameters of liberalism and cleanse communism and other undesirable politics from all corners of cultural production. In *American Fiction in the Cold War* (1991), Thomas Hill Schaub traces this cleansing back to a panic among historians and literary critics in the United States that the leftist leanings of the previous decades led to the totalitarian regimes in Europe and that the same could happen in their own country. “The new liberalism sought to define an anticommunism that was still liberal, but this was a high-wire act difficult to perform at a time when such distinctions seemed overly subtle to most citizens,” Schaub writes (8). Part of the high-wire act, he details, is a greater suspicion among intellectuals of the proliferation of mass culture, who saw it as part of the method by which the populations of the former Axis countries came to accept fascism, and consequently a more guarded attitude about what counts for serious art and what does not (15-18). The result becomes a closely protected liberalism at the center of American democracy, to which I will refer through out my project as the “vital center.” I borrow the term from Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., who coined it in 1949 with the title of an article in the *New York Times Magazine* and a book published the same

year expanding on the article, *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*. Both works expound upon the kind of politics required to steer the United States clear of totalitarianism. Hope lies in neither a communist left nor a fascist right, Schlesinger argues, but

in the revival of the Center in the triumph of those who believe deeply in civil liberties, in constitutional processes, and in the democratic determination of political and economic policies. And, in direct consequence, the main target of both totalitarian extremes must be the Center, the group which holds society together. Neither fascism nor communism can win so long as there remains a democratic middle way, which unites hopes of freedom and of economic abundance [...]. ("Not Right, Not Left, But a Vital Center" 47)

Such cultural vigilance was the only thing in Schlesinger and other Cold War intellectuals' estimations that could protect the American way of life from the threat of Soviet communism.

As the Cold War escalated, this rampant anticommunism appears in the world of literature and art as American artistic production becomes deployed as a weapon against communist culture. Among the best examples of this phenomenon come in the visual arts, effectively chronicled by art historian Serge Guilbaut in *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1983). His study explores how American intellectuals find through abstract expressionism and formalism in the visual arts what they deem a truly democratic art—a medium through which the nation's artistic and cultural hegemony can be asserted. Guilbaut identifies a de-Marxization of American artists and intellectuals in the late 1930s and 1940s that coincides with a turn to formalism in the visual and literary arts. In the American context, of course, communism was one of the key unsavory elements to be avoided. Political leaders and scholars alike required a democratic art exemplifying the great values of the West, though not seeming political at

all in its content—an art, to use Guilbaut’s term, that was “apolitically political.” A milestone that Guilbaut points to is Clement Greenberg’s important 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” which defines each of its title terms for American intellectuals in a provocative manner. The purpose of the avant-garde is “to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence” (Greenberg 36). Avant-garde artists, Greenberg argues, sought the absolute in their creations, and consequently “Art for art’s sake’ and ‘pure poetry’ appear, and subject matter or content,”—political or otherwise—“becomes something to be avoided like a plague” (36). Kitsch, on the other hand, is artistic productions informed by the avant-garde, but dangerous because they had been processed through commercialization and aimed at the unwashed masses, who were particularly susceptible to its content. The popularity of such art in the US and other industrialized nations—especially Germany, Italy, and Russia—was distressing to Greenberg in 1939. “The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects,” he argues, suggesting this as the reason why true avant-garde art is suppressed in countries where dictators rule. “Kitsch keeps a dictator in closer contact with the ‘soul’ of the people,” Greenberg argues, suggesting the dangerous ideology that lowbrow artistic production can carry (47). In Greenberg’s dichotomy, the avant-garde and its emphasis on formalism and pure aesthetics are privileged over commercialized, popularized kitsch. Through this essay and other key figures and events, Guilbaut’s history of the visual arts identifies larger trends in American culture that deeply inform my argument regarding the institutionalization of southern literature.

Additionally, democratic ideals in art were not policed only by intellectuals of the vital center, but sometimes funded by the US Government. In *The Cultural Cold War* (1999), Frances Stonor Saunders traces publications in America and abroad back to CIA projects of cultural warfare, revealing the complicity of intellectuals in CIA projects. In it, she profiles the involvement of many important American intellectuals in US projects of domestic and international policy. Schlesinger himself, she reveals, worked in close contact with members of the Truman administration, sat on the Executive Committee of Radio Free Europe, and even knew of covert cultural warfare operations, believing that such efforts were necessary to counter similar Soviet efforts in Europe (91). Stonor's history focuses primarily on CIA funding of *Encounter* (a magazine published in the United Kingdom) through the 1950s and 1960s, but she also addresses the participation of American writers and thinkers in conferences and symposiums abroad and grant programs that were designed to promote free, American artistic innovation as a balance to Soviet aesthetics. Participants in such events included William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren, both key figures in the institutionalization of southern literature. Indeed, the *Kenyon Review*, a publication whose first twelve volumes I will examine in detail in my first chapter, benefited from some CIA funding after Robie Macauley took over its helm from founding editor, John Crowe Ransom, in 1959 (333-34).

The second historical context framing my study is the great challenge of racism and poverty in the US South to the proliferation of American democracy and capitalism abroad and attempts to reconcile the two. Thomas Borstelmann argues that race was simultaneously the greatest domestic and foreign policy problem facing the country in

The Cold War and the Color Line (2001). World War II honed what was already a sharp category of difference within the US. One hand, having the Japanese as an enemy in the Pacific theatre created a “racially coded conflict” that was not replicated in the European theatre. Borstelmann quotes a black resident of Harlem disgusted with American dependence upon racial difference: “All these radio announcers talking about yellow this, yellow that. Don’t hear them calling the Nazis white this, pink that. What the hell color do they think the Chinese are anyway!” (30). American soldiers, especially ones from the South, took this racial discord with them to their barracks in Europe. In one particularly telling anecdote Borstelmann shares, then General Dwight Eisenhower wrote in 1942 to Washington brass about frequent altercations among soldiers stationed in England that typically involved white soldiers attacking black soldiers who went out with white English women, who did not harbor the same anxieties about race that many Americans did. In his letter, Eisenhower—sympathizing with his men’s concerns—explained that these women were of “perfectly fine character,” but the white soldiers often deemed it “necessary to intervene even to the extent of using force, to let her know what she’s doing” (qtd. in Borstelmann 34). Jim Crow caused difficult problems for American foreign policy, especially in Africa, where the US attempted to foster American-style democracy while at the same time maintain good relations with the former colonies’ imperial oppressors in Europe. How could Africans count on America as a democratic ally when an entire population of African Americans lived under oppressive racial discrimination? It was the most damning contradiction in the American program, one identified by both Soviet diplomats and American writers

throughout the middle twentieth century, including southern writers from Lillian Smith to Alice Walker.

The pressures of the Cold War led Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower to willingly overlook racial inequality in the United States by not pressing any congressional action against Jim Crow in the South in order to maintain national unity against what they saw as the real evil: communism. How, then, do writers and thinkers in a country attempting to assert its new power on the world stage reconcile a democratic, vital center with racial and economic inequality within its own borders? This is where, I contend, a formalized construct of a southern literature emerges and serves a function similar to the one Guilbaut identifies for abstract expressionism.

Institutionalized southern literary studies serves to neutralize these setbacks for the American agenda by creating a space to contain these ills to it within an apolitically political art. It also accomplishes this task by cleansing racism of political implications in formalist interpretations of literature, ignoring historical and social contexts. Such heavy emphasis on literary representation in the construct of southern literature construes discrimination as a moral problem as opposed to a political one. Its portrayals, scholars argued, showed individuals dealing with the personal, moral struggles of discrimination, and to them such was the mark of great, wholesome, American, democratic art.

I am certainly not the first to argue that there is artificiality in the organization of a canon of southern literature. My work builds upon that of Michael Kreyling, who proposes in *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998) that southern literature is an invention of white masculinity and its particular notions of history and place. Using Kreyling as a springboard, I turn my attention instead to how southern writers and intellectuals'

concerns for political issues—local and global—occur in their writing as concerns for traditional values and morals. These writers also frequently addressed poverty and racism, two weighty flaws of American society. Their literary expressions match the terminology intellectuals, who were framing the tenets of American democracy as a system of universal values uninformed by politics. Indeed, in his work on southern intellectual history, Michael O'Brien identifies an insistence among New Critics—many of whom were southerners—that literature “embod[ies] a special and superior order of knowledge.” Furthermore, “To note that a literary production was caused by and aimed at local social issues seemed to diminish its universality” (161). In light of this, I claim that these authors’ southern settings and themes allow their work to serve a paradoxical purpose for literary critics during the Cold War. At once these works compartmentalize America’s social ills to a single region of the country while universalizing the notion of racism and poverty as moral problems best dealt with by intellectuals, not political problems under the purview of governments, national or otherwise. The organization of southern authors into a field of study serves as an academic amelioration of a serious domestic and foreign policy conundrum facing the United States.

There were other values in the emerging southern studies besides its compartmentalization that become useful to the vital center from the 1940s onward. One of these is the perennial, staunch anticommunism of the US South. *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), the Agrarian manifesto featuring essays by many New Critics—including John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Andrew Nelson Lytle—was nearly called *Tracts Against Communism* (Romine 31). Though Lillian Smith is the only one I address in my study, there were other progressive, southern intellectuals who

were stringently anticommunist, such as William Terry Couch and Ralph McGill, even though they lived in a region of the country that to the Communist Party and its fellow travellers in the late 1930s offered a perfect storm for a communist base: both a regimented system of economic and racial class within which to build a base.¹

Essentially, my project is a literary history of southern writers and the scholarship on their work that understands its coalescence into a formal literary study as a variety of late modernism. Frederic Jameson theorizes late modernism as a moment separate from modernism proper in *A Singular Modernity* (2002), calling it the “ideology of modernism,” that is, a codification of modernist features in art and literature with emphasis on formalism and the divorce of politics from art in the specifically American context of the Cold War. During the moment of modernism proper, artistic production held revolutionary power according to Jameson, who quotes Adorno’s point, “in order for the work of art to be purely and fully a work of art, it must be more than a work of art” (160). In other words, the purely aesthetic cannot be purely art unless it crosses over into other contexts and content, including revolutionary and utopian possibilities. The Cold War, however, closes those possibilities within the American context and the ideology of modernism emerges:

Politics must therefore now be carefully monitored, and new social impulses repressed or disciplined. These new forms of control are symbolically reenacted in later modernism, which transforms the older modernist experimentation into an arsenal of tried and true techniques, no longer striving after aesthetic totality or the systemic and Utopian metamorphosis of forms. (166)

¹ Daniel Joseph Singal describes Couch’s anticommunism to be so fervent that it leads him to have more or less a shouting match with Communist Party members at the April 1940 Southern Conference from Human Welfare over amending a resolution to condemn Soviet aggression as well as Nazi aggression (295-96).

The late modernist aesthetic is apolitically political and highly formalist. The Cold War provides a situation ripe for US cultural nationalism and imperialism, Jameson insists. The codification of a southern literary canon during this historical period is part of the late modernist moment that delineates certain artistic practices and values in an effort to protect the vital center.

Jameson also argues that New Criticism plays an important role in the advent of late modernism. His specific example is Wallace Stevens, whose “poetry can be seen as literature and as theory alike; his practice is essentially what he himself, along with the influential New Criticism, made theory of: which is to say that both Stevens and the New Criticism prepared the space in which an ideology of modernism could emerge” (168-69). The New Critics preparing this space considered historical and social contexts irrelevant to the meaning of texts. Any art or literature containing overtly political content they considered propaganda, not art—a repudiation of Adorno’s maxim about art. As stated earlier, many practitioners of New Criticism were southerners, but also important to my narrative about the formalization of southern literature is the fact that two of the figures I address in this project were university professors and full-time poets, fiction writers, essayists and critics: Ransom and Warren. Their work, as we shall see, functions in the manner Jameson describes for Stevens, as both art and theory of the southern literary studies, and I contend the same is true for other writers, too, especially William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor. The New Criticism is also thoroughly connected to the institutionalization of the formalized southern studies I posit. Their rise to power coincides with the spike in college enrollment caused by the GI Bill after World War II and the establishment of modern literature departments in the

United States. Successively, they established a canon consisting of formally sound and politically safe, democratic literature that they taught to the great influx of students, cementing their methodology as the dominant one in the academy.

My understanding of southern literature as a late modernist phenomenon may be a bit scandalous, at least in terms of more traditional views of southern literary history, but it is significant because it clarifies the political function of literature in the mid-twentieth century United States. Prior to the Second World War, the American South was portrayed in print and political culture as an economically and socially backwards place compared to the rest of the US. In 1938 Franklin Roosevelt characterized the poverty of the region as the gravest economic problem facing the country. His claim implies a perception within the American public sphere that the South was in need of rehabilitation, both the region and its literatures. The means and opportunity arrive with the formalist turn and the Cold War. Critics and authors sensed a need to resolve those contradictions that made the South seem a problem at a time when a distinctly American culture was required for unity at home and the promotion of American ideals abroad. In this light, southern canon began as an American literary canon; many important authors of the period who are candidates for inclusion in an anthology of American literature are just as likely to be included in one of southern literature. This suggests the US South as a cultural unit finally has little meaning as connected to geography and is merely a product of the Cold War. In the end, I argue that the logical conclusion to this late modernist canonization of southern literature and literary practices is the emergence of contemporary conservatism in the late 1960s, which serves as the foundation for today's marketable cultural identity of the South that is

actually an ideological identity. In short, the result of late modernism is not an America divided by North and South, but by blue states and red states.

I consider my project as participant in the New Southern Studies, a movement of the last decade and a half that addresses the South from perspectives other than the white male and seeks to understand the South in unexplored contexts, both local and global. At its core, the New Southern Studies questions the assumptions of the “old southern studies,” especially the myths and understood histories of the Old South, its traditions, and attitudes toward race and class. Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Dana D. Nelson first coined the term in 2001 in their preface to their edited special issue of *American Literature* themed “Violence, the Body, and ‘The South,’” and they use it to describe new works of scholarship that refresh the old discourses on southern studies by “reconfigure[ing] our familiar notions of Good (or desperately bad) Old Southern White Men telling stories on the porch, protecting white women, and being friends to the Negro” (232). In some instances, this has led scholars, such as Jonathan Smith, Deborah Cohn, and George Handley, to turn their attention to parallels and literary kinships between the US South and South America and the Caribbean—regions that also have a history of slavery and plantation culture.

However, my work has more in common with scholars such as Michael Kreyling, whose *Inventing Southern Literature* is one of the first real interrogations of how the “canon” of southern literature came to be. His work is important groundwork for my project. Another scholar informing my work is Leigh Anne Duck. In *The Nation’s Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (2006), she focuses on works in the modernist literary canon as they engage *de jure* segregation, arguing

that the US South was considered by the rest of the country as a region separated not by distance, but by time—a distinction that allowed the region to maintain the cultural tradition of segregation and racism, which cleared national leaders of any guilt for the region’s poverty and social woes during the Great Depression, yet still allowed the South to participate in the federal government and support its anti-communist agenda. I see my project as picking up during World War II, which is where Duck’s story ends.

To argue my account of southern literature’s development as a formal, institutionalized study I address through close reading and contextualization a variety of literary texts—periodicals, essays, novels, and short stories—from the 1930s to the 1970s. Rather than focusing on how these texts are portrayals the US South, I explore how these authors’ representations of political anxieties related to communism, totalitarianism, racism, and poverty reflect their political sympathies and how their work comports with or challenges late modernist aesthetics. The consequences can be either canonicity or obscurity. For example, I trace the earliest developments of late modernism through the ideological disagreement regarding the political function of regionalist and nationalist art in society between two publications of the 1940s: *South Today* (1936-1945) and selected volumes of *Kenyon Review* (1939-1950). The two publications have highly disparate programs; one publication ceases publication within ten years of its launch while the other went on to define the aesthetic sensibilities for an entire generation of critics and educated readers of literature. I also directly associate primary texts with trends in American intellectual culture, as I do through scrutinizing Robert Penn Warren’s winning of the Pulitzer Prize and Ralph Ellison’s winning of the National Book Award.

My narrative begins with my first chapter proper, “Reviewing the South,” and its investigation of how the nearly concurrent runs of Lillian Smith and Paula Snelling’s *South Today* and John Crowe Ransom’s *Kenyon Review* develop two possibilities for the formation of a southern literary canon at the moment of American involvement in World War II. The former is concerned with the political efficacy of literature that is more openly activist and concerned with addressing material conditions; the latter promotes a highly formalistic, apolitical one. This chapter features original archival research on *South Today* in the form of unpublished letters and documents from the Lillian Smith Papers, housed in the Department of Special and Area Studies Collections at the University of Florida’s George A. Smathers Libraries. Aside from presenting new material, the materials in the archive uncover Smith and Snelling’s editorial insights and their intents for the magazine. I conclude that the ideological conflict between *South Today* and *Kenyon Review* lays the groundwork for institutionalized literary canons in which later critics and authors will participate. It is *Kenyon* that succeeds, and its successful agenda has much to do with institutional backing.

The subsequent chapter, “Southern Studies as Area Studies,” considers William Faulkner’s meteoric rise in critical acclaim and suggests that the study of his work as model American and southern literature leads to an area studies of the US South. Formerly dismissed as overly violent, grotesque, and formally confusing, Faulkner’s critical reputation was transformed by Malcolm Cowley and other New Critics into that of an author who showcases individuals committed to democratic morality against an increasingly alienating modern world. Rather than simply rehashing the tale of Faulkner’s rise in scholarly esteem, I argue in this chapter that interest in Faulkner as

the cornerstone for a formalized study of southern literature is also the basis for a kind of area studies. Area studies emerged in universities after World War II as disciplines used to produce knowledge about global regions in order to inform policy decisions. Similarly, I argue that a southern area studies assists literary critics and intellectuals in determining how to best use the most savory values of southern culture and history to assert American cultural dominance. I turn to the first major collection of scholarship on southern literature, *Southern Renascence: The Literature of the Modern South* (1953), edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs, to scrutinize Faulkner's role in their formulations of a Southern literary canon parallel to an American canon. I also offer a reading of Faulkner's *Intruder In the Dust* (1948) as a novel participating in the late modernist turn.

Next follows "Late Modernist Aesthetics and the Function of Literary Prizes," which argues for Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* (1946) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) as representations of individual, moral responsibility for American democracy and their awards as an affirmation of those values. In this chapter, I make three distinct claims. First I suggest that the peculiar political developments of this pair of authors and friends—Warren was an ex-segregationist and Ellison an ex-Communist—indicate their commitments to the American vital center, and likewise, their protagonists ultimately give up on their political extremes. Second, I assert that both *All the King's Men* and *Invisible Man* in their winning of major literary prizes signal that these novels were key representations of American values for intellectuals protecting the vital center, and their solid status as canonical works sheds light on the late modernist canon formation. Finally, the novels' portrayals of distinctly southern political

conundrums universalize their protagonists' experiences as American experiences and therefore suggest a preservation of American values. This is momentous because it connects the southern area studies with the formation of American literary canons, suggesting that the movements are one in the same.

Two short stories by Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People" and "The Displaced Person," both included in her collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955) are the subject of "Writing the Universal as American," my fourth chapter proper. Drawing on prior work on O'Connor's fiction informed by cultural studies rather than the typical readings that focus on her Catholicism, I argue that while O'Connor's settings may be thoroughly southern, the political and moral sensibilities she addresses are just as thoroughly those identified by New Critics as important to nationalist pride necessary for maintenance of American-style democracy at home and abroad. Her work thereby unmoors such values from specifically southern geographic settings, enabling American citizens to identify with ideologies rather than regions.

A final chapter on Walker Percy's *Love In the Ruins* (1971) and Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), entitled, "Red States and Blue States," brings my narrative of the southern late modernist phenomenon to its logical conclusion. These two novels portray a post-South in which the category of "southern" as defined by geography has completely given way to one of sensibilities appropriated by the Cold War thinkers and the culture industry. Walker and Percy provide visions of the US South in which communities are measured by how well its values measure up against those serving the preservation of American-style democracy. Through a treatment of the specific historical contexts for these novels, the Civil Rights movement and Richard Nixon's

victory in the 1968 presidential election, I argue that these values, grouped together in the service of preserving the freedom and liberty of the vital center, morph into the modern conservatism that emerges at the end of 1960s, marked by the proliferation of a suburban politics informed by segregationist sentiments. The end is a nation no longer divided by North and South, but by political sensibilities: blue states and red states, located in every geographic corner of the country.

In his address at the award ceremony where he was presented with the National Book Award for *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison described his purpose in writing the novel: “Whenever we as Americans have faced serious crises we have returned to fundamentals; this, in brief, is what I have tried to do” (“Brave Words For a Startling Occasion”154). While I do not claim my project to be a response to any particular crisis in United States politics or the academy, my course with this project has not been a fundamental one. It attempts to revise outmoded narratives on the history of southern literary studies and offer ways to connect literature and the way it is thought about to ideology. It also strives to provide a novel angle by which to understand the literature and culture of the Cold War in America in general. It points toward an “end” of southern studies that is not an end, but rather a renewed and repurposed academic discipline that can offer new avenues of exploration for American studies. “A new Southern studies,” Baker and Nelson say, “welcomes intellectual, multiparicipant, and revisionary complexity. It welcomes the complication of old borders and terrains, wishes to construct and survey a new scholarly map of ‘The South.’” To borrow Ellison’s words, such, in brief, is what I have tried to do.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEWING THE SOUTH

In the winter of 1943, Lillian Smith and Paula Snelling had their hands full. Several subscribers to their magazine, *South Today*, were writing to the editors wondering where their current Autumn-Winter '42-'43 number was or if it was even to be published. In response to a 5 January 1943 postcard from Dr. H.C. Nixon of Vanderbilt University, Smith explained the unconventional circumstances facing the magazine:

[T]he KKK or Vigilantes are after us and the magazine. [...] A large number of copies were stolen and circulated among the most vicious groups of anti-Negro Georgians. They are urging [sic] the governor to have the legislature investigate us. [...] And lately there has been prowling around Clayton according to reports from local friends a GBI [Georgia Bureau of Investigation] man trying apparently to "get something" on the magazine's editors.¹

Another 4 February letter to a Dr. Lott indicates that officials in Atlanta are upset with the magazine because "no one in the South can say in print that Negroes should be called 'mister.'" This correspondence demonstrates that Smith and Snelling were fighting the battle against racial segregation on two fronts. The first was within the pages of the magazine that the pair had published since 1936; the second was a tactical war of political influence and bureaucracy in a Southern state not ready to give in to calls for true democracy despite the fact that the United States was currently involved in a world war and claiming to be on the side of democracy. Smith's writings and editorial policies pointing out the inconsistencies and evils of segregation were obviously a thorn in the side of conservative southern politicians. They also, in

¹ This 3 February 1943 letter is part of the Lillian Smith Papers in the Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, which contain the business, subscription, and general correspondence received by Smith and Snelling related to the *South Today*, along with reprints of articles written by Smith for the magazine, a complete run of issues, and other material related to the magazine and Smith's work at the Laurel Falls Camp. The quotations from letters written by Smith concerning the trouble caused by the KKK are from carbon copies lacking her signature.

retrospect, seem a far cry from what Smith and Snelling had in mind for their little magazine in the beginning. The pair hatched the idea as a diversion while caring for Smith's ailing mother, launching the magazine on funds raised from the subscriptions of interested friends. What began as a magazine intended as a welcoming climate for new writers in the South to test the waters of publication became, however, a magazine of social, economic, and political interests at the regional, national, and international levels garnering a circulation nearing ten thousand (Loveland 22). These expansive interests are best demonstrated at times in Smith's regular columns, adeptly entitled "Dope with Lime" (i.e., Coca-Cola with lime juice to cut the sweetness). She frequently drew direct parallels between the Jim Crow South and fascist systems of government as the political climate in Europe degenerated into war in the late 1930s and early '40s.² Their sharp criticisms of southern traditions forced them to clarify for their readers in the Spring 1943 number, "Yes, [the editors] are southern . . . as southern as cotton and sand, palmettoes [*sic*] and peanuts and watermelon." Smith and Snelling also took the opportunity to write a short little manifesto for themselves and their magazine:

And [the editors] believe that being southern is not incompatible with being humane, intelligent, sensitive, beauty-loving, and sane. Nor does love for one's own region preclude deep loyalties to all peoples—black, white, brown and yellow wherever they may live, in Dixie or elsewhere on the earth's surface. They are southerners who want to be good democratic world citizens also. ("yes. . . we are southern" 42)

Their statement of principles articulates directly the magazine's broadening to include national and international subjects, and it is precisely this broadening focus that sets

² See Robert H. Brinkmeyer's in-depth study of Smith's comparisons between the US South and Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in a chapter from his *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950*.

South Today apart from other regional publications in the first portion of the twentieth century.

During the same time that *South Today* was evolving into a little magazine with big concerns, an academic journal was being planned by one of Smith and Snelling's fellow southerners. In 1937, John Crowe Ransom was lured away from Vanderbilt to Kenyon College. Upon his arrival, the college's president, Gordon Keith Chalmers, approached him with the idea for a quarterly addressing topics ranging from literature and art to politics and social issues that would enhance the academic reputation of the college. The quarterly that began its run in 1939 and was edited by Ransom was none other than the *Kenyon Review*, about which ten years later Allen Tate would say, "Without *The Kenyon Review* in the past ten years I doubt that we should have the New Criticism; for it was Mr. Ransom who created its myth by giving it a name" (13). Without a doubt, Ransom accomplished much with his writings and editorial policies for his magazine. Through them, he became a key figure in articulating the tenets of the New Criticism. By the end of the 1940s, his review was one of the most influential academic periodicals in the United States. Ransom's ambitions for the *Kenyon Review* were anything but modest from its inception. Upon being offered the editorship, Ransom wrote his friend Tate on 29 October 1937 to suggest he be his assistant editor, saying, "I have an idea we could really found criticism if we got together on it" (*Selected Letters* 229). Emphasizing a need for a "new" criticism, Ransom reviewed Warren and Brooks's new textbook, *Understanding Poetry* for the first issue. In it, he draws a conclusion concerning its equally rigorous and stirring analyses of old and contemporary, modernist poems, saying, "What can this mean, but that criticism as it is

now practised is a new thing? We do not possess anything like a critique of our own major poets" ("The Teaching of Poetry" 83). For Ransom, his review was a space for that critique, and consequently, he became the arbiter of taste for an entire literary generation.

In this chapter, I argue that the concurrent development of these two periodicals—and the demise of one while the other flourished—demonstrates divergent ways that literary-minded southerners understood and presented the US South in relation to growing attention to international political turmoil and how its regional practices and tendencies are reconciled at a time when it became abundantly clear that the United States and its various regions do not exist in a vacuum. The difference principally concerns editorial policy, treatments of current politics, and representations of politics in art chosen for inclusion in the periodicals, and subject matter emphasized or ignored.

The initial difficulty in such an argument lies in the sheer difference between *South Today* and the *Kenyon Review*. The *Kenyon* was a highbrow, scholarly quarterly publishing fiction, poetry, and criticism by established authors and had a respectable operating budget (though the 1941 volume was limited to three numbers due to financial difficulties). Its first series ran until 1969 (though under two editors other than Ransom). Necessarily for my purposes, I will consider primarily the first twelve volumes of the *Kenyon*). *South Today*, on the other hand, ran only ten years, ending in 1945. Unlike those of the *Kenyon*, contributors to *South Today* were not paid for their work, nor did Smith and Snelling compensate themselves as editors. The magazine was conceived as and remained a regional magazine enjoyed by a much smaller, general (and progressive) audience, though individual and library (both public and university)

subscription requests came in from as far as the Harvard University Library and the Seattle Public Library. Moreover, *South Today* had fans among intellectuals and authors: W.E.B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, W.J. Cash, and Howard Odum were among its list of subscribers (SP). Smith defined her literary career against the ideas espoused by the Fugitive Agrarians, a group in which Ransom was a key participant. Neither, as we shall see, did she accept the New Criticism into her critical practices. In terms of thinking about the South in the twentieth century, perhaps two minds could not have been as far apart at Smith and Ransom.³ And as one tried to depoliticized art through New Criticism, the other used art and culture to make important stands on civil rights and foreign policy.

These very differences are what create the two magazines' radically different understandings of region and nation at the outset of American hegemony on the global stage, and is also what makes them both participants in ushering in a late-modernist mode in World War II and post-war America, though one with instructions for political activism, the other with a codification of apolitical activism. The folding of *South Today* while the *Kenyon Review* flourished and their divergent commentaries on politics and editorial policies of the two journals demonstrate late modernist tendencies in two distinct ways. The first of these is the removal of Marxism from the art of the free world in order to maintain a "vital center" against the extremism of the Soviet Union at the Cold War's onset. The second movement is the United States' own overlooking of its racial and economic inequalities, and nowhere was this chink in America's ideological

³ Smith and Snelling did not deem Ransom important to current artistic and political discourses in the South during the 1940s. For the "Special South Today Number" (Winter 1941) they published a list of "100 Influential Southerners." While Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren were included, Ransom's name is absent.

armor more visible than in the South. US diplomats fought to spread a vision of freedom and democracy in Europe during and after World War II in an effort to halt communism's advance. However, there were glaring discrepancies between this vision of freedom and the reality for African-Americans living in the US South—a discrepancy Smith made her life's work to expose. Despite this serious flaw, United States political leaders and intellectuals alike decided that a unified United States, not a fragmented one, was better suited for winning the Cold War, so Truman and others appeased Southern white supremacists by finding ways to overlook racism. Intellectuals participated in this trade-off for unity, too, and here lies the significance of *South Today* and *Kenyon Review*. As Leigh Anne Duck explains, by 1950 the liberal consensus—that vital center—in the United States described the race problem not as a legal or institutional problem but a cultural problem beyond the purview of government (214). Though Smith and Snelling eventually supported government intervention in the race problem, their magazine was a cultural battle against racism in the form of editorials, essays, and their choice of articles included in their magazine. Attention paid to securing America's role as the center of the arts after World War II precluded attention to other issues, thereby corroborating the liberal consensus.

Matters of Region

South Today and *Kenyon Review* had one thing in common at their outsets: Thomas Wolfe. The lead article in each journal's first issue was about Wolfe; however, the two magazines could not have offered other articles so opposed on the subject. *South Today* began in the spring of 1936 as *Pseudopodia*, and at twelve pages, it seemed small even for a small magazine. Most of the articles in this issue were written by Smith and Snelling, including the article (by the latter) praising the youth and virility of

descriptive language in Thomas Wolfe's two completed novels. Three years later for the winter 1939 number, the first of the *Kenyon*, Ransom turned to a retrospective written by John Peale Bishop on the same novels, now the only two left by Wolfe after his death the previous year. At a time when Wolfe was held in greatest esteem among scholars and fresh on the minds of general readers following his untimely death, Bishop offered an acute critique of *Look Homeward, Angel*: "The meaning of a novel should be in its structure. But in Wolfe's novel, as far as it has gone, it is impossible to discover any structure at all" (9).

Both instances would indicate deference to issues related to the South, but even more remarkable in indicating regional concerns for *Pseudopodia* was its first issue's statement of purpose from the editors.⁴ Smith and Snelling indicate that they had a specific audience for their magazine in mind from the beginning, stating their purpose clearly so "that those irretrievably opposed or indifferent to its concepts may be spared the irritation subsequent to entrusting their dollars or manuscripts to dissentient hands." Moreover, they were progressive from the beginning, looking only at present conditions and what they meant for the future of the South: "We are not interested in perpetuating that sterile fetishism of the Old South which has so long gripped our section. We believe that the saline state which befell Lot's wife did not come by divine whim" (editorial statement 6). They promised to encourage developing artists and writers, but in the many places where we see vapidness, dishonesty, cruelty, stupidity, we wish to expose rather than gloss over. After our right eye has offended our neighbors of the north and they have self-righteously plucked it out for us the need becomes acute for devising less devastating means for treating the ailment in our left. (editorial statement 6)

⁴ For this first issue, Snelling was credited in the masthead as the editor, Smith as associate editor. All subsequent issues credited them as co-editors.

So while the progressivism that characterized *South Today* had early roots in the magazine, those same early issues did take a primarily regionalist perspective, though often a critique of that regionalism. Its purview would expand soon enough.

In the meantime, Smith and Snelling went straight to work on tearing the veneer off works they deemed vapid, dishonest, and cruel, and with a methodology that emphasized social, psychological, and economic criticism. There were a few obvious (and perhaps easy) targets at the outset. The group drawing the most of Smith's ire in the early issues was Ransom's Nashville Agrarians, most likely the group she had in mind when she dismissed the romanticized visions of the Old South. In her first "Dope with Lime" installment, Smith called Allen Tate's essay from *I'll Take My Stand*, "brilliantly untenable" (Spring 1936 7). Following this opening salvo, the lead of the second number was a review by John D. Allen of *Who Owns America?*, the second volume of essays from the Agrarians. Although Allen does take a moment to praise the talent the Agrarians have for making their position appealing, he focuses his critique on their unrealistic "us vs. them" paradigm concerning capitalism and modernism's encroachment upon morally and traditionally sound regional cultures. While Allen's summary of the book's argument is perhaps overly reductive, he sums up his own critique quite well: "It is a pity that a program so futile, a social philosophy so warped and partial, can be urged with a charm and vigor so dangerously seductive" (14). Another author winning attention in the same issue was Erskine Caldwell. In Snelling's overview of his work, she seems not to appreciate Caldwell's typical depictions of poor, rural Southerners. Her critique is not as sharp as Allen's critique of the Agrarians, yet she takes issue with the fact that Caldwell portrays the worst of the South without

including a call for help for Southerners living in abject poverty. The region recreated in Caldwell's books, Snelling says, is "just about as good a picture of the South as the old fashioned returned missionary gave us of China" ("Ground Itch" 13). But there is hope for him yet, she says, "if he would give himself time between books; would return to a continuous first hand study of his people as he matures [...]" ("Ground Itch" 13)—essentially, if he could incorporate a constructive criticism of the South.

While Snelling wrote many of the early review pieces, relegating the editorializing to her partner, Smith wrote several book reviews, as well. One of the best examples of Smith's literary criticism from the early days of their magazine is her panning of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind* in the Fall 1936 number. Her tone is harsh from the outset: "[W]e too had long looked for the 'great novel of the South' and hoped that this was it. It isn't" (6). While she commends Mitchell on her factual knowledge of Reconstruction Atlanta, she takes her to task for nostalgically clinging to the plantation economy as the best way to understand the society and culture of the Old South: Smith criticizes the novel's sentimentality and the fact that it is ready-made for transformation into film by Hollywood, but the bulk of her criticism comes in the form of socio-economic or psychological.⁵ She clarifies that artists serve as commentators on society's understandings of history and itself and the dangers of romanticizing the past: "An artist comprehends the social-economic-intellectual assumptions of a period, their implications and effect upon personality but surely he must remain detached and critical of them" (6). These tendencies may be attributed to the influence of leftist literary

⁵ My appendix offers an overview of the brief and tense correspondence from Mitchell to Smith. While I do not believe the correspondence diminishes the validity of Smith's critique, it certainly reveals how Mitchell seems to not have done herself any favors with the review by shrugging off Smith and Snelling's requests for a brief article to complement their interview of her.

thinkers such as V.F. Calverton, Granville Hicks, and Michael Gold (Blackwell and Clay 27). The review's attention to historical context and social and material conditions places Smith and her magazine in opposition to the New Criticism that began to coalesce in the late 1930s. But even as she distances herself from the movement Ransom would give a name to, Smith also distances herself from Marxism and communism, saying in her review of *Gone With the Wind* that such a single-minded focus on "Capitalistic (or ... Marxist) ideology" is no different from the emphasis on the defunct plantation economy (6). Smith was well-traveled and well educated (she spent three years as a teacher at a missionary school in China, as well as a few semesters at Columbia University and teaching music at a school in Harlem) and clearly had leftist politics and literary sensibilities, yet she did not align herself with "Communists, even during the Popular Front years when other southern reformers such as Lucy Randolph Mason and Claude Williams cooperated with them" (Loveland 60-61). Even into the 1960's, Smith expressed dissatisfaction with what seemed to be communism's requirement of holding to strict party lines, and outside of literary circles, she had little familiarity with Marxism in general (61). Her anti-communism became one thing she did have in common with many of her fellow southern liberals. She found particularly strong political allies, though, in southerners who also supported desegregation: Howard W. Odum, whose sociological works she reviewed favorably in *South Today*, maintained an extensive correspondence with Smith as a consultant to the magazine (SP Box 9, Folder 36). W. J. Cash was also a supporter of the magazine, even paying a visit to their mountain home, Old Screamer, in late February or early March 1941 (Box 8, Folder 25), and just as anti-communist and anti-totalitarian as Smith and Snelling (anti-

totalitarian to the point that he committed suicide in Mexico City on 1 July the same year for fear that Nazi agents were following him). Smith's lack of interest in party politics may also coincide with the de-Marxization of American intellectuals going into World War II.

Ransom's concerns with the US South—or at the very least issues of southernness—are much more veiled in the *Kenyon Review*. These considerations mostly lie in the figure of Ransom himself. The motives for his move from Vanderbilt to Kenyon were probably primarily financial (he got a substantial raise and a rent-free house on the campus). However, the move and the acceptance of the editorship of the *Kenyon* suggest that Ransom sought to depoliticize himself. By the end of the 1930s, the Agrarian thought experiment had been carried too far for his liking and was criticized by nationally recognized thinkers as well as regional ones, including Smith and Snelling. He attempted to distance himself from it, beginning with his contribution to the aforementioned and highly criticized *Who Owns America?* The volume was imagined by members of the original Twelve as a sequel to *I'll Take My Stand*, but morphed into something else when it fell to Allen Tate and Herbert Agar to edit the collection. Ransom confided to George Marion O'Donnell in 1936 that he was "determined to write no more economic essays," and the two agreed: "Agrarianism [...] is now passing into a second phase—the political" (qtd. in Young 261). This phase of Agrarianism was better left to politicians, they concluded. He also expressed his falling away from the movement in letters to Tate. Furthermore, in planning the *Kenyon*, President Chalmers seems to have more or less overlooked Ransom's prior ideological associations, and the pair came to an implicit understanding that the magazine would not be a soap box

for Agrarian issues. Marian Janssen suspects that this is reflected in Chalmers' choice of Philip Blair Rice, a left-leaning philosophy professor as the associate editor of the journal to counterbalance Ransom's Agrarian past when Tate could not accept the position. But she perceives Ransom as having been "not at all disturbed by Rice's leftism, which was only political and 'not a literary matter.' Clearly, Ransom, as in his Agrarian days, was not interested in everyday active politics" (21).⁶ Ergo, politics would no longer be a focus of Ransom's work. Additionally, the move to Ohio physically removed him from the politics and culture of the South. This self-insulation makes him capable of the work he does with the *Kenyon*.

With this in mind, the choice of Bishop's retrospective on Thomas Wolfe to begin the magazine becomes more significant in at least two ways. To be sure, "The Sorrows of Thomas Wolfe" was the lead essay in the first issue because, as in Janssen's estimation, it was the best one at Ransom's disposal upon the launch of the magazine. However, Bishop's emphasis upon the structure of Wolfe's novels foreshadows the formalist tendencies that would be prominent in the later volumes of the *Kenyon*, tendencies that reflected Ransom's own critical bent. Secondly, Thomas Wolfe is a Southern author, born and educated in North Carolina before he moved to New York, and his novels feature protagonists with backgrounds similar to his own. Ransom's own southern background suggests that a lead essay featuring a southerner in the new review would be no coincidence. Yet Bishop's essay makes no mention of Wolfe's origin and does not address his southerness. This would be a continuing trend for the *Kenyon*. One might describe the absence of discussions about the South, and, as we

⁶ Janssen's book, *The Kenyon Review 1939-1970: A Critical History*, is the most comprehensive source on the history of the magazine's first publication run.

shall see, race as conspicuous. The need to disregard deeply rooted racism and poverty in the South at the center of the region's problems merged concerns that were both regional and national. The *Kenyon Review*'s apoliticism, along with the pressures on Ransom to keep the magazine un-Southern, made it a convenient site for this convergence.

One of Ransom's first editorial conundrums concerning regional topics for his journal resulted also in the convergence of regional issues with the apolitical politicism characteristic of formalism. The event was Lionel Trilling's enthusiastic request to review James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), which chronicled in prose and image the difficulties faced by three families of white tenant farmers in Alabama in the late 1930s. Ransom initially wanted to deny Trilling's request because upon his first glance at Evans's photographs in the book, he figured it to be a "leftist tract about the South" (Janssen 56). However, Trilling insisted, so he relented. Ransom ended up liking Trilling's essay so much that it was the lead review for the winter 1942 issue. Like many of the reviews accepted for publication, Trilling focuses on the form of the book, though he addresses its moral content with significant results. He sees a failure in Agee's inability to point out the faults of the sharecroppers, specifically their hatred of blacks. Trilling says, "[Agee] writes of his people as if there were no human unregenerateness in them" (102). But ultimately, he calls the book, "the most realistic and the most important moral effort of our American generation" (102). Trilling is willing to ignore, and quite explicitly at that, the unsavory elements of the book in order to convert any political engagement with its subject to an ethical imperative. What need is there for activism when "the relatively fortunate middle class that reads

books and experiences emotions” can read Agee and Evans’s account and, like Trilling, “feel sure that this is a great book” (99)? This facet of Agee’s work, according to Susan Hegeman, was immediately identified by Trilling as “conformity with that classic ethical position of the Cold War intellectual: liberal guilt” (187). Hence, the book became not one about cruelties of poverty and the abuse of tenants by the landowners in the South, but a book about “the condition of the self”: the self of the middle class and the other of the impoverished (188). This dynamic has potentially significant implications for the contributions of *Kenyon Review* to manufacturing the space for Southern literature when further considering Hegeman’s reading of Agee and Evans, in which she connects the “self” and “other” dynamic created by Agee—similar to the three worlds theory that came into popularity at the beginning of the Cold War—to Area Studies. Area Studies were interdisciplinary academic programs designed by scholars to answer governmental needs to understand the cultures of competitors (the Soviet Union) and developing countries in order to best learn how to influence them. As she notes, emphasis on American exceptionalism resulted in the formation of American Studies as part of this paradigm. Perhaps with Trilling’s review, the seeds are sown for the beginnings of southern studies (as a kind of area study itself) as it came to be known.⁷

Other authors with southern backgrounds were featured in Ransom’s magazine as subjects or as authors with regularity, but rarely were southern issues explicitly discussed. Robert Penn Warren wrote a piece on Katherine Anne Porter that appeared in the same issue as Trilling’s review of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, yet Warren

⁷ This point will be more deeply explored in Chapter 3 on Faulkner and Rubin’s *Southern Renaissance*. Also, Snelling favorably reviewed *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in the Spring 1942 number of *South Today*. She, however, focuses its social awareness, saying the book “is filled with violent social protest, deep spiritual affirmation, strong and delicate artistic perceptions, detailed chronicling of human poverty, depletion, dignity” (63).

makes no comment about her southernness, opting instead to draw comparisons between her short fiction and that of authors in the modernist canon, which was coming into being in the pages of the *Kenyon*. Porter would make her own contribution later in the special Henry James number, Autumn 1943. Warren would also bring Eudora Welty some of her first critical attention with an essay in the *Kenyon's* spring 1944 number, but there is no treatment of her as a regional writer. Perhaps nothing makes the lack of southern issues as conspicuous as certain authors' lack of critical attention, especially those addressing racial politics.

Matters of Race

A key facet of the move towards the liberal consensus of the postwar US is that it does not accommodate critiques of the racist status quo. So, "by the late 1940s, activists suggesting that US apartheid reflected broad and intractable problems with the nation-state and its purportedly liberal structures were pronounced subversive and subjected to harassment and substantial penalties" (Duck 214). How this relates to *South Today* becomes all too clear in Smith and Snelling's battles with the KKK and local Georgia authorities: the battles over the publication of that Winter '42-'43 even led the Federal Bureau of Investigation to begin a file on Smith.⁸ On the other hand, the fact that certain authors related to the South and the topic of race went unreviewed or unaddressed by *Kenyon Review* are also a likely indication of this phenomenon. This is not to say that Ransom was actively censoring radical critiques, but certain works and authors most likely went unconsidered because of his aversion to politics altogether.

⁸ Details related to Smith's FBI file may be found in Will Brantley's "The Surveillance of Georgia Writer and Civil Rights Activist Lillian Smith; Another Story from the Federal Bureau of Investigation," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 85 (Spring 2001): 59-82.

These simply were ignored. For example, Carson McCullers's work is reviewed or critiqued only once in the first twelve volumes of the *Kenyon Review*, and the work reviewed is not *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), her first significant work and the one critics today might expect to receive attention. Instead, the winter 1947 issue features a review of *The Member of the Wedding* (1946). Quite possibly, her first novel's blatant treatment of union politics and racial inequality could have been intense subject matter in Ransom's eyes and too closely related to the subject of current politics.

Unsurprisingly, an author who does not even appear in *Kenyon Review*, save a couple of advertisements, is Lillian Smith. No doubt, her 1944 novel *Strange Fruit* and its explicit story of an interracial love affair that takes racial prejudices in the South head on proved too controversial and politically radical for review in the pages of *Kenyon*. Given the notoriety the book enjoyed after being banned in Boston and its status as a best seller, one might think the book commands treatment in one of the nation's leading literary quarterlies. Smith received so many letters with questions about *Strange Fruit* that she published several of these letters with her responses to them in the final issue of *South Today*, and later she printed a pamphlet, "Lillian Smith answers some questions about *Strange Fruit*," to deal with letters that came after the end of *South Today*. Smith's status as one of the first white southerners to speak out against segregation probably made her too much of a lightning rod for Ransom's liking, but her novel does get a veiled critique in 1946. Quentin Anderson's "Notes on the Theatre" reviews dramas running in New York, and he begins by saying that the current season was "badly cluttered with ideas and problems" (477). Anderson soon turns his attention

to a production called *Deep Are the Roots*, which is about the “Negro ‘problem’” (478). He uses a direct reference to the novel *Strange Fruit*, suggesting that the play attempts to do the same kind of work that Smith’s novel does. In a critique typical of New Critical disgust with political art (which they deemed simply propaganda), Anderson says the cost of this portrayal of social problems is flat characters. Concerning *Deep Are the Roots*, he concludes, “The effort to account for a situation as you present it is the task of the historian, not the playwright. It is a curious fact that the history of ideas which is the burden of much of our bad scholarship threatens to become a blight in the arts as well” (478-479). No doubt this is a jab at the work of raising awareness that Smith attempted in her novel, as well.

Otherwise, *Kenyon Review* paid little attention to issues of race as they related to the South. Gordon Hutner notes that it was “as sorry as any other mainstream publication in apprehending the claims of minority cultures” (108). One significant treatment of the “negro problem” comes in a 1941 symposium called “The American Culture: Studies in Definition and Prophecy,” which featured anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn. In his statement, Kluckhohn says assimilation is the answer to the Negro problem if we as Americans espouse racial equality, but he says so in a solitary, understated sentence (162). His essay also offers a reconciliation of sorts between the ideas of regionalists like Smith and those who were ready for American intervention in international affairs. Within the same breath that he praises the city, “which makes possible that greatest of all paradoxes: unity in diversity” (164), he praises regional sentiments at the roots of America’s cultural origins. In the same vein as Trilling’s later review of Agee and Evans, Kluckhohn resolutely opens a space for a southern studies

when he quotes historian and critic Lewis Mumford: “So far from being archaic and reactionary, regionalism belongs to the future” (165). Such a statement is an endorsement of the kind of regional work done by *South Today*, work that, as we shall see, Smith believed could change the nation and the world.

Ransom’s lack of interest in issues related to race may be elucidated with a brief survey of the appearance not only of works directly addressing racism, but the appearance and contexts of related terminology. The phrase “Jim Crow” appears once, and only in a 1948 book review, and the term “racism” also only appears twice, in essays by Meyer Shapiro in 1945 and by Philip Blair Rice in 1950. Even more symptomatic of this general unconcern over racial issues is the infrequency with which African American authors were reviewed. Ransom’s review paid as little attention to writers of color as it did to the color line. Zora Neale Hurston’s *Of Mules and Men* was briefly reviewed by Stanley Edgar Hyman in his featured review in the summer 1948 number. Malcolm Cowley briefly mentions Richard Wright in a summer 1947 essay on American naturalism. (Wright appears in a few advertisements, though, including a volume called *Primer for White Folks*, a volume described as “a collection of the nation’s most understanding stories and articles about the Negro in America.” According to the advertisement, he shares pages of this collection with Lillian Smith [xiii]). Lying beyond the first twelve volumes, though, is Richard Chase’s review of *Invisible Man*. The review is a favorable one, calling the novel “significant.” Yet it takes the same strategy as Trilling’s review by supplanting any political agenda within the novel with morality using the New Critical apparatus. Chase calls “invisibility” the greatest symbol of the novel, but it is not the invisibility of African Americans he highlights:

By extension, this invisibility is in our time the fate of all individuals. And this idea is not only a social comment, for Mr. Ellison is able to give it metaphysical, psychological, and moral meanings. Invisibility becomes for the hero both a plight and a device, like Hamlet's madness. (682)

Chase effectively generalizes the conditions of black Americans in a way that evokes affect rather than action; their plight is one that can be legitimized only in that it is an experience common to modernity.

On the other hand, *South Today* did not shy away from addressing real-world conditions, even in the early issues published as *Pseudopodia*. An editorial called “From Lack of Understanding” in the same issue as the *Gone With the Wind* review, probably authored by Smith, notes the poor standards of education, both secondary and higher education, among the Southern States, especially the disparate amount of funding devoted to white schools as opposed to black schools. This marks one of the magazine’s first concerns with broader social issues beyond their relevance to literature. Yet this also reveals the magazine’s early clinging to regional subject matter while even addressing problems of national import. The fourth issue announced a series of writing contests open to college and high school students that invited essays on topics from “a formulation of the primary problems which the United States must face in the next ten years” and “a statement of the political theories of Communism, Fascism and Liberalism” to “the problems of tenant farming” and “a sketch of some person or group in the writer’s hometown” (“Prize Contest Announcement” 11). Moreover, the issue included a rave review of Howard W. Odum’s *The Southern Regions of the United States*, and continued the publication of poetry and sketches by previously unpublished southerners.

Smith and Snelling changed their publication's name to *North Georgia Review* with the Spring 1937 issue in an effort to have the name indicate their regional subject matter, but it is with this name change that the magazine begins heeding more national and international concerns, especially as it relates to race. Smith strikes a more divergent path from other regional publications in "Along Their Way," the lead article of the first issue under the new title. In this review of a biography of Paul Laurence Dunbar and an autobiography by Claude McKay, Smith praises the works of McKay, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jean Toomer as important efforts in raising the awareness of racial inequality. She differentiates herself from the majority of southern liberals by indicating her belief that the fight for civil rights is worthwhile and can be influenced through the arts. Many of Smith and Snelling's peers, though, did not support desegregation and civil rights, not as a matter of objection, but simply because they saw them as futile in the shadow of the nostalgic visions of the Civil War and Reconstruction (Sosna 181). Still, the *North Georgia Review* began reviewing more and more works by black authors, including a favorable review of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Their literary activism extended not only to their own writing, but to their editorial policies as well. In a set of comments on a short piece that was submitted to (but did not win) one of *North Georgia Review*'s various contests, Snelling articulates the magazine's stance on the race question as related to its editorial policy:

It is our purpose in the little magazine to treat the Negro always with as deep respect as we do the white. [...] The traditional attitude of the white towards the Negro is to treat him, at best, as an end-man; to laugh down at him in a kindly way; to assume that he is more absurd than we are, instead of merely revealing his absurdities in ways which we can see, while we remain comparatively blind to our own unlogical and childish acts. This

tradition having been established, the burden of proof that one does not accept it is upon the writer of each new manuscript dealing with them. (To Lucy Winn Box 10, Folder 22)⁹

Smith's "Dope with Lime" in the Summer 1937 number—the issue that announced the contest results—states that despite clear winners and strong honorable mentions in certain categories, no winners in the fiction or poetry category were chosen because of the prevalence of stories similar to the one critiqued in the foregoing comments. "Most of the contributions were mere paper and typewriter ink," Smith laments, but goes on. "We say it frankly because we know the South can do better than this and while our slice of its literary output was thin we believe it was representative. We are still fixated to our Lost Cause" (2).

Snelling pressed the issue of stereotypical portrayals of African Americans in the literature of the south further in "Southern Fiction and Chronic Suicide" (the lead for Summer 1938). She again heaped criticism on *Gone With the Wind*, and other works as well, for maintaining the typical portrayal of whites in fiction as aristocratic individuals served by faithful yet demeaned black servants and sidekicks. No better were works that ignored the presence of black culture in the South: "[T]he black segments of southern life can no more be ignored than can the black squares on a checker board: they are as indubitably prevalent and integral to the pattern. To ignore them is to exemplify pathological blindness [...]" (6). Not only did *North Georgia Review* advocate respect for all people, it went so far as to acknowledge the inevitability and necessity of integration. This was the focus of the magazine's regional concerns: to harry white

⁹ The letter is an incomplete draft, and it remains unclear whether a final draft of the letter was sent to Winn. The letter lacks signature, but I assume the author to be Snelling based on the letter's style. The letter draft goes on to ask Winn to shorten and edit her submitted piece along the parameters quoted for possible later publication. It appears the piece was never published in the magazine, however.

southerners into abandoning the Lost Cause and to raise social awareness and opportunities for all living there. They continued to define their regionalism against the brand of former Agrarians such as Donald Davidson, whose *The Attack on the Leviathan* was unfavorably reviewed by, yet again, John Allen. Rather than a “regionalism based on an awareness of historical and social processes,” the regionalism of improvement that Smith and Snelling are proponents of in the *North Georgia Review*, Davidson’s regionalism is “based a number of fears [which include] Charles A. Beard, H.G. Wells, Walter Page, Arthur Raper, Freud, Marx, the southern liberals, social planning, Roosevelt’s new appointees, Teachers College of Columbia, equality for the Negroes, ‘science to the limit,’ the *New Republic* and the Future” (“Disunion in Dixie” 15). This concern with the issue of equality, an issue that would be in the coming years more global than regional confirms that Smith and Snelling intended to make a big difference with their little magazine.

Matters of War

Smith and Snelling maintained their deep devotion to regional (and domestic) political issues as long as they did, suggests Robert Brinkmeyer, precisely because of the international political climate of the late 1930s: “Smith’s concern about America’s entry into another world war intensified as the political situation [in Europe] deteriorated; steadfastly refusing to acknowledge Nazi Germany’s threat to Europe and, more generally, to democratic issues, fearing that the nation’s internal problems would be overlooked in the rush toward armament” (*The Fourth Ghost* 124). Yet at the end of the 1930s, the global stage could no longer be ignored, and Smith’s regionalism forced her to defend what seemed an isolationist position. *North Georgia Review* looked abroad towards these problems in the winter 1937-38 “Dope with Lime.” Smith subtitled this

column “A Catechism,” and its text takes that form. The piece solidifies their priority for domestic issues, and more importantly, how troubles abroad can become troubles at home without vigilance:

Is there any evil on earth greater than fascism?
Yes. Its progenitors.
War?
Yes.
Poverty?
Yes.
Hate?
Yes.
Stupidity?
Yes.
And yet we have no program?
No.
[...]
Aren’t we a bit old fashioned?
Yes.
Perhaps a little provincial?
Perhaps.
Maybe ‘innocent’ after all?
Maybe. (32)

The greatest opposition to fascism domestically was to fight the conditions that breed and are fostered by totalitarianism, ergo correcting social ills at home should be the first step in facing down political ills in Europe. The editors certainly knew how easily fascist ideology could be accepted. In the summer 1937 number, they published as an honorable mention from their essay contest, “Apologia of a Dictator,” by Morrison Colladay, which defended the practices of the late governor of Louisiana, Huey Long. An editor’s note warns the reader that the article “also presents the case for fascism in a most persuasive manner” (3). The white, fascist power structures in place in 1930’s Europe struck awfully close to home for Smith and Snelling, and they saw fighting for equality at home as the best strategy to ensure that such a persuasive ideology did not take root at home.

Gradually, Smith and Snelling's editorial stances and practices became more activist in regard to politics. Smith began going to even greater lengths with her "Dope with Lime" pieces and her general editorials express her ire with the rumors of war permeating journalism in the time leading up to World War II, as well as the connections she saw between the global political strife and regional racial discrimination. Smith's earliest commentary on the War called for America to remain uninvolved. She saw an alliance with Britain not as an effort to sustain democracy around the globe but to hamper it: aiding England would allow them to maintain their oppressive rule over colonies in Africa—Jim Crow on a global stage. In her winter '40-'41 "Dope with Lime," she criticized the American people for "toadying to England" (4). Yet in the same breath, Smith sees a way for the US—and necessarily the South—to lead the world to a new era of democracy. She admits, though made "squeamish" by "Messianic talk," that the United States is in a position to lead the world:

We are already a nation of nations in a democratic framework. Already on a small scale we have untangled the most irritating problems of State's Rights—which would be the first overtly hard step for nations to take toward an international democracy (a framework which surely is the only rational alternative the world now has to endless nationalistic wars). If we wanted it, we could go a long way on the new road by unifying this hemisphere not according to imperial patterns of spheres of interest (the interest being ours), but in a genuine democratic way. (5)

Two significant points are implied in her comment. First of all, the South is necessarily part of that contingent in the US capable and ready to lead. Smith is convinced that the South, for better or for worse, is on the verge of having an important presence on the global stage. The second is an optimistic parallel between the US South and the nations of the world in terms of their participation in democracy. If other nations could possibly be persuaded to join a supranational collective, perhaps then Southerners

could finally be aware of themselves as global citizens in the same way that Smith and Snelling thought of themselves.

Yet Smith remained acutely aware that international efforts to spread democracy were subject to the same problems that democracy in America faced. As Brinkmeyer points out, Smith's writing in *North Georgia Review* and *South Today* indicates that black soldiers in the United States will experience the same kind of subjugation that minorities from the colonies of the British realm would: being compelled to fight a war for the nations oppressing them (*The Fourth Ghost* 126). Smith makes her concerns explicit in an editorial called "Mr. Lafayette, Heah We Is—." Its beginning opens an essay contest on the causes of war, but restricts from considerations "the war cries of 'democracy' and 'fascism'" (14), which suggests that for an editor of a regional magazine, Smith was well aware of the complexity of the political situation in Europe and America's stake in it. The heart of this editorial is, however, a satirical critique (after the manner of Jonathan Swift, no less) of the great irony in calls for democracy abroad while democracy was not even offered to all of America's citizens. She imagines what a group of African American troops would say to Allied command of their home and mission upon arrival in France:

[W]e live in Gawd's country en that's a fact, en it's a fine place to live in if yo knows yo place, and we knows our place, yeah Lawd! Now we'se come to lay down our lives for those Jews Mister Hitler's been pickin' on. We hear tell he takes their property and their money and kicks them about and spits on 'em and burns their books. An' all that makes our democratic blood boil over. Yas suh! [...] and it show must be an awful sight to have yo books burned—hit's a lot better never to learn how to read and write like us, we'se telling you. (15)

Scholars are of two minds concerning this particular editorial. Loveland finds it not all that effective because it seems insensitive to the very serious issue of the Holocaust,

while at the same time being patronizing towards African-Americans, the group for whom Smith was advocating fair treatment (35). On the other hand, Brinkmeyer sees the editorial as one of her most persuasively bitter attacks on the status quo (*The Fourth Ghost* 126). Yet the editorial's significance does not lie in its efficacy or lack thereof. Most importantly, it exhibits Smith and Snelling's understanding that regional problems are at once international problems: their activism could be helpful because these seemingly different problems were yoked together by the fact that the first step in reaching the solution was to raise awareness among individuals, namely southerners.

And raising awareness of an issue requires acknowledgement of the issue: *Kenyon Review* rarely acknowledged political issues, national or international. Such issues were ignored in New Critical literary analysis, and Janssen argues that during its first decade, *Kenyon Review* presented the New Criticism primarily as the answer to a call for a new approach to literature (though Ransom did frequently include critical essays from other perspectives). More telling are her comments on the political ambivalence of the magazine: “[...] political and regional issues were avoided; reading *Kenyon* of the early 1940s, one has virtually no sense that World War II was being fought” (7). This is in stark contrast to *South Today*, which increased its focus on politics as the War escalated. The extent to which *Kenyon* did dabble in subjects beyond literature was at the behest of President Chalmers; it was not a priority for Ransom. Chalmers insisted that the publication he dreamed of would raise the reputation of his college and have a scope that included some visual art, politics, and culture. But when Ransom's magazine did address political issues, it did so in anticipation of cultural dominance for the United States. Significantly, one of the few

articles that mention the war is one that addresses the arts and the role that America must play in their survival. In his contribution to the aforementioned symposium featuring Clyde Kluckhohn, John Peale Bishop said of art surviving the war:

Without waiting for the outcome, or even attempting to predict it, it is possible even now to say that the center of western culture is no longer in Europe. It is in America. It is we who are the arbiters of its future and its immense responsibilities are ours. The future of the arts is in America.
("The Arts" 183-84)

With this statement, Bishop plants the seeds of America's claim to cultural and artistic hegemony that drove the Cold War even before American involvement in the War. His statement also links, as Serge Guilbaut also observed, democracy and the arts to American exceptionalism—an exceptionalism that, according to Kluckhohn, was rooted in the diversity provided by America's various regionalisms.

But this is not all that Bishop had to say of art. In the very first volume, he provided "World's Fair Notes," on the 1939 World's Fair at Flushing Meadows. His notes comment on the pavilions set up by the powers of the world, and in particular those of Mussolini's Italy and Stalin's Russia. Of significance are his statements on the merit of art used as propaganda by these two countries:

Mussolini's compositions of disparate photographs pasted together are good, not because of what he has to say, but because whoever did them learned his *collage* in a good school and because [...] classical materials lend themselves admirably to *collage*. The Soviet Worker is bad, not because of what soviet workers are, but because it is done by a sculptor badly trained in a bad tradition. ("World's Fair Notes" 247)

This criticism indicates that he perceives a difference between art and politics; Bishop judges these works not based on the merits of the political ideologies they support, but on their merits as works of art. Such stringent formalism, again, isolates politics from art. Any sense of urgency that came from this and similar treatments of fascist art in the

Kenyon Review came not from the need to combat the political ideologies of such art, but the artistic merit of such works in order to prepare the way for the American artistic hegemony that Bishop, among others, laid claim to. The causes of and the actual conflict of World War II may never have been taken up as a principal topic for the review, but what *Kenyon* did make clear was that a place drowning in political turmoil as Europe was in the late 1930's and early 1940's was no place for art.

Conversely, the War spurred Smith and Snelling into more actively engaging individuals and resulted in an expansion of the magazine and its readership. Despite its modest circulation, *South Today*, as their little magazine was finally named, boasted of readers as far away as California, New York City, and Chicago and as diverse as college students, TVA officials, and soldiers in boot camp (SP). The change of title marked the beginning of some of their most directed efforts at editorial activism, stressing repeatedly that the war abroad could not be won at the cost of losing ground on the civil rights issue at home. The most politically charged issue of *South Today* is the Autumn-Winter 1942-1943 number: the very issue stolen from the printer by the KKK in an effort to discredit the magazine and its editors among the political leaders in Georgia. Smith hoped that her regular readers and supporters would not be her only audience for this particularly stirring issue, but hoped to reach out to her fellow southern liberals who felt their hands tied on the issue of race. A common criticism levied against Smith by southern liberals is that ending segregation, while the right thing to do, would never be practical because of the violence such drastic measures would bring about. These explanations were unsatisfying for Smith, and she goes about dispelling them in two key essays—perhaps the most important essays from the magazine's entire run—

“Buying a New World With Old Confederate Bills” and “Addressed to Intelligent White Southerners.” The two pieces certainly drew the attention of a larger than normal audience: records indicate that Smith sold tens of thousands of reprints of the two essays to churches and other activism groups across the country (SP).

The most striking feature of “Buying a New World With Old Confederate Bills” is its treatment of racial tensions at home and the racial politics surrounding the War as two sides of the same coin. Her principal targets in the essay are southern liberals who fold their hands when the social conditions have been made pliable by political turmoil. Smith begins by extending the currency metaphor to a comparison between the South and its global neighbors: what really is the difference between old Confederate bills, British pounds, and German marks?—they all place a premium on white supremacy (9). Despite naysayers who argue that neither world war nor legislation does much to alter human nature, Smith argues that the world is ripe for reform since the war effort sheds light on the contradictions in the allied British Imperial system and segregated American claims of fighting for democracy the world over. She places special emphasis on understanding the regional problems through the global problems and vice versa:

We, the whole world, are going in new directions; and we, the South, must not lose our way. We must *learn to read our maps*. Unless we keep the world map open before us we shall slip back into the old, bad habit of looking down at our own feet, and if we do we shall find ourselves at the same place where we first began. We must learn to read our maps simultaneously: regional map, national map, world map. As time goes by, perhaps we shall find it more and more important to read and know our regional and world maps; less and less important may become our national map. That is possible. (12)

In following this maps model, progress in the South can only be understood as progress when it is made in relationship to global conditions. Peculiar here is Smith’s suggestion that the national map may become unneeded. In the aforementioned

profiles of herself and Snelling for *South Today*, the editors considered themselves just as much citizens of the world as they did citizens of the South. Moreover, her suggestion deemphasizes the role of national governments in creating real change. Smith seems not to see the federal government or the government of other nations as incapable of solving the problems her magazine addresses, but she does acknowledge that the problems can be solved through the collective action of individuals driven to action. In her system of maps, discounting the influence of government leaves only the regional and global maps. Of course, this deemphasizes the role of government, even if only accidentally, which casts southern segregation as a cultural issue beyond the purview of government.

Collective action becomes a key point again in the essay when Smith addresses the contradictions within the anti-union South. Despite her avowed anti-communism, she offers a compelling argument for a more prolific organization of labor among Southern wage laborers, white and black: “Why do we fight organized labor when strong democratic unions are a most potent lever by which to lift the burden of southern poverty?” (18) Imagine how strong the union would be, she posits, if white and black workers organized together as opposed to against each other. She effectively links the problems of poverty in the South to the race problem, and not through the traditional North-capitalist/South-agrarian axis that began losing traction in the 1940s. Rather, she pointed to the greed of individuals—whether it be that of factory owners or the landlords of tenant farmers—as a factor in prolonged racial inequality. In either case, “human exploitation” is the problem (20). Yet whom she faults the most are liberal intellectuals in the South who squander the opportunity for change. She tells them how direly their

leadership is needed, for “changes can come to the South *without group violence*, only by the liberals’ using the leadership now theirs, to prepare the people psychically, to give them understanding of the urgent necessity for these changes” (24). For Smith, the intellectual and the activist have the same role when effectual reform is a moral imperative. Her critique of those who believe they would do more harm than good in advocating equality by stirring up racial violence is among her most scathing. In objecting to equality, their objections are “not so much to evil means (as evidence by many liberals’ enthusiasm for war as a means to democracy) nor even to evil ends when they are sufficiently remote and beclouded, nor to deriving profit indirectly from them, but to the soiling of [their] own hand[s], the turning of [their] own stomach[s], from too close contact with them” (25). Smith closes the essay by reiterating her point that the circumstances of the war provide the opportunity for significant changes to improve the world for not only its current citizens, but for its future citizens: “The price will be high; but it will be a good bargain, a fine ‘buy’ for us, and for all the earth’s children” (30).

Smith pushes the point of activism beyond only intellectuals in “Addressed to Intelligent White Southerners,” and this essay was more popular in reprint than “Buying a New World With Old Confederate Bills,” topping 250,000 copies sold (Loveland 80). As its subtitle, “There Are Things To Do,” suggests, the essay reaches out to more general readers, listing things that they can do in their everyday lives and interactions with individuals to combat racism. Smith lists such actions as writing letters to the editor, refraining from making derogatory comments, and asking friends to not tell racist jokes. But for all the progressive actions that the essay endorses, it could have easily

been named “Addressed to Well-to-Do and Fiscally Advantaged White Southerners.” Whether Smith is working on the weaknesses of her well-off white readers or pandering to them is, at times, difficult to tell. Either way, social class comes to the fore. One of Smith’s suggestions is to address black doctors, attorneys, preachers, and educators with courtesy titles. However, she does not encourage the same for the less educated (perhaps in order to soften the scandal of what she was suggesting?—it was this point about courtesy titles that drove the KKK to steal the issues of the magazine). Another of her points is something which “any well-bred white man or woman can do,” and that is befriend an intelligent black person: “You can easily find many that are equal to you in education, intelligence, appearance, charm, ability, social poise, sensitive good-breeding” (37). In another instance, she suggests increasing the pay of one’s cook more or shortening her hours (38). Her calls to action totally ignore impoverished individuals, black or white, giving no advice on the kinds of things they could do to improve the situation for themselves; suddenly the essay does not seem a grassroots effort.

Despite these shortcomings, “Addressed to Intelligent White Southerners” calls for dialogue between the races and mutual understanding. An important suggestion from the essay is to subscribe to a black newspaper or magazine. Such publications could stir anger in white readers at first, Smith cautions, “But if you are a decent person, you will gradually begin to see that they have a right to their own opinions and their opinions are often right” (38). She calls on Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, and similar social and civic organizations to invite black members. Churches must integrate; leaders must be open to labor unions. And again, she makes it clear to her readers that their successes

regionally have global implications. Every act in defiance of segregation, Smith writes, "is a triple victory for racial democracy, for Christianity and for the United Nations in this war. It is also in the best southern tradition of Jefferson and Robert E. Lee" (40). And in the vein of her work with the Laurel Falls camp, Smith stresses the centrality of educating children about racial equality in bringing about a truly democratic world:

We can all begin to train our children now to be, not little Nazis, but democratic world citizens. We owe this to them, in order that they may adjust harmoniously and without psychic conflict to the new world democracy which we now dream about and know is coming towards mankind. (39)

Smith's final point of the essay is that such activism has never been more important because in her estimation, it is not a question of whether or not the South will integrate, but *when* and with how little violence. She is convinced that the South is necessarily beginning to desegregate because of the changing economic order caused by industrialization and the war. "The choice is ours only in *what we do about it*; not in the changes themselves" (43). The obvious plan of action Smith and Snelling framed for their readers was to work to the best of their abilities to usher in not only a harmonious South, but a new democratic world. Brinkmeyer amplifies the essay's power in noting that it ultimately considers southern traditionalism as the worst enemy of democracy (*The Fourth Ghost* 136). This would necessarily apply to racial injustice the world over.

Matters of Canon

South Today ceased publication with the Winter 1944-45 number, a special issue on the role of men in the church. Though Snelling's literary career effectively ended with the magazine, Smith continued the legacy of *South Today*'s political activism in her memoir, *Killers Of the Dream*, and novels and continued participation as the most prominent white, southern woman in the desegregation movement. She became more

anti-communist during the 1950's and 1960's: as Brinkmeyer argues, "It is finally the south's anti-Communism that provides Smith with a ray of hope for the future. She believes that if southerners could ever break free from the binding chains of totalitarianism, [...] they would not be seduced again by other forms of authoritarianism" (*The Fourth Ghost* 144). Her later works garner most scholarly energy focused on Smith, yet *South Today* and its important work remain overlooked. Its editors' activism was prolific —editorial policies that respected minorities, a reprint program for its articles as viable as any tract ministry, and several trips to conferences across the South further extolling the importance of racial equality. But *South Today* also prepares the way for southern studies to bloom during the Cold War in a couple of key ways. First, it does so by virtue of the fact that it created a canon of southern authors and literature that it deemed important on the basis of their political aims. Secondly, Smith and Snelling argued that regional, and specifically southern, literature plays an important role as a local barometer for global issues, perhaps even as the conscience for a nation waving democracy's flag abroad while its citizens suffered at home. Yet Smith does so with a literary mind. For her positive reviews of books that offered meaningful and constructive critiques of the South and all of the United States, W.J. Cash complimented Smith in a 26 February 1941 letter as "one of the ablest book critics in the country" (SP Box 8, Folder 25). The essays and reviews of the little magazine published from the mountains of northern Georgia are important documents from the trenches of the early civil rights movement, but I argue that the most important work of *South Today* was providing an outline for what might comprise a canon of southern literature based on everything outside of New Critical tenets.

From this small success, the grand one of *Kenyon Review* emerges. Ultimately Ransom would have preferred to avoid politics and political extremes altogether, but Smith and Snelling's treatment of the US South and its literature as serious art forced his hand to accommodate southern literature. *Kenyon* and its reviewers and critics more often than not dealt with it by transforming the political issues of the south into moral ones in their focus on aesthetics and form. Southern literature, especially the work of Faulkner, became the wild card in the New Critics' hand as they made a play for America's status as the new home for democracy and art as World War II wound down. The nation could move forward from the New Critical perspective because southern literature acknowledged the *moral* injustices of segregation and poverty domestically and internationally, and such an interpretation absolved them of any guilt in making such a power play to aid America and its colonialist allies.

The result became a space in which the works of the so-called Southern Renaissance could be canonized even before the phrase “southern literature” finally appeared in the *Kenyon Review*. Leslie Fiedler first used the phrase in 1948 in his review of Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. He argues that the book's conviction lies in its success as an anthology of southern literature. Fiedler says, “Poe is there first of all, in the ambivalent image, half fairy-tale, half psychopathic revelation; Faulkner does the décor; the young girls are by Carson MacCullers [sic], the freaks by Eudora Welty” (522). Fiedler was no New Critic, but what he does here, even if facetiously, is outline a nascent canon of Southern Literature, but with different criteria than *South Today*. The phrase does not appear again in *Kenyon Review* until 1955 in a book review, but no matter. But by this time, an anthology of southern literature and the

collection of essays from which the Renaissance got its name had been published. Ransom may have tried his best to distance himself from the South professionally, but as the United States emerged from World War II victorious and entered the Cold War, it was still his review that prepared the way for its myth.

CHAPTER 3

SOUTHERN STUDIES AS AREA STUDIES

Perhaps no individual is as singularly responsible for an author's critical reputation and legacy as Malcolm Cowley is for bringing William Faulkner back into readership in the 1940s. To say that Cowley assisted in delivering Faulkner from a stifling life of screenplays heavily revised by Hollywood brass into one of sudden academic relevance would not be great exaggeration. A great portion of this work he accomplished through the publication of *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946, which contained abridgements of what he considered the best of Faulkner's work, as well as new essays by Faulkner to serve as companions to his sometimes inaccessible work. Based on the decent success of *The Portable Hemingway*, Cowley guaranteed that Faulkner's *Portable* volume would spur reprints from Random House of his older novels, thereby making him some money. But in the 9 August 1945 letter to Faulkner confirming that Viking approved the project, he also told Faulkner of a more cosmopolitan audience who approved of his work. "Did I tell you what Jean-Paul Sartre said about your work?" Cowley asked. "He's the best of the new French dramatists: [...] What he said about you was, 'Pour les jeunes en France, Faulkner c'est un dieu'" (24).

Beyond being a compliment passed along to an author whose work Cowley deeply admired and respected, Sartre's words indicate that while Faulkner's work was in need of recovery among American readers, such was not the case among readers in Europe. More importantly, the fact that Cowley sees fit to quote Sartre's comments is evidence that literary thinkers in the United States were deeply interested in how American literature and art might influence intelligentsia in the world. Robert Penn Warren made clear in his review of *The Portable Faulkner* that he saw his fellow Southerner's

relevance quickly expanding beyond his “postage stamp of native soil,” arguing that Faulkner’s work concerned itself not only with the moral conundrums facing the South, but with the deep moral conflicts of the modern (and post-World War II) world. The review lists other avenues of approach into Faulkner’s oeuvre, as Joseph Blotner says, “setting down, in effect, categories for essays, theses, and dissertations over the next three decades” (*Faulkner* 1215). Blotner succinctly indicates what scholars of Faulkner have assumed for the past five decades: that he more or less shaped the institution of literature in English departments across the country with the help of critical voices such as Cowley’s and Warren’s. In a world with America vying to be at its center, Faulkner becomes politically relevant to the aims of the culture warriors fighting to enhance America’s reputation abroad and keep communism at bay in the West.

Rather than simply retrace the trajectory of Faulkner’s stratospheric rise at the hands of New Critics, I will offer my own corollary to the narrative: his critical recovery in the 1940s and early 1950s is an integral event in the late modernist moment that marks the beginning of formalized Southern literary studies. Put more radically, the formal study of American literature in the United States defines itself only with the emergence of Southern literature as a type of area studies. Through an exploration and critique of some early, key scholarship on Faulkner, I will reiterate how Faulkner becomes the key figure in this process because of his concern with literary forms and the ease with which he is interpreted as an author concerned with morality and individualism. Formalist scholars transformed him from an author of regional oddity into cultural monolith because they were able to identify parallels between the South’s racial conundrums and the moral challenges facing democracy. As well as becoming the

keystone of the American modernist canon, Faulkner serves the same purpose for the Southern literary canon. I will interrogate this role through an analysis of Faulkner's prominence in Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs's *Southern Renascence: The Literature of the Modern South* (1953), one of, if not the, first collections of criticism on Southern literature and a classic text. Closer consideration of its essays and its shaping of Southern literary study, however, will demonstrate that Faulkner serves similar purposes for both Southern and American literature canon formations. As a final waypoint, I will offer a reading of *Intruder In the Dust* (1948), published the year before he was awarded the Nobel Prize. Critical popularity for a novel that polemically addresses Southern racism reveals much about its particular function in the late 1940s as an instrument of Faulkner's own late modernist participation.

Faulkner remains more important than perhaps any other figure in discussions of the Southern or American literary canon, but he serves as an important waypoint in my argument about the formation of Southern literary studies not because he a prototypical Southern writer, nor because Southern literature began with him, though this is the mythology that developed around him in the final decade of his life and has perpetuated in rudimentary understandings of southern literature today. Rather, Faulkner becomes assimilated into the canon as a key figure among the development of Southern literary studies because his work, like that of other southern intellectuals and writers, served the same important political and ideological purposes for the same set of critics. And sometimes even Faulkner's own work engaged those ideological causes that required a southern area studies. This is the starting point for Lawrence H. Schwartz study, *Creating Faulkner's Reputation* (1988). While thinkers like Cowley would argue that

Faulkner became great because he is a literary genius who would eventually have attained proper honors, Schwartz counters that Faulkner “became one of the beneficiaries of an aesthetic created by an intellectual elite committed to the survival and preeminence of the United States” (28). During this late modernist moment, both New Critics and the New York Intellectuals recuperated Faulkner from his prior reputation—a realist author countering modern society with tales of the barbaric, violent, and corrupt South—to a modern literary master dealing with the moral challenges of an irrational, modern world and as key as T.S. Eliot and Jackson Pollock, whose achievements were products of the “preservation of freedom of expression under the democratic traditions of the West” (36).

This interest in the rehabilitation of Faulkner begins to coalesce at the time that Smith and Snellings’ *South Today* began to outline the qualifications for a canon of southern literature based on social and political awareness of both domestic and international issues. The recognition of such political contexts in southern literature forced New Critics to mobilize this regional literature for their paradigm as well. What Smith and Snellings’ counterparts were searching for at this time, Schwartz explains, “was a great literature rooted in the regional consciousness, but one that also transcended provincial nationalism to achieve universality” (94). Faulkner provided just such a convenient New Critical paradox—simultaneous concern for humanity and the peculiar customs of the US South. His distance from “literary radicalism” in the 1930s made him politically safe, and his extreme southerness, cast as rugged individualism and egalitarian concern for all peoples, was the centerpiece of America’s arsenal in the cultural Cold War.

Making Faulkner the most important of American writers seems to make him instantly the most important of southern writers, as well. But of more significance is that this appropriation of Faulkner provides the stepping-stone by which some scholars initially formulate southern studies. Their formulation presents southern literary studies as a peculiar type of area studies—not a regional genre—within which unsavory elements of American democracy could be housed as moral problems as opposed to political challenges tarnishing America's image abroad. As Carl E. Pletsch notes, area studies are “academic specialties created during the Cold War to supply governments with advice about policy making” (582). Generally, these academic specialties “correspond to the new areas of political and economic influence being sought by the United States” during the 1950s (588): African studies, European Studies, and Asian Studies are all key examples. I am not proposing that southern studies formed as a way for the US government to better understand how to exert its influence within the South; rather, I propose that southern studies as it was initially practiced was a way for literary critics to better understand America's newfound hegemony: provincial nationalism achieving universality. As Gerald Graff explains in his classic history of the academic literary profession, *Professing Literature*, patriotic sentiments about America led to a renewed focus on an American national literature, “but as American literature became professionalized the reassertion of nationality had less to do with exclusionary piety about the national spirit than with transcending positivistic specialization, embracing diversity as part of the whole, and even bridging the gap between high and popular American culture” (214). Organizing a southern literature becomes a way to demonstrate how the part makes the whole. Moreover, its inception as the segment of

national literature containing America's problems equipped warriors fighting in the cultural Cold War to better understand the challenges facing American democracy abroad and to counter Soviet attacks on the unsavory political elements of American society.

Thomas Borstelmann argues that going into the postwar period, the greatest foreign policy issue facing the US was a domestic problem: the existence of segregation among its own peoples while attempting to spread democracy abroad to areas formerly under colonial rule, especially Africa. The USSR told the colonized world that the United States would bring Jim Crow with their money everywhere they went, and US tolerance of European colonialism in Africa was due mainly to racial ideas that were held in common between Europe and the US (70). American attitudes about race became scrutinized in the international arena, and after WWII, efforts were made to shove Jim Crow to the fringes of American society (i.e., locate it only in the South). Nevertheless, racial violence in the South went overnight from being local news rarely heard to big international headlines (75). "The elemental problem for America's first Cold Warriors in dealing with race," Borstelmann says, "was their inability to wall off white American racial attitudes and practices from the rest of the world and its nonwhite majority" (74). The formalized study of Southern literature, though, allows just that: the literary value of works portraying racism in which ultimately democratic and American ideals prevail insulates these problems from the real political situation facing the United States. Now the peculiar ethical challenges of the South paralleled in a less immediately dangerous way America's challenges abroad. Segregation became, in

Leigh Anne Duck's explanation, a temporal and cultural difference within American literature beyond the purview of national and, by extrapolation, international law.

Faulkner realized how his work and southern literature in general could be mobilized to support democracy on all stages of the Cold War, and he sometimes participated in this mobilization. His understandings of literature's ethical, apolitically political influence is perhaps nowhere more clear than in his Nobel acceptance speech:

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. [...] The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

(“Address” 120)

His writing and others' could not merely be an account of (we can assume a distinctly westernized) humanity, but a key element in its survival through reinforcing values—courage, honor, hope, pride, and so on. Later in his life as a Cold Warrior, though, in 1956, Faulkner wrote to David Kirk, “There are seventeen million Negroes [in the United States]. Let us have them on our side, rather than on that of Russia” (*Letters* 395), indicating that a turn towards communism because of its integrationist sympathies was an outcome he thought plausible and one he wished to avoid.¹ The statement is also curiously utilitarian version of Smith and Snelling's understanding of the Southerners and African-Americans' role in national and international politics: blacks should only be appeased so that they do not become communists. But the larger vision underlying his

¹ Borstelmann notes that southern politicians generally believed there to be links between integration and communism, especially in terms of foreign policy, where the US was having most difficulty comporting its domestic and international policy on race. Governor Herman Talmadge and Senator Richard B. Russell, both of Georgia “believed liberals were being suckered by Moscow's Cold War rhetoric. Rather than try to satisfy Soviet demands, the United States should stand up proudly for its own traditions. If Communists supported racial integration, could there be any clearer sign of its immorality?” (108).

comment to Kirk applies to the Cold War function of southern literature: in understanding the conflict between the South's minorities and their oppressors, the US could better understand its new role as the primary disciple of democracy among nations newly freed from colonial rule.

Imagining a Renascence

With Faulkner as the author around whom the area studies of southern literature organized, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs were the critics primarily organizing it. Fred Hobson calls *Southern Renascence: The Literature of the Modern South*, the volume of essays Rubin and Jacobs edited, "the origins of modern southern literature as an academic discipline" (743). Michael Kreyling echoes that sentiment specifically about Rubin's career, saying, "Few will dispute the claim that Rubin is the primary architect and developer of southern literary study" in the twentieth century (*Inventing* 41). The clearest marker of Rubin's agenda for southern literature is a stringent formalism through which he plays, as Kreyling describes, guardian of the southern canon, preserving the Agrarian vision of the south without its explicit political trappings—namely racism (48). His interpretive balancing act between the South's history and its literature develops the field he pioneers as an area studies because he develops it with a certain purpose in mind for the field. The preface to *Southern Renascence* explains that he and Jacobs originally had the idea for the volume as a special issue of the *Hopkins Review*. After gauging the response to the special issue proposal, "it was realized just how widespread was the *latent interest* in Southern writing, and how potentially important a thoroughgoing survey and analysis of the literature of the modern South might be" (vii, emphasis mine). The same community of critics in the United States who had "latent interest" in the literature of the South was

also busy positioning America's national literature as the best artistic examples for the free world. Rubin and Jacobs seem to acknowledge in their preface that they seek to provide southern literary studies as a way for these scholars to better understand American literature.

As the beginning of an area studies of the South, *Southern Renascence* demonstrates its formalist, conservative aims especially well in its organization, selection of authors covered, and selected contributors. Its first section, called "The Mind of the South" (though W. J. Cash is nowhere mentioned in the book), comprises background essays on the history and society of the South from highly conservative scholars and former Agrarians, Richard M. Weaver and Andrew Lytle to name two. Jacobs, in one of his two essays, mentions Edgar Alan Poe just long enough to dismiss him from the southern canon. William Faulkner is the primary focus of five individual essays and appears as a point of comparison in nearly every other entry in section III, "Novelists of the South," and in all four pieces in section II, "The Themes of Southern Literature." Robert Penn Warren and his fiction garner only two essays as a primary topic. Most telling after Faulkner's ubiquity in the book is the final section on the "Poetry of the South." Five of the six figures addressed—John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, John Peale Bishop, Donald Davidson, and Cleanth Brooks—are New Critics; three of those five are former Agrarians (the sixth figure is Merrill Moore; none of the figures are women or minorities). No African-American authors were covered, and "Faulkner And The Black Shadow" by Irene C. Edmonds was the only essay written by a black scholar for the collection. (Rubin included his former student in the collection despite

resistance.²) Regardless, his gesture towards inclusivity did not prevent his collection from being charged with “parochialism and special pleading” (Kreyling, *Inventing* 48). In short, its table of contents does little to separate *Southern Renascence* from the elitism of the Agrarians’ vision.

Of particular importance in determining the direction of the collection was an essay by a figure who would play a significant role in the shaping of Southern studies for decades to come. C. Vann Woodward, then a professor of history at Johns Hopkins, contributed “The Irony of Southern History” to *Southern Renascence*, and it closed out its first section. In it, Woodward argues that studying the South as an “eccentric” segment of the United States is important not because doing so will enhance our understanding of the South, “For from a broader point of view it is not the South but America that is unique among the peoples of the world. This eccentricity arises out of the American legend of success and victory, a legend that is not shared by any other people of the civilized word” (63). Implied in his comment is that the study of the South and its literature is paramount for the comprehension of America’s leaderships of the free world at the end of World War II. In order to do so, he draws parallels between the economic situation facing the United States in the 1950s and that of the US South during the nineteenth century, as well as comparing the world opposition and resentment of American successes with Southern attitudes about its defeat in the Civil War. He concludes that America’s current situation does not suffer from the “moral

² Edmonds, a long-time professor at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, wrote the essay for one of Rubin’s seminars while a Master’s student at Johns Hopkins. According to Valencia Eloris Matthews, Rubin faced “objections from some corners of academia” for putting Edmonds’s essay in his collection (93). Matthews also suggests that “Faulkner And The Black Shadow” “was perhaps the first perspective published from an African-American in a general study discourse examining the representation of African-Americans in the works of an acknowledged leader in modern American literature” (93).

obloquy” of the antebellum Southern economy, but the US still is at risk of “abandonment by other countries” (73). Most powerful and significant in his essay, however, is his comment about what history is and where the history of America is located. Early on, Woodward comments that history is commonly regarded as the bad things that happen to other people; therefore, Americans are disconnected from their history. He ultimately proposes in “The Irony of Southern History” that the way for Americans to connect to their history is to study the South. Southerners know from firsthand experience that “history has happened to our people in our part of the world” (79). The United States can best understand its precarious position of power through the South’s history and circumstances—and literature, too, as suggested by this essay appearing in a book on the subject.

Where Woodward’s essay calls for an area study of the South, the rest of the book answers it. In some instances, such as Robert B. Heilman’s opening essay, “The Southern Temper,” the study is vague. The southern “sense of the concrete [...] is so emphatically apparent,” he claims at the outset, “that everybody knows it’s there” (3). (But what exactly is “it?” Kreyling concludes that since Heilman insists everyone knows it, he must have decided no definition was necessary [*Inventing* 44].) As the clearest guiding principle of the book, though, the call is answered by studying the South through the lens of Faulkner’s opus and the circumstances of its composition. Rubin and Jacobs make this explicit in their editor’s note to a symposium, which opens the second section, “The Themes of Southern Literature”. It features the sociologists Howard W. Odum and John MacLachlan, and in their note, the editors emphasize a question posed by Davidson in an address to Mississippi State College in 1950:

. . . I turn to sociology and ask whether it can account for the appearance in Mississippi, of all places, of William Faulkner, in the three decades between 1920 and 1950. [...] Can sociology also explain why William Faulkner, or some novelist of comparative stature, did *not* appear, during this period, somewhere north of the Ohio—say, in Massachusetts or Wisconsin? (qtd. in Rubin & Jacobs, editor's note 83)

In hindsight, Davidson's pondering seems a little preposterous, unanswerable outside of intangible speculation (the "it" of Heilman's essay) and perhaps irrelevant, yet it raises "a root question," according to Rubin and Jacobs, "one which must be thoroughly considered in any serious attempt to understand the modern literature produced by Southerners" (editor's note 83). Their use of Davidson's question as a key point of inquiry bears a couple of significant implications for *Southern Renaissance*. It more pointedly than other passages of the collection establishes an area studies project, especially in Davidson's call for sociology—a discipline closely associated with other area studies—to answer what was for scholars at the height of Faulkner's critical intrigue a burning question. Most importantly, the question all at once binds together the perceived supremacy of southern regional, the hegemonic aspirations of American national literature, and the figure of William Faulkner.

Odum seems dubious regarding Davidson's question. In his contribution to the seminar, he casts doubt on whether Faulkner's southerness has anything to do with his greatness. In a move that would make Lillian Smith proud, he addresses the problems with Davidson's understanding of sociology, then explores how different variables—socioeconomic, political, and otherwise—could be construed as factors in not just Faulkner's Southern origins, but the origins of any other author from the South or other US region. He even mentions the literary importance of H.L. Mencken, whose influences within the publishing industry opened the door for many Southerners (99-

100). His co-respondent, MacLachlan, on the other hand, readily accepts Davidson's implied postulation that the South has something to do with Faulkner's greatness. In "No Faulkner in Metropolis," he contends that Faulkner's familiarity with the rural allowed him in his fiction to create a place, unlike urban landscapes, where "There is nothing between its folk and the elemental forces of the universe, no canopies, walls, clinics, ranks of professionals and bureaucrats to stand between them and life and death" (107). The distinction between Odum and MacLachlan's response is important precisely because the former provides a coy critique in highlighting the challenges sociology faces in undertaking such a question, whereas the latter immediately embraces an area study of the South as the best method for understanding the primitive needs of individuals during modern times.

In the remaining portions of the "Themes of Southern Literature" section, the themes explored can be easily summed up as a sense of place and relationship to history. Unsurprisingly, Faulkner remains a critical mooring for authors in the harbor of Rubin and Jacob's project. Also significant are correlations drawn between these distinctly southern themes and the national zeitgeist of the Cold War. Walter Sullivan, in his contribution, states explicitly that a recurring theme in southern fiction is the Civil War's disturbance of the moral concurrence of the public and private spheres, in which the traditional family falters (119). He additionally states, in direct reference to Faulkner's opus:

Because in the Old South the honor and the pride were there, not as individual virtues in isolated men, but as a part of the public consciousness, the moral basis on which the culture was constructed. This is the reason that the War has been used so often by so many Southern writers. It is the grand image of the novelist, the period when the "ultimate truths" with which Mr. Faulkner says the writer must deal, existed as commonly recognized

values within a social framework. *It is the only moment in American history when a completely developed national ethic was brought to a dramatic crisis.* (125, emphasis mine)

Sullivan's explication of the southern writer's relationship to the Civil War certainly fits as a cornerstone of the "old southern studies," yet he presents what his article has labored to define as the southern experience and understanding of history and ethics as commensurate with the national experience. Southern literature, in other words, elucidates for its scholars how a commonly held morality centered on pride and honor confronts and endures a challenge to its supremacy. In Sullivan's depiction, comparisons beg to be drawn between the common southern ethic and a similar American ethic being challenged abroad during the Cold War. Scholars can learn from southern literature's portrayals of its ethical and moral challenges (the simultaneously political problem of slavery, for example) and its confrontation with crisis how best to promulgate and protect America's democratic ethic abroad in an equally precarious and challenging climate.

Equally aimed toward area studies are the three essays dealing specifically with Faulkner's fiction. William Van O'Connor moves in such a direction with his exploration of Protestantism as Southern mores in *Light In August*, declaring that the novel indicates "the Protestant or puritan spirit is one of the most significant factors [...] in the tragedy of Negro and white relationships" (158). Though he later notes "That *Light in August* is not a sociological document is clear enough" (169), O'Connor's close reading emphasizes the novel's portrayal of fanatical Calvinism and suggests it as a way of understanding the South, and the nation's, poor race relations. The Calvinism he sees in Faulkner's writing, moreover, is a reading of the fundamentalist underpinning in the whole of American society through the South, given Calvinism's correlation to colonial

history. Framing racial conflict in terms of the Protestant spirit also presents it as a moral or ethical problem within the hearts of men solved with the “direction, discipline and consolations” that religion has to offer (169) rather than an epidemic of crooked political motivations defeated by legalistic structures. Morality, *Southern Renascence* consistently asserts, cannot be legislated. Robert Jacobs describes Faulkner as primarily a moralist.³ He casts the tragic worlds of *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* as ones of moral order in which each protagonist fails in “the general responsibility for his fellow” (173). These characters, Jacobs argues, all arrive at their tragic endings by rebelling against, and he quotes the Nobel Prize speech, “old verities and truths of the heart” (Faulkner qtd. in Jacobs 191). The real tragedy that befell the South, and could ostensibly face America, has everything to do with the shirking of an individual’s responsibility to a larger community, slavery, poverty, and risk of utter defeat notwithstanding. Much like Heilman earlier, Jacobs writes of a universal truth from which man must act, but he does little to attempt to define it outside of quoting the Nobel Prize address (191).

Race does not take center stage in the area studies formulation of *Southern Renascence* until Irene C. Edmonds’s “Faulkner and the Black Shadow,” which is its last essay directly addressing southern literature’s singular monolithic figure. She begins her essay by quoting Shreve McCannon, who implores his roommate at Harvard, Quentin Compson, to tell about the South. Her essay seems to stand in for Quentin’s story; Edmonds indicates in her consideration of black characters in

³ Jacobs does not take credit as the first to call Faulkner a moralist. In his second contribution to the volume, he points to a “fine essay in 1939” by George Marion O’Donnell (172)—no doubt O’Donnell’s contribution to the first issue of the *Kenyon Review*, “Faulkner’s Mythology.”

Faulkner's work that understanding blacks and their relationship with their oppressors is vital to understanding the South. She declares that the South's fall has roots not so much in "a death struggle between decadent Sartorises and materialistic Snopeses" so much as in claiming to be Christian, yet not behaving as such, particularly in regard to race relations (192). Faulkner rarely attempted such an understanding, she argues, pointing to Lucas Beauchamp being the only black character of his whose inner thoughts are revealed through narration (201). However, Edmonds's incisive critique does not so much present how Faulkner's dealings with race could be a model for intellectuals grappling with racial discord in the United States as opposed to demonstrating how best to avoid a treatment of the problem altogether. In pointing to disparities between Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* and the strong-willed Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust*, Edmonds concludes that Faulkner's fiction as a whole does not contribute to the race question in the South. And even though she concludes that Faulkner deems slavery the cause of the South's failure, she says, "What Faulkner has done is to present situations and reserve any personal judgment. He does not write social protest" (206). The grand mage of Southern literature and culture takes no activist stance on improving conditions for minorities in the South; why should its scholars and intellectuals?

It is precisely this kind of formalist posturing that *Southern Renaissance* features: praising works by framing their significance within questions of aesthetics, morality, internal conflict, or individual worth as it relates to a grand American society—a Yoknapatawpha of their own design—rather than addressing any collectivist or progressive narrative advocating change within the real world. While it does devote

essays to other authors prominently in its pages (including James Branch Cabell and Ellen Glasgow, to whom critics have paid less attention as time wears on), the figure of Faulkner is what makes possible the area studies paradigm of southern studies. This is not only significant for southern studies, but for Faulkner, as well, who was alive and witnessing this mobilization of his novels and stories and found himself in a position to participate in it.

Blowing Smoke

A critical project such as Rubin and Jacobs's, therefore, bears significance not only for the development of the southern area studies and Faulkner's critical history, but even for his own attitude toward his work. Without a doubt, Faulkner felt the intellectual pressures that scholars of the emerging canons of American and southern literature placed upon him. Frequently an audience to interpretations—political or otherwise—of his own works, he maintained a distance. Kreyling argues that “Faulkner had few or partially formed ideas and judgments on many of these issues, and he was normally reluctant to divulge, and never willing to debate, most of them,” requiring a critical “fabrication” of the monolithic figure, “Faulkner” (*Inventing* 130). Kreyling further comments, “William Faulkner was sincere when he said he wanted anonymity, that he resented imprisonment in the role of representative author, that his later work is marked by the desire to unwrite or subvert his public image” (*Inventing* 132). On the other hand, *Intruder in the Dust*, a novel from just past the midpoint of his career, assists in the formulation of Kreyling’s “Faulkner” and southern area studies rather than providing a barrier for William Faulkner, the individual. It does so in its representation of problems facing the US and South after World War II.

Intruder in the Dust is a murder mystery that becomes a case history on the nascent civil rights struggles and Faulkner's most pointed, novelistic comment on Southern race relations. It centers on Lucas Beauchamp, a black man who frustrates the folks in and around Jefferson because he has white ancestors and refuses to behave in the way blacks were expected to in the 1940s. Lucas is wrongly arrested for the murder of Vinson Gowrie. At Lucas's request, the sixteen-year-old Charles "Chick" Mallison, who was bewildered by Lucas and his wife's generosity after falling through ice while out hunting one winter long ago, and his childhood friend, Aleck Sander, search for evidence of the real murderer. Their efforts exonerate Lucas, whose legal representation, Gavin Stevens, Chick's uncle, is barely a party to the activities. Its early reviewers immediately noticed a political tinge in the novel. Calling the novel a "tract," Edmund Wilson, in his frequently cited 1948 review, surmises *Intruder* "seems to have been partly inspired by the crisis at the time of the recent war in the relations between white and Negroes and by the recently proposed legislation for guaranteeing Negro rights" (222). Few who refer to Wilson go on to include his more polemical comment on Lucas's rescue from the lynch mob. He says of the would-be lynchers leaving in their cars to return to Beat Four, the community in the outlying areas of Yoknapatawpha County where the murder took place, "There has been nothing so exhilarating in its way since the triumphs of the Communist-led workers in the early Soviet films" (224). The description importantly compares *Intruder* with propagandistic art, framing the coalition of Chick, Aleck, Stevens, and Miss Habersham (a spinster who assists Chick and Aleck) as having specific collective, political aims beyond simply rescuing Lucas. Wilson is not alone in detecting the political content of Faulkner's detective novel. Another early

reviewer, Elizabeth Hardwick, perceives Gavin Stevens's expressed views on the race issue to be nothing more than a "want [of] violence in order to prove themselves right" that immediate integration would cause more harm than good (1133). She, too, evokes Cold War apprehensions, suggesting that the position held by *Intruder* could cause the continued popularity of Communism among African-Americans.

However, Cleanth Brooks, in the first extensive scholarly treatment of *Intruder*, discounts both Wilson's and Hardwick's readings of the novel as a tract. Being the consummate New Critic, Brooks could not accept a simple dismissal of the novel as political, for doing so acknowledges political content. "A more cogent objection to this novel," he declares, "is the incoherence of the plot," with the speeches one of the incoherent elements (280). Alternatively, Brooks reads *Intruder* as a story of a boy growing into a man through a conflict with his community. Chick's own ethical compass, which spurs him to accept Lucas's request and extend justice and equality to Lucas, steers him through the storm of racial discontent. Stevens's ramblings are, in Brooks's understanding of *Intruder*, "subordinate to the main matter: Charles Mallison's development toward wider sympathies and a sharper ethical conscience" (288-89). Such a reading of Chick's moral individuality as the solution to what is really a rampant political problem within the South is not only a classic New Critical perspective, but another apolitically political move offering a palliative for racial unrest that does not solve the underlying issues of discrimination (such as the poverty and vigilantism of the Beat Four lynch mob).

Most scholars regard *Intruder* as one of Faulkner's lesser works, perhaps following Brooks's lead, citing Stevens's moralizing, heavy-handed speeches as ill connected to

the narrative. There seems a kind of double standard applied to *Intruder in the Dust*, as suggested by Jean E. Graham. Other characters—Quentin Compson and Jason in *The Sound and the Fury* are Graham's examples—have extended dialogues guilty of the same transgressions levied against Stevens, yet there is no prevalent dismissal of them as characters in the scholarship (78-79). Graham ultimately argues for Stevens's importance to the novel as a complex, confusing complement to an equally complex plot that also tutors his nephew in his conflict with the Southern community's long held racism. The interaction between the two results in a complex dialogue between uncle and nephew. To dismiss the novel altogether on the basis of Gavin Stevens is, I concur, a terrible mistake, but for the reasons that the novel has been dismissed in the first place. His words are what make *Intruder* at the same time a political novel and a significant point of departure for Faulkner. The novel begins to forge an understanding of the South during the Cold War adopted by the scholars who founded southern studies and who later passed over the novel in order to keep it politically apolitical.

The key to this is, of course, Stevens's long monologues, which fall short of any kind of activism. One easily compares Stevens with the Southern liberals Smith lambasts in *South Today*. Faulkner assists in the parallel through his own description of Stevens in an October 1948 conversation about *Intruder* with Malcolm Cowley during a visit at Cowley's home. According to published notes Cowley scribbled down about the visit after Faulkner's departure, "Stevens, he explained, was not speaking for the author, but for the best type of liberal Southerners; that is how they feel about Negroes. 'If the race problem were just left to the children,' Faulkner told me, 'they'd be solved soon enough.'" (110-111). The latter assertion plays out in the pages of *Intruder*, for it is

through the efforts of young Chick and Aleck (assisted by the spinster, Miss Habersham) that Lucas is exonerated, and certainly not through any philosophical waxing on Stevens's part. Noel Polk argues, and I agree, that Stevens is mostly a smoke-blower. In corroboration, Polk points to the number of times he lights his corn cob pipe at the end of speeches to Chick and in the way he reaches for the offensive abstraction "Sambo" when addressing the broad issues of the race problems as opposed to actually naming his client, Lucas Beauchamp, and addressing methods by which he may be defended.

In spite of his denial to Cowley that Stevens spoke for him, the character has long been regarded as Faulkner's political mouthpiece. A part of this function is serving as instruments of a southern area studies: a paradigm for the southern racial redemption through which manifests suggestions about the primacy of individual moral responsibility and relationship to country. If not outwardly, his statements support certain values key to American ambitions for global democracy during the Cold War. Most telling are Stevens's claims about American "homogeneity," which he tells Chick they are defending as opposed to tradition or "politics or beliefs" (*ID* 150). The South stands alone, for "the rest of the country has had to surrender voluntarily more and more of its personal and private liberty in order to continue to afford the United States. And of course we will continue to defend it" (*ID* 150). Here, Stevens reveals one of the great paradoxes of Southern political sensibilities of the twentieth century: individual, provincial pride translated into love of one's (homogenous) nation. For "only a few of us know that only from homogeneity come anything of a people or for a people of durable and lasting value—the literature, the art, the science, that minimum of government and

police which is the meaning of freedom and liberty, and perhaps most valuable of all a national character worth anything in a crisis" (*ID* 151) If democratic art and the most advanced sciences on the globe are what Cold War intellectuals seek to enable the US fight against the contagion of Communism, then the South ostensibly has all this to offer.

A similar kind of reasoning appears in Stevens's argument specifically about Northern interference in the race question, phrased simply in his famous statement toward the end of *Intruder in the Dust*, "I only say that the injustice is ours, the South's. We must expatriate and abolish it ourselves, alone and without help or even (with thanks) advice" (*ID* 199). Yet Stevens's position as outlined here is deceptively simple when compared to his earlier comments:

We—he [Sambo, not Lucas Beauchamp] and us—should confederate: swap him the rest of the economic and political and cultural privileges which are his right, for the reversion of his capacity to wait and endure and survive. Then we would prevail; together we would dominate the United States; we would present a front not only impregnable but not even to be threatened by a mass of people who no longer have anything in common save a frantic greed for money and a basic fear of failure of national character which they hid from one another behind a loud lip-service to a flag. (*ID* 153)

It is preposterous, of course, to suggest that contentious racial relations over hundreds of years built character among white and black southerners and that their differences can be solved once and for all through an economy of generosity: white southerners give black southerners their rights in exchange for all the brutality endured.

Preposterous or no, the most important thing about his claim is its suggestion of again a lack of homogeneity in the rest of the country, not simply racial but moral or cultural, too. Joe Karaganis argues that in Stevens's logic, the protection of this homogeneity is crucial for the protection of the United States. Furthermore, he claims "*Confederation*,

in this respect, is not just a regional solution to the race question, but a model of national redemption in which the white South stands, unexpectedly, in the vanguard" (121, emphasis retained from original). Karaganis's presentation of Stevens's assertions substantiates this paradigm as a southern area studies: the South leads with a model for the best management of national—and, as we shall see, international—tensions.

In the foregoing comment from Stevens, he places the impetus for change with willing individuals—in the novel his nephew and Aleck—rather than the object of his criticism, a "mass of people" bound together by only business interests and national pride. Given such emphasis, Stevens's principal declaration in *Intruder* is, and Karaganis agrees, that individuals are necessary as opposed to any collective effort to make material changes to race relations in the South and the US. Progress begins with an individual and spreads virally (124-25). His model is, therefore, not one of collectivity, which would be too closely associated with Communism during the Cold War. Here Faulkner divulges one of his great political fears within his art. Polk notes that the notion of any group acting collectively, in Faulkner's mind and the collective conscious of Cold War intellectuals, is unappealing precisely because collectivism most frequently manifested itself as Communism after World War II. This also applied to the new government programs that "in Faulkner's view, were depriving individual man of his capacity and of his right to depend upon himself" (175). Stevens's lectures may be him blowing smoke at Chick, but these lengthy talks suggest more broadly what Southerners and Americans can do to combat these unsavory political developments in the United States and abroad. Polk further explains:

Southern whites and blacks, he [Faulkner through Stevens] argued, had more in common with each other than any Southerner had with any Northerner; therefore, Southerners, black and white, had better stick together to stave off any outsider's challenge to their way of life. By the same token, he felt all Americans, black, white, southern, northern, needed to stick together in order to present a united front to combat the menace of Communism. (176)

Faulkner's vehement anti-communism as a context for *Intruder* is important for two reasons. First of all, the novel does, indeed, transmit Faulkner's political sensibilities regarding issues newsworthy in 1948: discrimination and communism. Secondly, if the nascent southern studies is organizing itself around "Faulkner" as its monolithic figure, it does so with a nesting doll scheme: Americans can learn how best to contain its political ills by watching how the South labors to contain its own. *Intruder* becomes the first literary text contributing to an area studies of the US South, thereby making Faulkner politically complicit in the area studies paradigm.

At least one of the first reviews of the novel takes note of its area studies gestures: Elizabeth Hardwick's excoriating review. "The sickness of *Intruder in the Dust*, the fear and despair," which she sees driving the political agenda of southern resolve in solving its own shortcomings

are intimately connected with the future of Faulkner's career, a career which demands that there be a South, not just a geographical section and an accent, but a reasonably autonomous unit, a kind of family ready, and even with a measure of geniality, to admit the existence of the people next door and to cooperate in the necessary civic responsibilities, [...] but beyond that unique and separate, not to be reproached, advised, or mourned for the goings on behind the door. (1131, emphasis mine)

There is a double-entendre in Hardwick's statement. Initially, she seems to say that a career such as his required there to be a South to use as subject matter. (To say that Faulkner's career would not exist without the South is, perhaps, reason enough to be run out on a rail from English departments, given the sheer quantity and depth of

scholarship produced on his work and life.) Of greater consequence is the second interpretation of Hardwick's remark, and what I believe she intends: Faulkner's career and the study of it *command* that there be a South. His works foster the theorization of the South as a discrete unit for twentieth century sociological study (if even in the very least by way of Donald Davidson's misguided question that Howard Odum was forced to answer) and the formal study of its literature (for which Faulkner has been taken as the supreme example and starting point). And in the case of *Intruder*, the South must maintain its independence by being allowed to lead itself to whatever destiny after a sordid and brutal history of racial injustice, even if that includes the secret hope for violence in order to prove all non-southern meddlers (and Lillian Smith) wrong. But because of the entangled, unique history of white and black in Faulkner's South, it can lead the way as the model for the management of such tensions, and for others.

Faulkner as “Faulkner”

William Faulkner never escaped the “Faulkner” figuration posited by Kreyling, and neither *Intruder* nor the increased amount of attention his work would receive in the years following his Nobel win and prominence in *Southern Renaissance* would assist in gaining any more distance from it. The film version of his detective novel, which was slated to be and eventually filmed in Oxford, stirred the locals: Mississippi conservatives attacked him as a radical spewing dangerous ideas about race in the most recent novel, though politically Faulkner was more aligned with them considering his opposition to the New Deal and government intervention in general (Blotner, *Faulkner* 1273). Willing or not, Faulkner became not only the rallying point, but a participant in the founding of southern literary studies as an area studies by which intellectuals better understood what it meant to be American—to value tradition, history,

the individual's moral initiative and ingenuity for solving problems, and be uninvolved in the affairs of others (or at least maintain the appearance of being uninvolved)—and how to further contain unsavory, national political problems into an object of formalistic literary study.

While nothing but speculation may be made on the immediate impact of the emerging southern studies on policy, the South's unwavering self-determinism seems to influence the US in its dealings with European allies regarding its colonial holdings. Domestically and internationally, containment became the strategy for dealing with race and communism. Borstelmann recounts that in order to maintain good working relationships and free commerce with European nations and their colonies, the US allowed its distaste for outside rule (akin to the South's distaste for meddling) to allow the issues of colonial independence fall to the backburner during the late 1940s (68-70). This trend continued in the 1950s with President Eisenhower and his administration, who were satisfied with the “political containment of racial problems rather than their solutions” domestically or internationally (Burk qtd. in Borstelmann 86). By 1954, Faulkner himself was making his first voyages abroad at the behest of the State Department as a cultural ambassador with the primary mission of smoothing things over. His first assignment was to an international writers' conference in São Paulo, Brazil, the purpose of which was “improving relations between the United States and the countries of South America” (Minter 232-33), and he later traveled on diplomatic business through Japan, Greece, and western Europe. This work further closes the gap between Faulkner and “Faulkner,” which more solidly correlates the literary and political

ambitions and activities of the author with the late modernist aims of New Critics re-founding democratic art on American (and southern) soil.

Four years after Faulkner's death in 1962, Malcolm Cowley attempted to offer a summative statement for the literary career that he had a hand in resurrecting two decades earlier. He claimed that Faulkner retained his "genius" as a writer late in his career despite the challenges of isolation, provincialism, and sudden stardom—all of these related to his Southern origins. He admires Faulkner the most "[a]mong the great dead," because, "he was the proudest man I knew. The pride made him act by his own standards, which were always difficult ones" (175). Faulkner is no longer, or perhaps never was, judged by those exacting personal standards of his, but by a knowledge community much less interested in him than in "Faulkner," the regional study that his fiction demanded for his canonization, and its national politics. No doubt, his students have effectively surveyed into his mapping of Yoknapatawpha America's unique political situation at the beginning of the Cold War.

CHAPTER 4

LATE MODERNIST AESTHETICS AND THE FUNCTION OF LITERARY PRIZES

The evening of 28 January 1953 found the authors of two decorated and highly regarded novels at the same dinner party. The day before, the National Book Foundation presented Ralph Ellison with a National Book Award for *Invisible Man*. Even though it was only the fourth presentation of the Award, the ceremony drew much attention and provided Ellison with the opportunity to mingle with other acclaimed American authors: William Carlos Williams, Eudora Welty, and William Faulkner to name a few. The dinner party, however, gave Ellison time to do more than simply mingle with Robert Penn Warren, whose *All the King's Men* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1947. The two quickly developed a professional relationship at this dinner party. Warren asked Ellison that very evening to collaborate with him on a television documentary on American history (Rampersad 272). This professional relationship and mutual respect developed into a friendship when their families spent time together in Rome in 1956. Other professional correlations between the two include working with the same editor, Albert Erskine, at Random House, Warren later interviewing and featuring Ellison in *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (essentially a collection of heavily edited interviews with leaders of the civil rights movement), and their service in several academic positions throughout their long careers. They shared a strong friendship that ended with Ellison delivering a eulogy for Warren at his memorial service in 1989 (Blotner, Warren 500).

The story of the friendship between Warren, the ex-Fugitive and ex-segregationist, and Ellison, the African American ex-Communist, is quite compelling, and perhaps even inspiring. Yet what sheds the most light on their repositioning towards seemingly more

centrist American artistic and intellectual activity is the most significant commonality between the two: their prize-winning novels. In this chapter I will argue that together *All the King's Men* and *Invisible Man* are texts worthy of attention in coming to understand the formation of literary canons in the United States and the conditions for the formalization of the study of Southern literature during the postwar period. Three distinct factors contribute to these novels being watershed moments in my reading of postwar American literature. The first of these is Warren's disavowal of Agrarian political views and Ellison's self-driven de-Marxization (to use Guilbaut's term), which both serve as examples of the commitment among writers and intellectuals to hold fast to the politically safe and unquestioningly American "vital center," as described by Arthur Schlesinger. The commitment to centrist, safe politics makes both *All the King's Men* and *Invisible Man* exemplary works of late modernist fiction in their humanist or moralist agendas despite their deeply politicized settings. Secondly, the recognition of these novels by prize committees, each charged with conferring their award upon a work of American fiction of the highest artistic—and politically amenable—merit indicates that these are works that were held in the highest regard by their contemporaries as representations of American values, and that the persistent treatment of these works among scholarship on American literature suggest an importance to the late modernist impulse for canon formation. Finally, these novels' separate portrayals of political conundrums perceived as distinctively Southern universalizes them as a part of the American experience by emphasizing the US South's valuing of the individual as a key component in shoring up the vital center in American political aspirations. The significance of this reinterpretation of the place of *All*

the King's Men and *Invisible Man* in American letters is that the treatment of Southern literary studies as a kind of area studies is necessarily one and the same with the formalization and institutionalization of American literary studies.

Warren, Ellison, and the Vital Center

In the decades that followed the publication of *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), its most visible and widely respected contributor was Robert Penn Warren, who won two additional Pulitzers and a National Book Award for his poetry and was Poet Laureate of the United States. He was also a respected critic and author of textbooks that fundamentally changed the approach to literature in the college classroom. Perhaps his success can be attributed to the fact that no other Agrarian seems to have recanted his segregationist beliefs faster than Warren, nor perhaps—along with John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate—clung to formalism so tightly. Most telling of Warren's commitment to New Critical formalism is his application of it on his past in the opening pages of *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (1965). He reminisces on an essay he wrote—a “cogent and human defense of segregation”—during the winter of 1929 and admits not reading the essay in its published form for concern of it making him “uncomfortable.” Going on, Warren states, “In fact, while writing it, I had experienced some vague discomfort, like the discomfort you feel with your poem doesn't quite come off, when you've had to fake, or twist, or pad it, when you haven't really explored the impulse” (10-11). No doubt the essay to which he refers is “The Briar Patch,” his contribution to *I'll Take My Stand*. Yet what is most notable about his recollection of the essay is the nature of the uneasiness it gave him. Warren seems concerned with neither the ramifications of being a committed segregationist nor his audience's reaction to Agrarian politics. He certainly does not seem concerned about the future and welfare of those whose fate his essay

most pointedly addresses. Rather, the essay makes him uncomfortable because it reads like a bad poem. While one could interpret Warren's statement as a deployment of figurative language to suggest that any argument in support of segregation holds its basis only in imagined supportive points about the conditions of the US South, this is nonetheless an instance in which Warren attempts to thoroughly depoliticize his former associations and beliefs. According to his reminiscing on the essay, the gross inhumanity of segregation is nothing worse than an overwrought poem.

Warren's retreat toward the center, which continued through the 1940s, seems to have more basis in his artistic and critical commitments than his political sensibilities, though they become one and the same—a variety of Guilbaut's apolitical politicization. This is repeatedly evident in the progression of his literary career. One significant marker in particular is his essay, "Literature as Symptom," which he provided for *Who Owns America?: A New Declaration of Independence* (1936). The book was a second symposium of former Agrarians edited by Allen Tate, Warren's long-time friend, and Herbert Agar and intended as a deep criticism of finance capitalism. Of the essay, Joseph Blotner warns, "Any reader seeking a political-literary program would have been disappointed, finding there instead a brilliant discourse on literary history capped by the adjuration to the artist to his own self to be true" (Warren 153-54). That is, an apolitically political program instead.

Warren participated in the apolitical politicization of American intellectual life in his activities as a scholar, critic, and university teacher. Among his lasting influences on the teaching of literature is *Understanding Poetry* (1938), the combination textbook-anthology he co-wrote with his Louisiana State University colleague and co-editor on

the *Southern Review*, Cleanth Brooks. The textbook became a standard. It emphasized close reading, limiting criticism to the text itself, and banished biographical, historical, and social context from the classroom approach. In their “letter to the teacher” in the front matter of *Understanding Poetry*, Brooks and Warren say that their text is suitable for teachers who agree with the following point, which they quote from Louis Cazamain:

that all students of literature should be regarded as historians is an exaggerated and a pernicious assumption. More important still, and much more fruitful than the problems of origins and development are those of content and significance. What is the human matter, what is the artistic value of the work? (qtd. In Brooks and Warren xiv)

The organization of the textbook emphasizes this crucial point. Each section instructs on a particular poetic device and provides as examples poems from a variety of literary epochs. Its final section on “Theme” reproduces poems by John Donne, William Wordsworth, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and T.S Eliot without once acknowledging the vast historical and contextual differences between these authors. “[T]he method of presenting theme will vary from poem to poem,” Brooks and Warren write, and this method will be based in “special combinations of imagery, rhythm, statement, etc. [...] the real poet in presenting his theme never depends merely on general statement” (489). History is relevant to them only when it relates to one of the formal aspects of the poem, such as tone, subject, or theme, and the authors only bother to explain an historical context when it is relevant to these aspects and nothing else. *Understanding Poetry* was such a departure from the manner in which literature had been taught at in colleges that the book caused problems for Brooks and Warren at their university.

Blotner suggests that the book was “inimical” to the way many of the old professors at the school had been teaching literature, it caused faculty to sour on the two editors when LSU was taking austerity measures as World War II began; budget cuts ended

the first successful run of *Southern Review* in 1942, perhaps because of the feathers Brooks and Warren's book ruffled (Warren 191). It was the first of many conflicts that would drive Warren to the University of Minnesota, where he would write *All the King's Men*.

Warren eased into the center over the course of a decade. On the other hand, Ralph Ellison's bungeed from the left to the center over a shorter period of time than Warren. He departed the Tuskegee Institute for New York City in 1936 to escape the Jim Crow South but found racism still in the north. Rampersad suggests that it may have been his brief employment as a lab technician at the A.C. Horn Paint Company during 1937 —where his white co-workers resented him as the only black employee at the factory, and which no doubt served as the inspiration for the Liberty Paint Company in *Invisible Man*—that spring-boarded him towards the radical left and the Communist Party, of which he became a member (91-93). He also befriended Richard Wright during this time, who was already involved in the Communist Party and the John Reed Club (and was one of the primary figures leading Ellison to writing). Ellison participated in political events, agitations, and picketing; he toed the party line so tightly that he even supported a plank in the Party's platform that would create an autonomous nation for African-Americans in the South (122-23).

The principal records of Ellison's involvement remain the essays, reviews, and stories he contributed to the *New Masses*, the most famous Communist publication, between 1938 and 1942. Some of these essays were pointedly about African-Americans' struggle for equality, such as the narrative of his attendance of the Third National Negro Congress in Washington in a piece called "A Congress Jim Crow Didn't

Attend," which also advocated trade union membership among blacks. His contributions to the magazine ceased upon his service in the Merchant Marine during the winter of 1943-44, but his lack of involvement was more closely tied to his altering political beliefs. Before departing New York that winter, he had already begun his quiet break with the Communist Party. When the *People's Voice*, another publication with close Communist ties, asked for a special piece from Ellison for their May Day issue in 1943, he declined—or possibly never acknowledged the request (Rampersad 162). His friend and mentor, Richard Wright, had abandoned the Communists the previous year. Even during his work on *New Masses*, Ellison did not feel politically aligned with the publication or its editors in terms of writing. Rampersad quotes Ellison at length reflecting on his involvement with *New Masses* later in life:

“I never wrote the official type of fiction,” he later insisted. “I wrote what might be called propaganda—having to do with the Negro struggle—but my fiction was always trying to do something else. . . I never accepted the ideology which the *New Masses* attempted to impose on writers.” (121-122)

Ellison attempts to maintain a separation between ideology and literature in essays he wrote after his involvement with *New Masses*. In “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity” (written in 1946 but not published until 1953, then republished in *Shadow and Act*), Ellison addresses the problem of unsophisticated or grossly exaggerated, inaccurate portrayals of blacks in American fiction with a particularly moralistic emphasis on the virtues of American democracy rather than the political implications of such portrayals. He asserts, after establishing that the renderings of black Americans in fiction by Twain, Hemingway, and Faulkner have a basis in the context of slavery and oppression, that not history, but fiction, is his concern. He then questions how America’s literature, “one of the most vital bodies of twentieth-century

fiction, perhaps the brightest instrument for recording sociological fact, physical action, the nuance of speech, yet achieved—becomes suddenly dull when confronting the Negro" ("Black Mast" 83)? Never does he deny that American fiction has served as a kind of barometer for race relations in the United States. On the other hand, Ellison favors addressing the issue in terms of individualism and morality instead of emphasizing politics or political action. The fiction of prejudice "forgets that a democracy is a collectivity of *individuals*" and "its function is no less personal than political" ("Black Mast" 84). The greatest purpose in analyzing this stereotype in literature is to understand that it is a "key figure in a magic rite by which the white American seeks to resolve the dilemma arising between his democratic beliefs and certain antidemocratic practices" (85), namely, discrimination and *de jure* segregation in the US South. Ellison recasts the greatest foreign policy and domestic issue for the United States during the escalation of the Cold War as a problem of morality: the national crisis reduced to immorality, specifically in the denials of the greatest virtues the American way of life has to offer to African American.

These instances from the lives and works of Warren and Ellison significantly reveal their commitment to the apolitical politics. These politics deemed necessary for American-style democracy and freedom can be located in a political center first named by the historian Arthur Schlesinger in his 1948 *New York Times Magazine* article, "Not Right, Not Left, but a Vital Center." In his essay, Schlesinger envisions a democratic and distinctly American political center that would prevail because the "non-Communist Left" and "non-Fascist Right" both have a tremendous stake in the perseverance of American capitalism, the free market, and civil liberties—"a faith that the differences

between them over economic issues can be best worked out by discussion and debate under law" rather than through violence or, perhaps worse, political radicalism (47). The vital center influences the late modernist turn in the arts because its uses a closely monitored aesthetic to protect the sanctity these American politics-turned-values, namely "civil liberties," "constitutional processes," and "democratic determination" (47). Schlesinger further develops his ideas in *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (1949), a book that Thomas Hill Schaub says only attempts to understand history "within ahistorical and moral categories" as opposed to political ones (10), especially in Schlesinger's repeated references to the "faith" that American intellectuals must have in liberalism for the country to succeed on the world stage. The book also repeatedly ties economic success to that of individual liberty within society. The moral category Schlesinger seems particularly obsessed with is none other than the evils of Communism. In a chapter on the virtue of American civil liberties, he celebrates the Constitution's protections of free speech and the Supreme Court's espousal of the "clear and present danger" doctrine when dealing with inflammatory rhetoric. This celebration cannot include manifestations of Communism in free speech, for when "Communist activities do present, not just a potential threat [...] we must act swiftly in defense of freedom. Civil liberties do not deny society its right of self-protection" (218). Not discussed, however, is how civil liberties might defend civil rights, a category he mentions but fails to discuss at length. At the beginning of the civil liberties chapter, Schlesinger comments briefly on President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights and its 1948 report, stating merely that "Most Americans accept, at least in principle, the obligations spelled out in the Civil Rights report" (190). Yet he, too, recasts the social

conditions of prejudice as a moral conundrum in writing, “The sin of racial pride still represents the most basic challenge to the American conscience” (190). The challenge is so basic for Schlesinger that he addresses it in all of one page. It is such a non-issue for him that he suggests that even the South understands that the civil rights agenda is a valid program “even though it may have serious and intelligible reservations about timing and method” (190). His gross understatement about the realities of the predominant Southern attitudes toward desegregation indicate an attempt to refocus intellectual attention on what he deems greater threats to American democracy, fascism and Communism.

If vehement anti-fascism and anti-Communism are the markers of the vital center, *All the King’s Men* and *Invisible Man* certainly situate Warren and Ellison within its area on the political continuum. The markers are strong in both books despite the fact that both authors claimed that their novels were not at all about politics—this, too, is arguably a marker of late modernist literature. In an introduction Warren wrote for the Modern Library edition of his novel, he says that even though upon its publication readers interpreted the novel to be an “apologia” for Huey Long—the wildly popular but paranoid and tyrannical senator from Louisiana—or a “rousing declaration of democratic principles and a tract for the assassination of dictators,” (v) politics were not what he had in mind. *All the King’s Men* “was never intended to be a book about politics. Politics merely provided the *framework* story in which the deeper concerns, whatever their final significance, might work themselves out” (vi, emphasis mine). In Warren’s view, the political content of *All the King’s Men* is not content at all. Willie Stark’s

platform and method of governance serve merely as a formal aspect of the novel upon which hangs the novel's larger questions of personal responsibility and morality.

Yet politics were no doubt on Warren's mind. As described by himself in his introduction, the characters and story of *All the King's Men* find their genesis in *Proud Flesh*, a verse drama about a character inspired by Huey Long, which he finished work on in the late 1930s. The preponderance of the work on the play was completed in Rome during the time of Mussolini's rise to power (i-ii). Robert Brinkmeyer identifies this fact to be of critical importance in understanding Warren's work during this time, especially considering Warren's opportunities to see the specter of fascism with his own eyes during his long stays in Europe:

Almost all of Warren's writing from the mid-1930s to 1950 show him wrestling in one way or another with this dark enemy [fascism], though not with the patriotic clarity that many critics demanded. Straightforwardly instructive literature for Warren was not a defense against totalitarianism but the voice of totalitarianism, and the best way to silence that voice was to write contested, complex, and ironic literature whose very form embodied an affirmed intellectual freedom and democracy. (*The Fourth Ghost* 279)

Essentially Brinkmeyer outs Warren as a late modernist; his works during these years had no outward political warnings against the trappings of charismatic political leadership and totalitarianism (that would be propaganda), but his works had a political agenda nonetheless. The agenda was more concerned with that "affirm[ation of] intellectual freedom and democracy," the critical American morals.

Just as telling as the proto-Willie Stark from *Proud Flesh*¹ regarding political trappings are the early drafts of *Invisible Man*. At no point in his life did Ellison ever

¹ In *Proud Flesh*, the protagonist and pseudo-Huey Long is named Willie Talos, a direct allusion to the "brutal, blank-eyed 'iron groom' of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the pitiless servant of the knight of justice" (Warren, introduction vi). In the initial drafts of *All the King's Men* retained the name. Noel Polk restores

broadcast his involvement in the Communist party, and especially not during the time of his winning of the National Book Award. Barbara Foley describes the novel as “unequivocally, a text of the Cold War” because of its anticomunism and “antipathy to the organized Left” (164). Yet in her study of the drafts of *Invisible Man* (held by the Library of Congress), she notices a pattern in which the presence of the Communist party becomes diminished as Ellison made progress on the novel. The first manifestations of Ellison’s invisible man were of a figure much more invested in organized radical political activism on the Left and much more enamored with the Communist Party. Foley comments, “his hero’s encounter with the organized Left is hardly that of a Cold Warrior and in fact suggests considerable admiration for various facets of the Communist activity in Harlem with which Ellison himself was quite familiar” (178-79). Also according to Foley, the shunning of Communism in the pages of *Invisible Man* did not happen overnight: the radical Leftist politics were excised in a “process, not a single act”—a process she terms “anticommunistization” (179).² The de-radicalization of *Invisible Man* makes it no less a political novel despite Ellison’s claims otherwise. He described the novel as an “attempt to return to the mood of personal moral responsibility for democracy” (“Brave Words” 151). The moral responsibility for democracy again recalls the vital center, treating American democracy not as a political program, but a sound, moral principle. Its insistence on the sanctity of distinctly American virtues makes it the first true Cold War novel.

the name Willie Talos, along with other alterations insisted upon by Warren’s editors, in his 2001 restored edition of the novel.

² Foley’s terminology begs comparison with Serge Guilbaut’s “de-Marxization.” Ellison’s own turning away from the radical Left corresponds with the rise of abstract expressionism, and both take place in New York: Ellison’s home and the new home for art after World War II.

Of Prizes and Politics

Warren and Ellison's activities and commentary on their work leave little doubt that their novels are the two quintessential late modernist texts; their winning of the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award respectively removes the last shades of doubt. Literary prizes by their design seek to reward certain qualities in literature. Indeed, the celebrations of certain qualities in American literature were of utmost importance to intellectuals and critics in the late 1940s to early 1950s.

In the particular case of the Pulitzer Prize, its initial prize criteria and revisions to it supplied a convenient organ by which to reinforce American values. The prizes were established at Columbia University upon the death of the shrewd journalist and businessman Joseph Pulitzer. The prizes mostly focused on awarding outstanding journalism, but there were also categories in letters, including one for the best American novel. His will stipulated, "Annually for the American novel published during the year which shall best present the whole atmosphere of American life, and the highest standard of American manners and manhood, One thousand dollars (\$1,000)" (qtd. in Hohenberg 19). His will also stipulated that the Advisory Board for the prize may revise the criteria as necessary to keep the prize relevant, which they did with frequency. Soon after the first prize was awarded in 1917, the board, under the control of Nicholas Murray Butler—the highly conservative president of Columbia—replaced the word "whole" with "wholesome" (Stuckey 7). By 1928, "wholesome" was reverted to "whole" and the words "manners" and "manhood" were dropped from the criteria; it was revised again for 1930, when the prize was given for "the best American novel published during the year, preferably one which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life" (9-10). The insistence upon wholesomeness—most likely the work of

Butler—deeply frustrated literary critics and writers because such a qualification severely limited what subjects serious, meritorious novels could broach.³ Moreover, in the method by which the prizewinners are determined, the final decision lies not with the jurors but with the Advisory Board, who have ignored the wishes of the jurors on more than one occasion.⁴ In the ultimate act of capriciousness, the Advisory Board changed “novel” to “fiction in book form” almost immediately after awarding Warren the prize for 1947 in the anticipation that they would give the following year’s prize to James Michener’s collection of stories, *Tales of the South Pacific*.

The consequences of the Advisory Board’s capriciousness and obsession with wholesomeness resulted in the selection of novels that are often highly accessible and safe in regards to their portrayal of politics (or lack thereof) and the passing over of novels scholars today look back on favorably. J. Douglas Bates points to the repeated exclusion of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner from the award (123). Of particular relevance is the 1937 award, for which Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* was eligible. Instead, Margaret Mitchell won for *Gone With the Wind*. Rather than choosing a novel of technical difficulty weaving a sexually explicit story of probable incest and cold-blooded murder that confronted southern (and American) obsessions with racial purity, the Advisory Board honored a best-selling novel ripe for film adaptation and featuring an ameliorated portrayal of plantation slavery and honorable Confederates. Its

³ W.J. Stuckey has gone so far to say that wholesomeness criterium became “irrelevant to second- and third-rate American novels” well before 1930 (8).

⁴ Perhaps the most famous example of this is the Advisory Board’s refusal to accede to the jurors’ selection of Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* for the 1973 prize, and consequently the Board presented no award for fiction that year. A similar situation occurred for the 1954 award because the eligibility period “had produced no novel by an American author that merited such distinction” (Hohenberg 166).

adherence to idealized tradition and social mores (i.e., wholesomeness) also made it a safe choice. The journalist John Hohenberg reports in his history of the Prizes—a book he wrote while serving as secretary to the Advisory Board—what the selection of *Gone With the Wind* accomplished:

[...] with the passage of time, Margaret Mitchell's story became a part of American folklore—a novel that was read by millions of people inside and outside the country, a movie that was shown and reshown, and shown on television to a new generation, even a musical drama that originated in Japan with an all-Japanese cast singing a score by the American composer, Harold Rome. Whatever the critics may have thought of the book's sentiment and magnolia-scented romance, the public loved it and still does. *Gone With the Wind* was an eminently defensible choice. (140)

As secretary of the Advisory Board, Hohenberg had an interest in defending the Board's decisions concerning winners. But while comments suggest that the Pulitzer went to the right novel that year because of the success of *Gone With the Wind*, there is no accounting for the effect that winning such a prestigious award had on the future successes of Mitchell's novel. Also revealing within his comments is his pointing toward the worldwide success of the novel as a part of "American folklore." The implication is that the most defensible winners of the Pulitzer Prize in fiction are works that serve as ambassadors of idealized culture and that the prize has influence on what passes into the American mythos. With these concerns at play in selecting *Gone With the Wind* for the 1937 prize, the literary Pulitzer Prizes emerge as relevant players in the apolitically political turn in literature and literary studies.

The choice of *All the King's Men* in 1947, however, is the selection that cements the Prize's commitment to promoting literature of the vital center, a choice upon which the Advisory Board and jurors could agree. W.J. Stuckey argues that Warren's novel

was a natural choice for the award because his conservatism was a trait he shared with previous Pulitzer novelists, with slight differences:

Whereas his predecessors' outlook is primarily social and economic, Warren's is primarily philosophical and moral. [Booth] Tarkington, [Edna] Ferber, [Louis] Bromfield, [Margaret Ayers] Barnes, [T.S.] Stribling, Mitchell, [Martin] Flavin, and the others are concerned mainly with the individual's allegiance to certain rules of conduct having to do with money, work, and sexual behavior; Warren is concerned with the total problem of individual responsibility and the individual conscience. (134-35)

But what is the real difference between being socially and economically conservative and philosophically and morally conservative? *All the King's Men* is all too aware of social and economic mores given Jack Burden's project of digging up dirt on Judge Irwin. The better way to express Stuckey's perceived differences is that Warren ameliorates the political problems of social, racial, and class differences with a novel that focuses on "individual responsibility and [...] conscience." The novel is a literary manifestation of the vital center that depicts democratic values as indicative of a geographic and cultural region integral for the survival of the nation as a whole.

Invisible Man was eligible for the prize in 1953 and, similarly being a novel of the vital center, would have been more than a worthy target. The Pulitzer for fiction that year went instead to Hemingway for *The Old Man and the Sea*. (Stuckey suggests that the prize was a consolation award, the Advisory Board finally recognizing the past accomplishments for novelists they could no longer ignore [166]). The same would be true for Faulkner's *A Fable*, winner of the 1955 prize.) But another award for literary merit had appeared since the Pulitzers: in 1950, The National Book Awards were first presented. Established and administered by the National Book Foundation (an association formed by publishing firms), these awards in the categories of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction were intended to be conferred upon writers by other writers and

quickly became more lauded honor because of its novelty and close associations to practicing writers and editors.⁵ For the 1953 edition, *Invisible Man* was an easy winner. A Harvard professor, an editor, and three writers (Alfred Kazin, Saul Bellow, and Irving Howe) sat on the committee that year; Ellison's novel won the votes of all but the professor (Rampersad 269). In only the fourth year of the award, Ellison found himself in the company of William Faulkner, who won in 1951 for *The Complete Stories of William Faulkner*, and the subsequent year would be joined by Saul Bellow, whose *The Adventures of Augie March* won the fiction award.

Even at such an early point in the granting of the awards, these selections indicate the qualities of literature held valuable in the United States in the early 1950s. Faulkner was in the midst of his critical revival as a recognized, important artist of modern ingenuity. Concerning Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, Ellison himself called it "the first real novel by an American Jew, full of variety, sharp characterization and sheer magical prose," indicating that in his eyes the novel is somehow as much about being American as being Jewish (qtd. in Rampersad 269). Ellison himself seems to have understood the significance being selected (over Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*). In his acceptance speech, he states, "That my first novel should win this most coveted prize must certainly indicate that there is a crisis in the American novel" ("Brave Words" 151). The nature of the crisis, he clarifies:

I felt that except for the work of William Faulkner something vital had gone out of American prose after Mark Twain. I came to believe that the writers of the period [of Twain] took a much greater responsibility for the condition

⁵ No critical, exhaustive, or authorized history of the National Book Awards has been published. What resources do exist are a pamphlet published by the Committee for the 25th Anniversary of the National Book Awards in 1974—cited earlier in this chapter, but more commemorative booklet than history of the award—and works listing the Award winners, such as Joseph F. Trimmer's *The National Book Awards For Fiction : An Index to the First Twenty-Five Years* (1978).

of democracy and, indeed, their works were imaginative projections of the conflicts within the human heart which arose when the sacred principles of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights clashed with the practical exigencies of human greed and fear, hate and love. (152-53)

Somehow, American values had made its way out of American fiction, and Ellison strove to restore those values and make the American literary tradition part of the vital center. Beyond the tinge of patriotism in his naming the Constitution and Bill of Rights, referring to their principles as “sacred” aligns with Schlesinger’s repeated references to faith in American values in *The Vital Center*. The speech corroborates Richard Chase’s review of *Invisible Man*: the experience of the alienated African-American in the United States becomes generalized into the alienation of the modern man in a politically dangerous world. Confirming this as the extent of late modernist interest in the plight minorities in the United States, it would be another thirty years before another black writer won the National Book Award for fiction (Alice Walker for *The Color Purple* in 1983).

The selection of *All the King’s Men* and *Invisible Man* for prestigious literary prizes actually reveals much more about the aims and societal functions of such prizes than the prizes teach later generations anything about a text’s merit. Of course, this statement does not preclude the fact that many novels that have won awards are in fact texts ripe for scholarly attention and the enjoyment of casual and serious readers alike. However, the function that the Pulitzers, National Book Awards, and other literary and cultural prizes in the twentieth century largely have is to recognize creative works that preserve the American mythos and national identity. This function does not begin in the American context, but began with the grandfather of all cultural prizes, the Nobel Prize in Literature. James F. English emphasizes that from the Nobel’s beginnings, it has

retained an emphasis on the Swedish national identity. The prize itself is awarded by the Swedish Academy, which was founded by the Swedish monarchs to “defend the purity of the Swedish language,” and to this day the Swedish king presides at the awards ceremony and personally confers the medals upon the recipients (55). Even though the Nobels carry an air of cosmopolitan goodwill, English argues, “the prize remained recognizably a nationalist initiative on the European model, designed to raise the cultural profile and broaden the cultural authority of a self-consciously minor European nation-state” (55). In the cultural disruption of World War II, the Pulitzer and National Book Award for fiction became part of the attempt of the United States, self-consciously one of two major players on a shifting world stage, to raise its cultural and political profile. The same may be argued for the barrage of awards devised within the culture industry beginning around 1930 and lasting through the 1950s, which include the Oscars (1929), Tony Awards (1947), Emmys (1949), and the Grammys (1958). Through the Cold War, these awards along with the literary prizes, began honoring creative works as successful cultural products of American society just as much as if not more than works of high artistic merit and integrity.⁶ Sometimes it is not necessary for a William Faulkner or Robert Frost to be a cultural ambassador; Award winning products, such as *Gone With the Wind* and its film adaptations, can be the best carriers of American values.

⁶ In his expansive book-length study of all manners of cultural prizes the globe over, *The Economy of Prestige*, English keenly particularly on the value that awards have relating to their ability to enhance the sales of nearly all cultural product bestowed with one. This culminates in the realm of American fiction in 2001 when Oprah Winfrey selected Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections* for her book club. For the National Book Foundation, this confirmed that they had done well in also choosing *The Corrections* for that year’s National Book Award and recognized that sale of the novel spurred by her selection would publicize their Award (35).

Despite the fact that literary prizes can be dismissed as simply as decorations of the cultural reproduction of the American mythos, *All the King's Men* and *Invisible Man* are not easily dismissed. While there is no way to know whether these novels would remain the subject of scholarly debate without winning the Pulitzer and National Book Award, there are many more winning novels that seem to have been relegated to collecting dust with the deepest recesses of stacks at cavernous university libraries, never again to see the light of day. Prizes or no, Warren and Ellison's most significant contributions to American letters remain important even after the end of the Cold War primarily because they are indispensable artifacts of their era, but they are also artifacts useful to the formalization of the South in their treatments of race and indirect treatment of political issues.

Southern Honor, American Values

All the King's Men could certainly be described as the great American political novel despite Warren's claims of the contrary. Yet even if the political atmosphere of the South is merely a framework, to use Warren's word, the novel's designations of desirable versus undesirable political allegiances within Willie Stark's inner circle remain associated with socioeconomic factors. Race and history necessarily pervade the novel. Nearly all of Willie's decisions in the novel are political, but in the reasoning narrated by Jack Burden, Willie exercises his power through influencing an individual's moral character. "You don't ever have to frame anybody, because the truth is always sufficient," he explains to Jack, further elaborating his method of rule: "I went to a Presbyterian Sunday school back in the days when they still had some theology, and that much of it stuck. And—' he grinned suddenly— 'I have found it very valuable'" (AKM 508). At the very least the tactics used by Willie and his rivals conflate morality

and political viability. When the MacMurfee outfit, Willie's nemeses, approach him about his son, Tom, and the young woman Sibyl Frey, whom Tom allegedly impregnated, the situation is problematic for Willie, but not because Tom broke the rules of polite Southern society by engaging in sex out of wedlock. Rather, Tom's breaking of the social mores is a problem because it endangers Willie's political power. It is a problem because Tom's perceived moral baggage makes Willie unelectable.

Essentially every instance of the conflation of morality and political power in the novel is connected to good social standing, or honor in Southern society. John Blair argues that honor is the fulcrum upon which Jack totters, not knowing whether to trust his friend Adam Stanton, who clings to an honor-enriched identity, or his boss Willie, who sees honor as a political tool. Jack realizes in his historical studies that the notion of Southern honor is somewhat bankrupt, considering the story of betrayal told in the journals of his supposed ancestor, Cass Mastern, the cuckolding of Ellis Burden (called the "Scholarly Attorney" by Jack and his mother's first husband) by his best friend, the Judge, and Adam and Anne Stanton's father's involvement in assisting the Judge in covering up the moves that secure his finances and drive Mortimer Littlepaugh to suicide. Jack finally copes with this construction of Southern tradition by acknowledging that it is false and "allowing his heritage of traditional Southern values to affect but not delineate his identity" (470). What fills that hollow space in honor is political power and responsibility. Tom's bawdy behavior puts a blight on the Stark name, but only in terms of Willie's political aspirations. The facts Jack unearths about the Judge's money problems and their connection to Mortimer Littlepaugh tarnish the Judge's reputation so much in his mind that the Judge commits suicide, which Blair describes as a flagrant

public ritual (464). The suicide also reveals the secret dishonor of Jack's true parentage, but its real impetus to the progression of the novel lies in how it renders irrelevant the chink in Irwin's armor. In effort to preserve honor, he interferes with Willie's political leverage.

In a novel where respectability is the key to power, Southern honor becomes a salient issue. I contend that this feature of *All the King's Men* is crucial to understanding it as an artistic artifact of late modernism and the immediacy with which it became a part of the American canon and Southern studies. When honor equates with political power, it must be protected not only through either hiding or avoiding ethical misconduct, but it also must be used to resist unfavorable political methods and ideologies. Here enters the Cold War context of the novel: Willie Stark will always be linked with the legacy of Huey Long, even if not in a one-to-one correlation. Stark's rise and fall is recognizable as a compelling narrative that suggests the possibility for and delineates the pitfalls of fascism or other totalitarian forms of government. This was recognized in the time soon after the novel's publication. In an article on Warren's first three novels, in none other than *Kenyon Review*, Eric Bentley says that rather than a "political treatise about Long," *All the King's Men* is about "self-knowledge" (417), but as his further comments reveal, about how knowing the virtues of one's self can fight political contagion. "Indeed, to say that we must see politics within a broader frame—the frame being morality and human life in general—is precisely Warren's thesis. Willie Stark, Adam Stanton, and Tiny Duffy are wrong politically because they are wrong humanly," Bentley insists (417). He expounds upon this point by relating it to the larger realm of American culture:

For the Hollywood movie, just as much as the Moscow edict, takes politics to be a battle between the Wrong People and the Right People. One judges

the man not by his nature but by his affiliation. The same action is good, performed by Us, and bad, performed by Them. All war propaganda depends on this morality, and today we live in a perpetual state of war.

Now there is nothing Warren loathes more than this morality. (417-18)

Bentley interprets Warren as exhorting his readers to not accept the moral relativity offered through the groupthink of any particular faction: one side must be good (American) and the other evil (fascism and Communism). The lesson learned by Jack Burden is the same one *All the King's Men* teaches readers: that the individual's honor dictates that strict adherence to any ideology is a fallacy and disagreeable politics must be resisted. Mike Augspurger goes so far to suggest that Warren's lesson is addressed specifically to citizens of democratic societies, who "must learn through experience that any single idealistic narrative will eventually fail to explain a profoundly complex reality: only by eschewing the certainty of ideological explanations can they function effectively and democratically"; moreover, human connectedness, symbolized by Jack Burden's theorized "spider web," makes all citizens responsible for the welfare of other citizens (52). In protecting democracy for oneself, a citizen preserves it for other citizens.⁷

The novel's emphasis on the culpability of individuals has its limits, though, and makes way for something that Jack Burden calls the "moral neutrality of history," and his theory holds significant ramifications related to the novel's late modernist project. He

⁷ Though Augspurger assists in elucidating the democratic parable of *All the King's Men*, his article primarily addresses discrepancies between the novel and the 1949 film adaptation by director Robert Rossen. Augspurger argues that the film adaptation's portrayal of idealism such as Adam Stanton's as the best defense against fascism departs dramatically from the novel's lesson centering on the individual's guarding of democracy and is therefore a much more pointed and direct film about how easily totalitarianism could take root in America. Relevant to my discussion here, Augspurger begins by reminding us that Rossen narrowly avoided becoming one of the "Hollywood Ten" at the center of the House Un-American Activities Committee. In the aftermath, he renounced his membership in the Communist party and gave up on progressive politics, thereby de-Marxifying himself. His film version of *All the King's Men* won three Academy Awards, including Best Picture, ensuring its Cold War cultural capital.

ruminates from his office the day the best friend assassinates the Boss at the height of his political power: "Process as process is neither morally good nor morally bad. We may judge results but not process. The morally bad agent may perform the deed with is good. The morally good agent may perform the deed which is bad" (AKM 593). The statement comes as Jack considers the good things Willie has accomplished for the impoverished of the state, but also as an attempt to reconcile Willie's and Judge Irwin's respective deeds. Jack's theory suggests that individuals have a responsibility primarily for the ends, but not necessarily the means, of political outcomes. The theory then also provides opportunity for pondering who or what is responsible for the means, or the course of history. Willie Stark, after all, begins his meteoric rise to power after the collapse of shoddily built fire escape at a schoolhouse whose contractor he attempted to block. "People said that God had taken a hand in the schoolhouse business. That God had stepped in on Willie's side," Jack recalls concerning the matter. "The Lord had justified him" (AKM 99). And why question an act of God? Even so, on the day Willie squashes his impending impeachment, Jack looks out at the crowd gathering around the Capital, drawn by the suspense, and says he "felt like God-Almighty brooding on History" (AKM 225). His comment is the genesis of some philosophical meandering within his narration regarding God's relationship to history in the form of a remembered conversation with the Scholarly Attorney. (He became a missionary when he left Jack's mother, for which Jack holds contempt.) Jack shares some of the facetious reasoning implemented in his sparring with his supposed father, but returns again to the image of God brooding over history: "I felt like God, because I had the knowledge of what was to come" (AKM 227). In the most literal sense, Jack knows what is to come because in

his telling of the story he has just delivered the paperwork that ends the impeachment proceedings against his boss. However, the larger meaning contained in his statement is that as narrator of the entirety of Willie's story Jack knows the beginning to the end, from Willie's trouble as the Mason County treasurer to his shooting in the rotunda of the same building from which Jack looks out in this scene. Jack's brooding over history is a metaphor for his absolute power over the legacy of Willie Stark; in remembering him in the manner he does, intermingled with his own personal history, and refusing to renew his cycle of political tyranny by joining Tiny Duffy's administration, Jack is taking personal responsibility for history and the safety of democracy for his fellow citizens. Yet as the knower of history, Jack is not culpable in its happening: only in its retelling. Therefore, the novel's treatment of history and knowledge thereof may be understood as an oblique comment on the historical situation of the United States in the 1940s in the vein of the adage that victors are the authors of history—manifest destiny updated for the Cold War. Allied triumph and the promise of western democracy's conquest over totalitarian regimes somehow negates the horrors of the Second World War; American economic supremacy abrogates the class disparity and discrimination that drive massive growth in global capitalism. Individuals within democracy can act according to appropriate understandings of these events.

Despite the emphasis on individuality and honor and an obvious setting in the South, Warren stops short of naming a specific state as the location for *All the King's Men*. Possibly, in an effort to prevent the politics of Willie Stark from being associated with a particular place, he left only clues in his geography and settings. Besides the environment, characters, and idiom-laden dialogue, the novel suggests the South in

Jack's indication that the state is a stronghold of the Democratic Party (competing in the Democratic primary for Governor, Jack explains, "in our state is the same a running for Governor" (AKM 98)). The location of Burden's Landing on the Gulf and the ability of Willie, Jack, and Sugar Boy to visit the Judge there and return to Mason City all in one night during in the first chapter suggest Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana as probably states. Considering the use of "county" rather than "parish" (AKM 18) many other states are named, including Mississippi, the home state of Cass Mastern, Alabama is a possibility, yet the novel is inconclusive.

Rather than being a trivial, slippery detail of the novel, Warren's coyness about the location creates a universality by de-centering it as the South. The locale's vague namelessness opens the possibility for it to be any American locale, Southern state, border state, or beyond. For instance, in Jack's digging on Judge Irwin, he makes his trip to Savannah to investigate the finances of his wife, Mabel Carruthers. He discovers through conversations that she "married a rich man from the West. Or rather what in Savannah they called 'the West'" (AKM 328). The setting of the novel appears outside the South to the residents of a quintessential southern city, adding indeterminacy to the locale. The imprecise location serves as a universalizing gesture of the vital center supporting a late modernist project within the novel and is indicative of Warren's own tempestuous relationship with regionalism. As Joseph R. Millichap notes, while Warren retains blatant ties to his southern identity in his writing that he shared with some fellow southern writers, he "moves beyond it to his own regionalism constructed from universal literary themes and artistic meanings" (30). Millichap even goes on to categorize Warren with William Faulkner as a "universal regionalist" (31).

A social ill of note whose absence is as conspicuous as the specter of fascism in the pages of *All the King's Men* is racism. Indeed, the only black characters appear in a caricature on the opening pages of the novel—black men chopping cotton witness Jack's imagined automobile accident, laugh at it, and comment in dialect—and the Phebe, a slave central to the story of Cass Mastern's affair with his best friend's wife. I agree with Forrest G. Robinson that Warren's own unwillingness to address at length or in detail his own conflicted feelings on the issue of race manifest in Jack's muted attitudes toward the subject. Robinson helpfully describes the imagined fatal automobile accident as a “fantasy” in which he simultaneously acknowledges but declines to engage in discussion of “the race problem”:

His [Jack's] death—inevitable, as if profoundly deserved or desired—is of little moment to the black field workers save as the occasion for their amusement. Their laughter is testimony to their secret contempt for white people, a return, no doubt, for all that the word "nigger" has meant in their lives expressed not so much with bitterness as with the resigned levity one might direct toward a madman. (Robinson 524)

Robinson's interpretation supposes a lack of understanding or even a fear on Jack's part for confronting racism, perhaps in thinking about the awkwardness of being a white man in the South who breaks the stringent Jim Crow codes.⁸

For a political novel based in the American Southeast, there is certainly very little talk of Jim Crow or discrimination. Jack uncovers some during his career as a newspaper report investigating Willie's ousting as county treasurer for his insistence on using the lowest bidding contractor for the new school building. The men Jack

⁸ Warren in *Who Speaks For the Negro?* describes an instance from his life in 1939 while living in Baton Rouge in which he was “saved” from having to intervene in a public act of racial hazing. A white man was beating a black teenager with his own belt; Warren was about to break it up when an LSU football player stepped in and stopped the beating, though not without much sympathy for the poor teenager. He considered himself saved because he “had not had to get ‘involved’” (13).

interviews on the street in Mason City say that Willie “wants’em to take the low bid and git a passel of niggers in here,” which would “put white folks out of work (*AKM* 80), and the chairman of the county commissioners and his cohorts call Willie and Jack both “nigger-lovers” (*AKM* 85). This racism is merely a screen for the real issue of political corruption, that the company awarded the contract was given a favor, and is therefore downplayed within the novel. Racism in the form of nineteenth century slavery is raised quite directly through Jack’s sharing of Cass Mastern’s papers and journals. Cass is perhaps the sympathetic activist-of-sorts and ascetic that Jack, and even perhaps Warren aspire to be. Cass attempts to track and buy the freedom of Phebe, the house slave his friend’s wife sold down the river simply because she had knowledge of the affair between she and Cass. When he returns to Mississippi from that journey unsuccessful, he frees all of his slaves, opting instead to run his plantation on a wage system. Cass Mastern’s story is rich in details about the horrors of chattel slavery, from Phebe’s treatment to Cass witnessing a Frenchman from New Orleans at a Lexington, Kentucky slave market procuring slaves to become prostitutes. In sharing such a story with such details, “Jack Burden reveals a deep, though unconscious, concern with racial injustice,” Robinson asserts (521). Regardless, it is a concern that he cannot deal with because of his commitment to his theory of the moral neutrality of history; he and other politically responsible citizens strive toward the understanding of implementation of democracy and not the means by which it imagined or won. “The novel is studied and approved because it moves us toward a bearable angle of vision on a matter we can neither face for long nor fully forget” (Robinson 525). In this manner, *All the King’s Men*

successfully universalizes Southern virtue and honor while concurrently compartmentalizing its racism.

Democratic Discrepancies

Invisible Man is perhaps a more obvious work of late modernism considering its direct anti-Communism. But unlike *All the King's Men*, the novel is not obviously a story of the South in particular. Ellison is similarly indeterminate in whether his protagonist identifies as Southern or Northern, and for good reason. Ellison's novel follows the nameless invisible man from his youth at a black college in the South to his deep involvement and then separation from the Brotherhood in the great metropolis of New York City, more specifically Harlem. This just one way that *Invisible Man* makes the South a universalizing element in American literature: the invisible man fails to escape racial discrimination so readily associated with the US South even when he moves to the North. One might say the South is everywhere there is discrimination. And given Ellison's commitment to the moralized conception democratic values, the book is an artistic demonstration that American-style democracy is aware of its own shortcomings and is prepared to face them. The great New Critical irony, though, is that *Invisible Man* suggests a correction through the attempted use of the exact same set of political values that resulted in discrimination to begin with. The systematic change begins with individuals: individuals who suffer the prejudices of American society, such as the invisible man, must understand their situation is the same, as Richard Chase observed, as the plight of alienation visited upon the modern man in the industrialized global economy. Truly democratic, individual citizens are able to defeat any obstacle to freedom. Rather than simply compartmentalizing racism to the South, I suggest that Ellison instead portrays a serious flaw in what was internationally perceived to be an

American foreign policy problem as an immoral discrepancy in the American dream corrected only by the individual, who is fully culpable in his actions based on his willingness to use the knowledge of past events to correct the present.

The most basic understanding of *Invisible Man* begins with considering it as an example of migration fiction, which has historical underpinnings in the Great Migration of African-Americans from the South to other parts of the United States in the years after World War I through the years following World War II. Several factors spurred this movement, but most noteworthy are the growth in manufacturing in urban centers across the United States, the increased mechanization of agriculture in the South that eliminated manual labor and forced small-time farmers to seek a living in other ways, and the reluctance of African-American veterans to return to the South after experiencing equality abroad.⁹ In his history on the migration of southerners in the twentieth century, James N. Gregory notes that Ellison' novel hinges on the sociology of migration. Gregory writes of the protagonist, "this southerner in Harlem is not simply lost in the metropolis and yearning for home. There is no home, not in the South and not in the North" (75). Many individuals hoping for social mobility found none in their moves across the country, but only a fresh version of their former poverty and social inequality. *Invisible Man* confronts this reality that was rapidly becoming a stark revision of the American dream by showing not only the lack of geographical boundaries for hard times but that discrimination is an unavoidable part of the American social landscape.¹⁰

⁹ Ellison's friend and fellow Tuskegee alumnus, Albert Murray, is one such example. He served in the Army Air Corps in World War II, then moved to New York and earned a masters degree. When writing did not pay the bills, though, he reenlisted and became a training officers at Tuskegee. After his retirement, he returned to New York and picked up his literary career where he left off (Gregory 37-38).

¹⁰ Lawrence R. Rodgers's *Canaan Bound: The African-American Great Migration Novel* (1997) deals explicitly with *Invisible Man* as a migration novel.

One of Ellison's best metaphors for this reality comes during his protagonist's brief employment at the Liberty Paint Company, whose flashy sign near its entrance advertises boldly, "KEEP AMERICA PURE WITH LIBERTY PAINTS" (*IM* 196). The sign evokes the Cold War atmosphere in that it suggests that the purity of American ideals is dependent upon consumer capitalism—that "liberty" comes in the form of the free market and also in the form of government contracting with the private sector (the personnel officer at Liberty Paint tells invisible man that much of their paint is sold to the government). He begins his work finishing the production of a color called "optic white," destined for a national monument, by following instructions to add "dead black" substance to each bucket of paint and stirring. The procedure makes the paint improbably whiter: "as white as George Washington's Sunday-go-to-meetin' wig and as sound as the all-mighty dollar!" declares the supervisor (*IM* 201-02). The dope added to the paint is the great secret in the myth of American exceptionalism: the necessary exploitation of African-Americans brought America to its idealized, racially homogenous supremacy. George Washington, of course, owned slaves who ran his plantation that brought income; before the growth of manufacturing in the United States, the plantation economy, impossible without chattel slavery, brought the country riches through agricultural exports. As Joseph Urgo insightfully notes, the Negro was the first product of American capitalism (6). Yet the intensity and depth of this injustice does not blemish the American story; it makes it whiter, purer, and cleaner. The paint's planned use on a national monument indicates a collective unwillingness to acknowledge the atrocities that went into making the country great and whitewashes away race as crucial to conversation of democracy.

The narrator experienced a shrewd manipulation of this reality earlier in the novel while serving as the chauffeur and assistant to Mr. Norton, the white, northern trustee down visiting the college his funds endow (presumably an analog to Tuskegee Institute). After his initial explanation to Dr. Bledsoe, the president of the college (presumably an analog to Booker T. Washington) that Mr. Norton's sudden illness is the result of Norton's desire to hear firsthand the sordid tale of Jim Trueblood's incest with his daughter and the ill-advised attempt to procure whiskey for the swooning trustee at the Golden Day, Dr. Bledsoe gives what reads like a refresher course on how blacks must deal with whites. "Damn what *he* wants," Bledsoe tells invisible man, "haven't you the sense God gave a dog? We take these white folks where we want them to go, we show them what we want them to see. Don't you know that?" (*IM* 102). The comment is merely the first in a line of harsh admonishments from Bledsoe that the best way for the minority to survive in severely distorted democracy of the United States is to provide the construct of blackness to whites in power. The only way to please a white man, Bledsoe says, is to tell a lie (*IM* 139). Of great consequence is one of Bledsoe's final statements to invisible man: "If there weren't men like me running schools like this, there'd be no South. Nor North, either. No, and there'd be no country—not as it is today" (*IM* 142). The cunning Bledsoe reveals his understanding that discrimination is necessary to American democracy. There would be no South as it is without a college such as Bledsoe's that instructs African Americans about their role in society—an unassuming assimilation through which greater resources for black schools and colleges can be procured and predominant constructions of blackness may be manipulated. The other implication too is that Bledsoe's schools and others like it

instruct citizens in complacency that is necessary for the nation-building requisite for the unified country that would ensure victory in the Cold War. To reveal to whites their prejudices as opposed to exploiting them would be too disruptive.

Bledsoe's model is a responsibility to a collective ideal. Invisible man ultimately learns through his adventures on the Harlem political scene that individual identity and its responsibility to democracy is more important. This realization begins with the man at the yam stand, to whom he says upon rediscovering his love for sweet potatoes, "They are my birthmark, [...] I yam what I am!" (*IM* 266). The freedom to fulfill the desire of eating a sweet potato is more important than the stereotype that the yams informs, and in a rejection of Bledsoe's model, he imagines the administrator being outed as a secret lover of yams and chitterlings (*IM* 265). On the heels of this moment and muddying the waters, however, is his recruitment by the Brotherhood, who approaches him because they need "Someone who can articulate the grievances of the people" (*IM* 292)—a mouthpiece for collective representation. From its publication, critics have understood the Brotherhood to be analogous with the Communist Party; this organization, which invisible man joins and becomes a representative of, interferes with the individual responsibility to democracy. Invisible man joins the Brotherhood because of the opportunity it will give him to finally use his rhetorical gifts, which were an object of disdain to the white folks back home, who more enjoyed the beatings of the battle royal. But before he can give sanctioned speeches, he must learn the organization's view of history and its lexicon for his speech making. This causes some anxiety at his first official speaking engagement because he "couldn't remember the correct words and phrases from the pamphlet" (*IM* 342). After a somewhat successful run as an

orator and organizer for the Brotherhood, his patience for them runs out when party directives require that they “sacrifice” Harlem in order to pursue a larger political agenda. Danielle Allen homes in on the Brotherhood’s lack of understanding of the word “sacrifice” as their greatest weakness in affecting democratic values. She concludes that for sacrifice to be meaningful, those being sacrificed must have some agency in it, yet the Brotherhood does not give invisible man nor the people of Harlem an option. Doing so undoes the work of democracy, which is to open “a distinction between those who give up their interests consensually and those who do not, between sacrificers and victims, aiming to reduce as much as possible the category of victim” (67). The Brotherhood’s action undermines individual responsibility, and the conundrum that Ellison wrestles with, Allen concludes, is that “democratic citizenship [...] empowers only to disempower” (74). Invisible man feels himself to be betrayed as well in this move, for the refocusing of the Brotherhood’s efforts will interrupt the personal responsibility he felt for citizens of Harlem.

How exactly invisible man goes about navigating the vision of American democracy the novel recreates—and suggests it as a strategy to us as readers—has been at the center of recent critical conversations about the enduring popularity of the earliest readings of the novel as a universalizing force for humanity. The shortcomings of this reading, as Lesley Larkin points out, is a lack of any true understanding of racialized identities on the part of white readers:

a postwar white reader might experience an amelioration of the anxieties of modern individuality without having to understand a black experience on its own terms. Crucially, a reader’s acquisition of individuality or independence can proceed through transracial identification without requiring the application of “race-free” individuality to a black author. The resulting conundrum is that “race” is at once excised from such a reader’s

experience of the text's "universality" and is the central mechanism of that experience. (269-70)

While I agree that this approach to *Invisible Man* does little to assist the reader in any real understanding about racial identity and their constructions, this approach to the novel, no doubt spearheaded by the New Criticism, is more closely aligned with Ellison's purposes and retains its importance as a tool historicizing the novel and examining its relationship to ideology of the vital center. Schaub is the most important voice on this point, and he sees the African-American experience of being denied equal representation under the law in a society as comporting with the New Critical emphasis on paradox and irony as the great way markers of the shared human experience. Ellison strived to expose this "hypocrisy" about American democracy, Schaub claims, and his effort to portray his protagonist a figure whose commitment to individual responsibility would "resonate universally for all readers" was typical of Cold War thinkers (92). His desire to steer clear of the political extremes of the Brotherhood leads to a paralysis, Schaub concludes, which allows the novel to become Schlesinger's political treatise in novel form: "Ellison's effort to situate the grounds of responsible political action within the space between extremes provides the literary instance of similar exhortations in the writings of Schlesinger and Trilling, for *Invisible Man* transforms his paralysis into a 'vital center' through the power of art" (114).

Receiving the Torch

Christopher Douglas observes that it is quite easy for the literary critics to see the resistance to "radical projects" in *Invisible Man*, but cautions that "critical works on Ralph Ellison have to grapple not only with his rejection of radical ideologies but with his apparent acceptance of conventional national ones as well" (60). The similar

observation can be made for *All the King's Men*. The conventional, national ideology that readily comes to mind is Schlesinger's vital center, no doubt. And these political affinities made these novels prime candidates for the awards they won—prized emissaries of the mythical processes of American democracy. But these novels are also examples of artistic late modernism, which distills the artistic output of the early twentieth century into a set of tenets and features, institutionalized and depoliticized.

In the beginnings of a final thought, I would suggest that these novels are clearly works of late modernism in ways both small and large. To do so, I will turn to Michael Kreyling's essay on the similarities of the "southern problem" shared by both the United States and Italy, a country visited frequently by both Warren and Ellison. Kreyling argues, "parallels between Italian and US representations of our southern problem(s) trigger similar politics and poetics" ("Italy" 288). One comparison that Kreyling makes in detail is between Carlo Levi's memoir *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945) and James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Both texts turn their subjects, rural folk in respective souths living in poverty and way behind modern standards, into art objects. Kreyling concludes through this comparison that in both nations "the historical urgency of region gave way, over time, to its deployment in a network of cultural politics," and when the problem of the South becomes that it has been thoroughly othered by works such as those by Levi and Agee and Evans, "the problem rather than the solution become vital" ("Italy" 302). The compartmentalizing of social problems assists in building a national identity free of the unsavory elements of abject poverty and racism.

Kreyling's observations are helpful for understanding the small allusions that both Warren and Ellison make to the *Divine Comedy*, the keystone in Italian national literature. *All the King's Men* has as its epigraph a line from the third book of *Purgatorio*: “*Mentre che la speraza ha fior del verde*” (“As long as hope still has its bits of green”), a move perhaps expected from a university professor with textbooks on poetry and affinity for Italian. The allusion is only slightly less direct in the opening pages of *Invisible Man*, where the narrator speaks of his method for listening to music: “I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths” (*IM* 9), the depths suggesting his journey through the nine circles of hell. Each reference is suggestive of the novels' respective narrators. By the end of *All the King's Men*, Jack wanders in a bit of moral limbo, “out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time” (*AKM* 661), tenuous about his Boss's legacy; Invisible Man's story begins where it ends, plunging into the inequality beneath the surface of American democracy to formulate the appropriate response. While these allusions to Dante may be weak ones, they are still international gestures attempting to separate the success of American artistic production from that of totalitarian regimes in Europe. Warren and Ellison claim the torch from war-ravaged Europe as intellectuals attempted to jockey the United States into place as the brightest stage for the art. The two novels demonstrate particular southern differences that are instead transformed into positive, democratic forces. Considering the “southern problems” facing both Italy and the US, the latter was better able to manage its southern problem in a manner that warded off fascism.

Indeed, both Warren and Ellison envisioned their novels as part of an American tradition, the establishment of which is also a facet of late modernism. As these new

works became the objects of study during the moment of the institutionalization of literary studies, their universalizing of perceived Southern values and Southern social ills went a long way towards formulating a response to the threat of fascism and Communism within the United States. The novels remind intellectuals that while the circumstances of American cultural and political influence are beyond their control, it can last only as long as they are willing to be responsible.

CHAPTER 5

WRITING THE UNIVERSAL AS AMERICAN

As the twentieth century wore on, writers became just as invested as their critics in determining the best ways to deal with resolute entrenchment of modernity and American exceptionalism. Some chose to do so by producing fictions in a formalist vein, depicting deeply flawed characters navigating the unique challenges of changing (and mostly American) landscape in a search for some kind of stability. One of these writers is Flannery O'Connor, and no doubt she owes at least some of her critical and commercial successes of the 1950s and 1960s to the New Critical interest in her fiction. John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate (whose wife, Caroline Gordon, would become a mentor for O'Connor) all served as guest lecturers or teachers at the Iowa Writer's Workshop, where she earned her graduate degree in the late 1940s. Andrew Lytle—also a guest lecturer at Iowa during O'Connor's time there—oversaw the revisions of several short stories into her first novel, *Wise Blood* (Gooch 135). On numerous occasions she named Warren and Cleanth Brooks's *Understanding Fiction* as a text extremely useful in her approach to writing (Prown 26). Indeed, her time at the Writer's Workshop and the exposure to Ransom, Warren, Tate, and Lytle identify O'Connor as a participant in a New Critical approach to fiction writing. Her novels, *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, and her short stories were good fodder for New Critics and continue to be so for students learning the ins and outs of close reading. This is a quality of her work that elicits frustrating encounters, such as one the author tells in a letter to a friend in 1959. She writes that after a reading of her story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" at Wesleyan College, she was invited to a classroom for a question and answer session. One of the "young teachers" took charge of the session,

asking “why was the Misfit’s hat *black*?” and “the Misfit represents Christ, does he not?” When he asked “what is the significance of the Misfit’s hat,” an annoyed O’Connor replied, “to cover his head,” which ended his questioning. “Anyway,” O’Connor states at the end of her letter, “that’s what’s happening to the teaching of literature.”¹

The anecdote is a particularly telling one among the many to be found in O’Connor’s letters, and it provides a humorous opening for my argument for the role that O’Connor plays in my narrative as a practitioner of Southern literature after the establishment of its scholarly study the previous decade. O’Connor’s comments about her interlocutor at Wesleyan and the direction of the “teaching of literature” indicates some frustration with stringent, formulaic formalist analyses of her stories. According to O’Connor’s sensibilities, her stories say what they mean and mean what they say. In light of this, I propose a revision to common perceptions of O’Connor as a writer who primarily portrays the peculiar regional oddities of the US South through stories of the grotesque or universalizes the modern American experience through religion. The area studies of the US South, after all, never were about categorizing certain literature as southern or not, but about how to best understand and mobilize the racial, economic, political, and sometimes regional sentiments of the American people in order to preserve the cultural and political solvency of the United States on the international stage. Therefore, I argue that while O’Connor identified as a southern writer, the best way to understand her is as a writer who did not write about the US South with the purpose of portraying a place, general geographical location, or even regional

¹ O’Connor. “To Dr. T.R. Spivey.” 25 May 1959. *The Habit of Being: Letters*. Ed. Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979. 334. Future citations from this volume will be indicated parenthetically with *HB*, along with the addressee and date of the letter cited if not stated in text.

subculture, but as a writer who explores the valued moral and political sensibilities (individualism, for example) of the vital center required to maintain American-style democracy during the Cold War at home and abroad. If the New Critics located the American, democratic qualities they valued in literature in the US South and works written about it, O'Connor initiates a detachment between these values and the particular locale and region, unfettering her religiously informed universalizing narratives from the geographic South and creating a cultural, American identity politics that prepares a way for a nation whose citizens' identities are tied to ideology rather than region. Her stories may be set in the South, but she writes about American sensibilities: sensibilities that are related to the national Cold War discourse as opposed to one limited to the vagaries of Southern identity.

My position on O'Connor, perhaps perceived as scandalous by some, strives to understand her as a transitional figure between the institutionalization and practice of a formal study of the South and the manner in which our current cultural identity for the South enters the American imagination. However, the difficulty faced when attempting to periodize her work and its paradoxical nature (a New Critical virtue) makes her an author suitably read through such a transitional lens. Such an understanding of O'Connor is grounded in the work of a few critics who interpret of O'Connor's fiction principally in the Cold War context. The first of these is Thomas Hill Schaub, who in his study of America fiction during the Cold War claims that she cannot be understood without acknowledging her writing as a response to American liberalism of the 1950s. He comments that the words O'Connor frequently used in talking about her own fiction, such as "grotesque," were in the postwar liberal vocabulary as well, and so they

indicated both literary and political reactions to modernity (119). The themes she explores in her first short story collection, *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*, Schaub notes, were thoroughly ingrained in the American zeitgeist:

The imputation to culture and history of a complex ambiguity beyond the reach of reason and ideas, the assumption of human imperfection and the ineradicability of evil, the necessity to recognize the limitation of human control and aspiration, her repeated representation of brutal reality in masculine figures—all these elements are commonplaces in the discourses of cold war liberalism. Though she viewed her fiction as a dramatic reprimand to liberal assumptions, the revisionist liberalism of the postwar era was in many respects speaking her language. (124)

The South in which O'Connor locates her stories, then, is one she places right in the middle of the labyrinth where competing ideologies spar through the interactions of her characters. Jon Lance Bacon takes this a step further in his provocative book length study of O'Connor in the strict context of Cold War culture, arguing she was a writer offering a critique of not the actual political conflict between the superpowers of the day, but of what happens to characters living in a world “dominated by one political worldview” (3). Bacon identifies O'Connor's use of several tropes of Cold War literature, namely portrayals of invasion in which the regional South serves as a stand-in for the whole of the United States as a nation, religious doctrine serving an anti-Communist, consumerist society, and racism as the primary obstacle to the international successes of American-style democracy. Acknowledging that prior to his study O'Connor's work had not really been explored along these avenues, Bacon states this shortsightedness is the result of reviewers and critics writing about O'Connor's work during her life and just after her death:

Once they had categorized O'Connor as a religious writer, readers both sympathetic and unsympathetic to her worldview could overlook the political dimensions of her art. During her career, after all, American religion seemed political only to the extent that it valorized and reinforced the Cold

War consensus. Although there were significant exceptions, the adoption of a religious voice usually signaled political quietism or superpatriotism. (140)

The reinforcement of this apolitical political function for her fiction is typical of New Critical modes and indicates the continued significance of late modernism in the evolution of the “South” from an object of formalized, institutionalized study to a cultural identity and practice prevalent in society.

A third scholar whose work frames my argument for O’Connor as a transitional figure is Katherine Hemplé Prown, whose ambitiously titled *Revising Flannery O’Connor* concludes that O’Connor’s embrace of southern literary values was not the result of an embrace of conservative values; rather, it centers on the “conflicts associated with her attempts to ally herself with a masculinist literary and cultural tradition” (2). The defining crisis of O’Connor’s development as a writer becomes her concern over how to become accepted into the principally male community of southern authors and New Critics, and she accomplishes this through writing tales of misogynistic violence in a masculine narrative voice, as well as adopting the stringent New Critical aesthetic. As Prown’s study of O’Connor’s manuscripts points out, it is under Lytle’s tutelage that Hazel Motes, the protagonist of *Wise Blood*, transforms from a character weighed down by a mother and sisters suffering from “out-of-control sexuality” into the “lone existential hero, utterly bereft of family and friends” (7). If O’Connor intended to burst onto a literary scene dominated by former Fugitives and Agrarians, Prown argues, she “would have to embrace an aesthetic tradition constructed on the contradictory premise that, while she might claim subjectivity on the basis of her whiteness, she would have to deny any form of subjectivity grounded in her femaleness” (32). O’Connor would also have to orient herself within the canonical parameters outlined in a book that highly influenced her

critical and creative sensibilities, namely Warren and Brooks' *Understanding Fiction*. Prown helpfully explains its authors' method of categorizing authors as either "major" or "minor"; in other words, the book strives to train its readers how to understand and formulate canons. "Critics of the period tended to assume that a given writer's rank was self-evident, when in fact rank was more often than not determined by the application of critical theory and the practice of interpretation" (63). Major writers were Shakespeare, Donne, and James—all men. Among the minor writers were Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, and Caroline Gordon—all peers to O'Connor and also all women. Thinking through O'Connor's oeuvre in light of her anxieties about gender and race and her attempt to break into what she very much perceived as the white, masculine tradition of southern letters confirms "southern," and all of the political and cultural trappings associated with it, to be an identity produced through the formalized study and practice of literature during the Cold War. While Prown's study is not an empowering, feminist reading of O'Connor's work, her study does usefully explore O'Connor's foray into the masculine dominated world of southern letters and particular New Critics' perceptions of her.

Building on the foundation of these foregoing critics, I will orient O'Connor as my transitional figure through my rereading of two of her short stories first collected in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* in order to uncover observations and critiques O'Connor makes regarding Cold War politics and culture during the 1950s normally obfuscated by typical critical approaches to her work. Her published letters and essays and lectures on southern letters and literature in general will inform my reading. First I argue that the fate of Joy/Hulga, an intellectual who disdains plain, rural folks in "Good Country"

People" reveals the great emphasis that O'Connor places on individual faith and moral faculties and the importance of those faculties for solving contradictions between the purported rationality of democracy and the irrational prejudices that it holds, economic, religious, or both. Second, my study of "The Displaced Person," her longest story, will examine the prejudices of the Shortleys and Mrs. McIntyre in their desire to maintain order on the dairy farm and how their devotion to a hegemonic white southern identity coincides with ideals espoused by the most fervent Cold War liberalism of the vital center. Both of these stories—as with many of O'Connor's stories—portray a South easily called grotesque and preoccupied with settings, characters, and plot elements easing a self-categorization of the story as "southern" fiction. However, the themes and ideology with which her fiction grapples cannot be separated from the frame of postwar American liberalism and a cultural identity supportive of it: a new patriotism born of values associated with the South by intellectuals and universalized by writers such as O'Connor.

Good Country People are Americans, Too

In a bit of occasional prose published in *Mystery and Manners*, O'Connor gives straightforward guidance to readers regarding how to understand the handicap of Joy/Hulga in "Good Country People." She writes that while pretty much any reader might be amused by a story in which someone's wooden leg is stolen, Joy/Hulga's wooden leg serves a deeper purpose in her story because it "accumulate[s] meaning. Early in the story, we're presented with the fact that the Ph.D. is spiritually as well as physically crippled. She believes in nothing but her own belief in nothing, and we perceive that there is a wooden part of her soul that corresponds to her wooden leg" (MM 98-99). As her essay continues, she resists calling the leg a symbol, but

acknowledges its importance for the story: when Joy/Hulga loses it, she finally realizes her personal, “deeper affliction” (MM 99). Her reflections on the story reveals one of its themes to be that of individual reflection and responsibility for understanding and abiding by a certain moral code—one that requires a balance in faith and intellect, which seem to be at odds in the story. Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. has explored the presence of evangelical fundamentalism (frequently associated with the rural South) in O’Connor’s fiction at length, and he sees characters facing deep religious questions as one of her work’s strongest forces. Brinkmeyer points most helpfully toward O’Connor’s “lack of timidity” in reaching out to the faith-less among her readers (“A Closer Walk with Thee” 7). Indeed, when theological concerns intersect with O’Connor’s commentary on Cold War discourses, her energies do not center on church politics or theological controversies, but on “the individual’s private and intimate struggles with Christ and the dramatic intrusion of God’s grace that forever alters one’s life” in an increasingly modern age of alienation (“A Closer Walk with Thee” 8), but also an age of rugged individualism adhering to moral, democratic imperatives.

O’Connor’s radical emphasis on the individual’s reckoning with faith and the circumstances of twentieth-century modernity leads some to peg her as a figure at odds with any discourse outside the discourses of faith, including intellectual ones. The result is sometimes the mistaken portrayal of her as a purely reactionary figure. Yet while O’Connor was critical of intellectuals, she was still one herself in her juxtapositions of the American political scene with perceived timeless questions of morality and spirituality. Brinkmeyer informs us that she “did not reject out-and-out intellectual pursuits, but rather endorsed a healthy skepticism of the adventures of the mind” (“A

“Closer Walk with Thee” 12). Because of her emphasis on personal, individual struggles with religion and morality, readings of her work as a collective bulwark against the encroachments of intellectual movements or secular humanism are suspect at best. Just the opposite: the vital center’s moral imperative for the individual’s conduct conducive to democracy dovetails nicely with her emphasis on individuals. Indeed, for O’Connor the greatest stakes are found at the level of the individual experience, which she emphasized best in her imaginative depictions of the rural folk of the South surrounding Andalusia, a farmhouse near Milledgeville, GA to which O’Connor and her mother, Regina, moved permanently in the spring of 1951; within five years, Regina had turned it into a profitable dairy operation (Gooch 195, 279).

The preoccupation with the individuals from these rural areas contributes to a significant binary of sorts that exists in many of O’Connor’s stories in the form of tensions that arise when individuals from the country visit the city and vice versa. Her rural settings never provide the idyllic portrayal of the pastoral typical of that literary tradition; rather, O’Connor makes it her business to push such representations of simple rural life off kilter. Bacon recognizes this as well, and he defines her upsetting of the pastoral as a critique of an appropriation of that tradition by both intellectual and popular culture to represent American consumer comforts in the middle of the century. “In portraying her rural characters as freaks and misfits, O’Connor allied herself with those who called attention to the representational inadequacy of the pastoral myth,” he argues. “She suggested that Americans could no longer base their national identity on a belief in pastoral experience” (38-39). Major pitfalls, then, lie in waiting for characters such as Mrs. Hopewell of “Good Country People,” an optimistic, seemingly well

meaning mother and farm owner who thinks “there aren’t enough good country people in the world” (CS 279). Mrs. Hopewell’s love of good country people and her daughter, Joy/Hulga’s, abhorrence of them set the stage for a macabre spectacle that both satirizes Cold War anxieties regarding possible invasion by Soviets or the aliens of the emerging culture industry—as posited by Bacon. It also points toward Joy/Hulga’s coldly rational intellect that assumes religious faith as a component of America nationalist identity.

The central conflict in the story is between Mrs. Hopewell and her daughter, Joy, who earned a Ph.D. in philosophy, changed her name to Hulga because it is the ugliest name she could imagine, and is a nihilist. Though she is thirty-two years old, Joy/Hulga lives at home with her mother because of an artificial leg and a heart condition, but “Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people” (CS 276). On the other hand, Mrs. Hopewell believes Joy/Hulga is educated to a fault. Moreover, she is afraid of her daughter’s learning. Upon reading an underlined passage of a book her daughter left open, Mrs. Hopewell got chills, for the words “worked on Mrs. Hopewell like some evil incantation in gibberish” (CS 277). Ralph C. Wood identifies the passage quoted in the story to be from a lecture by Heidegger in which he “argues that the whole history of Western though and life has constituted a sustained exercise in nihilism” (202). Joy/Hulga’s association with nihilism sets her apart from her mother, whose incessant optimism perhaps drove Joy/Hulga to such nihilism in the first place. As her name implies, Mrs. Hopewell seems to see only the good in other people. She appreciates the simple and annoying Mrs. Freeman, who visits her every morning to brag about her underachieving

daughters. They are most likely the “good country people” Joy/Hulga holds in the highest contempt. The daughter “lives in an atmosphere of constant affirmation, an atmosphere her mother has created,” notes Bacon (46). Mrs. Hopewell repeats her tried-and-true aphorisms at breakfast, dinner, and supper: “Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs. Hopewell’s favorite sayings. Another was: that is life! And still another, the most important, was: well, other people have their opinions too” (CS 273-73). The last one especially, as Bacon reminds us, pays great lip service to the democratic ideals good country people in a rural (Southern) setting and a national (American) one should embrace, illuminating the pun in O’Connor’s title.

Yet the category of “good country people” has significant challenges on its own, in particular, who counts as good country people? As the term implies, it must necessarily include individuals who live in rural areas and most likely individuals who have not attained any advanced education. They are individuals who presumably live simple lives: they earn just enough to survive. The category is an extension of the vision of American rural areas as pastoral landscapes embodying simpler times. Yet Mrs. Hopewell’s hired help, the Freemans, who earn this categorization from their employer, problematize it. To begin, Mrs. Hopewell is reluctant to hire them. She put off hiring them for a couple of days because she learned in a phone conversation with a previous employer that “Mr. Freeman was a good farmer but that his wife was the nosiest woman ever to walk the earth” (CS 272). Mrs. Hopewell hired them because they were the only applicants she got, but she could not deny the fact that they had been good workers for the four years they had been on her farm, even though Mrs. Freeman confirmed not only how insufferably nosey she was, but also how unwilling she was to admit that she

was wrong. "The reason for her keeping them so long was that they were not trash," Mrs. Hopewell would tell people. "They were good country people" (CS 272).

While it is Mr. Freeman's hard work that earns his family status as good country people in Mrs. Hopewell's eyes, Mrs. Freeman and her daughters, Glynese and Carramae seem simple enough and at times make it difficult to uphold Mrs. Hopewell's conviction that they are not "trash." Carramae is married and pregnant at the age of fifteen, and Mrs. Freeman's mealtime conversations with Mrs. Hopewell always include a detailed report of how many times she had vomited. Despite the doctor's advice for Carramae to eat prunes and Mrs. Hopewell's assurances that she will be better soon, Mrs. Freeman conjectures the pregnancy is "In the tube, [...] Else she wouldn't be as sick as she is" (CS 282). Glynese, the older daughter at age eighteen, is currently being courted by a man attending chiropractor school (she and her mother seem convinced that the man cured Glynese's sty by popping her neck). Though the man owns a new car, he wants to marry by the ordinary, and "Glynese said she would rather marry a man with only a '36 Plymouth who would be married by a preacher" (CS 282). The Freemans' simplicity, which Mrs. Hopewell overlooks and Joy/Hulga openly ridicules in front of the oblivious Mrs. Freeman, makes them appear to the readers not as good country people, but the trash that Mrs. Hopewell declares they are not. Mrs. Freeman appears to lack the education, common sense, and understanding of manners to realize that vomit reports are not polite dinner conversation, that the ectopic pregnancy that she seems to think Carramae suffers from is a serious complication about which she should not be so blasé, and that a chiropractic procedure will not cure a sty. And while they seem to not be impoverished, Mrs. Freeman's interest in

describing the occupation and car make and model of Glynese's prospective husband indicates that they are not a family of means—at least not as well means as Mrs. Hopewell, who sent her daughter to graduate school. The Freemans' and their status as good country people, beyond providing some of the most humorous dialogue in all of O'Connor's stories, serve as the object of ridicule for Joy/Hulga, who receives a comeuppance for condemning them as so simple. The portrayal of the Freemans is a satiric rendering of social realism of Dorothea Lange, John Steinbeck, and other and populist portrayals of rural folk during the New Deal days. Yet O'Connor still poses the question: if the foundation of American democracy is hard working, red-blooded Americans—good country people, for example—does that foundation develop cracks when rugged American individualism leaves rural Southerners or any American citizens disadvantaged on account of poverty or lack of education? Just as Joy/Hulga points out contradictions in her mother's classification of the Freemans as good country people, O'Connor points out the contradictions in the mythological socially mobile democratic society.

Indeed, Joy/Hulga is proud and arrogant because she believes she understands how and why individuals cling to certain beliefs. She seems to be the only intellectual and resident nihilist in the countryside, and such remains the case even when Manley Pointer first appears on the scene. He introduces himself as a young man not like other young men selling Bibles to get through college: "I don't want to go to college. I want to devote my life to Christian service" (CS 279). He patronizes Mrs. Hopewell when he comments on her forwardness about not wishing to purchase a Bible: "You don't see any more real honest people unless you go way out in the country" (CS 279). His

efforts earn him a reluctant invitation to stay for dinner. In the yard after dinner, he flirts with Joy/Hulga, who appreciates the attention even from the salt of the earth (and secretly thinks the simpleton might be easily taken advantage of) and does not think twice about accepting an invitation to go on a picnic with him the following morning. The picnic almost immediately turns into a debate between a Christian perspective and a nihilist one, with Pointer initially seeming in awe of Hulga's atheism. In reading O'Connor as a writer thoroughly concerned with Cold War politics, the conversation becomes a stand-in for tensions between writers and the dominant culture, that is, the quagmire caused by deviating from outright support of the status quo caused in 1950s America. Resemblances between O'Connor and Joy/Hulga suggest that perhaps she, too, recognized the ideological cramping. The author and character share a physical resemblance in the form of a handicap affecting their legs; O'Connor, like Joy/Hulga, lived on a farm with her mother. "What would you make out about me just from reading 'Good Country People'?" O'Connor asked in a 19 May 1956 letter to "A," "Plenty, but not the whole story" (*HB* 158).

Their discussion comes to a head during some heavy petting in a hayloft when Joy/Hulga refuses to tell Pointer she loves him. He insists that she do so: Pointer requires some sort of verbal proof or confirmation of the acts in which they engage. Joy/Hulga writes it off as simplicity: "'We're all damned,' she said, 'but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation'" (CS 288). Her statement here is the first of several portraying the conflation of faith-based and fact-based discourses that are untenable in the universe of O'Connor's fiction. Finally, she relents to his demands and says she loves him, and Pointer asks her to

prove her love by removing her artificial leg. The burden of proof the Bible salesman creates by requiring such drastic evidence as asking Joy/Hulga to make herself completely vulnerable is unreasonable. It seems that Pointer's motives are driven by the religious requirement accepted by all good country people that adults engaging in sexual activity should be married, or at the very least love each other.

The good country people Pointer seems to be one of stands in for the red-blooded American in the story upholding sacred, societal virtues. Here I argue O'Connor advances a parallel between religious virtue and the vital center—an unwavering faith in God separating American style democracy from the atheistic Communism of the Soviet Union. Dwight Eisenhower as president-elect stated that the United States would have a difficult time explaining American democracy to the Soviets because "our government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept, but it must be a religion that all men are created equal" (qtd. in "President-Elect Says" 16). To win the Cold War, the United States would have to return "to the very fundamentals in all things, and one of them is that we are a religious people" (16). If politicians and intellectuals could convince citizens and their foreign enemies of this, the international community would understand that American leadership is based in "purity" and not "imperialism" (16). Sure enough, during his presidency Eisenhower oversaw the inclusion of the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance, as well as the creation of the statue requiring the slogan "In God We Trust" to be placed upon all American currency and coinage in an effort to remind Americans of those fundamentals. But even prior to Eisenhower's election, President Harry Truman used religion in order to convince Americans of the

importance of their new role on the international stage. To bolster his support, he required powerful allies with great religious credibility to support his strict anti-Communist stance. Pope Pius XII, who was concerned about the diminishing of Vatican influence in areas with strong Catholic populations now under the control of the USSR, was staunchly anti-Communist, too, and was a ready ally to Truman and the United States (Kirby 79). In fact, the historian William Inboden goes so far as to declare that the Cold War was ultimately a war in which religion was both cause and instrument. First, it was a cause because it gave a reason for US leaders and citizens to be willing to prepare for potentially a third world war (2), and it was an instrument because only through collective religious resolve against the anti-religiousness of the Soviet Union could the American way of life be preserved and promoted abroad (5). Inboden reminds us that Truman himself declared in a speech that God's purpose for the United States was to be the leader of the free world (105). To assist him in that goal, the State Department recruited Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders to form an advisory panel to suggest how best to include religious faith in programs abroad for the United States Information Exchange, though they advocated the idea that a balance between the religious and the secular would foster the most confidence in American governance (117). Ultimately, Inboden argues that not theology, but morality and politics, were the driving force behind Truman's desire for religious unity.

Because it taught codes of universal morality based on humanity's creation in the image of God, religion offered a compelling alternative to Marxist social engineering. And because it demanded mankind's highest allegiance above even the dictates of state, religious faith challenged vigorously the totalitarian state's pretensions to absolute control. (122)

Through the requirements for a vital center, hegemonic American identity became almost irrevocably intertwined with religious faith.

While anti-Communist herself, O'Connor could not bear the deployment of religious faith and unity as an ideological weapon in the Cold War. The side effect of pressuring religion in such a way is a gutting of faith, for insisting on proof of God or spiritual concepts or the belief in God as proof of allegiance to an ideology dismantles faith for the individual believer, the element of religion that O'Connor values most. And gutting the Word of God is what Pointer literally and figuratively has done. After removing her prosthesis in the manner she demonstrated to him, he pulls one of his Bibles from his suitcase and opens it, revealing it to be hollow and holding his whiskey, pornographic playing cards, and condoms. Realizing his true worldliness and his intentions with her, Joy/Hulga pleads for her leg back, offering something of a recantation of her nihilism by appealing to Pointer's prior exhibition of Christian sensibilities. He only replies, "I hope you don't think [...] that I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn't born yesterday and I know where I'm going!" (CS 290). He gathers his things to leave, including Joy/Hulga's leg, divulges that her leg was not the first prosthesis he had acquired in similar fashion, and parts with the final retort, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" (CS 291).

Bacon suggests that Joy/Hulga's encounter with the confidence man can be read as the pre-Cold War intellectual being faced with the great anxiety of an infiltration of American society by foreign agents and ideology. It also reinforces the trope he identifies as the invaded pastoral in which a truly atheistic, vile force from the outside has infiltrated the quiet farm and hoodwinked its good country people. On the other hand, Wood chooses to read Pointer as an up-and-coming "confidence man" who has

dealt Joy/Hulga a “blessed loss, a saving devastation, a deflowering of not her sexual virginity but of her virginal nihilism [...] potentially freed for a positive life of communion with God and her mother” (209). I suggest a middle ground, a reading that subscribes to neither a strictly spiritual position nor a strictly political one on the story’s conclusion. I argue that Pointer reveals more than just himself as the typical scam artist. He reveals the paradox advanced by O’Connor in the story: the cold warrior using religious faith as a rallying point for the advancement of American political principles or as an identification of his or her allies is at risk of perpetuating a similar kind of nihilism when requiring proof of intangibles that must be taken in good faith by the believer—whether that be love or patriotism. Even good country people are at risk for making this critical error, and O’Connor’s farce handily strips bare the absurd construction that is good country people/red-blooded Americans and the pitfalls in deploying faith for political gain.

But Not Displaced Persons

The rural Georgia piedmont where O’Connor lived provided her with the general model for her rural characters and settings; interestingly enough, a family who came to live on Andalusia in the fall of 1953 provided her with a model for a refugee family. In his recent biography of O’Connor, Brad Gooch details the circumstances by which the Matysiaks, a family of Polish immigrants, became employed at Andalusia: they were displaced persons who had spent six years in refugee camps in West Germany before being granted entry to the United States. While the O’Connors provided them with employment on the farm, their new lives in the American South still had their difficulties. Only the Matysiaks’ son, Alfred, could speak English well and often served as a translator. They were Catholics, as were Regina and Flannery O’Connor, in a land

dominated by fundamentalist Protestantism and a deep mistrust of foreigners—domestic or international. When President Truman signed the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 into law, allowing 400,000 individuals such as the Matysiaks into the country, it was decried by Southern politicians as a move that would allow revolutionaries and dissidents in the country, threatening national stability and unity (as if a segregated country could be called stable and unified) (Gooch 240). Despite these challenges, the Matysiaks fit right in at Andalusia and earned much respect from Regina when Jan, the father of the family and jack-of-all-trades, was able to repair a broken down tractor she had deemed beyond hope of ever running again (241).

The Matysiaks are certainly the real-life analogues to the Guizacs of “The Displaced Person,” and the story, like so many others of O’Connor’s stories, present “an eyewitness account of daily life on Andalusia” in its description of the daily work completed on the farm, the depiction of characters—such as the description of the two black farm hands, Astor and Sulk, “who were basically life drawings of Henry and Shot,” two workers at Andalusia—and even dialogue borrowed from the sundry individuals who came and went (Gooch 242-42). Most importantly, the relocation of the Matysiaks to Andalusia assists in establishing the extent to which the US South during the 1950s remains in the cross-currents of politics and culture, only now aggravated by Cold War policies of containment and the export of American cultural practices. O’Connor was conscious of these exchanges, and especially of the exportation of American ideals to Europe in the wake of the formation of the Soviet Bloc. In fact, she expressly forbade the publication of her work in “any Russian-occupied country. They would probably use the Misfit [the murderous criminal in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find”] to represent the

Typical American Business Man" (to Denver Lindley, 19 Apr 1956, *HB* 151). Her comment is not a rebuke of publishing American literature behind the Iron Curtain, but an acknowledgement that such an interpretation is not the one she intended, as well as an intimation that literature can serve political purposes. Such purposes arise in "The Displaced Person" and its portrayal of the ways in which characters sense that the usual business of Mrs. McIntyre's dairy farm becomes disrupted because of the presence of the displaced person and his family. As we shall see, the order that the Shortleys and Mrs. McIntyre attempt to maintain is one that has footing in racist Southern mores, but equally in American nationalism and xenophobia that complements those mores. "The Displaced Person" repeats a pattern from "Good Country People" in which markers for southern culture become associated with American national identity necessary for sustaining the vital center in the face of the Cold War. Where "Good Country People" initiates this transition of southern values into more general values disassociated from the regional sense of place, "The Displaced Person" concludes this transition in its thorough and distressing portrayal of individuals looking after their self-interest in the guise of protecting American freedoms.

Because of the Guizacs' status as strangers in a strange land, Catholicism, and connection to the events of World War II floating in the backs of the minds of the folks already living on the farm who become unwilling to accept them, scholarly attention afforded the story often points to issues of community, religion, and depictions of the Holocaust. William Burke argues that the narrative form of the story emphasizes the manners in which the characters are displaced from their geographic homelands and any manner of human community. The arrival of the Guizacs disrupts the community

on the farm forged around implicit understandings between employee and employer and between employees such as Mr. Shortley's and the black workers' knowledge of each others' stills (220). This disruption is reinforced by an undermining of the narrative form, in which the story's first section matches the usual course of O'Connor's stories in Mrs. Shortley receiving her revelation before a violently contorting stroke from which she dies, but the other two sections offer differing styles of narration, the third section being nearly a revision of the first in which Mrs. McIntyre wastes away after a revelation of her own. Burke points to the fact that although "The Displaced Person" exists in a short form published in *Sewanee Review* in 1954 and a long version, chosen by Robert Giroux, O'Connor's editor, for *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and included by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald as the official version of the story in *The Complete Stories*, O'Connor seems to have had no preference between the two, merely asking Giroux to choose the draft he liked best to be published in *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. While critics prefer the long version as the superior piece, Kathleen Lipovski-Helal considers primarily the short version of the story, arguing that it, in concert with the longer version, addresses transitions within the Catholic Church precipitated by the necessity of dealing the morally reprehensible event of the Holocaust because the modern world was otherwise unprepared for it. According to Lipovski-Helal, the story's vague representations of the Holocaust do not name it as such, even though the characters understand that it is the event from which the Guizacs fled. Mrs. Shortley remembers a newsreel showing

small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together, a head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered up sticking out, a hand raised clutching nothing. Before you could realize that it was real and take it into your head, the picture changed and a hollow-sounding voice was saying, "Time marches on!" (CS 196)

The rapid pace of modern society, mirrored in the quick-cuts of the newsreel shorts popular at the time further complicate the ability of individuals to comprehend genocide as something possible in advanced civilization. In light of such a reading, the displaced person of the story becomes an allegory of all of humanity—displaced and alienated for lack of a connection with God.

Community becomes an issue in another, more politically charged way as the characters' increasing fear and distrust of the displaced person and his family suggest that the Guizacs are infiltrators of their homeland—disruptors of the Southern community's underlying racial order, but also of American nationalism. Bacon helpfully comments that Mrs. McIntyre's farm “functions as a synecdoche for the United States” (87). The individual with whom the malice towards the Displaced Person begins is Mrs. Shortley, the wife of the dairy man working for Mrs. McIntyre; she perceives him as a threat to her husband's job, but the greater threat to his employment is his persistent smoking in the barn against Mrs. McIntyre's wishes and his lazy pace of work, precipitated by his tending of a still on the back side of the farm. Mrs. Shortley is always an observer and obsesses about knowing all of the activity on the farm. On the day the Guizacs are brought to the farm by the priest, Father Flynn, she observes the scene of their arrival from a somewhat distant hill: “Her arms were folded and as she mounted the prominence, she might have been the giant wife of the countryside, come out at some sign of danger to see what the trouble was” (CS 194). She also enjoys pointing out the slovenliness of Astor and Sulk, whom she accuses of napping in the middle of the day when they should be working. Not only does Mrs. Shortley behave as if she owns the place, she also considers it her duty monitor the premises for any outsiders—

especially those who might upset her tenuous status on the farm. Her busy-bodying around the McIntyre place elicits a comparison between her and Mrs. Freeman of “Good Country People.” She listens in on Mrs. McIntyre’s complaining about the “poor white trash and niggers” who have taken advantage of her over the years, and listens to these rants “with composure because she knew that if Mrs. McIntyre had considered her trash, they couldn’t have talked about trashy people together. Neither of them approved of trash” (CS 202-3). However, the Shortleys, like the Freemans, have traits that might lead readers to find them “trash.” In their absence, Mrs. McIntyre considers them to have been “not quite trash” (CS 214), therefore close to it. Mrs. Shortley immensely enjoys one of her husband’s crude tricks: extinguishing his cigarettes in his mouth and spitting out the butts. This unappealing gesture, connected to a habit that Mrs. McIntyre considered unbecoming and dirty, “was actually his way of making love” to Mrs. Shortley (CS 200). And despite her incessant monitoring of who is working on the farm and who is not, Mrs. Shortley appears to do no work herself and certainly benefits from her husband’s half-hearted employment.

Indeed, Mrs. Shortley and her husband are at heart paranoid folks concerned primarily with the maintenance of their livelihood, but also the American way of life. They suffer from what the historian Richard Hofstadter calls the “paranoid style” in politics. The Shortleys, like others of the paranoid style, do not have an irrational fear for their personal safety or violent attacks on them individually; rather, they fear an attack on the freedom that affords Americans their patriotic, middle-class livelihoods. Paranoids in the mid-twentieth century also passionately defend the way of life they hold sacred, Hofstadter says. “Since what is at stake is always a conflict between

absolute good and absolute evil, the quality needed is not a willingness to compromise but the will to fight things out to a finish. Nothing but complete victory will do" (31). The paranoid style is also distinguished not by any lack of factual basis for its positions, "but rather the curious leap in imagination that is always made at some critical point in the recital of events" (37).

The Shortleys certainly have an imaginative paranoid style, especially Mrs. Shortley, and they hold themselves deserving of their status because they are both white and American and because uphold a set of revered ideals. Their fear that the Guizacs will rearrange the pecking order on the dairy farm does come true, irrespective of its irrational basis in racial and national hierarchies. Intense focus on protecting a way of life fed irrational Cold War anxieties about invasions and atomic bombings. The story is yet another manifestation of Bacon's invaded pastoral, and Mrs. Shortley deliberately treads around the farm with her arms folded on the lookout for anything that could cause her and her husband trouble for their place in that hierarchy and ready to buttress their position. When Mrs. McIntyre announces to her that she wants Mr. Shortley to meet the Guizacs upon their arrival, Mrs. Shortley informs her that he is working at the barn: "he don't have time to rest himself in the bushes like them niggers over there" (CS 197), referring to Astor and Sulk and seizing the opportunity to embellish her husband's labors for the dairy farm. She attempts to reinforce inferiority in Astor and Sulk by telling them they would be the ones replaced if (and when) more displaced persons came to work on farms in the area (CS 199).

This worldview that enables Mrs. Shortley to hold herself in higher esteem than "poor white trash and niggers" is informed by deeply entrenched white southern social

codes about race, wealth, and politeness. The arrival of the displaced person becomes a challenge to that basis because the perceived differences that instigate Mrs. Shortley's prejudice against him are not racial. Rather, her and Mr. Shortley's basis for suspicion become xenophobia and anti-Catholicism that are based more in the spirit of extreme US nationalism at the height of the Cold War. Their vague, scrambled vision of recent history and politics in Europe, which the Shortleys imagine as an unrefined, violent, and dangerous place, convicts Mr. Guizac as an imposter, especially via their associations of Roman Catholicism with fascist Italy and newsreels of the Holocaust. "I ain't going to have the Pope of Rome tell me how to run no dairy," Mr. Shortley says to his wife, who sees fit to correct him that they are not "Eye-talians," but "From Poland, where all them bodies were stacked up" (CS 201), confusing the ecumenical leader of the Church with the political leader of Italy. Their conversation shows just how little they know about Europe and Catholicism. Indeed, "Every time Mr. Guizac smiled, Europe stretched out in Mrs. Shortley's imagination, mysterious and evil, the devil's experiment station" (CS 205). O'Connor would have no doubt been aware of the anti-Catholic sentiments running deep in the South, and the United States as a whole, long before the ethos of the Cold War took hold. Within that particular context, Bacon points to assistant editor of the *Nation*, Paul Blanshard, who in the 1950s lumped together the Church and Communists as threats to the American way of life.

On the other hand, The Shortleys should feel the most threatened by the displaced person because he is a harder worker than Mr. Shortley, completing tasks in less time and able to use machinery Mr. Shortley cannot. More threatening to them in their "imagination," though, is his otherness and upsetting of their social order. Mrs. Shortley

cannot believe that the Guizacs ever lived in a brick house, as the Guizacs' daughter, Sledgewig says, when her family never has. She dismisses it, saying "That's just airs. A wooden house is good enough for me" (CS 207). Yet the "airs" do bother her, otherwise she would not have mentioned it to Mr. Shortley; she suddenly feels more like "trash" when compared to the Guizacs. She reassures herself by saying she has "a heap of pity for niggers and poor folks," implying that they are threatened by the Guizacs' presence, and declares, "I'll stand up for the niggers and that's that. I ain't going to see that priest drive out all the niggers" (CS 207). Yet her reasons for taking this stand are not altruistic: should Mrs. McIntyre let Sulk and Astor go, the Shortleys immediately become the lowest on the farm's totem pole; consequently she becomes obsessed with maintaining her status on the farm.

In due course, the Shortleys are upended. Mrs. Shortley has a vision while on one of her walks through the pasture: a blindingly luminous figure says to her, "Prophesy!" (CS 210). She states her apocalyptic prophecy aloud: "The children of wicked nations will be butchered. [...] Who will remain whole?" (CS 210). In the immediate turn of events, she learns it won't be her family. Through her clandestine monitoring of a conversation between Mrs. McIntyre and Father Flynn about how the Guizacs might be retained, she learns of the former's plan to let Mr. Shortley go in order to pay the displaced person more. In her "volcanic" fury, she races home and has Mr. Shortley and their two daughters begin packing their belongings so they may depart and save a shred of dignity in not allowing Mrs. McIntyre the pleasure of firing her husband. Her fury ends in a violent, contorting, and fatal stroke. It forces her body into the same grotesque posture of those stacked bodies from the newsreel. The Guizacs arrival on

the farm leads to her worst fears coming true, and her narrow worldview provides no answer except her death. “The apocalypticism of the paranoid style runs dangerously near to hopeless pessimism, but usually stops short of it,” Hofstadter writes (30). Mrs. Shortley’s apocalyptic vision barrels past pessimism to self destruction.

Paranoia about the crumbling of the social order eventually catches up to Mrs. McIntyre, too, who appears to trust the displaced person at the outset. The Guizacs’ arrival to the farm are an occasion for its owner to feel good about herself, since she is providing a home for a family who suffered inescapable hardships in the years since the end of World War II. She grows fond of Mr. Guizac as a multi-talented worker allowing her to purchase equipment none of her workers could operate before and because “she figured he would save her twenty dollars a month on repair bills alone” (CS 201). Mrs. McIntyre trusts her new worker because he increases efficiency around the farm, thereby increasing her profits. Mrs. Shortley notices, “she had begun to act like somebody who was getting rich secretly” (CS 208). Like her fellow Americans during a time of unprecedented economic expansion and prosperity in the wake of World War II, money motivates her decisions, and her conversation with Father Flynn about dismissing the Shortleys indicates that her decision is related to her desire to pad her pocketbook. Moreover, Mrs. McIntyre does not have concerns about Mr. Guizac upsetting the social order around the farm because she owns the farm and is therefore at the top of the hierarchy. She also presumes that she will easily be able to teach him the racial codes. Mrs. Shortley’s pondering about window curtains for the Guizac’s home—“You reckon they’ll know what colors even is?” (CS 196)—suggests race as a construct and that the Poles have to become acculturated to the South’s prejudices.

Certainly, they do not know what “colors” is. For instance, when the displaced person catches Sulk attempting to steal a turkey from the farm and takes him to Mrs. McIntyre, she takes the opportunity to inform him that “all Negroes would steal. She finally had to call Rudolph and tell him in English and have him tell his father in Polish” (CS 202). Mr. Guizac does not understand or appreciate the lesson, for he leaves “with a startled disappointed face” (CS 202).

Despite being the figure for the polite Southern upper class in the story (the farm she owns she took control over after her husband, the Judge, died, and he is buried under a fine-but-desecrated stone marker), Mrs. McIntyre eventually slips into the same pitfall as the Shortleys. At first the distrust of her newest employee originates in her supposing that he would demand more money than she is willing to part with in order to retain him, occasioning her decision to give Mr. Shortley his notice. Then she learns that the displaced person arranged the marriage of his younger cousin to Sulk in exchange for Sulk’s financial assistance in paying for her voyage to America. This arrangement strengthens her prejudice against the Guizacs and finds for her some common ground with her former help: her irrational fear of miscegenation trumps any economic gains she had made. She first suspects of some kind of deal between Sulk and Mr. Guizac by observing from afar when going to the barn one morning where the two are working, in a manner not unlike Mrs. Shortley’s. Then she observes Sulk with the photograph Mr. Guizac gave him. “He lifted one finger and traced it lightly over the surface of the picture,” a sensual gesture of infatuation that becomes taboo when Mrs. McIntyre discovers the subject of the photograph (CS 219). Mrs. McIntyre is so physically affected by the prospect of the arrangement that before she can confront Mr.

Guizac and demand that it be cancelled, she must go home and lie down, where she “shut her eyes and pressed her hand over her heart as if she were trying to keep it in place” (CS 220). Her physical distress foreshadows the ailment that will strike Mrs. McIntyre at the story’s end, but also serves to parallel to Mrs. Shortley’s physical ailment.

The confrontation with Mrs. Guizac about his deal with Sulk further demonstrates how residents of the South had to be acculturated to its normative racial relations and how deep the fears of racial mixing go. It begins with Mrs. McIntyre demonizing—therefore othering—Sulk and the man who was the day before her best employee ever. “Mr. Guizac!” she yells at him, “you would bring this poor innocent child over here and try to marry her to a half-witted thieving black stinking nigger! What kind of monster are you!” (CS 222). She attempts to explain to him that his idea is “foolishness” that will upset the balance of power on her farm, yet Mr. Guizac does not comprehend. For him, it is merely an opportunity to provide for his cousin the same gift of American freedom that he had received. The more she reiterates to him what a monster he is for allowing his white, blonde-haired cousin to marry an African American, the more he repeats his enumeration of the hardships that she has endured in the refugee camps in Europe. Because he does not understand the mores of his new surroundings, he does not understand Mrs. McIntyre’s vehement disapproval. But she remembers Mrs. Shortley’s earlier words to her: “He understands everything, he only pretends he don’t so as to do exactly as he pleases” (CS 223). Her racism leads her to offer an ultimatum to Mr. Guizac: mention to Sulk again any arranged marriage between him and the cousin and he will be fired. “I will not have my niggers upset,” Mrs. McIntyre state. “I cannot run

this place without my niggers. I can run it without you but not without them [...]” (CS 223), which is to say that she can only maintain control over her farm so long as the racial hierarchies are not upset.

At this moment in the story and during the historical moment of the Cold War, the racism that had been a typical marker for the South and the identity and category of southern begins to be displaced as less important than nationalist ideals in which outsiders were to be feared because of unfounded worries that immigrants from Europe brought with them social upheaval. This is another key point that Bacon helpfully elucidates, especially as it relates to Communism and the South. He cites an anti-Communist pamphlet by Tom P. Brady called *Black Monday* (1955), in which he claims that Communists in the 1930s planned to destroy America from within by attacking and ending segregation in the South:

A black empire was to be established in the Southern States of this nation, ruled by negroes. . . . Back of all this was but one motive, not the welfare of the negro, but the splitting away and controlling of a fine section of this nation, the segment which gave to democracy Thomas Jefferson, Washington, Madison, Monroe and Andrew Jackson. It was and is being done in behalf of Communist Russia. If the South, the stronghold of democracy, could be destroyed, then the nation could be destroyed. (qtd. in Bacon 94)

Xenophobia and allegiance to the normative white, male hegemonic hierarchies are no longer simply regional oddities in the Cold War but matters of national security, and while O'Connor seems to critique such views since characters in the story meet ill fates for holding to such beliefs, her story is nonetheless a portrayal of this phenomenon. Where the concerns of politicians and intellectuals protected southern identity and values used to simply intersect the agenda of cold warriors, the two finally merged into Cold War nationalism. Furthermore, O'Connor herself writes that during the 1950s,

there was little else besides segregation to define the South against the rest of the country. In an essay called “The Regional Writer,” she wrote, “In the past, the things that have seemed to many to make us ourselves have been very obvious things, but now no amount of nostalgia can make us believe that they will characterize us much longer” (MM 57), but she stops short of calling the obvious thing segregation and refuses to admit that it is a political problem when she states that southern identity is not “necessarily shown forth in the antics of our politicians, for the development of power obeys strange laws of its own” (MM 58). It follows, then, that as discrimination on the basis of race or national origin rises to the level of national necessity, the regional identity becomes one with the national one.

The supplanting of the white characters’ prejudice against the African Americans working on the farm by their prejudice against the displaced person, a foreigner, marks the alteration in their scheme of identity in which they begin to identify more as American than southern. The return of Mr. Shortley to the McIntyre farm in the final section of the story reiterates this. After Mrs. McIntyre has given a job to him as a farm hand, he suggests a moral, patriotic duty as a reason to keep him employed and let the displaced person go. His scheming works, for Mrs. McIntyre begins to feel tricked by Father Flynn into allowing the Guizacs on the farm in the first place. “She meant to tell [the priest] that *her* moral obligation was to her own people, to Mr. Shortley, who had fought in the world war for his country and not to Mr. Guizac who had merely arrived here to take advantage of whatever he could” (CS 228). To keep nudging Mrs. McIntyre to decide to fire Mr. Guizac, Mr. Shortley capitalizes on his military service, saying to her “a man that’s fought and bled and died in the service of his native land don’t get the

consideration of them he was fighting. I ast you: is that right?" (CS 228). In another conversation demonstrating how racial difference gives way to the importance of national differences, Mr. Shortley asks Sulk why he does not "go back to Africa," but concludes that he should not because it was not his choice to leave his country. He cannot tolerate "the people that run away from where they come from," meaning Mr. Guizac (CS 232). His next statement, though, further elucidates why Mr. Guizac is so insidious to him:

If I was going to travel again, it would be to either China or Africa. You go to either of them two places and you can tell right away what the difference is between you and them. You go to these other places and the only way you can tell is if they say something. And then you can't always tell because about half of them know the English language. (CS 233)

Precisely because the displaced person is white yet does not learn to discriminate on the basis of race, he is the Communist imposter of Brady's pamphlet. He is an undetectable, treacherous enemy because he looks the part but does not play the part. In Mr. Shortley, Mrs. McIntyre, and other cold warriors' point of view, racism and xenophobia becomes the shibboleth by which red-blooded, hard working American can identify themselves to each other.

Mrs. McIntyre does make up her mind to fire Mr. Guizac, telling Father Flynn, "He's extra and he's upset the balance around here" (CS 231). However, she stammers over her words, and Mr. Shortley and Sulk stall as a tractor begins to roll toward and over Mr. Guizac, breaking his back and killing him. The story ends with Mrs. McIntyre immobilized, made blind and mute by a "nervous affliction," and frequently visited by Father Flynn, who teaches to her "the doctrines of the Church" (CS 235), now a replacement for the priest's tender pleas for her to forget her irrational fears and compassionately keep the Guizacs on the farm. Throughout "The Displaced Person,"

the white characters all wait around for God to strike down the Pole for the sins they see him perpetrating in *their* eyes: the racial sin of miscegenation, the economic sin of taking a job that an American veteran deserves more, and the political sin of being too similar to Americans yet not different enough. His life is exchanged for racial purity and national security. In the end, God does not strike, but fearful indifference does, pointing very strongly to a political reading of the story underneath its religious veneer.

“I Don’t Consider That I Write About the South”

After recognizing O’Connor’s fiction as a rendering of the South into the ethics of the vital center, a couple of final points of consideration arise. The first of these is whether O’Connor is offering a critique of American and southern society during the Cold War. Among the three critics serving as the foundation for my study, Bacon certainly believes so and argues, “Dissent becomes the moral standard in fiction by O’Connor, regardless of any crimes her dissenters commit” (86). Indeed, the many of the characters in “Good Country People” and “The Displaced Person” suffer—physically, emotionally, or spiritually—for their trespasses against other individuals or their obsessions with societal strictures. Farrell O’Gorman, on the other hand, understands O’Connor as offering a critique of American consumerist society, but one connected to the passing of the Old South. He says, speaking of her novel *Wise Blood* in particular:

Each critique of that culture—its rabid consumerism as communicated through pervasive advertising and embodied most fully in the automobile, its complacency under the sway of Hollywood and soothing media messengers of public good—is presented in a setting characterized by an underlying apocalyptic mood. That mood is established partly by a broad appeal to contemporary American anxieties and partly by a regional awareness of the demise of an older South, but it is resolved with a religiously grounded sense of the possibility of meaningful life in the here and now. [...] in neither case is it backward-looking, or absurd. (166)

In other words, the critique of consumerism in her writing is founded upon the idea of the passing away of the South as it was, but it does not necessarily call for a return to the virtues and vices of the Old South. He goes on to say that O'Connor was fearful of an institutionalization of southern literature in which it would be "falsified" (179).

In this chapter, I have argued that as O'Connor portrays southern values merging with the vital center to become American values, there are implicit critiques of American culture, especially in "Good Country People" as an allegory against the use of religion in political struggles. However, I have suggested the opposite of O'Gorman's point on institutionalization: O'Connor's fiction participates in that institutionalization in that she operates in the theatre of New Criticism and its Agrarian roots. This leads into a second final point of consideration: was O'Connor racist? Many critics conclude no, including Bacon (113), despite wide knowledge among O'Connor scholars that she refused a visit at Andalusia from James Baldwin. Her friend, Maryat Lee, bumped into the writer in New York and wrote O'Connor suggesting that she should entertain a visit from Baldwin. She replied to Lee, on 25 April 1959, "No I can't see James Baldwin in Georgia. It would cause the greatest trouble and disturbance and disunion. In New York it would be nice to meet him; here it would not. I observe the traditions of the society I feed on—it's only fair. Might as well expect a mule to fly as me to see James Baldwin in Georgia" (*HB* 329). Her words "disturbance" and "disunion" make her sound eerily similar to the Shortleys and Mrs. McIntyre. Prown, another of my foundational critics, argues that the greatest pitfall O'Connor scholars face in rushing to defend her against charges of racism is that they "have generally overlooked both the origins and the function of her racial attitudes" (70). To better get at O'Connor's own ideas about

race, Prown cites the influence of the gatekeepers of canonicity, Ransom, Tate, and Warren. Their understanding of literature and culture began with their Fugitive and Agrarian roots, and Prown contends that when one supports O'Connor on her point that the South maintains a sense of place through its racial attitudes ("the things that have seemed to many to make us ourselves have been very obvious things"), one neglects that the point

is itself founded on the racist premise that blacks, whether or not they assume equal status with whites, remain outside the South's real tradition, and that this tradition, in fact, depends upon the subordination of both African Americans and women. The subsequent rise of New Critical apoliticism was more than coincidentally linked to Fugitive/Agrarian discourse on race. By claiming that the "topical," or political, is somehow irrelevant to more "timeless" concerns—and thereby dismissing any challenges to white hegemony—critics like Ransom and Tate could ensure the centrality of white consciousness and at the same time lay claim to a dispassionate objectivity that in itself justified the transformation of blacks into Other. (70)

New Criticism and the tradition upon which it was founded is the literary discourse into which O'Connor inserts herself as a writer. Her primary emphasis on the "timeless" concerns of religion and limited concerns with treating the "topical" concern of racism as the social ill that it is while it actually proliferated through the growth of American nationalist sentiments far from exonerates O'Connor as a racist. While these challenges within her work do not diminish its importance in the development of American literature as a distinct national canon nor in its importance for understanding the climate of the Cold War, simply accounting for racism in her life or her work by acknowledging her as a product of her time does little besides reiterate her desire to participate in the New Critical literary canon.

From the many of contradictions and paradoxes that lie in her writing, this one from an essay tellingly called "The Teaching of Literature" best encapsulates my

argument for how to understand O'Connor as the transitional figure shifting focus from preserving a regional identity to preserving a national one:

As a fiction writer who is a Southerner, I use the idiom and the manners of the country I know, but I don't consider that I write *about* the South. So far as I am concerned as a novelist, a bomb on Hiroshima affects my judgment of life in rural Georgia, and this is not the result of taking a relative view and judging one thing by another, but of taking an absolute view and judging all things together; for a view taken in the light of the absolute will include a good deal more than one taken merely in the light provided by a house-to-house survey. (MM 133-4)

Certainly, O'Connor understood that at the height of the Cold War the local was the portal to the global; individual actions within one's community have ramifications in international relations. The point is relevant to her fiction because it is an attempt to partake in the absolute: to be a component of a distinctly American and universalizing cultural production.

CHAPTER 6

RED STATES AND BLUE STATES

The 1960s presented new challenges to the critics and practitioners who created the southern area studies. The start of the decade saw the Civil Rights movement in full swing, and demonstrations against segregation in the US South and white southerners' frequently violent reactions to them garnered the region increasing prominence in the national political arena. The headlines and unrest became inescapable for writers, and the literary vital center's appropriation of southern values as national ones further and further disassociated with the geographical South in favor of a patriotic, conservative cultural identity, which, as I pointed out in the last chapter, Flannery O'Connor exemplifies in her short stories. As an introduction to my final chapter, I offer another short story as a key waypoint in this shift: Eudora Welty's response to the killing of Medgar Evers on 12 June 1963, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" Written the very same night of the murder, it was published shortly thereafter in the *New Yorker*, and it seems to be of two minds regarding the killing. Her first person retelling of the shooting through the eyes of the killer eerily recreates the particular circumstances of Evers's assassination. The unnamed narrator's motive is his disgust with seeing African Americans on television. Television is also signaled as a key factor and his rebuke of the president, who "can't walk in my house without being invited, like he's my daddy, just to say whoa. Not yet!" (607), suggests John F. Kennedy's televised address to the nation the day before the murder, 11 June 1963. The speech was made in support of his actions to prevent Alabama governor George Wallace from keeping segregation the policy at the University of Alabama; in it he clearly declares all American citizens deserving of equality regardless of race. The nameless shooter (therefore potentially

any disgruntled southerner) is ignorant, insecure in his white masculine identity, and terrified of social justice. The story is very much in the Lillian Smith vein of literary activism in her focus on the local and its connection to national and global problems.

Welty nearly admits as much in her preface to her *Collected Stories*:

That hot August night when Medgar Evers, the local civil rights leader, was shot down from behind in Jackson, I thought, with overwhelming directness: Whoever the murderer is, I know him: not his identity, but his coming about, in this time and place. That is, I ought to have learned by now, from here, what such a man, intent on such a deed, had going on in his mind. I wrote his story—my fiction—in the first person: about that character's point of view, I felt, through shock and revolt I could make no mistake. (ix)

But on the other hand, the story also moves toward a de-contextualization of Evers' assassination through its historical, literary allusions and appeals to morality. The town in which the story takes place is called Thermopylae, a direct allusion to the site of the fabled battle between the Spartans and Persians. Moreover, the name Thermopylae loosely translates to “hot gate” and refers to the number of hot springs in the area. This clever use of a place name with deep historical and mythological associations diverts attention from the story’s contemporary parallels, instead directing the reader to pay attention to the rich implications of its language and word choice—every context needed to understand the story becomes therein contained. The name Thermopylae also defamiliarizes Jackson, the city where Welty lives, putting some distance between herself and the killing (in case she did, indeed “know” the murderer). While other images of the story indicate its southern setting—Nathan B. Forrest Road and signs for “Live Bait” and “Peaches” (603)—the moral of the story does not necessarily pertain to southern racists. In the moment of the murder, the narrator tells the dead Roland Summers, the story’s analogue for Medgar Evers, “there was one way left, for me to be ahead of you and stay ahead of you, by Dad, and I just taken it. Now

I'm alive and you ain't" (604). The language in which the narrator provides his reasoning to his victim itself does not explicitly mention race, while it is certainly implied. Ignoring the extratextual context of the story's writing, the reason may as well be pride or simply as the narrator repeats through out the story, his own "pure-D satisfaction." Welty's visually rich tale leaves her narrator/murderer not feeling any remorse but distant from his wife because of her belittling of his actions, isolated from society because he cannot take credit for his deed because "people are dead now" (607), and in the final scene, by himself at home playing guitar with only "what I've held on to from way back when, and I never dropped that, never lost or forgot, never hocked it but to get it again" (607), which is to say his malicious pride. The story becomes a tale of interpersonal alienation due to the moral sins of murder and haughtiness rather than political allegory for racial violence in the South.

My brief overview of Welty's story serves as a helpful introduction because it demonstrates what I argue is the consequence of the late modernist formalization of the area studies of the South: a giving way to a cultural and political identity associated with southerness that supersedes the geographical category of southern, that is, an identity not tied to the classic, southern sense of place, but to that matching set of cultural sensibilities formulated by the vital center at the height of the Cold War. To support my argument, I will offer close readings of two novels written about the American political climate of 1960s, Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976) and Walker Percy's *Love In the Ruins* (1971). In their respective mappings of turbulence in American society through the actions and perspectives of individuals as well as collective action at regional and national levels of discourse these novels suggest a description of regional

communities based on how well its values align with a continuum of the vital center that is a precursor to current political debates in which the United States is not so much classified anymore by southern and northern states, but by red states and blue states. Within this model, the values cultivated within literature written by southerners or about the South and identified by intellectuals as American become the guiding principles of general conservative political identity; communities are not necessarily grouped together by geography, but by correlations in their ideology. First, in my consideration of *Meridian*, I examine how the title character's personal life provides a feminist history of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. *Meridian* Hill's highly personal and highly political experiences establish the efficacy of personal identifications with political movements to resist forced acceptance of conformist mores, but also address the unique challenges of women participating in political resistance dominated by men and the greater democratic discourse. Then in a treatment of *Love In the Ruins*, at heart a science fiction novel in its presentation of an alternate future, I examine Percy's pointing toward the emerging red/blue state model in the sheer politicization of nearly every individual and community in the novel and how it parallels the spread of conservative politics to the white suburban middle class in the late sixties. The novel's downplaying of racial strife and lampooning of extreme political viewpoints coupled with the protagonist's supposition that political affiliations are associated with treatable psychological disorders suggest a diagnosable vital center. However, the book ultimately points toward what I argue is Percy's own revision of the vital center, making *Love in the Ruins* a resolutely late modernist novel and a troubling one. My readings of these two novels in concert indicate that personal connections to ideologies play a

prominent role in sustaining the vital center's cultural identity once it has been separated from concerns of place.

My assertion that the sense of place so long associated with southern literature as an institutionalized discipline ultimately has little relevance to geography and wanes in importance is part of a growing critical conversation challenging typical definitions of "place" and exploring the extent to which it serves to define southern literature. The limitations of the term arise when considering the drastic transformations of landscapes, demographics, and economies throughout the United States in the last quarter of the twentieth century, but especially in the southeastern and Sunbelt areas of the United States. In an essay whose title asks, "Where Is Southern Literature?" Scott Romine reminds us that "sense of place" can have in its common usage, in which the term "serves as both a description (southern literature has it) and a distinction (southern literature has more of it than other literatures)" and was originally deployed by southern writers and intellectuals to "prevent 'southern literature' from becoming an arbitrary geographical designation" (23, 24). He concludes that due to the increasingly global nature of economic and political forces, "The determinants of even the most isolated southern hamlet are increasingly dispersed to other locations: an Indonesian labor force willing to work at low wages, a board of directors' meeting in New York, a Hollywood film set" (41). Place, then, is no longer the concept connecting literary representations to identities of the US South; rather, it is socioeconomic or political realities tied to that cultural history. Such is the end of late modernism; it is no longer the actual geographic place that has importance but the intellectual, political, and economic forces that codify or define that place, its culture, and conceptions of it. The

construct of the “South” begins to stand in the place of the actual literature, people, and material history of the region.

Here my narrative comes to a juncture with the concept of the “post-South” or “postsouthern,” a term first coined by Lewis P. Simpson in the early 1980s that has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry in the last decade. In 2010, Michael Kreyling succinctly defined the post-South as “what the South as content and temper becomes when it is read as ‘produced by and distributed through media’ where literature shares space with theme parks, lifestyle real estate developments, TV sitcoms, film, and other forms of consumer entertainment” (*The South That Wasn’t There* 12). The phenomenon is the subject of Martyn Bone’s book length study, *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (2005), which as its title suggests theorizes a postsouthern sense of place through scrutiny of literature from the Agrarians to authors of the 1990s. In the same vein as Kreyling’s definition, Bone “insist[s] that we must pay attention to the historical-geographical, material reproduction of place as real estate, and the creation, destruction, and mediation of place more generally” (46). Leaning on the theories of David Harvey, Edward Soja, and Fredric Jameson (in particular his *Postmodernism*), he concludes, “If ‘the South’ no longer survives as a material, sociospatial reality, or even as part of the Agrarian political-poetic imagination, this does not mean that postsouthern geographies exhibit no sense of place” (51). That sense of place, though, is of the post-South, a sense manufactured through media. While my focus is not specifically on any sense of place, I do offer an additional dimension to Bone’s theory of the postsouthern in my narrative of the South’s production through the practice and institutionalization of southern literary criticism. Essentially, the vital

center's production of the South is one of these postsouthern designations. This chapter will place pressure on the "sociospatial realities" for the South presented in novels by Walker and Percy, as well as enhance the connection between literary texts and popular productions of the South. Both *Love In the Ruins* and *Meridian* paint portraits of Americans—not necessarily southerners—participating in cultures and practices associated with the US South through media representations, televised historical events and happenings, real estate developments, and other reproductions of the South.

Strategies, Southern or Otherwise

Two particular historical trends of the 1960s provide a springboard into Walker's and Percy's novels. The first of these is the work of nonviolent civil rights activists, whose slow march toward equality included demonstrations, voter registration drives, and led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, finally legally prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race in the electoral process and in public places. The movement proper seems to come to an end (such is the case in *Meridian*), with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, leaving a void in the leadership of the movement. This becomes coupled with President Richard Nixon's, a Republican, victory in the 1968 presidential election, won in part by carrying the traditionally Democratic southern states: a feat he accomplished by targeting his campaigns in the region at middle-class, white suburbanites. With the South now vastly different and thoroughly politicized because of the movement, population shifts to the suburbs, and television coverage of those changes, the late modernist sundering of politics and literature was more dependent than ever on individuals' commitment to ideology to sustain the vital center so important to the success of American-style democracy.

Where O'Connor, Welty, and others had driven in the wedge, Walker and Percy complete the cleft in their novels about individuals deeply devoted to ideologies that each perceive as a way to mend a nation fractured by a decade rife with war, political assassinations, and civil unrest.

That both *Meridian* and *Love in the Ruins* have direct connections with historical circumstances is quite clear. In Walker's case, she participated in many of the same activities as her protagonist. As a student at Spelman College in Atlanta, she participated locally in the movement and would go on to work in voter registration drives in Mississippi after completing her BA at Sarah Lawrence College. Her novel's title character follows a similar path from rural community to activist in a southern city to experiences in the North, culminating with a return to the South. The parallels are so strong between activities of and attitudes about the movement and *Meridian*, historian Barbara Melosh argues, "In the subjective medium of fiction, we can read the afterimage of history, its imprints on the writer's consciousness and way of seeing the world. In this sense, novels are themselves primary sources, historical evidence of ideology" (65).¹ *Meridian* is not just, according to Susan Danielson, a novel in which the civil rights movement is a background or setting, but it is a record of the reasons individuals got involved, its methods and practices, and how communities changed because of the level of activism within them. In particular, Danielson suggests that the novel chronicles the rise and fall of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as well as the shortcomings of its philosophy and its activists. Her basis for this reading are textual details that are markers for dates, places, and items significant to

¹ Her article additionally considers *Civil Wars* (1984) by Rosellen Brown and *Only Great Changes* (1985) by Meredith Sue Willis.

the SNCC, such as the overalls—the unofficial uniform of the SNCC—Meridian wears in the opening section of the novel (319). The novel takes its title from the Mississippi town where three SNCC workers disappeared in 1964, and many dates the novel uses are corollary to key dates in the history of the SNCC (318). Danielson reads the novel's first section as covering the rise and fall of the story's SNCC-like organization; the second section covers the disillusionment of each activist (322). As opposed to telling the history of the movement with a cold objectivity, Walker's novel offers perspectives from individuals struggling to understand its success and shortcomings through episodes of interpersonal relationships within it and individuals' devotion to (and criticisms of) it.

Love In the Ruins also lacks cold objectivity, but it additionally lacks meaningful personal connections to the movements transforming American in the 1960s. Instead, Percy lampoons individuals' devotion to hyperbolic political views through his caricature of materialistic suburban dwelling. One thing distinguishing it among all the texts in my narrative is its obvious anxiety about current social trends and a realization of that the former foundations of the US South's society were eroding. Michael Kobre says it best when he quotes from *Love In the Ruins* to demonstrate how Percy really was of two minds and traditions. He was raised in the Old South and its traditional mores, "yet Percy also recognized that the severe and honorable traditions he had inherited were increasingly outdated in a New South that was, in his own words, 'happy, victorious, Christian, rich, patriotic and Republican'" (4). Percy's own vision of this New South is remarkably in line with two recent histories by Kevin M. Kruse and Matthew D. Lassiter

narrating the roles played by suburbs in the turn toward modern, Republican conservatism in the US South in the twenty-five years after the end of World War II.

During the postwar expansion of industry to the region, Atlanta, Charlotte, and Memphis became metropolitan centers of commerce attracting more and more southerners—white and black alike—who decided to give factory and office work a go as opposed to trying to eke out living as farmers competing against larger and more commercial farming operations in rural areas. In *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (2005), Kruse explores the connections between these demographic changes in the specific context of Atlanta politics. William Hartsfield, mayor from 1937-41 and again from 1942-62, mounted an effort driven by “moderate coalition” of both white and black elite and business leaders to increase civil services, draw business and industry to Atlanta, and strengthen the city into a global center of commerce (25-35). He coined the slogan, “The City Too Busy to Hate,” and visitors to Atlanta were truly astounded to see a lack of outward racial strife in the 1950s with segregation still in full effect (1, 19). As populations grew within the city limits, however, whites and blacks found themselves living more closely together, though not integrated. The resulting racial tensions came to a head in an incident with which Kruse opens his book, in which the white citizens of Atlanta’s Peyton Forest neighborhood put up a roadblock to prevent passage by residents of a black neighborhood that was for the residents of Peyton Forest alarmingly close. Mayor Hartsfield managed to diffuse the situation, but white flight had begun. Kruse explains that from 1960 to 1980, over 160,000 whites moved from Atlanta to its suburbs. Georgia’s capital had gone from being “The City Too Busy to Hate” to “The City Too Busy *Moving to Hate*” (5).

Kruse's study focuses on this white flight in Atlanta and the political identity that develops out of the manner in which whites fought to preserve segregation. The popular notions of civil rights history paint segregationists as a group of folks only interested in depriving equality and rights to others. But Kruse reminds us that in their own minds, segregationists were instead fighting *for* rights of their own—such as the “right” to select their neighbors, their employees, and their children’s classmates, the “right” to do as they please with their private property and personal businesses, and, perhaps most important, the “right” to remain free from what they saw as dangerous encroachments by the federal government. (9)

Their insistence on utter freedom from bureaucracies is reminiscent not only of Welty’s protagonist in “Where is the Voice Coming From?” but is evocative of individualism prized by the vital center—that American democracy rests in the ability of citizens to make their own choices about what will preserve their nation and their livelihood. These sentiments, of course, were not held by all whites in the South during the 1960s. As Jason Sokol reminds us, “[S]ome white southerners perceived the civil rights movement as a threat to their very notion of freedom. Others saw the civil rights struggles for what they were—attempts to translate American promises of democracy and liberty for all into reality” (17). But we shall see that in the case of Percy’s novel, the vehement conservatives and bleeding heart liberals live peacefully side-by-side in the suburban development of *Love In the Ruins* because they can agree on one thing: neither wants to have blacks for neighbors.

Lassiter’s *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (2006) is a study of the political mobilization of similar values among a similar demographic during Nixon’s successful 1968 campaign for the presidency. His study is an alternative to the conventional notion that Nixon managed to win on a “Southern Strategy,” by

campaigning on the racially motivated anxieties of poor, rural southerners. Instead, “Richard Nixon’s triumph in 1968 depended upon a de facto suburban strategy that targeted middle-class voters in the metropolitan South and positioned the GOP as the centrist alternative to the racial extremism of George Wallace and the racial liberalism of Hubert Humphrey,” his two opponents in the election (227). In order to downplay any racial component to his campaign, the anxieties Nixon focused on were suburban, middle-class disgust with protests against the Vietnam War, black militants, and increasing urban violence; however, he needed to do so without alienating centrists (234). Rick Perlstein, in his recent study of Nixon’s political career, contends that in preparation for his second run for the presidency he calculatingly built a platform for himself that maintained a separation from staunch, radical segregationists such as George Wallace but remained appealing to the more coy, reserved racists in the South and elsewhere. “I will go to any state in the country to campaign for a strong two-party system, whether or not I agree with local Republicans on every issue,” Nixon said while touring the South during 1966 (qtd. in Perlstein 88). On a separate occasion that same year he said that he did not support segregation, but it would be unwise for Washington Republicans to “dictate” the state parties what positions to hold (qtd. in Perlstein 88). In the position Nixon hammered out for himself at the center of 1960s American politics, “He was ventriloquizing to a generation of Southern lost-cause speechifying about Yankees dictating to Dixie” (Perlstein 88). Two years later near the beginning of his successful run for President, Nixon even held some closed-door dealings with Strom Thurmond to ensure the South Carolina delegation to the Republican National Convention would support his candidacy (284-85). Publicly, Nixon evoked civil rights in

his advertisements in a moderate fashion to further distance himself from his opponents while acknowledging southern suburban fears: “the first civil right of every American is to be free from domestic violence, so I pledge to you: We shall have order in the United States” (qtd. in Lassiter 236). Nixon’s mobilization of these fears dovetails with Percy’s suburbanites’ distaste for all radicals and nonconformists. Despite the radical’s self-imposed exile in the Honey Island Swamp near Tom More’s neighborhood, the residents of Paradise Estates still feel threatened by them, and their homes and bourgeois activities do fall under revolutionary attack. The attack is both literal and figurative. It is literally carried out by reluctant black militants, while the figurative attack is More’s satiric narration of the novel’s events.

These histories and novels show the culmination of American writers and politicians’ attempt to downplay segregation as a major political problem facing the US. Jim Crow travelled a great distance from being a regional anomaly to the greatest hurdle of American democratic ideals at home and abroad at the beginning of the Cold War, to the motivation of both the civil rights movement and suburban politics. As southern suburban politics disguised racial anxieties as political moderation, the vital center morphed into modern conservatism—moral and social conservatism coupled with financial neoliberalism. Together *Meridian* and *Love In the Ruins* make the literary representation of this new cultural ideology’s cleft between the US South and the US Post-South—a fracturing of America into red states in political opposition to blue states in all geographic corners of the country.

Revolution Gets Personal

In “The Black Writer and the Southern Experience,” Alice Walker meditates on the importance of her upbringing in a share-cropper family, a situation in which she did not

consider herself disadvantaged because of race or poverty, and how her times in college and broader experiences thereafter showed her that others saw her as disadvantaged. A student of literature, her own admiration of William Faulkner ended upon reading *Faulkner in the University*. She discovered that Faulkner found “whites superior morally to blacks” and considered it the duty of whites “to ‘bring blacks along’ politically”—only under white patronage could they become productive contributors to American democracy (19-20). “For the black person coming of age in the sixties, where Martin Luther King stands against the murderers of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner,” Walker counters in her essay, “there appears no basis for such assumptions” (20). With its characters’ deeply personal yet complex devotion to the work of social and political equality, *Meridian* is Walker’s literary counter to Faulkner’s provincial and grandfatherly racism. Also countering this view of southern race relations are the book’s three principal characters, Meridian Hill, Truman Held, and Lynne Rabinowitz, who all exhibit some personal investment in the movement in the novel, though each character has a different kind of commitment to the movement and its ideology. Yet in this book, as Dror Abend-David points out, Walker shows a “firm dislike of mass movements and ‘professional’ ideologists” (19). This is especially true with regard to the particular perils endured by the novel’s women who participate in the movement, and postsouthern suburban populism’s de-politicization of segregation only widens the gulf.

Though her background is not an impoverished or uneducated one, indeed, it is the tactics of such suburban politics that cause some of Meridian’s early hardships. Countering portrayals of racism as a moral problem that the South would be able to

solve on its own time, as Faulkner and New Critics had suggested in the past, Walker shows how some of the hardships Meridian's family faces are directly related to strategies used by the whites in their Georgia town to maintain segregation. The Hill family farm, inherited from Mr. Hill's grandfather's post-Civil War acquisition, shared land with the Sacred Serpent, an ancient and sacred burial mound built by Native Americans. Meridian's father's respect for the land and the mound are so great that he gives the deed to an Indian, Walter Longknife, who camps on the land for much of the summer before returning the deed to the Hills. He gives Longknife the land for the summer because "the land already belonged to them" (*M* 47), and also as a duty to a veteran who "killed a lot of people, mainly Italians, in the Second World War. [...] He was looking for reasons, answers, anything to keep his historical vision of himself as a just person from falling apart" (*M* 49). Mr. Hill understands how military service, just like Cold War conformity, obscures identities that are neither white nor American, and he hopes to help Longknife recover his. But in the end, the Hills cannot even keep the farm. Soon after the veteran departs, government workers show up on the place with picnic tables and trashcans and inform Meridian's father that the Sacred Serpent and the Hills' farm surrounding were becoming "a tourist attraction, a public park" (*M* 49). Upon presenting the deed to county officials to prove his ownership, he learned the park would not be that public: "[the county] could offer only token payment; that, and the warning to stay away from Sacred Serpent Park which, now that it belonged to the public, was of course not open to Colored" (*M* 49). Their simultaneous loss of their farm and the Sacred Serpent in both private and public ownership demonstrates the length to which white southerners went to exclude blacks from public discourse. The white

officials in the novel as the majority in power feel they have a right to determine who visits the same park they do. Moreover, they perform a disservice in turning the burial mound into an attraction; doing so is an appropriation of sacred land for the production of a white, hegemonic history of the place.

White politics also beset Meridian's father during the years she attend Saxon College (most likely modeled on Spelman College). Meridian takes a typist job for a professor at his off-campus office to earn some money because her father no longer earns much money to send: "He was no longer qualified to teach, now that integration was threatening the school" (*M* 97). Here Walker satirically adopts the language of the segregationist to highlight the injustice of the situation. The only disqualification that Mr. Hill has for teaching in an integrated school is his race; segregationists in power insisted upon their "right" to choose who teaches their children. Yet within the same school system that eventually fired her father, Meridian had to learn a speech "that extolled the virtues of the Constitution and praised the superiority of The American Way of Life"—a speech that Meridian is unable to finish (*M* 126). Lauren Berlant argues that the speech's role in this scene, and the predominant role of education in the novel, is to transmit this American national identity—parallel in my narrative with the vital center—to students. However, in the case of Meridian and her peers, this kind of nationalistic education within their social conditions is only a "terrible joke," for the inalienable rights about which black students learn are never actually bestowed (834). It, too, is a fantasy just like the movies that Meridian, after becoming a mother, imagines fills the lives of teenagers just a few years younger than her: "Blondes against brunettes and cowboys against Indians, good men against bad, darker men. This fantasy world made the other

world of school—with its monotony and tedium—bearable” (*M* 72). Perhaps, yet it is still a fantasy world that underscores their role on the negative side of strict Cold War binaries.

While these personal dealings with Jim Crow could certainly have been reason enough for Meridian to become a civil rights worker, she is spurred into action through a defining feature of Cold War culture: television. A teenage wife and mother, therefore not allowed to finish school, she spends her days being resentful of her husband and child for diminishing her agency and watching television. She catches a news report at a house where a voter registration drive among blacks in her town and county is being organized, but the next morning tunes in to see news reports of the same house, this time bombed with three children dead (*M* 70-71). Seeing the violence she was used to see on television occur in her hometown helps Meridian to realize that the brewing racial conflict in her home town was connected to the larger civil rights struggle and to human rights. “And so it was that one day in the middle of April in 1960 Meridian Hill became aware of the past and present of the larger world” (*M* 70). It is a sense of altruism that sparks Meridian’s desire to take back her life that has been weighed down by marriage and motherhood. However, once she makes the decision to divorce her husband and leave her child to attend Saxon, her devotion to the movement is also stirred by her guilt for leaving her child. Before Meridian’s departure, her mother tells her, “Everybody else that slips up like you did *bears* it. You’re the only one that think you can just outright refuse” (*M* 86). Mrs. Hill is upset because what she sees as Meridian’s shirking of domestic duties as mother and homemaker disturbs the social order, but the problem runs deeper. Meridian feels woefully unprepared for

motherhood, especially since her mother never fully explained what she meant by her instructions to “be sweet” on a date. “She did not realize this was a euphemism for ‘Keep your panties up and your dress down,’ an expression she *had* heard and been puzzled by” (*M* 55). More significant, though, is that Mrs. Hill was a teacher, too, like Mr. Hill, but was forced to give up her job when she became a mother. She is perhaps jealous of Meridian’s being able to put motherhood aside and pursue her interests.

This conflict between Meridian and Mrs. Hill and the guilt that Meridian deals with opens the door to the critique that Walker offers of the movement: often ignored within the issues of race and class that it tackled, the movement did not do well addressing sexism. Alan Nadel argues that Walker’s novel surveys the conflict within African American culture in which women suffer oppression by men parallel to the racial oppression suffered by all blacks.

This leaves black women at a double remove from power and makes them participants in a double encoding system. If black history forms a repressed, encoded, ruptured alternative to published American history, then maternal history—the chain between generations bound by maternal experience, genetic biases, and empathetic subjugation—is an encoded sub text within the black male cultural history. (255)

Meridian’s experiences with Saxon’s expectations for its students and her confusion about maternal roles are intertwined with her involvement in the movement. To reconcile Nadel’s observation about the double subjugation of black women within *Meridian* means that neither women’s issues nor civil rights can be treated as merely a backdrop to the story. The power of women beyond domestic roles is important, a point counter to the limited, domesticated womanhood in the canon of the so-called southern renascence (those women character who did upset the balance, such as Flannery O’Connor’s female protagonists, paid dire consequences).

Saxon College is doubly complicit in the terrible joke because it not only maintains a degree of patriotism and religious hopefulness for those inalienable rights, but the school also oppressively monitors the behavior of its students to ensure they do not break social mores for women. Meridian must hide from her peers that she has a child and was married because Saxon students were assumed to be virgins. The school's song declares its women "chaste and pure as the driven snow," a ridiculous lyric cleverly mocked by Meridian's friend, Anne-Marion with her own line, "We are as choice and prime as the daily steak" (M 93). The revision vigorously suggests the objectification and consumption of women graduating from Saxon, whose education has made them prime candidates for marriage. Because of Saxon College's investment in producing students conforming to the appropriate social role, its administrators attempt to foster an environment that is as apolitical as possible.

The administration of the college neither condoned Saxon students' participation in the Atlanta Movement nor discouraged it. Once it was understood that the student could not be stopped, their involvement, as much as possible, was ignored. All of Saxon's rules, against smoking, drinking, speaking loudly, going off campus without an escort, remaining off campus after six, talking to boys before visiting hours, remained in effect. It was understood that a student who allowed herself to be arrested did so at her own academic risk. (M 94)

Their apolitically political stance against their students' activity in the Atlanta Movement is a common thread between the Saxon administration and Dr. Bledsoe of *Invisible Man*: like Dr. Bledsoe's college, which has a white, the northerner Mr. Norton, Saxon College benefits from white wealth. It is built on the land of the old plantation owned by the slaveholding Saxon family. Saxon administrators have white benefactors to keep happy, as well, and they would frown on the students' involvement with the movement.

Despite the administration's attitude toward activism, Meridian takes an interest in the poverty stricken community surrounding Saxon. While registering voters in the area, she hears about "Wile Chile," an uncouth orphaned girl who had grown up homeless, survived by rummaging through garbage, and taken to drinking and smoking. Meridian manages to catch her and bring her onto campus for a bath. This earns the disapproval of her peers and the housemother, who insists that Wile Chile must go because Saxon is a "school for ladies" (*M* 25). While Meridian is distracted trying to find a new home for her, Wile Chile escapes, runs across the street, and is killed when hit by a car. Saxon officials' refusal to allow Wile Chile's funeral to take place in the college chapel leads to a riot of misdirected anger on campus that culminates with students chopping down the Sojourner, a magnolia tree surviving from plantation days that holds a special place in the private culture of the women at Saxon.

Meridian's interest in the welfare of Wile Chile is certainly propelled by her devotion to the movement and its work for the community surrounding Saxon, but another motivating factor is the guilt that Meridian feels about the life she took away from her mother and the child she abandoned to retain her agency. Brenda O. Daly goes so far as to argue that the most significant dimension of the novel is how "it tells the story of the Civil Rights Movement from the point of view of a mother—or, more accurately, from the point of view of a variety of different mothers, old and young white and black, violent and nonviolent, self-denying and self-defining" (240). Meridian is the mother at the center of the novel, and her paralytic fits, first encountered by readers in the novel's opening, are physical manifestations of her feelings of inadequacy in her relationship with her mother and her own child. As a child, she felt inexplicable guilt,

and when sharing the feeling with her mother, she asked, "Have you stolen anything?" The implied answer is that through the requirements for her care, Meridian stole her mother's career. With the question, "a stillness fell over Meridian and for seconds she could not move. The question literally stopped her in her tracks" (*M* 43). She would go on to feel more guilt about the child she had given up to attend Saxon. However, this guilt over refusing socially predetermined roles is evocative of the sexist oppression endured by black women that mirrors racial oppression. After leaving for school, she ponders the condition of mothers in slavery, whose greatest fear was separation by the sale of their children, to torture herself. "And what had Meridian Hill done with her precious child? She had given him away. She thought of her mother as being worthy of this maternal history, and of herself as belonging to an unworthy minority, for which there was no precedent and of which she was, as far as she knew, the only member" (*M* 90). She denies herself motherhood a second time after she discovers that Truman Held begins dating Lynne Rabinowitz shortly after ending their affair.

Though it is difficult, Meridian remains a close, supportive friend to Truman and Lynne through their marriage, divorce, and the murder of their daughter, Camara. These friendships she forged through her activism are part of her personal connection to the movement, but an even deeper connection is the manner in which her work in the movement compensates for denying herself biological motherhood. Keith Byerman argues that Meridian interprets her work within the movement as maternal, and through that work she heals her own affliction (102). In the very least, her maternal vision of her work shines through in her dedication to nonviolent protest, which she sees as a life-sustaining form of resistance. During time spent in New York, her inability to declare

she would kill for the cause (maybe, she says) ends with Anne-Marion's cadre of militant revolutionaries literally turning their backs on her. John F. Callahan explains that Meridian certainly sees the crises of American society, but "Unlike the others, [Meridian] cannot answer simply as an individual and a contemporary because for her social and political change is bound up with love and with the witnessing, participatory form that belongs to a true community" (156). This only strengthens Meridian's resolve to "go back to the people, live among them, like Civil Rights workers used to" (*M* 19). Many of her experiences after this return to the South lead her to work as an advocate for children and their parents. The novel's opening episode shows her leading the black children of Chicokema in a peaceful demonstration against a sideshow owner who refuses to admit them to his show until Thursday—the day set aside for "coloreds." In a separate ordeal, she marches into a town meeting and delivers to the mayor the bloated, decomposing body of a five-year-old boy. He drowned because the town closed their public pool rather than integrate it, forcing him and other children to play in a drainage ditch that floods without warning when the town drains its reservoir. The child's family offered to name their next daughter after her to reward her actions: "Instead she made them promise they would learn, as their smallest resistance to the murder of their children, to use the vote" (*M* 209). Meridian's activism is always with individuals in order to keep the focus on the objectives of the movement instead of its ideology—a fault she sees in Anne-Marion's uncontemplative devotion to revolution. Here Meridian has much in common with Ellison's invisible man, who grows frustrated when he realizes that the Brotherhood wants him to simply deliver its messages without

thinking much about its content or goals; neither are slaves to ideology, but have a sincere desire to perform action rather than advocacy.

However, it is finally the inconsolable sorrow of a father that makes Meridian believe she could kill for the movement. A “red-eye man” at a church service where the preacher praises the man’s son as a martyr on the anniversary of his death—a young man killed when he merely spoke of armed resistance against discrimination—is so bereaved that he can only say over and over again, “my son died” (*M* 217). After leaving the church service, “she made a promise to the red-eyed man herself: that yes, indeed she *would* kill, before she allowed anyone to murder his son again” (*M* 220). She wavers on whether she could ever make good on the promise, but what is key is that it is parental grief that leads her to even consider it. The movement for her is not simply about forcing reality to conform to the American fantasy of equality for all, but it is also for her about preserving familiar relationships. She sees first hand that it is a community that can soothe the pain of these families who lost children and take collective action to improve its conditions. Though Meridian finds her identity in the movement, for Meridian, her work within it is ultimately about the people it sought to help from its inception, not its ideology or militancy.

The other two main characters of *Meridian*, Truman and Lynne, are both northerners who have come to the South to work with the movement, and their personal connection to the region is that they find their identities in it. Their lack of connection to the South yet participation in a national movement so thoroughly associated with the region demonstrates a progressive cultural identity splitting off from its regional associations, not unlike the vital center’s splitting off of southern values into its new

conservative identity. In this light, the pair represents the emerging blue states. One of their personal connections to the movement is also their shortcoming: their objectification of the black folk of the US South as art. Truman is a particularly problematic character because he is one of the male oppressors replicating racial oppression against women involved in the movement (namely Meridian). He abruptly leaves after his sexual encounter with Meridian and almost immediately begins dating Lynne, never realizing that Meridian is pregnant and has an abortion. Yet while on a break from Lynne he approaches Meridian, calls her beautiful, professes love, and tells her, “*Have my beautiful black babies*” (*M* 120). His insensitive pandering, objectification of Meridian’s fertility, and reification of cultural prejudices for white beauty in his attraction to Lynne earn him a beating from Meridian. After becoming estranged from Lynne, Truman retires from activism to focus on his art; however, his subjects remain romanticized portraits of black women whom Truman scorned for not caring more about their appearance. “‘They are so *fat*,’ he would say, even as he sculpted a ‘Big Bessie Smith’ in solid marble, caressing her monstrous and lovely flanks with an admiring hand” (*M* 183).

Rather than replicating oppression, Lynne’s artistic objectification of African-Americans living in the US South raises concerns about how artistic representations strip the movement of its political aims and become complicit in the production of the post-South. These notions of hers arise from her disgust with the uniformity of the northern suburbs. The counter she finds to that is in the South: “the South—and the people living there—was Art. The songs, the dances, the food, the speech. Oh! She was such a romantic, so in love with the air she breathed, the honeysuckle that grew

just beyond the door" (*M* 136). So Lynne moves south to assist with the movement, spite her affluent family, and find the best art. "If Mississippi is the worst place in America for black people, it stood to reason, she thought, that the Art that was their lives would flourish best there" (*M* 136-7). Lynne's sentimentalized vision is highly problematic. It participates in a common trope pastoralizing the existence of southern, rural blacks as happy workers who are part of the background of the idyllic, relaxing countryside where urbanites can go to escape the hustle and bustle.²

Besides being a racist perpetuation, seeing the South as art depoliticizes it by separating the artistic image of the region by ignoring the complexities of its social and racial strife. Nadel sees as one of the primary conflicts in the novel as the one between art and politics in which a balance is difficult to strike. He explains, "When an experience or material condition becomes the subject of art, it is stabilized and is not as subject to change or improvement. But the problem with revolutionary politics [...] is that they are not 'stable or predictable'" (263). Lynne learns as much through her tenuous status as a white woman involved with the movement. She is likewise objectified by its black members and seen as a dangerous reminder of and temptress from the hegemonic white culture. "To them [the workers] she was a route to Death, pure and simple. [...] They did not even see her as a human being, but as some kind of large, mysterious doll. A thing of movies and television, of billboards and car and soap commercials" (*M* 146). Lynne endures being raped by Tommy Odds, another civil rights worker who blames her for his arm being shot off in an attack by white supremacists

² For a further discussion of this trope in American literature, see Paul Outka, *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance*, especially his treatments of Jean Toomer and Zora Neale Hurston.

because they saw Lynne hanging out with black men after dark. She becomes the one objectified in the attack, and the rape is doubly torturous for Lynne because she feels responsibility for the attack that cost Tommy his arm and the pangs of white guilt. She cannot cry rape; doing so would guarantee a lynching. She tells him she forgives him, which only earns more contempt from Tommy. He returns the next night with more friends and attempts to instigate a gang rape. The group prevents the second attack when one of its members disputes Tommy's calling Lynne "it," saying, "That ain't no *it*, that's Lynne" (M 175). The moment provides some hope that artistic and popularized objectifications of people can be beaten. With Lynne, perhaps even more so than with Meridian, Walker surveys the complex relationships and conflicts between genders and races among civil rights workers, especially the personal costs for those workers.

And yet these painful experiences within the movement can combat the encroaching post-South. After Camara's death, Meridian spends time in New York with the grieving Truman and Lynne, and she has a reconciliation of sorts with the former while watching television. The program is "One of those Southern epics" presenting stereotypical images of white men and black men, leaving women out. It moves to a scene in which a black man says the movement got him the vote and ended segregation, but taught him also that more than that needed changing and maybe a gun was needed for it. The two women have the same reaction to the man:

That the country was owned by the rich and that the rich must be relieved of this ownership before "Freedom" meant anything was something so basic to their understanding of America that they felt naïve even discussing it. Still, the face got to them. It was the kind of face they had seen only in the South. A face in which the fever of suffering had left an immense warmth, and the heat of pain had lighted a candle behind the eyes. (M 190)

Their shared response leads them to seek out tangible objects, such as a quilt, that reminds them of their experiences in the South. It is significant because their activism is the root of their reconciliation. Despite the waning of the movement after the death of Martin Luther King, they remain politically aware of the salient economic barriers to equality that remain. Moreover, by recalling the specific individuals they set out to help, their shared experiences rebuff depictions of the US South politically diluted through media. Meridian and Lynne will always find their identities in their particular, tangible participation in the revolution and remembrance of the past.

A similar phenomenon happens in the book's second chapter, which begins with the names of assassinated political leaders and civil rights activists—"MEDGAR EVERE/JOHN F. KENNEDY/MALCOM X/MARTIN LUTHER KING/ROBERT KENNEDY/CHE GUEVARA/PATRICE LAMUMBA [sic]/GEORGE JACKSON/CYNTHIA WESLEY/ADDIE MAE COLLINS/DENISE MCNAIR/CAROLE ROBERTSON/VIOLA LIUZZO" (*M* 21)—before focusing on John F. Kennedy's televised funeral and Anne-Marion's observation of Meridian's specific response to it. Elliot Butler-Evans notes how the focus remains on "Meridian's specific response to the funeral of John Kennedy, and what is striking here is that, throughout the episode, the horror of Kennedy's death is experienced only through Meridian's reactions to it"; thereby the novel gives an individual perspective on historical events and allows the personal relationship to them overtake the larger, public narrative of history with which the consumer of media can readily identify (117). A second significance of this chapter is how the list of names provides regional, national, and international context to the Civil Rights movement. The names include national leaders, civil rights workers, the victims of the 16th Street Church

bombing (1963), and, quite tellingly concerning America's ambitions abroad, Patrice Lumumba, the first elected leader of the Congo who was deposed and executed, most likely with the support of the United States. Lumumba caused problems for US political influence in Africa because he was a socialist and a Soviet sympathizer. He won no points with the Eisenhower administration during his one visit to Washington when he asked his handlers with the State Department to find him a blonde escort for the evening, and within the administration it was accepted that he sought to seize the property of all whites in the Congo. "The oldest and deepest fear of white Americans seemed to be coming true on the international stage in the midst of the Cold War: Patrice Lumumba was Nat Turner" (Borstelmann 131). In this list of names, Walker takes a page from Lillian Smith's playbook of thirty years prior: she learns to read her maps, which Smith advises as a way to understand how actions within the local have global implications. Walker reverses the route, however, showing that American political actions abroad to stifle meaningful revolution parallel domestic politics.

Still, Berlant criticizes *Meridian* for not giving up on the utopic dream of America equality as something that all citizens will be able to participate in, for which she favors *The Color Purple* and its rejection the myth of American national heritage. Perhaps this is a valid criticism of the novel, but a more important point is that the novel refuses to give up on the value of political action within communities. Near the end of the novel, Meridian and Truman canvass for voters in a rural area and labor to convince a man whose wife is bed ridden and close to death (she hopes to die and be buried on Mother's Day) of the power of the vote to bring them better living conditions and health care for his wife. Reluctant to register for fear that doing so will bring him "a lot of

trouble,” he would rather devote his energy for caring for her and their son than voting (M 225). To lend him their support, Meridian brings them groceries, making it clear that they do so not to coax him into voting. The Monday after Mother’s Day, he comes to Meridian’s house to register to vote. The man registers because he sees that Meridian is not driven to any kind of demagoguery or ideology, but by a caring for others. To return the kindness of Meridian’s charity, he registers to vote in hopes of making a difference in the community. The man, and many of the rural characters in *Meridian*, “are capable of change and of political action; it is simply that change must be connected to concrete experience” (Byerman 93). Presenting concrete experiences of the Civil Rights Movement counter to postsouthern imaginings of it is one of this book’s merits.

Paradise and Its Malcontents

In his reflection upon the U.S South in the fracturing 1960s, Walker Percy chooses to look forward to an even more splintered society in a near-future in *Love In the Ruins*, subtitled *The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World*. His third novel is a departure from *The Moviegoer* (1961) and *The Last Gentleman* (1966) in that it is decidedly satire, but it also begins a trajectory of increasing preachiness for the remainder of Percy’s career. Yet long before beginning work on the novel, he had written to his mentor, Caroline Gordon (a second connection to Flannery O’Connor besides their Catholicism), saying, “Actually I do not consider myself a novelist but a moralist or a propagandist. [...] What I really want to do is to tell people *what they must do and what they must believe if they want to live*” (qtd. in Tolson 300). Percy’s desire to help people “live” comes on strong in *Love In the Ruins*. Within its pages, he offers an America full of political extremes, and Tom More’s objective in his near-apocalyptic

adventure is to find not only some kind of middle ground, but also a basis for it. The novel's significance at the end of my narrative lies in that middle ground, which I argue is a refiguring of the Cold War vital center that shares a foundation with the modern conservative identity.

Allen Pridgen sees Tom, a physician, as looking for some kind of middle ground as well, focusing more specifically on a reading of the book as a critique of the 1960s in general. He first points to specific patterns within newspaper and magazine clippings—ranging on topics from free love to the ability of science to accomplish infinite improvements for humanity—that appear in Percy's papers that coincide with the time he was working on it (148-9). He also turns, as I will now, to comments Percy made to the Publisher's Publicity Association just before the book was published. In his comments on the book, Percy states his intentions for the novel to be a bit of satire, but he also betrays other intentions. Paraphrasing a line from Yeats to which Tom alludes in the novel—"The center did not hold" (*LR* 18)—Percy says that such is true in the novel, "But even to say this is misleading. It suggests a political satire which attacks right and left and comes down on the side of moderate Republicans and Democrats. I had a different center in mind" ("Concerning *Love In the Ruins*" 248). If not a political center, when what center? Pridgen proposes that the center Percy has in mind "lies in human language, the center that makes possible whatever consciousness of the self and the world human beings have" (152). Critics have written much about Percy's fascination with language and semiotics and how his theories on these subjects appear in his novels. Percy may have had such things in mind, and in his talk, he goes out of the way to move beyond his novel's political considerations, stating, "But the novel is

not saying: Don't rock the boat, cool it, be moderate, vote moderate Republican or Democrat. No, it rocks the boat" ("Concerning *Love In the Ruins*" 250). The boat must be carrying more than just political passengers. I contend that the center that Tom ultimately presents in *Love In the Ruins* is a cultural center—a new mediation capable of reconciling the political, social, racial, and economic polarization in a future where such problems seem to get even worse than they were in America at the height of the Cold War.

Certainly, Tom's world is marked by schism, hyperbole, and fluctuations between insightful hilarity and shortsightedness. It is the early 1980s (Percy said he imagined around 1983 in his comments on the novel), and The Catholic Church in America has split into three different sects. The sect faithful to Rome, of which Tom considers himself a member, is "scattered and demoralized" and let their church go to ruins (*LR* 6). The United States has wasted away into deserted urban areas and increasingly independent states:

Americans have turned against each other; race against race, right against left, believer against heathens, San Francisco against Los Angeles, Chicago against Cicero. Vines sprout in sections of New York where not even Negroes will live. Wolves have been seen in downtown Cleveland, like Rome during the Black Plague. Some Southern states have established diplomatic ties with Rhodesia. Minnesota and Oregon have their own consulates in Sweden (where so many deserters from their states dwell). (*LR* 17)

Such a shattered country would have been the cold warrior's worst nightmare, and the passage hints at the international implications of such problems in the states' commencement of foreign relations, a power constitutionally reserved for the federal government. Also quite telling is the southern states' diplomatic exchange with Rhodesia, a colony in Africa whose white colonial government declared independence

in 1970. The morass of political discourse is further complicated in the two major parties becoming caricatures of themselves. The Republicans become the Knothead Party, an epithet they embraced after it was proposed they change their name to “the Christian Conservative Constitutional Party, and campaign buttons were even printed with the letters CCCP on them” before pundits recognized the abbreviation was shared with the Soviets and “called it the most knotheaded political bungle of the century” (*LR* 17-18). The Democrats emerge as the Left Party, a shortening of “a derisive acronym that the Right made up and the Left accepted, [...] LEFTPAPASANE, which stood for what, according to the Right, the Left believed in: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, The Pill, Atheism, Pot, Anti-Pollution, Sex, Abortion Now, Euthanasia” (*LR* 18). Tom is either unable to or does not name any individuals associated with the parties; therefore, readers must assume that these parties are more easily identified now by their talking points than their leadership, ideals, or platform for practical, responsible domestic and foreign policy.

Even more jarring and relevant for the events of the novel is how these deep political divides manifest in media, demographic, and geographical lines of the country and Tom More’s community. “There are Left states and Knothead states, Left towns and Knothead towns, but no center towns [...], Left networks and Knothead networks, Left movies and Knothead movies” (*LR* 18). In this manner, *Love In the Ruins* prefigures the red state/blue state model of American politics that emerges near the end of the twentieth century and continues today. While Tom still addresses a South and a North within the United States, the greatest indicators of cultural difference are no longer tied to such distinction. Every aspect of cultural identity within the US’s various

populations is thoroughly dependent on political identification that has no middle ground. Typical of the late modernist turn during the Cold War, taste in art and literature is informed by politics. Preference for neighborhood is dictated by a desire to live near politically like-minded people—the “right” to choose one’s neighbors asserted by suburban politics. Yet the neighborhoods are separated along more than just partisan lines. The setting appears to be Louisiana—the setting of most of Percy’s novels—and Tom identifies at least four distinct areas: the unnamed town where Tom’s office is, populated by Knotheads; Fedville (a federal complex comprising a hospital, medical school, NASA facilities, and research centers for behavior, geriatrics, and sex) where Lefts work; Paradise Estates, Tom’s own neighborhood where Knotheads and Lefts live peacefully side-by-side, united in their relief that no blacks live in the neighborhood, and populated by northerners who have moved south and taken up the customs; and the Honey Island Swamp, the home to the “dropouts from and castoffs of and rebels against our society” (*LR* 15), including college dropouts, militant guerrillas, deserters from foreign armies, “ex-Ayn Randers, Choctaw Zionists [...], and even a few old graybeard Kerouac beats” (*LR* 16). Essentially, Honey Island is home to anyone refusing either of the two accepted cultural identities.

We learn about the features of this imaginary 1983 in a rather lengthy exposition, though there is much else to be learned. The structure of the book introduces us to Tom, his country, and his neighborhood on July fourth, with Tom sitting in a pine forest near the interstate waiting for the world to end. He nods off to sleep at the end of the first section, and the book returns to July first, catching the reader up to speed on the events that led to Tom’s current situation. Tom awakens from his catnap to commence

the book's resolution, which is followed by an epilogue, a section to which I will pay particular attention subsequently. Two key forces drive the plot: the repercussions of Tom's use and development of his invention, the ontological lapsometer, and a planned, armed revolution by the Bantus, a black paramilitary organization whose name Percy sourced from a factual student group with a similar name in the 1960s. The plans for their revolution end up becoming secondary to the plot, which I argue is indicative of Percy's unwillingness to confront racial discrimination in the South as a continued political problem after the end of segregation. This leaves the problems Tom identifies and causes with the lapsometer sharing the limelight.

Tom describes his lapsometer and its potential in the lengthy expository section. It is a device able to measure the electrical activity in specific places within a patient's brain, and Tom conjectures, "could the readings then be correlated with the manifold woes of the Western world, its terrors and rages and murderous impulses? And if so, could the latter be treated by treating the former?" (*LR* 28-29). He sees his invention as diagnosing the "deep perturbations of the soul" (*LR* 29) and it is from this that Tom derives the machine's name: a device for measuring a "lapse." Tom elaborates in some scientific jargon that only with measurements taken of the brains of humans—not animals—can he detect a sense of self. He sees his discovery as a major advance in understanding the human condition:

Only in man does the self miss itself, *fall* from itself (hence *lapsometer*!). Suppose—! Suppose I could hit on the right dosage and weld the broken self whole! What if man could reenter paradise, so to speak, and live there both as man and spirit, whole and intact man-spirit, as solid flesh as a speckled trout, a dappled thing, yet aware of itself as a self! (*LR* 36)

If examining Percy's work strictly through his devout Catholicism, the etymology of the device suggests the lapse that was the fall of man in Genesis (or that of the lapsed,

or secular, Christian), ergo the lapsometer also measures how far the individual has fallen from God. Kieran Quinlan, on the other hand, develops the argument further, advancing the idea that the device is part of a larger comment the novel makes on the *cogito ergo sum*. Hence, part of what the lapsometer measures is the span of the Cartesian split between mind and body (131). Martin Luschei, in the first book-length study of Percy's fiction, pushes beyond the Cartesian split to construe Tom's tool as measuring an existentialist separation from the body in which a "socially conditioned self-consciousness" is alienated enough from material existence causing the great wars of the twentieth century (188). At its most basic level, the lapsometer is a tool that leads Tom to believe that he can repair the fragmented United States, but also leads to a spectacular scene in the Pit ("a seriocomic clinic" for the edification and amusement of med students) when the device winds up in the hands of everyone present.

What these readings do not fully account for is that the lapsometer is just as much a political gauge as it is a spiritual one, connecting psychiatric symptoms with ideology. Tom uses his first subject's measurements to draw correlations between his righteous, conservative rage and his headaches. Through the data collected on his second subject, a graduate student, he connects his terrors and self-abstraction to his liberalism, and in his third patient, he links deep depression with ire against his son—who has joined the hippies in Honey Island Swamp—to his near dependence on television news to provide him something to be angry about. The invention may as well be a political continuum that can be used to adjust a patient's particular sentiments as needed and, in the climate of the Cold War, determine exactly how American or un-American a subject may be. Coupled with Tom More's desire to develop his invention

in a “crash program,” the lapsometer is a tool for preserving the vital center of American-style democracy, and even its global ambitions. “It’s not even the U.S.A.,” Tom explains to his friend, doctor, and colleague at Fedville, Max Gottlieb, “it’s the soul of Western man that is in the very act of flying apart HERE and NOW” (*LR* 115). Max accuses his notions of being quite metaphysical and abstract, but Tom insists on the realities of the situation: “There is nothing metaphysical about the tenfold increase in atrocities in this area. There’s nothing metaphysical about the vines sprouting. There’s nothing metaphysical about the Bantu guerrillas and this country falling about between the Knotheads and the Leftpapas” (*LR* 115). Through Tom, Percy insists that some semblance of the vital center must be maintained for the American way of life to survive.

Yet in a novel that is so conspicuously critical of the ways that political ideology informs individual identity, neither women nor blacks participate meaningfully in its political discourse or even its plot. Fully developed, strong, or admirable female characters are essentially nonexistent in Percy’s body of fiction, and *Love In the Ruins* is no exception. Tom’s marriage with his late wife, Doris, disintegrates after the death of their daughter, Samantha. Doris began travelling widely and having an affair with an Englishman. It was on a trip to Cozumel with her lover that Doris died. In his reminiscing Tom pokes fun at her favorite books, which he has left on the enclosed patio where they have swollen with moisture: *Siddhartha*, *Atlas Shrugged*, and *ESP and the New Spirituality*. “My poor wife, Doris, was ruined by books,” Tom laments, “by books and a heathen Englishman, not by dirty books but by clean books, not by depraved books but by spiritual books” (*LR* 64). As many times as he repeats the point,

Tom seem ultimately more upset about his wife having cuckolded him than mournful about her death.

In the time since he became a widower, Tom has been a womanizer, and there are three women—Moira Schaeffer, Lola Rhodes, and Ellen Oglethorpe—for whom he feels an affinity, though they have little agency in the novel plot or discourse. All three are holed up in the abandoned Howard Johnson Inn during the climax of the novel while Tom sits in the pines waiting for the end of the world, catnapping, and amusing himself with the thought of having three beautiful women with him to endure the apocalypse.

The Howard Johnson was originally planned to be a secret location for a tryst with Moira, but the Bantu Revolution causes him to send Lola and Ellen there too for their safety. Tom's compulsion to protect them in the face of a revolution by blacks is all too similar to southern obsessions with the taboo of miscegenation and irrational fears regarding the protection white femininity from violation by African-Americans. It is a sentiment held by Tom's neighbors in Paradise Estates. Colonel Ringo tells him while crouched behind a guardhouse and under fire from Bantus who have occupied the Paradise Estates Country Club that he cherishes "The Southern womanhood right here in Paradise!" (LR 283). Additionally, descriptions and behavior leave Moira and Lola one-dimensional. Moira is quite simple, even childlike, in her sensibilities, preferring the poems of Rod McKuen to the collection of Great Books Tom has stashed in the Howard Johnson; she is also most obviously used by Tom to fulfill his erotic desires. Fulfilling Tom's aesthetic desires, Lola is an accomplished cellist, but has an air of simplicity as well, referring to herself frequently in the third person. She lives in Paradise Estates in her father's home, named Tara, an obvious allusion to *Gone With the Wind* and a

testament to the contrived nature of subdivisions. Ellen, Tom's nurse and sidekick (as opposed to partner), is who Tom eventually marries in the interval between the end of the novel proper and the epilogue. The role she plays there contributes to the novel's problematic resolution.

Conversely, at least some of the black characters in the novel are involved in a revolution, but it is a revolution that Percy's satire belittles. Percy himself was opposed to segregation from his college days. Still, the extent to which the novel—even as satire—downplays racial inequality as the principal problem of the novel and for the United States is difficult to ignore. During his musings under the pine tree, Tom articulates a mythology that explains how the United States got into its current mess:

Was it always the nigger business from the beginning? What a bad joke: God saying, here it is, the new Eden, and it is your because you're the apple of my eye; because you the lordly Westerners, the fierce Caucasian-Gentile-Visigoths, believed in me and in the outlandish Jewish Event even though you were nowhere near it an had to hear the news of it from strangers. But you believed and so I gave it all to you, gave you Israel and Greece and science and art and the lordship of he earth, and finally even gave you the new world that I blessed for you. And all you had to do was pass one little test, which was surely child's play for you because you had already passed the big one. One little test: here's a helpless man in Africa, all you have to do is not violate him. That's all.

One little test: you flunk! (*LR* 57)

Satire this may be, but the story told in the passage has some serious complications, the least of which is reducing African-American history into “nigger business.” First, it trivializes the long and sordid history of the slave trade and chattel slavery in the founding and development of the United States into merely an exam that whites were required to pass in order to maintain stability for their new nation. Secondly, the story recapitulates a white nationalist myth that God favors Caucasians and that the US is the result of that favor. In its telling, Tom abstracts centuries of racism and brutality into one

simple little allegory that explains away contemporary political strife. One purpose of myths is to provide a basis for the collective identity of a group of people, and being a nationalist narrative that does not question the validity of American democracy and expansion, it falls well within the purview of the Cold War's vital center. But he has also upped the ante on Faulkner, whose Ike McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses* declares the South cursed because of the sin of slavery. Tom More declares the entire nation cursed for failing this test; in doing so, Percy solidifies his place in a late modernist progression that began with New Critical praise for southern literature in its conversion of racism from a political problem to a moral one and ends with suburban politics and the development of modern conservatism.

William Rodney Allen, Thomas Hardy, and John F. Desmond all draw the comparison between Tom More and Ike McCaslin. However, my assertion breaks a pattern in their criticism, a pattern in which critics typically diminish the import of Percy's depictions of race and race relations by arguing, as Desmond does, that "Percy suggests through More that the racism splintering America (the novel was written during the racial turmoil of the 1960s) is a manifestation of deeper spiritual ills" (127). Such episodes as the one above, they argue, are merely symptoms of a basic human problem that Percy diagnoses in his work. Allen uses the comparison between Tom More and Ike McCaslin in a book that has the larger purpose of "reclaim[ing] Percy as an American and, more specifically, a southern writer" well within its traditions and values as opposed to just another existentialist writer (how critics considered him up to that point) (xiv, 88). Thomas Hardy goes a step further in his analysis of this passage, saying, "the 'nigger business' is simply the most conspicuous example of our failure as

a nation to keep Christ's commandments—first and foremost, as the title again suggests, those *two* commandments (Matt. 22:39-40) upon which 'hang all the law and the prophets': 1) that we love God, 2) that we love our neighbors 'as ourselves'" (114). Hardy goes onto argue that Percy simply uses relations between whites and blacks in America as an allegory for all varieties of hatred between groups and individuals. The exception I take to all of these readings of Percy's work is that they trivialize racism and discrimination as serious political problems that have done much to shape the course of American history and culture, and especially the manner in which intellectuals' manipulations of the problem altered policy in the mid-twentieth century. On the contrary, the true import of race relations within the novel is quite clear, as Kobre, who also breaks the pattern, points out. It lies in what I have identified as one of the novel's defining features: "the real issue that corrupts and rends society is race. As a result, conservatives and liberals can live side by side happily in the segregated utopia of Paradise Estates *as long as everyone tacitly agrees to forget or abridge the real history of America's racial troubles*" (129, emphasis mine).

Tom gets his own chance to directly diminish the revolution—one he knew was coming since he was shot at in his home on July first—when he is taken prisoner by Uru, the leader of the revolution, and Victor Charles, who has moved back to the South after several years in the North and is frustrated because his efforts to buy a house in Paradise Estates have been repeatedly blocked by its segregationist residents. Tom's capture reveals conflicts within the revolution and disrupts its order; Victor has a deep respect for Tom for visiting and staying with his dying "auntee" all night, and he affords his prisoner more courtesy than Uru advises. Tom asks them if their plan is to take over

Paradise Estates, and Victor volunteers, “Not in the beginning” (*LR* 298), but that scaring Tom away from his home was the first step because it sat under the television transmitter. The revolution required access to it in order to communicate its platform across a larger area. Uru tells Tom, “We’re going to build a new society right here” (*LR* 300). However, Tom does what he can to diminish the revolution. He tells Uru in response to the declaration of building a new society, “You haven’t done very well so far” and references Liberia and Haiti (*LR* 300). Victor’s insistence on treating Tom with respect—he even moves to make a drink for him before Uru stops him—undermines the revolution because it reinforces not only southern mores about interaction between races, but also honor: Victor trusts Doc, as he calls Tom, and wishes to indicate his gratitude for kind work Doc does not just for his auntie, but for many more blacks who depended on him for house calls. Tom’s preoccupation with the vital center quells the revolution.

Also, Tom recognizes Uru as Elijah Washington, a former professional football player and holder of a Ph.D. in political science—a product of the American academy turned revolutionary. Kobre infers that Tom sees Uru as assuming the identity of a revolutionary in the same way that his northern neighbors in Paradise Estates assumed the identity of southerners:

Uru refuses to see the past clearly and, therefore, is caught up in violence and discord. Just as the whites of Paradise Estates cannot redress past injustices because they insist on obscuring them with a sentimentalized vision of southern history, so too, Percy seems to argue, will blacks like Uru fail to overcome those injustices [...] because the injustices are all they see of the past. (131)

In this reading, revolution is not praxis or effective political activism. Rather, it is simply another cultural identity informed by politics, just like the postsouthern, suburban

conservatism espoused by Paradise Estates homeowners. This exchange is the last that readers see of the revolution; the remainder of the novel focuses on the chaos created by Tom's lapsometers, which had been distributed without his consent.

The final undermining of revolution and marginalization of racial conflict comes in the novel's highly problematic resolution, which finally reveals Percy's revised vital center. It takes place five years after the events of the novel proper, and while the fissures still exist on a national level, to our protagonist they seem mostly cured in the area surrounding Paradise Estates. Readers find Tom married to Ellen (her ultimate importance to the story) with two children, living in poverty in the old black quarters of town, and attending church again. Tom reveals that the "revolution was a flop" (*LR* 385), but that the Bantus did manage to take over Paradise Estates, owning 99% of the homes there. In a turn of fortune, they had been living in the Honey Island Swamp for so long that they claimed squatter's rights to own it. Soon thereafter, oil was struck in the swamp. With their new wealth, the Bantus bought up the houses in Paradise Estates and took up golf and the other hobbies of the white former owners. It is not the vote or even armed military action that desegregates Paradise, but good old-fashioned capitalism. The only cultural practice the Bantus bring with them is their religion; otherwise they adopt wholesale the lives of the whites they displace. The drive to conformity is alive and well. The only sustainable identity within the novel is the consumerist one.

Of this reversal between the Mores and the Bantus in living spaces and wealth, Hardy writes that really nothing has changed: "Whether whites are up and blacks down, or vice versa, social inequity is social inequity, racial discrimination is racial

discrimination" (116). Whether this is Percy's intention or merely Hardy's own perspective, the statement is short sighted. Like the whole of *Love In the Ruins*, it demeans the material struggles of African-Americans suffering in poverty as a result from Jim Crow and other societal disadvantages. To compare the prior condition of blacks living in the Quarters with More, who is now happy to be living a simpler life there with his family, is unfair, especially given More's choice to live there. Additionally, it displaces the detriments caused specifically white-on-black racism in American history with a general, vague moral imperative for equality with which any red-blooded American would agree. Besides, to place the Bantus in the subdivision by virtue of property rights is a literary preservation of suburban, middle-class politics that divorces it from its racial component in the US South.

In its creation of a post-South, *Love In the Ruins* strips the segregationist sentiments from the emerging conservatism of the suburban middle class identity. Such is Percy's revision to the Cold War's vital center, and it is all too similar to Nixon's suburban strategy and furtive pandering to Southern segregationist. It is a unifying gesture of American identity that only further drives the stake in the cleft between races and classes. It also goes a step further to reinforce a religious angle. Through his licentious protagonist's settling down with Ellen and recommencing his religious life, it continues to reinforce a couple of Cold War staples in American culture: the nuclear family and the faith in God in the face of atheistic Communism. Now, however, they are social values that have become inextricably tied to modern conservatism in the past decades. With all of its abstractions and mythologizing of America's current state, *Love*

In the Ruins is one of the last late modernist novels—satire that, despite having gone a long way, leaves us curiously in the same place we began.

APPENDIX
THE CORRESPONDENCE OF MARGARET MITCHELL TO LILLIAN SMITH: AN
OVERVIEW

Extant in the Lillian Smith Papers, Box 9, Folder 32 are three letters written by Margaret Mitchell to Lillian Smith that refer to a visit Smith and Paula Snelling made to her home in Atlanta and a request that Mitchell write a short piece for *Pseudopodia* about her soon to be released novel, *Gone With the Wind* (1936). Mitchell's letters imply that Smith and Snelling requested an interview with her for the magazine. Mitchell, who expresses interest in the magazine, suggests they visit her in Atlanta for the interview in a 4 May 1936 handwritten letter to Smith. The visit took place between that date and 19 May 1936, the date of Mitchell's next note to Smith. In the 19 May note, also handwritten, Mitchell apologizes for not having time to answer all of the questions that Smith had for her during the interview, and also reports that she should provide a deadline for three hundred words that she had agreed to write about herself to supplement the interview for publication in *Pseudopodia*. In this letter, Mitchell calls writing "a god-awful bore." The final letter of the correspondence dated 21 May 1936, Mitchell informs Smith that *Gone With the Wind* "last day of June as the book is the July Book Club choice." She apologizes for never having written the three hundred words as promised, and instructs Smith to use whatever material from she can from their interview to make up for it.

The result of this visit, Mitchell's lack of cooperation in providing more material or the interview, and correspondence is Smith's summer '36 "Dope with Lime. In it she describes the extent of her interactions with Mitchell and she hints at an impending review of *Gone With the Wind*. In it, she says she felt compelled by rave reviews of the

novel to visit Margaret Mitchell in Atlanta. In the column, worth quoting at length, she describes the visit, which must have left Smith less than impressed with Mitchell:

So . . . Dope With Lime took off their mountain boots, put on their town clothes and after an interval of space and time knocked on Miss Mitchell's door. A very small keen-eyed red-headed attractive person asked, "Which is which?" said immediately, "I'm scared to death. Do come in." But curled up on a divan, drinking black coffee, she really did not look scared but very alert and intelligent and vivacious with the situation well in the hollow of her hand, and seemed far more interested in discussing Faulkner, Cabell, Emily Clark, Wolfe, and some mutual friends than her own book. "I'm sick to death of it," she groaned. "You would be too if you had spend six months checking ten thousand references—or was it twenty?"

"Were they all wrong?"

"They were right. But you see, I didn't know they were. I wrote the book never expecting to publish it, from my memory of the thousands of conversations I have listened to all my life about Lee, Sherman, Lincoln, Longstreet, Appomattox, the Battle of Atlanta ...I didn't write of the past," she laughed, "but of contemporary happenings. Time has stood still hereabouts." Again she laughed. "I had to check. I don't dare face some good old Confederate soldier, whiskers bristling with indignation as he points his finger at me and says 'Sister, you said Lee was in that cornfield north of the old cow pasture on the morning of July 14, 1863, when by God he was in the cornfield a mile south of that one.' You can't . . . not safely."

She calls her book "a Victorian novel," insists that she has no theories of style, trying only to avoid journalese. But she says she wrote the first chapter seventy times. She is very modest, seems to prefer visiting her friends in little Georgia towns to New York literary teas, declares her book unimportant, herself unimportant, has no desire to be a "writer" and hopes the Lord will protect her from writing another book. All of which was very pleasant and ingratiating to her visitors who found, to their shocked astonishment, that they had stayed far beyond the limits of even southern hospitality so delightfully entertaining had their hostess been. The novel is the Book of the Month's July selection and will be published on June 30th. Rumor says advance sales are heavy. (11)

The correspondence and its repercussions in the first volume of *Pseudopodia* are truly a literary treasure. It reveals the very different personalities of two major literary southern women and their tense, very brief working relationship. Without a doubt, Smith's not only negative but scathingly cold review of *Gone With the Wind* has merit, yet one might

speculate whether or not the novelist's flippant attitude and shrugging off of Smith's request could have contributed to the poor review in *Pseudopodia*.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jordan J. Dominy was born in Dublin, Georgia in 1982. A first generation college student, he attended Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, earning a Bachelor of Arts in English, completing both the literature and creative writing track and earning honors in the latter. After graduating from Mercer *Summa cum Laude* in 2004, he attended The Florida State University for his Master of Arts in English. He completed his thesis, “The Nature of the Search’: Popular Culture and Intellectual Identity in the Work of Walker Percy,” and graduated in 2006. He began his work in the University of Florida Department of English’s PhD program the same year.

Jordan’s primary areas of scholarly interest are twentieth-century American and Southern literature and culture and modernism, and he has presented conference papers on topics ranging from his primary interests to nineteenth-century American sentimental fiction to television programs. He also has wide teaching interests, which include both fiction and poetry. Jordan anticipates his next projects to include a critical history of Lillian Smith’s magazine, *South Today*, and a study of apocalyptic, dystopian, and alternate history works in southern fiction. After graduation, Jordan will become Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Berry College near Rome, Georgia.

When not pursuing scholarly interests, Jordan’s favorite pastime is spending time with his wife, Jessica. He enjoys cycling and participates in annual fundraising rides for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s disease), riding in honor of Leon Peek, his father-in-law. Jordan is also an avid baseball fan, rooting for the Tampa Bay Rays.