Dissonances of Dispossession: Narrating Colonialism and Slavery in the Expansion of Capitalism

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DISSONANCES OF DISPOSSESSION: NARRATING
COLONIALISM AND SLAVERY IN THE EXPANSION OF
CAPITALISM

by

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DISSONANCES OF DISPOSSESSION: NARRATING COLONIALISM AND SLAVERY IN THE EXPANSION OF CAPITALISM

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ABSTRACT

This project studies how ethnic American literature of the long nineteenth century represents the relationship between the dispossession of lands and lives—the histories of settler colonialism and slavery—and the making of democracy and capitalism in the United States. We often think of this relationship in terms of temporally distinct stages in which the formal equality of democracy and the marketplace overcome and thus leave behind the direct domination of colonization and enslavement. However, I focus on how the early novels of Indigenous, African, and Mexican American writers from the period of manifest destiny to the New Deal era represent the ways colonial and racial dispossession are not overcome by but in fact underpin and cohere liberal democracy and its market economy. I argue that the formal dissonance of these early novels—the way the narrative and aesthetic structures of these works contain irresolvable tensions and oppositions that foreclose harmony or unity in their formal visions or experiences—embodies how the social cohesion, cooperation, and consent required for liberal democracy and the wage labor relation are produced through and continue to depend on Native dispossession and anti-Black subjection. In doing so, they serve as a key literary
history or archive of narrative forms mapping a formative period in the history of racial
capitalism. These early novels reveal how whiteness and settler sovereignty serve as the
linchpins of capitalism. That is, they demonstrate how the violence of anti-Indianness
and anti-Blackness generates the forms of unity among settlers that help overcome the
contradictions of US capitalism in ways that enable its meteoric expansion in the long
nineteenth century when the United States transforms from a settler colony into a settler
empire at the center of the world system in the twentieth century. In this way, my project
contributes to how we understand race and capitalism. It shows not only how capitalism
depends on producing racial, colonial, gender, and sexual difference, but also how the
ability for capitalism to expand in the face of its internal conflict between labor and
capital is made possible through this unity among settlers generated by colonization and
enslavement.
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Introduction

In a work mostly ignored or when acknowledged often dismissed, sometimes even derided by academics, yet well-read in study groups of community organizers since its publication in 1983, J. Sakai’s *Settlers* writes a history of the United States as a capitalist society based on slavery and genocide in which settlers from the poorest to the richest collaborate to share power and wealth through the dispossession of Native lands and Black lives. For Sakai, capitalism arrives and develops differently in the North American European settler colonies than how Marx theorizes capitalism’s history in England. Marx’s map of capital focuses on wage labor and the value form, a social relation between owners of the means of production and a class of proletarians divorced from the land and forced to sell their labor in exchange for subsistence wages. For Sakai, the United States context is defined by a social relation between settlers and the colonized and enslaved. There is an unbridgeable gulf between settlers and those whom settlers genocide and hold captive in their pursuit of capital accumulation. That is, for Sakai, settlers are a class of parasites living off the stolen land, enslaved bodies, and labor of Native, African, and Chicanx peoples, and later imported colonial laborers from around the world. Sakai writes that

in Amerika intra-oppressor class distinctions have always been muted on the mass level by the fact that the main distinction was whether you were a settler or a subject, whether you were in the slave patrols or enslaved in the fields, whether you were in the frontier garrison community or imprisoned in the reservation. This was the all-important identity, to which everything else was subordinate. Only someone with no contact with reality can fail to see this. (352)
While within the settler ranks there are conflicts of class, there is only irreconcilable antagonism between colonized people and settlers. It is from this antagonism, Sakai contends, that springs democracy and the growth of US capitalism.

It is easy to why *Settlers* finds itself in the spaces of community organizing and the undercommons of the (neoliberal) university rather than in the works cited pages of liberal humanist academics.¹ It suggests that settlers will not, on their own, dismantle the structures of violence they constructed, continue to uphold, and benefit from. Instead, Sakai argues only liberation movements of the colonized and enslaved will do this. However, narratives of liberal progress represent this antagonism Sakai identifies in terms of distinct stages in which expanded forms of citizenship and the formal equality of wage labor overcome the direct domination of colonization and enslavement. We are told that whatever happened in the past can stay there for we are all Americans now, or for class-first thinkers, we are all workers now, the 99%, and should not divide ourselves worrying about issues of “identity” like race or gender.

In this climate, *Dissonances of Dispossession* returns to Sakai’s history of the United States and studies how narrative form can help bring into view what Sakai maintains are relations of violence constitutive of a settler society that nonetheless celebrates itself as a democracy not only worth saving and defending but one marching toward further progress. It asks the questions: what is the relationship between the dispossession of lands and lives—the histories of settler colonialism and slavery—and the making of democracy and capitalism in the United States? How can literary narrative map the terrain of this relationship between dispossession and US settler society?
In pursuing these questions, *Dissonances of Dispossession* examines how the early literary narratives of Native, African, and Mexican American writers from the mid-nineteenth century to 1945 offer ways of mapping how settler colonialism and slavery create the conditions in which the wage labor system emerges and expands. This period precedes the arrival of global anticolonial rebellions of the mid-twentieth-century and their corresponding literary and cultural nationalisms. Which is to say, these early narratives had much different aims than those of literary and cultural nationalisms. Writers and artists of literary and cultural nationalisms represented and cohered the identity of national liberation struggles. Such representations affirmed the humanity of dispossessed peoples in the face of a colonial system that treated them as Franz Fanon put it, “the wretched of the earth,” or as Sylvia Wynter termed, “the irrational/subrational Human Other” (266). Artists of the cultural nationalism period used narrative form to construct the affirmable identities of Black, Red, and Chicanx power. However, during this earlier period of my study from manifest destiny to the New Deal Era, writers of the colonized and racialized classes use the genres of the novel to demand recognition of their sovereignty and humanity. Writers from John Rollin Ridge and Martin Delany at mid-century to Alice Callahan, Simon Pokagon, and Nat Love at the turn-of-the-century, to D’Arcy McNickle, Américo Paredes, and Ann Petry in the years when the welfare state emerges, use the novel to craft images of their communities’ sovereignty and humanity in an effort to challenge the ways colonization and racialization positioned them as the unsovereign and nonhuman.

Yet the visions or formal experiences these early novels offer to do this work are uneven, fractured, and irregular. The images of sovereignty or humanity they seek to
produce do not turn out coherently like they do in major works of the novel of the time. However, it is this literary history of dissonance in the early ethnic American novel I focus on. I argue that the dissonant forms of early literary narratives of Indigenous, African, and Mexican American writers embody and thus make visible the way settler colonialism and slavery are asymmetrical power relations—antagonisms—through which the forms of unity, reciprocity, and equivalence among settlers are forged that then become central to the consolidation of democracy and expansion of capitalism in the United States. The antagonism between settlers and the colonized and enslaved inscribes itself in the forms of these early novels as narrative and aesthetic dissonance. I am suggesting, then, that these early novels map this contradictory history in which the social cohesion, stability, and consent required for liberal democracy and the wage labor relation are produced through and depend on these structures of anti-Indian and anti-Black violence. They serve as a literary history periodizing the way colonial and racial dispossession produce the unity and cooperation among white settlers that allow the wage labor relation to emerge and expand without facing catastrophic worker refusals or rebellions.

*Dissonances of Dispossession* thus demonstrates how capitalism emerges within and through these relations of violence of Native elimination and anti-Blackness and continues to be reproduced through them. It highlights how the overlooked or understudied formal features of the early ethnic American novel help us see how forms of direct domination of dispossession are co-present with, and not prior stages to, the indirect domination of labor exploitation. They also help historicize how settler sovereignty and whiteness are key formations through which the conflict between labor
and capital, the conflict of exploitation, is resolved in ways allowing for US capitalism not only to emerge and expand in the nineteenth century but rise to the center of the world-system in the twentieth century to come.

This project is also a study of how nineteenth-century narrative form develops and functions at the locations that serve as the constitutive exterior to liberal modernity. Here is where marginalized authors use the novel not so much to respond to the contradictions of nation-building, or the alienation of market society, but rather to help their communities simply survive the nineteenth century. The same genres of the novel at the locations of possession and freedom—the sites of white settler power—which are used to cohere the nation, consolidate liberal subjectivity, or the bourgeois nuclear family, are used by Native, African, and Mexican American writers in ways that reveal the limits or contradictions of these categories. In this way, I locate a much earlier and overlooked history of form that does the work of expressing the contradictions of liberal modernity in the way the modernist aesthetic is valued for doing so later. However, the dissonances I read in these early novels that embody these contradictions result not from attempts at formal experimentation, but from what these authors sought to imagine from the structural locations where they are positioned using the available narrative forms of the nineteenth century literary marketplace. Writers of colonized and enslaved groups of this period seek to imagine justice, redemption, or inclusion within the same sites of equality, possession, freedom, and rights that are premised, however, on their peoples’ oppression. As such, they try to envision demands that if fulfilled would destabilize these very categories, demands that if satisfied would make US settler society impossible. By using the very narrative forms legitimizing this society to write such demands, these authors
cause such forms to buckle and break—they cannot bear the load of this task—and it is in
these binds and tensions where these early novels map for us the terrain of contradictions
of a settler society like the United States built on and through stolen land and lives.

This earlier period my project focuses on spans the time from when the wage
labor relation formally emerged in the US national economy to the moment when this
economy reached its zenith or center of the world-system as the twentieth century
hegemon. This is a period when important developments between dispossession and
capitalism crystalized in ways that prepared the way for United States to become the
center of capitalism in the twentieth century, as well as, the later arrival of late capitalism
and its failure we are living through right now. It begins with the absorption of labor in
the mid-nineteenth century and ends when labor is perhaps most fully absorbed by the
capitalist relation during the welfare-state/Fordist model of accumulation. It ends, then,
right before US capital enters its “golden era” (1945-1973) and then subsequent descent
into secular crisis or our current era of deindustrialization and structural unemployment
of late capitalism (1973-present). This earlier period of my project also begins when the
dream of realizing a white settler republic appeared the most attainable, when colonialism
and slavery not only enclosed a continent through genocidal wars against Indigenous
nations and Mexico but also accumulated millions of African people as slaves to make
this dream possible. It ends, as I will show, when this dream is later recuperated but at a
higher level of mediation in the welfare-state model that promises to strike a permanent
balance between labor and capital.

*Racial Capitalism*
The argument, then, of *Dissonances of Dispossession* builds on and responds to a body of work interested in both questioning the assumed teleology of liberal democracy and broadening our understanding of capitalist modernity beyond the realm of the wage labor relation to the sites of colonial and racial dispossession. Recent work from scholars in Indigenous studies, Black studies, critical ethnic studies as well as scholars using decolonial and Black abolitionist frameworks have offered critiques of colonialism and slavery in response to post-racial imaginaries and to the lack of attention theories of neoliberalism give to questions of race and coloniality. This work highlights the ongoing role of dispossession in the contemporary, challenging the view that liberal inclusion resolves the violence of colonization and racialization or that neoliberalism is only a matter of finance (or fictitious) capital and/or immaterial labor. In doing so, this work points up how critiques of settler colonialism and slavery better explain the United States as a white settler colony and slave estate than either postcolonial critiques or orthodox (white) Marxisms. The former tends to ignore that the colonizer never left North America and the latter focuses on wage labor and finance capitalism without a view of colonization or racialization. I want to reflect, then, on some key perspectives from this body of work in order to show how my project both rests and seeks to expand on the critical maps this work offers for understanding the way histories of dispossession relate to capitalism.

To do this, we must begin with Marx and his theory of capitalism not only because it offers a foundational understanding of the capitalist relation, but also because it prompts responses that stretch it to account for colonialism and slavery. While Marx maps the movements of capitalism’s law of accumulation between labor and capital, he
doesn’t attend to the co-presences of colonialism and slavery. Instead, they are stages of capitalism’s past rather than ongoing structures of dispossession on which capitalism depends. In *Capital*, Marx uses the term primitive accumulation (borrowed from Adam Smith) to describe not only the origins of capitalism as the stage of colonialism and slavery that gives birth to capitalism, but also the history of land enclosures and expulsion of peasants that creates masses of propertyless populations or “wageless life” from which capital culls (absorbs) wage laborers.

Much of this account serves to dispel bourgeois economic theories that teach that capitalism emerged from the thrift and work-ethic of merchants or entrepreneurs. Against this, Marx emphasizes that capitalism arrives, “dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (926). While Marx in the sections on primitive accumulation demonstrates that capitalism is not universal but historical—its origins remind us that if it was created by human hands, it can be ended by them as well—he nonetheless suggests that the capitalist relation temporally supplants prior forms of primary or direct accumulation like colonial and racial dispossession. In Marx’s account, capitalism overtakes colonialism and slavery and other “precapitalist formations” by homogenizing space and time and creating its own presuppositions. Primitive accumulation doesn’t continue, according to Marx, because once the capitalist relation arrives, its relations of production of surplus value become its relations of reproduction. It becomes a closed loop until its own internal contradictions result in a terminal crisis out of which emerges, it is imagined, the negation of capital’s negation of the proletariat, namely a democratized worker-controlled mode of production, or communism as synthesis.
Yet theories produced by decolonial struggles and the Black radical tradition have offered crucial updates and expansions to Marx’s map of capitalism. They have done what Fanon had said was necessary when understanding capitalism in a colonial context which was to stretch Marxism, or Marx’s map of capitalism, to be accountable to the liberation struggles of the colonized and enslaved. Theorists of racial capitalism, building on the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Cedric Robinson, argue that capitalism is a racial capitalism insofar as racialization is central to the wage labor relation and the management of capitalism’s surplus populations (those excluded from waged labor, or the unwaged). Racialization produces hierarchies of social value through which capital exploits and sheds labor. Devalued bodies are made to be cheaper and more disposable. This allows capital to more easily exploit labor power for profit and to shed labor from the production process in the attempt to increase profitability through innovations in productivity that reduce the need for labor. Such exclusions from the wage form not only have been made along the lines of race but racial differentiation also legitimates the use of state-sponsored direct violence in managing those made superfluous to wage labor. Critiques of capitalism as racial capitalism thus help us understand how dispossession generates hierarchies of social value as categories of racial difference that help justify the distribution of populations among the waged, the underwaged, and the unwaged.

Recent work in Indigenous and Black studies consider the colonial relation and slave relation as paradigmatic sites of dispossession rather than the exploitation of wage labor as Marxism suggests. Critiques of settler colonialism show how the colonial relation in the United States is one of European settlers eliminating Indigenous people in
order to replace them, turning the land into a literal and figurative base for the capitalist relation. The aim in settler colonialism is transform land not only into wealth but the means itself of producing wealth, and Indigenous peoples stand in the way of this. As such, Indigenous people relate to capital as already surplus or impediments to capitalism’s arrival and expansion. In this way, Indigenous peoples are not positioned as wage laborers, even though they must work as wage laborers to live. They are positioned as “savages” to be eliminated because their sovereignty over or autonomy through the lands that capitalism seeks to enclose opposes its aim of turning all land into means for producing more capital.

As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang explain:

Within settler colonialism. . . Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation. . . In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage. (5)

To capital, then, the “Savage,” neither owns land as property nor labors on the land to produce value. The “Savage” is one without productive capacity. In this way, then, the “Savage” is surplus to capital and thus marked for elimination rather than absorption into the production process as wage laborers.
From this violence of colonial dispossession as the attempt to eliminate Indigenous peoples emerges the asymmetry of the colonial relation in which the power or sovereignty of settlers as both a subject position and a nation-state form derive from what is simultaneously the recognition and disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty. The process of dispossessing Indigenous peoples, in other words, creates settler sovereignty as a form of what Manu Vimalassery calls a “countersovereignty”: “US sovereignty is in perpetual reaction to the prior and primary claims of Native peoples on the territories that the United States claims as its own. Seen in this light, US sovereignty will always be an unfinished project in perpetual crisis of unraveling.” (142). The settler state recognizes Indigenous sovereignty only insofar as doing so legitimates its claims to lands in relation to other competing empires. Yet the settler state cannot recognize the sovereignty of Indigenous people on lands it has enclosed through violent dispossession or it risks demonstrating the illegitimacy of its own sovereignty. My project thus considers settler sovereignty not only in terms of state power and territoriality but more broadly as a site or position of power derivative of the processes of colonization and elimination. The colonial relation engenders settler sovereignty as a shared power among settlers through their mutual support, participation, and benefits received from, colonization.

Building on these insights, my project studies more closely the relationship between this asymmetry of the colonial relation and the wage labor relation. It asks what is the role of settler sovereignty in the relationship between labor and capital? Settler sovereignty, or the structural position of the settler, becomes a site of shared power among settlers over the colonized. It is the site of expectation of autonomy through a claim to productive capacity, which is the claim of immunity to being made surplus, or
being positioned as the “Savage.” My project seeks to show, then, how settler sovereignty serves as one of the sites power in which the wage labor relation emerges and expands. It is the settler wage worker’s shared status with the settler owner that allows for the reproduction of the wage labor relation. The worker fights on behalf of the colonial relation to gain more power within the capitalist relation. The owner depends on the worker to do the work of expanding empire by enclosing land. In this site of shared power of settler sovereignty, worker or owner alike, are offered the expectation of property or autonomy through colonialism. It is through these shared benefits and power that labor consents to capital despite the conflict and crisis of the wage labor relation.

My project also examines the relationship between slavery and the capitalist relation, or the slave relation and the wage labor relation. Theorists of slavery and/or whiteness studies demonstrate how the slave relation was the primary economic engine of capitalist production. Du Bois, Walter Johnson, and others show that all capitalist production rested on exploited slave labor and the economic value of slave bodies as fixed capital. Johnson argues in his historical study of slavery in the Mississippi Valley that in 1860 New Orleans was the center of capital not London. Innovation of machinery like the steam boat occurred at faster rates on the Mississippi river than it did in the textile mills of Lowell, MA, or Manchester. For David Roediger and Joel Olson (both of whom build on Du Bois’ critique of whiteness), slavery constitutes the formal wage worker as the white worker and white citizen. Wages of whiteness and the privileges of white citizenship depend on anti-Black subjection. The wage worker becomes white, then, insofar as the wage worker is “free” through the selling of his or her labor to capital. Which is to say, selling one’s labor came to index one’s unenslaveability or claim to be
free from being positioned as a slave. Such critiques of whiteness show how it serves as a form of social control. The wages of whiteness and white citizenship make the white worker loyal to capital against his or her interests as a proletarian. In this account, whiteness is an ideology. For my project, I am less concerned with how whiteness works as an ideology than I am with the way the slave relation generates whiteness as position of cross-class shared power. The working class of US capitalism is not divided by the ideology of whiteness. Rather, the asymmetry of the slave relation has positioned white labor on the side of capital in their mutual opposition/shared power over enslaved Africans.

It is for this reason that I also draw on critiques of whiteness or anti-Blackness from Afropessimist theory. For Afropessimists, slavery is neither a stage nor a relation of labor. It is a structure of anti-Black violence that positions the Slave in social death in order to provide coherence to the social world (symbolic order) of the master-class. In this way, the Slave is not a laborer, but, as Frank Wilderson puts it, “a being for the captor” (2). From within this position the Slave might be forced to labor, but he or she is not enslaved in order to enrich economically the master. Economic profit is secondary to or a product of the primary role of anti-Blackness or the making of the Slave position which is to cohere and stabilize the libidinal economy of the master-class. The enslavement of African people creates the racialized the status of slaveness, the site of social death, as Blackness where slaves are accumulated and made fungible as objects to be owned and traded before they are exploited as laborers. In this same process, the site in which one claims immunity from this violence of enslavement or position of social death is racialized as whiteness.
For Wilderson, the wage laborer, then, exists within this site of whiteness as Humanity itself. The wage laborer relates to the Slave in the same way the capitalist relates to the Slave: as a potential buyer of slaves. As Wilderson puts it, “If workers can buy a loaf of bread, they can also buy a slave. It seems to me that, the psychic dimension of a proletariat, who stand in precisely the same relationship to other members of civil society due to their intramural exchange in mutual possessive possibilities, the ability to own either a piece of Black flesh or a loaf of white bread or both, is where we must begin to understand the founding antagonism between [whiteness and blackness]” (13). The wage labor relation is thus a conflict in relation to the antagonism of Blackness. Workers and owners share power through their support of the enslavement of African people. Owners might exploit workers, but owners nonetheless relate to workers as fellow masters or potential buyers of enslaved Africans. The antagonism of anti-Blackness thus enables workers and owners to reconcile their conflict in ways that the relationship between the Slave and the master, whether he or she be an owner or worker, is without a resolution. This is why the slave relation never ended but was carried forward through different technologies and methods. Anti-Black violence must be repeated to cohere meanings of whiteness as Humanity in which the conflict between labor and capital can be resolved. Not only is hegemony not a constituent element of the Slave position like it is for the wage laborer, but hegemony, as the gaining of the consent of workers to be ruled, is enabled or made possible through anti-Black violence.

While Wilderson addresses the relationship between anti-Blackness and the capitalist relation, he tends to focus on either the role of accumulation of slaves as resolution to capital’s profitability crisis or on the way wage labor exploitation should be
seen as one among many sites of oppression that are equivalent as non-Black or “intra-Human” conflicts in relationship to the antagonism of Blackness. To this latter point, Afropessimism argues that Marxism explains only the experience of white or human workers and does not apply to those racialized as Black. My project seeks to use these insights of Afropessimism to sharpen or focus Marxism’s understanding of wage labor as a relation structurally dependent on the asymmetry of the slave relation. If Wilderson argues that anti-Blackness makes waged labor white labor or places the wage laborer on the side of capital in relationship to the Slave, my project continues to follow the movement of this relationship by looking at the ways the alienation of labor produces a need for psychic or libidinal coherence in the first place. In other words, the wage labor relation and its commodity fetish produce alienated life and atomization, which for the reproduction of wage labor to occur, demands forms of symbolic value that anti-Black violence offers to members of the master-class. If Afropessimism appears totalizing or universalizing at times, even anti-dialectical to many, my project focuses on the specific historical conditions of alienated labor and the ways these conditions produce a need for symbolic value that the slave relation as social death offers. That is, my project contends that dialectically capitalism depends on Black social death. While this point supports the Afropessimist thesis that slavery was less about exploiting labor and more about subjugating people in order to cohere the life of European colonizers engaged in capitalist social relations, it also suggests that capitalism’s law of accumulation, and the life of alienation it creates, plays a recursive material role in reproducing the slave relation. That is, anti-Black subjection produces the symbolic compensation helping settlers overcome the alienation they experience in a society they have created based on wage labor
exploitation. In this way, through the help of Afropessimism, my project hopes to offer a way of completing rather than breaking Marxism’s theory of wage labor.

If the above studies offer contributions to understanding the role of colonialism and slavery in capitalism, stretching Marx’s map in important ways, an area in need of more attention is grasping how colonialism and slavery create the conditions of possibility for capitalism to overcome its conflict with labor and crisis of its own reproduction. My project offers a close look at this relationship between dispossession and the expansion of capitalism by demonstrating how the early narratives of the colonized and enslaved represent colonialism and slavery’s role in creating sites of shared power among settlers in which the conflict of exploitation and the crisis of reproduction, housed within these sites, do not turn into catastrophic worker refusals or rebellions.

What is the conflict and crisis of the capitalist relation and how do they stand in the way of capitalism’s expansion? Marx theorizes that the wage labor relation emerges when workers are divorced from the means to production and must sell their labor-power to capital in exchange for wages they use to buy the commodities necessary for life. Capital in turn must reproduce workers in order to accumulate surplus value from their labor. When this relation emerges, it can be said that capitalism produces its own presuppositions. That is, it produces its own conditions of possibility. Without wages, the worker cannot live. Without labor power, capital has no source from which to accumulate surplus value. Labor and capital must reproduce each other for each to live, so to speak.

However, the conflict at the heart of this relationship is exploitation. The value workers produce for capital is not returned to them. Through the compulsion to labor for wages, because workers are divorced from the means to produce their lives outside of the
market, capital exploits the capacity of workers to produce value. It alienates the product of their labor. They work not for themselves but to produce surplus value. Furthermore, the crisis of this relation is that for capital to accumulate surplus value it must also shed the commodity that produces surplus value, namely labor power. Inter-capitalist competition requires reducing the cost of labor. Capital organizes the production process such that productivity increases while using less labor. With less labor, not only are workers shed or excluded from receiving wages necessary for life but aggregate surplus value decreases. The capitalist relation enters a crisis of reproduction. It cannot produce surplus value and workers cannot reproduce their lives without laboring for wages. In other words, the crisis of the reproduction of capitalism is not only a crisis of accumulating surplus value but a crisis of the reproducing the lives of workers. Together the conflict of exploitation and this crisis of reproduction create conditions of catastrophe for capital. That is, if we understand that the capitalist relation requires proletarianized laborers and produces its own limits or crisis of reproduction, the problem of how it expands without catastrophe emerges. If producing capitalism is also producing its own impossibility, how does it continue to be reproduced? Why hasn’t labor in North America turned this conflict and crisis into catastrophe for capital?

For Marx, this crisis becomes the occasion for labor’s negation of capital. For others, this crisis produces imperial seizures of land and cheaper labor where the process starts all over again on an expanded scale. For economist Giovanni Arrighi, the crisis of capitalism’s reproduction means the changing of hands of the center of capitalism, the move from one hegemon to another. My project, however, suggests that the early narratives of colonized and racialized writers offer an important view of how capitalism
avoids conflict and crisis turning into catastrophe through the ways the colonial and slave relation produce and maintain sites of white settler power. They represent how the colonial relation produces settler sovereignty as site of shared power counterposed to Indigenous dispossession, how the slave relation produces whiteness as site of shared power counterposed to the social death of the Slave, and how it is from within these two sites of white settler power that the wage labor relation can emerge and become reproducible despite conflict and crisis.¹⁵

In this way, my project reveals how settler sovereignty and whiteness together serve as the linchpin to the wage labor relation. If ideology or producing consent is integral to the wage labor relation as a form of indirect domination, it is through these categories that this process takes place. Studies on whiteness from Du Bois to Baldwin to Roediger maintain that whiteness is an institution of social control. I expand on this social control thesis by showing how settler sovereignty intersects with whiteness in creating these conditions of gaining consent. I also try to flesh out a better understanding of the material role of the symbolic value these categories produce for white settlers in the capitalist relation. The symbolic value of being in the master class and being protected by sovereignty of empire matters in a situation of alienated labor and the crisis of labor’s reproduction. Symbolic value provides the coherence that capitalism prevents in the first place. In this way, my project traces the way the colonial and slave relation must be reproduced recursively to ensure the conditions of capitalism’s reproduction.

My argument that the early narratives of Indigenous, African, and Mexican American writers map the way colonialism and slavery create sites of shared power, symmetries of white settler power, that enable the resolution to capitalism’s conflict of
exploitation and crisis of reproduction helps answer the question of why colonization and racialization persist in capitalism. Why do colonialism and anti-Blackness remain co-present structures of dispossession with the capitalist relation? Recent work by scholars studying this very question have demonstrated how late capitalism works through the long histories of dispossession. These studies work against the idea that capitalism has outgrown its colonial and racial origins, revealing instead how capitalism’s latest stage depends on the technologies and institutions of colonialism and slavery.¹⁶ My argument suggests that they persist because the capitalist relation depends on colonialism and anti-Blackness reproducing the asymmetrical power relations between settlers and the colonized and enslaved through which the reproduction of capitalism can continue on an expanding scale without falling victim to catastrophic labor refusals or colonial and racial rebellions. The asymmetries of colonialism and slavery, or the ontological hierarchies between white settlers and the dispossessed, justify the use of (state) violence to subjugate the dispossessed, while at the same time gaining from settler workers not only the consent to be exploited but the commitment to defend capital against colonial or racial rebellion.

Understanding how reproducing settler sovereignty and whiteness is integral to the wage labor relation also helps explain why colonialism and anti-Blackness and their technologies of managing populations “return” so strongly to resolve capitalism’s protracted crisis in our contemporary period of deindustrialization and state policies of neoliberalism. While my project focuses on an earlier period, its findings offer answers to questions about late capitalism and the contemporary. If these early narratives show us how dispossession constituted the conditions in which the wage labor relation could
emerge and expand despite the crisis of its reproduction, they already offer then a view of how colonialism and anti-Blackness would remain pivotal in later stages of capitalism when the wage labor relation sheds labor leaving the once waged increasingly wageless or surplus to capital. While technologies of colonialism and slavery serve to manage surplus humanity in late capitalism, capital’s shedding of labor increases the pressure to strengthen the positions of power of settler sovereignty and whiteness, which is done through reinforcing the antagonism of anti-Indianness and anti-Blackness. The maps these early narratives offer of the intersections between colonialism, slavery, and capitalism predict in many ways how capital will attempt to resolve the problem of structural unemployment, and its crisis of reproduction, by fortifying asymmetries created through colonialism and slavery.

*Form at the Sites of Coloniality*

As Fanon had advised, *Dissonances of Dispossession* stretches the method of historical materialism to focus on sites beyond wage labor and the commodity form to write a new literary history of the rise of capitalism in the US settler colonial context. It offers a way of understanding the development of the novel form moving along a different trajectory at the sites of coloniality than the line it follows at the sites of modernity. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson studies how the novel “plays a significant role in what can be called a properly bourgeois cultural revolution—that immense process of transformation whereby populations whose life habits were formed by other, now archaic, modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life and work in the new world of market capitalism” (153). The novel’s task in this cultural revolution, Jameson continues, is to produce
for the first time that very life world, that very ‘referent’—the newly quantifiable space of extension and market equivalence, the new rhythms of measurable time, the new secular and ‘disenchanted’ object world of the commodity system, with its post-traditional daily life and its bewideringly empirical, ‘meaningless,’ and contingent Unwelt—of which this new narrative discourse will then claim to be the ‘realistic’ reflection. (153)

Understood through this lens, we can see how the novel aids in the construction of the bourgeois subject, the nation, the family, and other categories cohering of commodity society, generating the experience of aesthetic and narrative unity as compensation for the increasing atomization and alienation of life under capitalism. The novel carries forward a bourgeois aesthetic tradition offering formal experiences of unity, harmony, and balance that serve as resolutions to how reification or commodification destroys a social unity or capacity to map one’s place in his or her larger social world.

Terry Eagleton explains how the rise of capitalism atomizes social relations in a way that hails the need for the bourgeois aesthetic:

in economic life, individuals are structurally isolated and antagonistic; at the political level there would seem nothing but abstract rights to link one subject to the other. This is one reason why the ‘aesthetic’ realm of sentiments, affections and spontaneous bodily habits comes to assume the significance it does. Custom piety, intuition and opinion must now cohere an otherwise abstract, atomized social order. (23)

Eagleton argues that the most “important cultural instrument of this hegemony in the nineteenth century . . . uniting within itself an economy of abstract form with the effect of
lived experience [is] the realist novel” (44). If this is the case at the sites of modernity, I demonstrate that Native, African, and Mexican American authors of this period, writing from the standpoint of coloniality, use the very forms of the novel doing this work of cohering bourgeois modernity in ways that disrupt this trajectory, which is to say, their use of the novel moves in a direction that reveals the impossibility of the aesthetic and the colonial modern world it emerges to resolve and legitimize.

To see how this is the case, we have to first understand how my project defines form. I understand form in the way the Frankfurt school and Jameson’s contributions to that school theorize it, which is to say, form is ideology. Forms are representations (mediations) of the subject’s relationship to his or her, in the language of Althusser, conditions of existence. Forms as ideologies mediate the subject’s experience of his or her objective conditions, the social system or mode of production in which one is situated historically. What is, then, the form that is the novel? Jameson contends that “the novel is then not so much an organic unity as a symbolic act that must reunite or harmonize heterogeneous narrative paradigms which have their own specific and contradictory ideological meaning” (144). That is, the novel takes already existing forms and puts them into relationship with one another in the structure of its text, creating out of this arrangement a new form itself, with the chance to do something ideologically different or not. As mentioned, the novel as a form develops in the nineteenth century as a mode of legitimizing the social life of capitalist modernity. Key to this is the way the novel unifies and harmonizes its formal elements in ways that ideologically legitimize bourgeois experience. This study, however, suggests that the forms of the early novels of Native, African, and Mexican authors do not arrange within themselves pre-existing generic
codes in ways creating unity or harmony, but rather these preexisting forms and genres are arranged in ways that they relate through tension, incommensurability, collision, and conflict, the result of which are narrative structures that produce dissonant experiences or uneven visions of the categories of modernity, like sovereignty or humanity. Genres are combined in these early works in ways that create dissonance and tension rather than ideological closure and unity of experience, the result of which are forms that destabilize the categories that the novel at the location of modernity is cohering.

The reason these early novels contain dissonance has to do with how their authors take genres developed at one structural location and put them into new arrangements for much different uses at the locations of coloniality. Jameson explains how “a genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms, that form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right. When such forms are reappropriated and refashioned in quite different social and cultural contexts, this message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new form” (141). These writers seek to show their humanity and sovereignty through the genres developed at and used to cohere the social and political worlds of the structural locations premised on their own communities’ elimination and death. By transferring these genres from one location to another where they are placed into new arrangements within their novels—for reasons of demonstrating the sovereignty and humanity of the colonized and enslaved—these writers break or cause these genres to fail, or not perform the same ideological function. It is this failure due to the dissonance in these new arrangements of genres in the formal structures of the early ethnic American novel that embodies the asymmetrical relationship between modernity and coloniality, how the violence done in the latter constitutes the stability and
progress of the former. This asymmetry is what limits or prevents these early novels from replicating and reproducing the same formal structures and ideological visions that the novel in the hands of settlers at the locations of modernity offer and produce. Put differently, it is in causing genres of the nineteenth century to fail to envision sovereignty and humanity of the colonized and enslaved that these novels make explicit the ways in which the categories of settler modernity cannot include the very people whose destruction produces such categories in the first place.

Another way of saying this is if Jameson looks at texts for their diachronic sequence, how genres from prior stages of production are put to use in later stages, forming generic discontinuities which are signs of historical change, I am using a similar approach only I am looking at how genres, as mentioned above, move across political ontologies, how they move from sites of power to sites of elimination and death. When genres in the hands of settler writers cannot do the same ideological work once in the hands of the colonized and enslaved, it points up how the genre has travelled across the asymmetries of the colonial and slave relation—where if before it helped to construct categories of modernity, now it forms tensions with other genres in ways that produce visions destabilizing these categories. The historical ground that appears in this difference is precisely the colonial and slave relations as antagonisms, as asymmetrical power relations. The categories of modernity cannot hold their line if they include or redeem the very people whose exclusion has produced them in the first place. Native, African, and Mexican American writers of this study take the narrative forms writing modernity and create from them new forms that imagine how the categories of modernity can save colonized people. In doing so, they show that where these forms succeed in writing the
cultural revolution of bourgeois modernity, they fail to write a place for colonized people in this modernity precisely because it is premised on their death and elimination. Making these forms fail to write a place for colonized people in modernity is the way these authors register the antagonism at the heart of modernity, how there is no modernity without genocide and enslavement, how there is no progress without this violence, no democratic inclusion or market freedom without racial and colonial exclusions.

In this way, the dissonant forms of these early narratives exemplify, I suggest, negative dialectical representations that Theodore Adorno theorized as formal acts of making visible irreconcilable antagonisms of capitalist society in the hope that such an understanding could help map their overcoming. A negative dialectics derives from the material reality it attempts to model. That is, as Jameson also explains, “you have to be grappling with a dialectical reality already in order to be able to show what the dialectic is” (50). Negative dialectics brings into view the irreconcilable and incommensurable. As Jameson describes it, a negative dialectic is “where the antinomy has taken the place of the contradiction, expressing intractability rather than energy and construction (or indeed incommensurability rather than relationship)” (50). My project illustrates how the asymmetrical relations of the colonialism and slavery are a negative dialectic reality that these early narratives encode through their dissonance.

This reality is what Fanon described as a manichean world of colonialism and anti-Blackness. The settler world has nothing in common with the colonized; they are incommensurable because the life of one is premised on the death of the other: “the zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in service of a higher unity. . . they both follow the principle
of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for the two terms, one is superfluous” (38). The reformulation of prior genres in these early novels in ways creating irresolvable binds is a product and mediation of this manichean reality. These works and their formal dissonance model their worlds in ways that demonstrate how the settler colonial and anti-Black structure of the United States cannot be synthesized or resolved in ways that leave behind or overcome the colonial and slave relation. Yet by seeing intractability and impossibility for resolution, these early novels, I maintain, see a new future precisely in the destruction of what cannot be synthesized. They see a new future in the refusal to accept synthesis, a refusal to see justice in carrying forward at higher levels of development relations of violence.

In other words, these early narratives indicate how the requisite for freedom of the colonized and enslaved, as well as all workers whose exploitation rests on such oppressions, is not synthesis in reforms or linear stagism, but the destruction of the asymmetrical power relations that are colonialism and slavery and how they uphold the capitalist relation. This is a destruction, of course, not only of the violence of these relations but also of the power, benefits, and cohesion of settler life derived from such violence in the first place. While biographically some of the authors of these early narratives may have supported this kind of synthesis, the forms of their narratives do not. This reading of these early narratives is important, then, because it brings attention to how their uneven forms prefigure what becomes manifest at the level of content of later cultural nationalisms that represented identities of national liberation struggles whose goal was the overcoming of the colonial and slave relation not their synthesis at higher levels. In short, these early narratives map the antagonisms of colonialism and anti-
Blackness that mid-twentieth-century national liberation struggles were actively attempting to overcome.¹⁹

It is in this way that Dissonances of Dispossession also shows how these early narratives make legible forms of resistance not legible to dominant narratives of liberal progress, freedom, and redemption. Their dissonant forms, which are a negative dialectics, a refusing to affirm the world premised on colonial and racial violence, embody the position (and politics) of those who have always tried to refuse or escape capitalism and its colonial and slave relations. In other words, the logic of Indigenous and Chicanx autonomy and defense against the arrival and expansion of capitalism, or the fugitivity and building of Black autonomy found in slave insurrections and maroon societies, are found in the dissonant forms of these early narratives. For those who wanted America never to be or who wanted it to always go away, there was never any debate whether it should be synthesized, resolved, realized, or redeemed. The goal of these forms of resistance and struggle was always to destroy the destroyer, to dismantle the structures targeting one for elimination or captivity. These early narratives inscribe this logic by making explicit how reforming or synthesizing capitalism and its settler democracy has and will always rest on maintaining the colonial and slave relations.²⁰

Those who struggle from this point of view, of course, have always been rendered invisible. Such a position is illegible to the United States and its literary and cultural imaginaries, yet it is given form in the dissonances of these early novels.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 studies how the uneven narrative forms of Cherokee writer John Rollin Ridge’s Joaquín Murieta (1854) and Mexican American author María Ampáro Ruiz de
Burton’s *Squatter and the Don* (1885) represent the role of settler colonialism in creating an asymmetrical relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and settler sovereignty and how this asymmetry creates the conditions in which capital and labor overcome the conflict of exploitation through their shared support and benefit from colonization. Ridge’s novel uses historical romance and frontier sensationalism to represent Indigenous sovereignty as commensurable to US sovereignty. While Ridge turns to frontier sensationalism for the same reasons he uses the historical romance—both call for the United States to recognize Indigenous sovereignty—each mode of representation, however, serves as a necessary supplement to the other, forming an irresolvable bind. The bind in the narrative strategy rehearses and thus brings to light this asymmetry of indigenous dispossession and how it underpins the ways settler sovereignty is a site of symmetry among settlers who share power through dispossession.

It is this symmetry of settler sovereignty that allows for capital to absorb labor and form the wage labor relation without catastrophic refusal. The chapter makes this point through a reading of Melville’s “Bartleby,” as a counterpoint to Ridge and Ruiz de Burton’s attempts to use narrative fiction to resolve the problem of colonial violence. “Bartleby” demonstrates how the wage laborer’s conflict with capital is overcome through appeals to settler sovereignty as a position of power premised on colonial dispossession. While Melville’s story portrays the conflict between labor and capital and the revolutionary potential of the worker’s refusal of labor, the story’s narrative and aesthetic structure resolves this conflict in a way that no such resolution is found in Ridge’s novel for the colonial subject. “Bartleby” offers a coherent experience of the grievability of the wage laborer’s exploitation. This aesthetic resolution to capital’s
treatment of the wage laborer indexes the way colonialism—the enclosure of land through genocide—resolves the conflict between wage labor and capital ensuring the reproduction of their relationship. Colonialism creates settler sovereignty as a position of shared power among settlers in which workers and owners meet as fellow settlers.

Ruiz de Burton further makes explicit this asymmetry of the colonial relation when she attempts to write, as Melville does for the white workers, the grievability of the dispossession of Mexican land owners in California in the years following the US-Mexico War of 1848. The novel tries to point up a structural equivalence between white settlers and Californios in order to suggest that US capitalism is not recognizing the settler sovereignty of Californios as land owning small capitalists. The tension, however, between the novel’s use of romance and populist realism to write this grievability brings to light the asymmetry of the colonial relation that Ruiz de Burton’s demand to be recognized as equivalent to white settlers cannot overcome as a member of a community targeted for dispossession. The dispossession and proletarianization of the Californios place them in the category of the colonized, even as Ruiz de Burton writes from the point of view of the settler with expectations of sovereignty and immunity from disposability and proletarian life. The novel’s narrative tension offers an important representation, then, of colonization as the process that generates asymmetries of power, the ontological hierarchies in which settlers overcome conflicts through their support and benefits from colonization.

The chapter shows how the dispossession of Indigenous peoples creates settler sovereignty as one site of shared power where wage labor is formed as consenting to capital from its inception precisely because labor expects to benefit from empire. Literary
form grieves the worker’s exploitation, but renders victims of colonial dispossession ungrievability. Yet, the chapter also argues that by encoding this asymmetry in their narrative tensions, the novels of Ridge and Ruiz de Burton not only demonstrate how colonialism generates the conditions for the emergence of the wage labor relation, but also make legible the history of indigenous autonomy as the refusal of and struggle to prevent the arrival of the capitalist relation.

Chapter 2 explores the way Martin Delany’s *Blake* (1859) represents slavery as a structure of anti-Black violence that constitutes whiteness as a site of power in which wage labor emerges from its inception as white labor. That is, this chapter argues that Delany maps slavery less as a relation of labor than as a relation of violence producing the positions of the Slave as a “being for the captor” and whiteness or the Human as immunity from enslavement. From within this site of whiteness, the novel shows how wage labor is made white in two ways. The first is how exchanging labor power for wages indexes the way the wage laborer meets the owner within the same position of “freedom” or unenslaveability. This is the argument Du Bois, Roediger and others make and that Delany’s novel already knows in 1859. The second way is how wage labor as free labor “earns” its unslaveability by defending capital against colonial and/or racial rebellion. It polices for capital to prove its whiteness or unenslaveability. In this way, Delany’s representation of slavery points up how wage labor as white labor emerges precisely as a consenting and thus more easily reproducible class.

The tensions in the novel’s view of slavery brings this to light. The novel represents two national visions of insurrection, one in the United States and the other in Cuba. The vision of insurrection in Cuba, however, functions as a supplement to the
vision of insurrection in the United States. When read together in this way, we see that what cannot be expressed in the United States comes to light in Cuba but in a displaced form. Non-enslaved or free workers in Cuba join with the enslaved to make the insurrection a possibility, whereas Delany doesn’t address the problem of the whiteness of free workers in the United States and how they relate to the enslaved. The role of the free laboring class to police black insurrection cannot be expressed in the novel’s vision of the United States, yet in Cuba the novel envisions free workers and slaves working together for insurrection precisely because they are both racialized as nonwhite. Delany takes his insurrection to Cuba, in other words, because it is where the problem of a large free laboring policing force does not exist like it does in the United States. In Cuba, this problem can be narratively resolved in order to envision the emergence of insurrection. This gap in the novel’s vision of insurrection reveals how one of the constituent elements of wage labor in the United States is to defend capital against Black rebellion in order to maintain solidarity between itself and capital to overcome the conflict of exploitation.

The chapter also argues that the novel’s incomplete mapping of insurrection, its refusal to totalize or offer the ideological closure necessary to complete its transnational or global view of slavery, points to how the event of insurrection that dismantles the slave relation or negates anti-Black violence would also abolish the very conditions upholding liberal capitalism and thus the world the novel tries to imagine Black nationalism emerging within. In other words, the incomplete map of insurrection encodes at the level of form what Afropessimists theorize as the place of anti-Black violence in the modern world of liberal capitalism, namely this world’s constitutive foundation. Blake is not so much an incomplete representation of insurrection and Black nationalism as it is a view
of Black insurrectionist actions as the undoing or abolition of a world held together by anti-Black violence.

Chapter 3 examines the role of colonialism and slavery (ongoing as anti-Blackness) in liberal capitalism’s transition to industrialized forms of accumulation. The chapter looks at how Native and African American writers represent the way the rise of industrial capitalism and its increasing absorption and disciplining of wage labor at the turn of the century depended on reproducing the colonial and slave relation. This is a stage of capitalism when the reproduction of wage labor becomes much more central to the accumulation of surplus value. That is, this is a period that begins the transition from what Marx called formal subsumption of labor to the real subsumption of labor, or in other terms, the maturing of capital’s organization of the production process in which the production of relative surplus value (real subsumption) begins to overtake the production of absolute surplus value (formal subsumption). From 1873 and on, this transformation of labor process increasingly consolidated the wage labor relation which intensified the conflict between labor and capital. The narratives of Alice Callahan (Muscogee) writer, Simon Pokagon (Potawatomie), and African American writer Nat Love represent how the colonial and slave relation were integral in this transformation of the labor process. The asymmetries of the colonial and slave relation enabled settler workers and owners to manage the conflict of labor’s increased subordination to capital.

Callahan’s *Wynema* responds to state-sponsored forms of indirect colonization and elimination, namely policies of assimilation, like allotment. The tension between its sentimentalism endorsing assimilation and reform realism exposing the violence of colonization dramatizes the way indirect forms of elimination were pursued to generate
greater social stability for settler society in a moment when not only military campaigns of direct elimination had created costly instability for capital, but also conflicts between labor and capital that challenged capitalism’s industrialization and expansion. It is this tension between the two modes that reveals how the internal stability at the site of settler sovereignty allowing for the resolution of conflicts is fiction, since it is premised, in part, on elimination. That is, the means for resolving conflicts to ensure capitalism’s success depended on elimination that was and would always be met with the contingency of indigenous resistance, or the defense of Indigenous sovereignty.

Similarly, Pokagon’s sentimental temperance novel, *Queen of the Woods*, responds to assimilation as a strategy of elimination. The novel uses sentimentalism and realism in contradictory ways that show how elimination produces ideologies of romantic anticapitalism that become so central to reconsolidating the site of settler sovereignty in the face of capital’s increased absorption of labor (called at the time the “closing of the frontier”) without the chance for escape through stolen land. In other words, Pokagon’s novel illustrates how the ideologies by which white labor accommodates itself to new realities of full proletarian life rest on continuing the project of elimination.

Nat Love’s autobiography represents how the slave relation continues to be reproduced after formal abolition in part because it animated the whiteness of the wage at a time when labor became not only increasingly absorbed and disciplined but also was shed or made surplus to capital. His narrative maps this through the way its dime-novel sensationalism interrupts the realism of his slave narrative. Love writes a slave narrative demonstrating the freedom he achieves through wage labor. Yet within this slave narrative Love uses dime-novel sensationalism to commodify these same life experiences
for the pleasure of the audience. The slave narrative demands readers recognize his humanity. The sensationalism offers his life experiences to readers as consumptive pleasure. This tension embodies the way the slave relation continues to position people of African descent after formal abolition as objects whose suffering and abjection coheres lives of the master-class, particularly in this period when these lives were increasingly brought into conflictive relationship with the rapid expansion of capitalism. When capitalism expanded and wage labor became increasingly absorbed and disciplined, capitalism required recursively that the slave relation be remade and maintained through new means after emancipation. All three novels thus reveal how the expansion of capital recursively depended on reproducing the colonial and slave relation in order maintain the sites of white settler power in which capital could accumulate greater surplus value by further subsuming the labor process without the catastrophe of labor’s refusal or rebellion, or without turning the crisis of capitalism’s reproduction into catastrophe.

In Chapter 4, I close my study focusing on the way the long nineteenth century ends, in my view, with the rise of the welfare state as the attempt to redeem the nineteenth-century dream of settler democracy. Here I examine how Salish writer D’arcy McNickle, African American writer Ann Petry, and Mexican American writer Américo Paredes use naturalist social protest fiction to demonstrate how the demand for the settler state to recognize and redress the conditions of colonization and anti-Blackness will always be ignored or disavowed—for the role of settler state, as they reveal in their works, is to ensure settler unity for successful capitalist expansion. In other words, these writers use the very genre of the 1930s that most powerfully produced visions demanding recognition and redress from the state for the plight of white workers and small farmers
to show how this genre and the political work it promises to do cannot secure the same recognition and redress for colonized and racialized groups. These novels suggest that New Deal reforms and the creation of the welfare state are forms of state recognition designed to rescue white workers and small farmers from the economic crisis of 1929 as a means of mending settler democracy as a necessary condition for creating the kind of harmony that enables Fordist production.

McNickle’s *The Surrounded* uses naturalist strategies for eliciting the recognition of the conditions of containment and imprisonment that is the reservation model. Yet McNickle comes to point up how these very strategies parallel the logic of liberal recognition found in the “Indian New Deal” or the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 in which the settler state appears to move away from allotment policy toward a new policy of federal recognition of tribal sovereignty when, in fact, the opposite was true: the IRA was policy that extended the project of Native elimination by only granting recognition of sovereignty if tribes agreed to structure their political forms and economies in ways favorable to US capital accumulation. *The Surrounded* reveals how naturalist protest fiction, like IRA policy, is not only a narrative strategy legitimizing the colonial relation, but it also conceals the presence of generative Indigenous refusals of the settler state and the colonial relation.

Similarly, Ann Petry’s *The Street* also contains naturalist techniques that seek to elicit empathy for the destruction and suffering of the Black family. I contend, however, that Petry stages naturalism in ways showing how the empathy it seeks to gain is empathy for the white nuclear family and not about the suffering of Black subjects in the novel. In this way, Petry’s novel makes visible how naturalist protest fiction continues the tradition
of documenting Black suffering as something for a master-class to own rather than confront. That is, Petry reveals how the consolidation of the nuclear family so central to Fordist production depends on the abjection of Black subjects.

I finish the chapter by discussing Américo Paredes’ novel, studying the ways he uses the proletarian novel form to narrate a potential recuperation of revolutionary consciousness among Mexican Americans of South Texas after years of facing violent counterinsurgency. I show how Paredes’ uses this form—that at the time emerged to cohere the identity of the worker movement and its universal or “collective worker”—to reveal how such an identity is entangled with US colonialism and thus cannot include Mexican American laborers and their demand not only for the end of exploitation but also decolonization. Paredes uses the proletarian novel to highlight how its politics advocates for a white worker-first class politics. In this way, the novel suggests that the welfare state that accommodates such politics depends on border violence in the policing not only of forms of resistance and survival among colonial populations, but also in securing the cross-class settler unity between white workers and capital.
Chapter 1

Settler Colonialism, Wage Labor, and Indigenous Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century

In the latter chapters of Capital on the origins of capitalism, Marx discusses the role of state violence in removing, policing and controlling the wageless and landless masses out of which the formal working class was created in England. Through policies of what Marx calls “Bloody Legislation,” the state officially made it a crime to be poor by branding, torturing, imprisoning, and even killing those categorized as vagrants and idlers—the wageless and landless—whose mere presence in public places, rather than at work, posed a threat to the social peace of the new social order of capitalism.¹ This was the process of primitive accumulation of capitalism—the expulsion of peasants from the land and the use of state violence to manage this new class of the propertyless. For those in Europe wishing to escape state violence, or, those hoping never to become its victims in the first place, the United States offered the chance to escape from or avoid falling into this proletarian status. It was chance, however, premised on the other face of primitive accumulation, that is, settler colonialism and slavery that targeted Indigenous people for removal and elimination, and accumulated African peoples as slaves. If in Europe the state aided in the enclosures of the peasant commons, in North America the settler state enclosed the Indigenous commons and stole bodies from Africa to create a democracy for people of European descent arriving as settlers.

By the 1840s, the US settler state had greatly expanded and centralized its use of violence, from the federally-sponsored removal of Indigenous people of the Southeast, to the genocidal campaigns against Native tribes in the Old and New Northwest, to the
imperialist war with a competing settler state of Mexico in the Southwest. It was also
during the 1840s that the settler state increasingly took on the role of managing the
emerging class conflict between capital and labor. For instance, the creation of the New
York Police department in 1845, and modern police departments to follow in other major
cities of the North, formalized the settler state’s use of violence to control and contain the
potential rebellion of wageless or unemployed workers.2 This class conflict in turn was a
motor for increased and expanded forms of state violence against colonized and enslaved
populations. As land speculation and monopoly increased the cost of land, limiting its
access, while driving down wages, a process which intensified beginning in the 1830s,
the demand from workers became louder, in the South and North, for the settler state to
expropriate more Native land and/or African people to relieve this tension.3 Within this
conflict between owner and worker, the state had to balance its role of managing class
conflict by controlling rebellious workers, while ensuring capitalism’s expansion. In
short, the inception of the wage labor relation in the United States already contained a
conflict that could prove catastrophic to its reproduction.

How did nineteenth-century US fiction represent this relationship between
colonial dispossession and the emergence of the wage labor relationship? While
separated by geography and genre, the novels of Cherokee writer John Rollin Ridge,
Mexican American writer María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, and Herman Melville’s story of
class conflict, “Bartleby,” address this question in their attempts to use fiction to demand
the state resolve the problem of dispossession. Ridge’s Joaquín Murieta (1854) and Ruiz
de Burton’s The Squatter and the Don (1885) narrate the violent state-sponsored
dispossession and removal of Indigenous people and Mexican settlers in a post-1848
California. Melville’s “Bartleby,” while widely recognized as a tale about worker alienation, is also concerned with the role of state violence in dispossessing settlers of their assumed right to be sovereign through ownership of land. If Melville’s “Bartleby” expresses a feeling of lament and melancholy over Bartleby’s alienation and incarceration, a rich and complete image of loss and exclusion that invokes sympathy for the forlorn (white) worker, the novels of Ridge and Ruiz de Burton offer uneven and dissonant representations of dispossession and exclusion. I argue that this difference in the form of representing dispossession embodies the way colonial dispossession generates settler sovereignty as a site of shared power between capital and labor in which the conflict of exploitation could be managed to ensure capital’s emergence and consolidation. Melville’s narrative vision lamenting Bartleby’s dispossession appeals to and is enabled by the promises of settler sovereignty as a site of shared power overcoming intra-settler conflicts like that between labor and capital. Ridge and Ruiz de Burton’s discordant and irregular representations of Indigenous and Mexican American dispossession bring to light this asymmetry of colonial relation—the way it produces cohesion for settlers precisely through the violent removal and/or removal of the colonized. In other words, if Melville represents the conflict of the capital/labor relation, his story also contains this conflict’s formal resolution found in its vision of Bartleby’s grievability. But for Ridge and Ruiz de Burton, their attempts to imagine a reconciliation between US sovereignty and the colonized results in narrative forms without resolutions. The unresolved narrative form of Ridge and Ruiz de Burton’s novels thus make explicit this irreducible antagonism of the colonial relation in which its violence constitutes a shared power among settlers—settler sovereignty—that allows for the wage labor relation
to emerge without catastrophic refusals from workers. Despite, then, their manifest
themes endorsing capitalist values, the uneven forms of Murieta and The Squatter and the
Don make legible the erased position of those in the nineteenth century who refused and
rejected the United States as an illegitimate colonial capitalist project.

Bartleby the Vagrant

Melville’s “Bartleby” is widely recognized as one of the most lucid literary
representations of what Marx had conceptualized in the same years as alienated labor.\(^5\)
The story not only allegorizes class conflict emerging in the North. It also demonstrates
how this conflict is concealed by the ideology of liberal humanism. The nameless
narrator, a lawyer and owner of the law firm on Wall-Street that employs Bartleby,
becomes the target of the story’s critique. The narrator is shown repeatedly emphasizing a
shared humanity with Bartleby that mystifies the inequality of the owner/worker relation.
The narrator tries to reconcile this inequality and his role in benefiting from it by
befriending Bartleby, even as he exploits and profits from his labor:

He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are
he will fall in with some less-indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely
treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply
purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his
strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what
will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. (56)

Bartleby’s “passive resistance” to the alienation of his labor and his choice to “prefer not
to” do anything but occupy the property of his employer is read by many as a refusal to
participate in a relationship that exploits him, regardless of whether or not he is treated kindly or harshly within it.⁶

Yet “Bartleby” is also concerned with state violence and its role in upholding the process of separating landless workers from accessing the means necessary to satisfy their needs, or what Marx had theorized as one aspect of primitive accumulation. If Bartleby resists capital by refusing to perform alienated labor, he also resists the state by refusing to be treated as a vagrant. Barbara Foley reads this refusal and occupation as an allegory of mid-century working class struggles in the North where workers, particularly after the panic of 1837, fought against exploitation by demanding land reform. As Foley argues:

For Bartleby both withholds his labor power and asserts his right to terrain. . .

Invoking a symbolic discourse current in the 1840s, [Bartleby] engage[s] in an occupation of space that is, simultaneously, an assertion of humanity. As a ‘Story of Wall Street,’ then, ‘Bartleby’ addresses not only the market in labor but also that in land, not only exploitation but also homelessness. Its portrait of alienation is devastatingly complete. (96)

While Bartleby’s occupation of privatized space works hand in hand with his refusal to work, it is not for reasons, I suggest, of challenging capital on Wall Street so much as it is the demand that the state and capital honor the sovereignty of his white settler status.

Labor parties that emerged from the 1830s and on demanded that land be made available to workers and that it be more equally distributed. This would result in increased worker mobility or escape from proletarian labor, and greater power to limit the work-day to 10 hours and increase wages. One such party, the National Reformers, which
held an Industrial Congress of workers in 1845, called for, in a popular circular printed in 1846 aptly titled, “Vote Yourself a Farm,” the following reforms: “1. To limit the quantity of land that any one man may henceforth monopolize or inherit; and 2. To make the public lands free to actual settlers only,” the result of which, “would then consist of the accumulated products of human labor” going to the worker-turned-farmer, “and the antagonism of capital and labor would forever cease” (306). If in Europe state violence helped enclose the peasant commons creating a landless class of proletarians, in North America, these proletarians could become settlers where it was expected that the state would ensure access to land as property precisely through the dispossession of the Indigenous commons. The demand for land reform was thus also support for state-sanctioned dispossession and destruction of Indigenous nations.7

If the question, then, is what is wrong with Bartleby, one answer could be that he is a settler being targeted rather than served by the settler state. The logic of the profit-motive embodied in the narrator has come to violate the promises of settler democracy. Bartleby is a fallen figure, one who holds a job of a gentlemen, but who is treated no better than a lowly hireling or wage slave whose refusal to labor has reduced him further to the station of a vagrant, that is, a failed settler. After Bartleby refuses to vacate the office, the narrator reminds Bartleby of this status as one dispossessed of property: “What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?” (84). The narrator’s questions reflect worker desires at the time to secure (stolen) land as a means not necessarily to escape poverty but to avoid a diminished status. For example, the “Vote Yourself a Farm” circular suggests that “If a man has a house and a home of his own, though it be a thousand miles off, he is well
received in other people’s houses; while the homeless wretch is turned away. The bare right to a farm, though you should never go near it, would save you from many an insult. Therefore, Vote yourself a farm” (306). With the increased consolidation of class inequality necessary for the expansion of the capitalist relation, a growing number of workers, like Bartleby, had become “homeless wretches,” or surplus, both a nuisance and a threat to capital:

In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me. . . not only useless as a necklace, but afflicting to bear. Yet I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, he occasioned me uneasiness. If he would but have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged their taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat. But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of a wreck in the mid-Atlantic. (76)

The solution to this hindrance becomes the use of state violence against rather than in favor of the settler worker.

Bartleby is removed and incarcerated for vagrancy, a victim of bloody legislation come full-circle: the office’s new property-owner “had sent to the police, and had Bartleby removed to the Tombs as a vagrant” (99). Here the story represents an anxiety that class conflict among settlers could not be squared with settler democracy, or egalitarian republicanism, precisely because the settler state had come to formalize its role in containing the rebellion of settler workers like Bartleby.

It is the narrator’s emphasis in not calling on the state to remove Bartleby that accentuates the scandal of state violence targeting a white settler: “What! surely you will
not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done? — a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? It is because he will not be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him as a vagrant. That is too absurd” (91). What is absurd is that capitalism appears to violate the political categories of the colonial relation. Settlers do not invade to become vagrants. They invade to become sovereign property owners. Bartleby’s occupation is about claiming space in order to refuse landlessness in a landed (settler) republic. After the narrator proposes Bartleby try his hand in other trades, all of which show the scrivener’s interchangeability, he refuses, saying, “It does not strike me that there is anything definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular” (97). The state should be ensuring, as working struggles of this time demanded, that land be made available to offer opportunities to escape proletarian labor. When the state, however, begins to formally target settler workers, it fails to uphold and secure settler sovereignty by treating settler workers as removable and thus disposable, that is, like the colonized and enslaved.

For instance, Bartleby who once had worked for the state in the destruction of dead letters, has by the end of the story been turned into one by the state and its support of capital: “Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. . . On errands of life, these letters speed to death. Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!” (107). While the image of dead letters being burned by the cart-load indicates how the life of the alienated worker is disposable to capital,
cart-loads of burning dead letters also invokes, if dead letters are dead men, images of state-sponsored genocide. And those at the time facing an actual holocaust were Indigenous people not settler workers denied sovereignty by land monopoly and state violence. Yet the story invokes this image of disposable life to suggest that Bartleby’s dispossession and removal is the same as the settler state’s genocidal treatment of colonized and enslaved populations.

The story likens Bartleby to a colonized and enslaved subject through the imagery of containment and exclusion. The most widely recognized example of this is Bartleby’s workplace location in the office. Relegated to a corner of the office and cordoned off by a partition, Bartleby is forced to stare, it is imagined, through a set of office windows which, as the lawyer-narrator describes, “commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade; which wall required no spy-glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but, for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes” (34). The blackness of the wall and darkness of corner highlight not so much the “wages of slavery,” as it was called at the time, of Bartleby’s position as a hired copyist, but his fallen and forlorn status because of it. Wage slavery appears to place him on the same footing as a Black slave, a fear the labor reform movement used to garner votes. “Are you tired of slavery,” reads the same circular, “of drudging for others—of poverty and its attendant miseries? Then, Vote yourself a farm” (306). To be denied land or the means of securing autonomy in the marketplace and respectable citizenship in a settler democracy, is felt by the white settler worker in Melville’s story as the same as to be treated like a Black slave or Native “savage.”
The full extent of Bartleby’s forlorn status of a failed settler is made clear when the plot of land the settler state does provide Bartleby is a prison-courtyard rather than 160 acres of farmland in western New York, or perhaps the Northwest territories. While visiting Bartleby in jail, the narrator reminds Bartleby, with the ostensible intention of raising his spirits, that incarceration and containment might offer the space that Bartleby was looking for all along in his demand for sovereignty: “‘Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here,’” the narrator tells Bartleby, “‘And, see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass.’ ‘I know where I am,’ he replied, but would say nothing more, and so I left him” (102). If Bartleby embodies worker struggles of the 1840s that fought against exploitation by fighting for a more equal distribution of enclosed Indigenous lands, his despondent awareness of the state’s role in containing his protest by removing and incarcerating him laments the fact that Bartleby’s occupation has been handled like the settler state handles Indigenous peoples’ claim to land: removal, incarceration, and death.  

When read this way, the story’s critique of the narrator is not so much an indictment of capital as it is an expression of disapproval of settler owners whose pursuit of profit threatens to undermine the aspiration for intra-settler equality and unity. For instance, the narrator appeals to a common humanity yet debases his workers by treating them as (white) chattel:  

Turkey would appreciate the favor, and abate his rashness and obstreperousness of afternoons. But no; I verily believe that buttoning himself up in so downy and blanket like a coat had a pernicious effect upon him — upon the same principle that too much oats are bad for horses. In fact, precisely as a rash, restive horse is
said to feel his oats, so Turkey felt his coat. It made him insolent. He was a man whom prosperity harmed. (42)

Here the wage labor relation has made the narrator believe that some white settler workers cannot be gentlemen, that is, be white enough to hold property. The profit-motive, it appears, causes the narrator to naturalize and thus support a racial hierarchy among whites. The more the narrator emphasizes his recognition of the humanity of Bartleby, the greater the story condemns the narrator’s undermining of this category in his drive to secure profits: “The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam” (65). Here, as elsewhere, the narrator’s reverence for the category of the human is ironized—for his support of class inequality and the use of state violence to manage it threatens the very meaning of this category premised on colonial dispossession in the first place.

Bartleby frustrates the narrator, then, because Bartleby refuses to participate in and threatens to disrupt the wage labor relation that undermines Bartleby’s assumed settler sovereignty, or expectation of accessing stolen land as a way to achieve autonomy and freedom. Bartleby’s passive resistance comes to appear as a violence against the order of things. Bartleby embodies the specter of a potential white settler riot, several of which had taken place in New York from the 1820s to up when Melville writes the story in late 1840s: “he now persists in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night. Everybody is concerned; clients are leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob” (95). This fear of Bartleby’s haunting, a fear of mobilizing a riot, is not just a fear that workers will rise up, destroy property, and demand better working conditions. From the perspective of the
owning-class, if workers demanded land reform, their rebellion was about reducing conflict by opening up access to land to the point at which profits could not be made. The riot for land was about depleting the pool of the wageless that served as a lever for reducing wages and increasing surplus value. The settler state had always been tasked with managing this tension between making lands available in the interests of accumulating value through direct expropriation, while also not making lands available by setting a price on it in the interests of accumulation by the exploitation of labor power. Commodifying land, raised the cost of escaping wage labor, giving capital more leverage to extract surplus value from the worker’s labor. Bartleby’s occupation and refusal to leave invokes this conflict of a capitalist settler democracy. It calls on the wageless to become settlers when it requires their help in the costly and bloody colonization of lands. In other times, it needs them to stay wageless to drive down wages and the cost of production that takes place on top of those stolen lands, (a point to which I will return when discussing *The Squatter and the Don*).

Yet if “Bartleby” reveals the conflict of labor and capital and its threat to settler sovereignty, the story’s formal experience nonetheless resolves this conflict. The state-sponsored dispossession and removal of Bartleby registers in the story as a grievable act, an image which elicits sympathy for the scrivener’s plight and a demand for redress and redemption. Consider how Melville narrates the moment when state violence befalls Bartleby. He is like the lamb being taken to slaughter: “the poor scrivener, when told that he must be conducted to the Tombs, offered not the slightest obstacle, but, in his pale, unmoving way, silently acquiesced. Some of the compassionate and curious by standers joined the party; and headed by one of the constable’s arm in arm with Bartleby, the
silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon” (100). The image of the imprisoned Bartleby becomes even more lamentable: “Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby” (105). This image of the wasted Bartleby emphasizes how as a settler he possesses a capacity for freedom and sovereignty that has been destroyed by the very state whose legitimacy is premised on ensuring that this capacity is respected and protected. Bartleby is the subject with the capacity to possess but is denied by the state and capital from doing so, a capacity that is the product in the first place of the colonial and racial processes of constituting the colonized and enslaved as subjects who lack the capacity to possess or be sovereign. In other words, Bartleby’s dispossession and removal registers as grievable precisely because he is the settler who has been treated or targeted in the same way the settler state treats the colonial and enslaved subject against whom the meaning of Bartleby’s status of settler sovereignty and freedom has come to be defined. Bartleby is the figure of the crisis of settler whiteness, democracy, and humanity, the lament of which becomes the call for its resolution—the settler worker’s redemption, as was the message of labor reform movements at the time. The image of grievability becomes the demand for the settler state to redeem and restore settler workers, to create the conditions in which the owner/worker relation does not break the bonds of settler sovereignty. The grievability of Bartleby is the aesthetic that encodes the resolution to the conflicts of capital’s form in the United States, namely the expansion of empire—the intensification of colonial dispossession—as a way to offset intra-settler conflicts.\(^\text{13}\)
Joaquin Murieta and Indigenous Sovereignty

In 1850, John Rollin Ridge fled the Cherokee nation for the gold fields of California because he had killed a man in retaliation for the murders of his father, John Ridge, grandfather Major Ridge, and cousin, Elias Boudinot. As members of the Cherokee nation’s slave-holding minority-faction, Ridge’s family had been targeted because of their role in signing the New Echota Treaty of 1835, which had ceded Cherokee lands in the Southeast in exchange for lands west of the Mississippi, an act that the majority of the Cherokee nation refused to acknowledge. The treaty sanctioned what had already been underway: the genocidal removal and displacement of the Cherokee, culminating in the Trail of Tears, a state-directed forced evacuation of the dissenting Cherokee where the rate of genocide by some estimates was a staggering 40-50%. A treaty that ostensibly was signed to broker peace between the Cherokee and the United States, had only sown violence, destruction, and death. Yet if Ridge had fled from the violence stemming from treaty-making with the United States, he would come to witness this violence again in California where the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 did not so much bring peace as it authorized and endorsed a white settler invasion of the region that sought to eliminate Indigenous people and dispossess the newly conquered Mexican citizenry.

It is in this context that Ridge, after failing as a miner and struggling as a journalist, writes a novel dramatizing the local rebellion, or, to Anglo-settlers, the terrorist uprising, of the Mexican social bandit Joaquin Murieta. Stories of Murieta had filled California newspapers in the early 1850s. In Ridge’s version of Murieta’s life and actions, Murieta aspires to pursue an honest living in post-1848 California, but comes to
be violently dispossessed and displaced by white settlers whose belief in racial hierarchy prevents them from honoring the sovereignty of the individual, a law that if kept, promises to protect both Mexican citizens and US settlers alike:

The country was then full of lawless and desperate men, who bore the name of Americans but failed to support the honor and dignity of that title. A feeling was prevalent among this class of contempt for any and all Mexicans, whom they looked upon as no better than conquered subjects of the United States, having no rights which could stand before a haughtier and superior race. They made no exceptions. If the proud blood of the Castilians mounted to the cheek of a partial descendant of the Mexiques, showing that he had inherited the old chivalrous spirit of his Spanish ancestry, they looked upon it as a saucy presumption in one so inferior to them. (9,10)

After white settlers violently remove Murieta from his mining claim and rape his mistress, he settles a plot of land that he turns into a successful farm. This is short-lived as white settlers once again arrive and violently steal his land and lynch his brother:

“They listened to no explanation, but bound him to a tree, and publicly disgraced him with the lash. They then proceeded to the house of his half-brother and hung him without judge or jury” (12). From such acts of violent dispossession, terror, and displacement, Murieta pledges to become a bandit, vowing to avenge the wrongs committed against him by stealing away the wealth and lives of invading white settlers: “It was then that the character of Joaquín changed, suddenly and irrevocably,” for “he had contracted a hatred to the whole American race, and was determined to shed their blood, whenever and wherever an opportunity occurred” (12, 14). After narrating the rise and fall of Murieta’s
rebellion that ends in his death and beheading, Ridge instructs readers on the importance of respecting individual sovereignty: “He also leaves behind him the important lesson that there is nothing so dangerous in its consequences as injustices to individuals—whether it arise from prejudice of color or from any other source; that a wrong done to one man is a wrong to society and the world” (158). If US settlers had respected the individual sovereignty of Murieta, his life and the lives of those he destroys could have been saved.

While many read Joaquín Murieta as a novel of ethnic American assimilation and/or its discontents in which Ridge ostensible supports US liberal democratic values of inclusion and universal emancipation precisely by calling on white settlers to uphold them for the benefit of all, I suggest it be considered a national allegory of the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and US state sovereignty, or the way the colonial relation constitutes Indigenous sovereignty as the supplement of US settler sovereignty. The story of Murieta and his movement’s sovereignty is the story not only of Cherokee sovereignty but of the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and the United States. Like the Cherokee, Murieta is a foreign nation(al) whose sovereignty is recognized but not honored by the United States. Also like the Cherokee, Murieta is dispossessed precisely because he is a competing sovereign. It must be remembered that it was because the Cherokee were recognized as a successful foreign nation that the United States sought to dispossess them through treaty-making and military force. As Patrick Wolfe explains:

the factor that most antagonized the Georgia state government. . . was not actually the recalcitrant savagery of which Indians were routinely accused, but the
Cherokee’s unmistakable aptitude for civilization. They had become successful agriculturalists on the White model, with a number of them owning substantial holdings of black slaves, and they had introduced a written national constitution that bore more than a passing resemblance to the US one. Why should genteel Georgians wish to rid themselves of such cultivated neighbours? The reason why the Cherokee’s constitution and their agricultural prowess stood out as such singular provocations to the officials and legislators of the state of Georgia. is that the Cherokee’s farms, plantations, slaves and written constitution all signified permanence. The first thing the rabble did, let us remember, was burn their houses. (396)

This problem of the United States recognizing Indigenous sovereignty while simultaneously rejecting it is what Ridge explores and attempts to resolve in his novel. The treaty-form, which the Supremacy clause (Article 6, section 2) of the constitution stipulates is the supreme law of the land, and the modern liberal meaning of sovereignty that the treaty-form represents, are under crisis for Ridge.

How can the United States be considered a sovereign nation if it doesn’t respect the sovereignty of other foreign nations? How can the United States propose and sign treaties in which Indigenous sovereignty is formally acknowledged, if it is for reasons of facilitating the removal and genocide of Indigenous people? As Kevin Bruyneel notes:

From 1789 to 1871, the U.S. Senate ratified over 370 of the 800 treaties negotiated by the executive branch of the government. The purpose of many of these treaties was to facilitate the removal of Indigenous tribes from their territories, especially tribes that resided east of the Mississippi River, which
generally coincided with the western boundary of the United States at the time. Therefore, these treaties inherently recognized the sovereignty of Indigenous tribes—at least to the extent that they could agree to a treaty—while also serving as the vehicle for placing many of these tribes beyond the extant political boundaries of the United States. (15)

A descendent of the slaveholding minority-faction who signed the New Echota Treaty, and a witness to the violence it engendered, Ridge is concerned not only with proving the legitimacy of Indigenous sovereignty, but also with demanding that the United States uphold it.

If we consider this the premise of the novel, which builds on Louis Owen’s early reading of it, Ridge’s *Murieta* becomes an important nineteenth-century narrative through which to apprehend the meanings of Indigenous and settler sovereignty and their interlocking relationship. Instead of resolving the problem of Indigenous sovereignty by imagining a balance or reconciliation between the US settler state and Indigenous sovereignty, Ridge’s novel represents Indigenous sovereignty as an irreconcilable aporia or antagonism of US sovereignty. The novel represents this antagonism through its uneven narrative structure that is often cited as a sign of Ridge’s immaturity as a writer or the result of his attempt to write a novel with mass appeal, but not as a symptomatic aesthetic structure of the eliminatory, exclusionist, and genocidal logics of settler colonialism.

The novel’s uneven form can be found in the relationship between Ridge’s use of the historical romance and frontier populism. Most readers of the novel often pay more attention to the novel’s low-brow mass appeal than to its aspirations for literary
respectability as a historical novel. For instance, John Carlos Rowe argues that “Ridge’s *Joaquín Murieta* fits most definitions of the category of ‘mass culture’ in its resolution of social and political problems by recourse to established cultural conventions,” and that because of this, it “belongs with the countless popular adventure stories of frontier life that exploit citizens’ fears of lawless anarchy, barbarism, and other threats to civilized life resulting from westward expansion” (150, 154). Or as Parins claims, “There is no doubt that Joaquín was meant to be sensational. That Ridge wanted a best-seller, the equivalent of a box office smash. . . he expected to make money from his book. . . Money was his prime motivation, and his quest for literary fame was a close second” (110).

Ridge, however, considered his novel an important literary project precisely because, in the tradition of the historical novel, it represented a formative event in the US nation’s history. Ridge indicates this in the preface:

> The author, in presenting this book to the public, is aware that its chief merit consists in the reliability of the ground-work upon which it stands and not in the beauty of its composition. He has aimed to do a service—in his humble way—to those who shall hereafter inquire into the early history of California, by preserving, in however rude shape, a record of at least a portion of those events which have made the early settlement of this State a living romance through all time. (4)

Ridge emphasizes how his novel both offers an accurate history of early California and that the events depicted are important enough to be considered a universal “living romance.” Although he acknowledges the “rude shape” of the novel, the reminder that his novel represents a foundational moment in history of the nation elevates the cultural
value of the novel from cheap to respectable literary fiction. “By shifting its subject to the serious matter of history,” Winfried Fluck writes, “the [historical] novel gained cultural respectability and successfully countered charges of frivolous irrelevancy” (117). As Shelby Streeby puts it, Ridge “wants to make it clear to readers that his novel transcends wild romance and cheap sensationalism, that it is not meant to imbue ‘enthusiastic spirits’ with the same sentiments. . . Ridge aspires to a sort of literary respectability even as he tries to appeal to popular tastes” (263). This tension between the cultural meanings of historical romance and the melodramatic modes of frontier sensation and sentiment results from a clashing narrative strategy at play in the novel that attempts to envision a reconciliation between Indigenous sovereignty and US state sovereignty.

In other words, the historical romance becomes the mode through which Ridge demonstrates how Indigenous sovereignty is equivalent to US sovereignty in order to demand Indigenous sovereignty be recognized and respected. Frontier populism serves to warn white settlers of the threat of Indigenous retribution which poses a danger to the security and stability of the nation if Indigenous sovereignty is not recognized and respected. Honor treaties and respect Indigenous sovereignty because it is equivalent to US sovereignty, or do it because Indigenous people are not sovereign but violent “savages,” whose retribution will be costly, enough so to threaten the stability of the nation. While Ridge turns to frontier populism for the same reasons he uses the historical romance—both are used to offer a vision calling for the United States to recognize and respect Indigenous sovereignty—each mode of representation serves as a necessary supplement to the other, forming an aporetic bind in which, as a supplement, the vision produced by one mode fills in the lack in the vision of the other. In doing so, however,
the legitimacy of each representational strategy is called into question by the presence of other. As the following discussion of the novel will show, it is this irresolvable negative dialectical movement in the novel’s representation of Indigenous sovereignty that makes explicit how Indigenous sovereignty simultaneously enables and makes impossible US sovereignty.

*Unsettling the Settler Nation*

In calling his novel a “living romance,” Ridge places before his readers the expectation that his account of Murieta’s rebellion will follow in the tradition of the historical romance of envisioning a national identity as the solution to the nation’s conflicts. The historical romance or historical novel had emerged in the first-half of the nineteenth century as a formidable cultural tool for constructing and legitimating a national identity. As Fluck explains, “by focusing on grand topics such as revolutionary wars or key conflicts in a nation’s history, the novel could be elevated to the rank of a modern epic that depicted the formation of a nation and captured the soul of its people” (117). Yet if Ridge announces his novel as a “living romance,” the national identity it writes is not so much of the United States as it of the organization or autonomous collective behind Murieta’s rebellion.

The describes the presence of this collective and its autonomy in post-48 California in several locations. Its most pronounced description can be found when Murieta announces the rebellion’s goals:

> I am at the head of an organization. . . of two thousand men whose ramifications are in Sonora, Lower California, and in this State. I have money in abundance deposited in a safe place. I intend to arm and equip fifteen hundred or two
thousand men and make a clean sweep of the southern counties. I intend to kill the Americans by ‘wholesale’ burn their ranchos, and run off their property at one single swoop so rapidly that they will not have to collect an opposing force before I will have finished the work and found safety in the mountains of Sonora. When I do this, I shall wind up my career. My brothers, we will then be revenged for our wrongs, and some little, too, for the wrongs of our poor bleeding country. We will divide our substance and spend the rest of our days in peace. (74, 75)

When Murieta refers to his country in this passage, it is easy to see how he ostensibly means Mexico, supporting the view of Mark Rifkin who argues that the novel is concerned with how the US imperialist war with Mexico never ended because the foreign publics it conquered and enclosed continue to resist and remain unmanageable. Yet if Murieta’s rebellion is an allegory for Cherokee or Indigenous rebellion, the country to which Murieta refers, and as the passage suggests, could also describe Murieta’s organization in terms of an unrecognized stateless nation cohered through its opposition to settler colonialism.20

This stateless autonomy can be seen in the organization’s many informal networks and institutions:

they invariably left those ranches and houses unharmed whose owners and inmates had afforded them shelter or assistance. Many persons, who were otherwise honestly inclined, bought the safety of their lives and property by remaining scrupulously silent in regard to Joaquín and neutral in every attempt to do him an injury. Further than this, there were many large rancheros who were secretly connected with the banditti, and stood ready to harbor them in times of
danger and to furnish them with the best of animals that fed on their extensive pastures. (19)

Murieta’ collective, what Alemán calls the region’s “racial body politic,” fights against the US state but not necessarily in the name of the Mexican state. Instead, it fights for its own autonomy by defending against settler invasion in order to secure its territory and capacity for self-determination. In this way, the form of Murieta’s organization embodies Indigenous sovereignty as the collective struggle to gain autonomy and achieve self-determination in the face of settler colonial violence. If the failure of treaty-making, for Ridge, lies in how the United States doesn’t recognize Indigenous sovereignty, his novel attempts to envision a resolution to this problem by dramatizing the sovereign status of Murieta’s organization, the recognition of which could prevent conflict and violence between the colonized and the United States. If recognized as sovereign, and given back what has been stolen from its members, Murieta’s collective, it is imagined, will live autonomously and peacefully on the lands the United States has claimed to enclose. This imagined arrangement echoes the proposed solution of the treaty-form in which US state sovereignty co-exists peacefully alongside the sovereignty of Indigenous nations. To represent, then, Murieta’s organization as sovereign, Ridge uses the historical romance to produce a coherent and unified image of the rebellion as it unfolds across space and time. In other words, it must offer an image of the totality of the rebellion in order to elicit/demand recognition of the sovereignty of Murieta’s organization, which in doing so, could (imaginatively) fulfill the treaty-form ideal of creating harmony between the United States and Indigenous America.

To represent the totality of the Murieta’s organization, the novel attempts to map,
both synchronically and diachronically, the multitude of events that constitute its anticolonial rebellion. Synchronically, the novel maps the space of the rebellion by locating for the reader the group’s many actions across the landscape of California. Great attention is given to the places and locales that mark the group’s action. As the actions accumulate, a view emerges tracking the expansion of the group’s many expropriations. In this way, the novel spatializes or gives an image of the group’s territory, the center of which is the valley at Arroyo Cantoova, a location described as an autonomous space where the expropriated goods and wealth of the banditti are distributed and enjoyed: “it was a beautiful sight that met his eye, as he gazed over the extensive valley and saw a thousand fine horse feeding on the rich grass,” where “busy cooks hurried up the fires, and the fresh venison and bear meat was soon smoking” and where “everything was spread forth in superabundance, scattered over a large white cloth that covered a few yards square of green grass” (70, 71). Diachronically, the novel takes great care to plot the group’s actions in a linear trajectory. Taking on a journalistic style, Ridge narrates incident after incident of violence either perpetrated by the banditti or against it, many of which have no bearing on the plot but are accounted for nonetheless to ensure that nothing is left out of the novel’s depiction of the rebellion.

The novel also pauses frequently to include several detailed scenes of violence, sentiment, descriptions of landscape, and attempts at characterization. They are muted and controlled, even if sometimes they are tangential to story. Their purpose is to prove the novel’s ability to accurately narrate history. As the narrator reminds readers of the purpose of the novel: “I do this, not for the purpose of ministering to any depraved taste for the dark and horrible in human action, but rather to contribute my mite to those
materials out of which the early history of California shall one day be composed” (7). In this way, the novel fulfills the expectations of the historical novel in which writing national identity required synthesizing disparate local conditions and competing identities that together formed the nation. As Fluck notes: “In order to do its work of national self-definition successfully, the historical novel had to be accepted as a truthful representation of history and of national conditions. Historical novels thus aim at a reality-effect produced by claims of accuracy in historical reference and verisimilitude in the description of customs and locales.” (122). Taken together, the geographic mapping, the linear-temporal plotting, and the inclusion of detailed scenes of the local conditions of the rebellion, are all attempts to produce an accurate, unified, and completed portrayal, as the historical novel called for, of the rebellion in order to write the national identity not of the United States but of the autonomous collective fighting to carve out and hold a territory within it. In doing so, the novel demonstrates and thus demands recognition that Murieta’s organization holds sovereignty over people, space, and time and that as such it is a competing foreign (stateless) nation.

The novel reflects on its own aspiration to represent the totality of the rebellion and the sovereign status of Murieta’s group in a poetic apostrophe Ridge includes to California’s Mt. Shasta. “Mount Shasta, a conspicuous land-mark in the northern portion of the State, which rears its white shaft at all seasons of the year high above every other peak, and serves at a distance of two hundred miles to direct the course of the mountain-traveler, being to him as the polar star to the mariner” (23). In writing a poem on Mt. Shasta’s sublimity, Ridge describes the ideal form to which his novel aspires. Just as Mt. Shasta serves as the figure that orients and directs, the novel has also tried to offer a
spatial and temporal map of the rebellion in order to bring a resolution to the conflict that engendered it. Conflict can be avoided and social peace achieved if a view of the absolute that Mt. Shasta embodies can be approached. As the poem, “Mount Shasta, Seen From a Distance” suggests, “To gaze upon its honored form; aye, standing/ There, the guarantee of health and happiness!/ Well might it win communities so blest/ To loftier feelings, and to nobler thoughts—/ The great material symbol of eternal/ Things!” (25). By aspiring to this form, the novel intimates that its absolute representation of the rebellion can, like Mt. Shasta, inspire resolution between the groups at war. “And well this Golden State shall thrive, if, like/ Its own Mount Shasta, sovereign law shall lift/ Itself in purer atmosphere—so high/ That human feeling, human passion, at its base/ Shall lie subdued” (25). When Murieta’s rebellion, as Indigenous rebellion, is seen as the event of a sovereign nation fighting for its autonomy, which is a view that has arrived through the novel’s image of its totality, the violent antagonism between US settlers and Indigenous America can be avoided and reconciled. To see that nations are equivalent through the law of sovereignty, is to see how peace can be broken between them. The problem to overcome, for Ridge, is for US settlers to see this mutual sovereignty and respect it as their treaties promise they will.

Yet the novel also announces in several places how Murieta’s rebellion is unrepresentable, an event much too chaotic for its language to capture and synthesize into a coherent identity. It makes these announcements in order to sensationalize the rebellion’s threat to settler security and stability. In the opening moments of the rebellion, the narrator admits: “The scenes of murder and robbery shifted with the rapidity of lightning. At one time, the northern countries would be suffering slaughters and
depredations, at another the southern, and, before one would have imagined it possible, the east and the west, and every point of the compass would be in trouble” (15). If Ridge highlights the rebellion’s chaos to warn of the instability that ensues from white settlers not respecting Indigenous sovereignty, this admission that the novel cannot offer a guiding map—an absolute view—of the rebellion’s totality, invalidates the novel’s aspiration to demonstrate how Indigenous sovereignty is equivalent to US state sovereignty.

This incongruence between chaos and the absolute intensifies as Murieta and his men accelerate their actions of robbery and murder. When Murieta’s movements transform from one of revenge with goal of “accumulate[ing] an equivalent for the fortune of which he had been robbed by the Americans,” to a movement that seeks to “kill the Americans by ‘wholesale,’” it is met by an equally intense and pervasive white settler vigilantism (29, 74). Tracking these movements, the novel concedes, becomes impossible: “Thus was the whole country alive with armed parties, whose separate movements it would be impossible, without much unnecessary labor, to trace. Arrests were continually being made, popular tribunals established in the woods, Judge Lynch installed upon the bench; criminals arraigned, tried, and executed upon the limb of a tree; pursuits, flights, skirmishes, and a topsy-turvy, hurly-burly mass of events that set narration at defiance” (135). The novel that has promised to totalize the rebellion and reveal its sovereign form, foregrounds the limit or impossibility of doing so.

This tension in the form of representing the space and time of the rebellion is crystallized in a latter scene where the narrator prepares to map what becomes the group’s last organized campaign of expropriation in which “the bloodiest scenes that ever
were enacted in the same space of time in any age or country” are promised to be depicted (109). The narrator tries to balance the chaos that is unrepresentable with the absolute:

though many villainous deeds which transpired in the short period which I am about to make a sketch of were mysterious and unaccountable, many murders committed in parts remote from each other, robberies here, thefts there, and destruction, lightening-footed, treading everywhere, invisible in its approach and revealed only in the death-trail which it left behind, yet all this mighty and seemingly chaotic scene had its birth in the dramatic brain of Joaquín—an author who acted out his own tragedies! Divergent as were the innumerable lines of action, yet they were all concentrated upon one point and directed to one purpose—that which existed in the breast of Joaquin. (109)

Here the two strategies for eliciting/demanding recognition of Indigenous sovereignty come to an impasse. The instability and violence of the rebellion cannot be contained and subdued precisely because the rebellion defies representation. Yet the rebellion is also an organized, planned event engineered and managed by the (sovereign) individual Joaquín. The rebellion is both out of control and in control at the same time. It’s decentralized but also hierarchal. It’s mappable and thus visible, yet it also exceeds narration and is unrepresentable—its only presence lies the traces of destruction it leaves behind. An image of the rebellion’s coherence thus cannot be reconciled with its image of instability.

It is through this representational bind that Ridge contradictorily intimates that the US state should both respect and reject Indigenous sovereignty for the same reason of recognizing the aporetic presence of Indigenous autonomy. Affirmatively, the novel
suggests, through the language of historical romance, Indigenous autonomy should be acknowledged because Indigenous nations are sovereign in the same way the US nation-state is sovereign. Negatively, through the language of sensation, Indigenous autonomy should be respected out of a fear of provoking unrestrained and chaotic rebellion and retribution which threatens settler security and safety. Its statelessness must be respected not as a sign of sovereignty but as a danger and threat to US settler sovereignty. These discordant representations of Murieta’s rebellion represents Indigenous sovereignty as both noble and savage, sovereign and unsovereign. Indigenous sovereignty must be recognized to ensure social peace between US state and Indigenous nations but also disavowed in order to prevent the violence of uncontrolled rebellion. Demonstrating how Indigenous sovereignty is equivalent to US state sovereignty cannot be reconciled, then, with the sensationalized fear-mongering view of the rebellion’s chaotic threat to settler security. The former assumes Indigenous nations are sovereign foreign nations, while the latter assumes Indigenous people are unsovereign stateless “savages” whose presence threatens civilization.

This irresolvable tension thus comes to foreclose Ridge’s proposed vision of reconciliation between Indigenous sovereignty and US state sovereignty. Yet it is this irresolvable tension, I want to suggest, that also makes explicit what theorist Jodi Byrd calls “impossible sovereign statelessness—desired and abjected precisely because it is required for all other claims to be made within and across the structuring (de)consolidations of the new world event,” of Indigenous people, or how Indigenous sovereignty is the supplement that makes possible and impossible US settler sovereignty (“Consolidation and Sovereignty” 435). Indigenous sovereignty is recognized by the US
settler state in order to define and legitimize its own claims to sovereignty in relation to other European nation-states over Indigenous lands. In the same moment, then, that the US settler state recognizes Indigenous sovereignty it must also deny it. Byrd describes this as follows:

Rather than producing a perfect state sovereignty that achieves territoriality and jurisdiction through the total annihilation of the Indian, however, the taxonomy of settler sovereignty requires Indigenous sovereignty as its necessary condition. In other words, within the recursive logics of a twisted reciprocity, settler sovereignty necessitates and hails the existence of Indigenous sovereignty, at the exact moment that settler sovereignty abjects Indigenous sovereignty beyond the internal of its own logical reach. (128)

If Ridge’s attempt to resolve the problem of treaty-making and international sovereignty between the United States and Indigenous America produces an aesthetic and narrative break-down, it does so because settler sovereignty is a fiction, or false synthesis of an irreconcilable asymmetry in which settler sovereignty is premised on the violent dispossession and exclusion of Indigenous people, not a co-equal balanced relationship between them.

It shows, in other words, how settler sovereignty is a counter-sovereignty: settler sovereignty depends on the very thing that also makes it impossible. “As counter-sovereignty,” writes Manu Vimalassery, “US sovereignty is in perpetual reaction to the prior and primary claims of Native peoples on the territories that the United States claims as its own. Seen in this light, US sovereignty will always be an unfinished project in perpetual crisis of unraveling” (142). As a counter-sovereignty and false synthesis, the
US nation-state form doesn’t so much signal sovereign control over people, space, and time as it is the identity of a perpetual counter-revolution seeking to manage the rebellion and resistance of the groups it has conquered and must continue to re-conquer. As Alyosha Goldstein explains, “against the numerical weight and majority rule of settler popular sovereignty, Indigenous sovereignty exposes the US nation-state as perpetually fragmented and incomplete, if nonetheless preponderant and lethal” (152). The tension between representing the rebellion as the event of a sovereign and unsovereign people aesthetically encodes, then, how Indigenous sovereignty both constitutes and destabilizes settler sovereignty. In this way, *Murieta* demonstrates how the settler nation is stable when Indigenous nations are destabilized, just as the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty—as the struggle for autonomy and self-determination of Indigenous people—threatens the coherence of US nation-state and its liberal democracy. 

*The Ungrievable Murieta*

If Ridge attempts to reconcile the disparity between settler sovereignty and Indigenous sovereignty at the level of the nation-form, he also seeks to highlight and resolve the asymmetry between the positions of the settler and Native, a problem of sovereignty at the level of political ontology. Ridge wishes for a harmony between the positions of the settler and the Native—both should be considered sovereign individuals. White settlers have denied Murieta’s claim to this status, the result of which has produced violent rebellion and social instability. To achieve social peace, as Ridge sees it, white settlers must come to recognize the (liberal) humanity—the individual sovereignty—of Murieta.
The novel represents this category of individual sovereignty as a shared honor exceeding national boundaries. For instance, in one scene, there is an exchange between Murieta and a “young man from Arkansas” that emphasizes the role of honor in maintaining social peace. While out hunting, a group of white settlers accidentally discover the whereabouts of the banditti’s hideout and center of operations, Arroyo Cantoova. Fearing the hunters will report the banditti’s location to state authorities, Murieta decides to kill them all. But before doing so, the man from Arkansas steps forward bravely declaring that as a fellow “man” of honor he will not betray Murieta’s location: “I promise you faithfully for myself, and in behalf of my companions, that if you spare our lives, which are completely in your power, not a word shall be breathed of your whereabouts. . . I stake my honor, not as an American citizen, but as a man, who is simply bound by justice to himself, under circumstances in which no other considerations can prevail, that you shall not be betrayed” (78). After Murieta’s wife Rosita urges him to save the men, Murieta acquiesces: “I will spare you. Your countrymen have injured me, they have made me what I am, but I scorn to take the advantage of so brave a man.” (79).

Here, Ridge stages how the mutual recognition of honor prevents conflict and creates harmony. If such an exchange had happened in the first place, Murieta would not have become a dark criminal. If, in other words, his status as a sovereign individual had been recognized—his humanity recognized—his rebellion could have been avoided.

To demonstrate, then, how Murieta is deserving of such recognition, Ridge again turns to the language of the historical romance. Murieta is the “Rinaldo Rinaldini of California,” or the sublime-hero of Ridge’s “living romance” (7). In one scene Murieta flees a group of armed miners by navigating a dangerous and narrow mountain-trail.
Running on the ledge, “his long hair streaming behind him” brandishing his “keenly polished bowie-knife,” the narrator remarks that “It was perfectly sublime to see such super-human daring and recklessness. At each report, which came fast and thick, he kissed the flashing blade and waved it at his foes. He passed the ordeal, as awful and harrowing to a man’s nerves as can be conceived. . . [and after his escape] a loud whoop rang out in the woods a quarter of a mile distant. . . the bold rider was safe” (87). In the closing moments of the rebellion, the narrator emphasizes the elevated status of Murieta, a point which is repeated in several locations throughout the tale: “It was the year which would close his short and tragical career with a crowning glory—a deed of daring and of power which would redeem with its refulgent light the darkness of his previous history and show him to oftentimes, not as a mere outlaw, committing petty depredations and robberies, but as a hero who has revenged his country’s wrongs and washed out her disgrace in the blood of her enemies” (80). Marking this difference between social bandit and common criminal, codes Murieta as a national hero, which is to say, a sovereign individual of a sovereign (Indigenous) nation, deserving to be recognized as such.

If recognized as a sovereign individual, then, it follows, as Ridge attempts to suggest, that Murieta’s mistreatment should be felt as grievable. That is, the wrongs committed against him are grievable because Murieta, as the sovereign individual, a subject of a nation, of a political community, protected by the law, or the social contract, expects to be immune from dispossession. This is why Ridge emphasizes how the dispossession of Murieta transforms his very being: “Those who knew him in his school-boy days speak affectionately of his generous and noble nature at that period of his life and can scarcely credit the fact that the renowned and bloody bandit of California was
one and the same being” (8). The change wrought by dispossession from noble to ignoble implies Murieta began as the self-possessive subject, something he retains but is sadly denied recognition for: “I was once as noble a man as ever breathed, and if I am not so now, it is because men would not allow me to be as I wished” (emphasis added 106). A sign of Murieta’s sovereign status, then, is that he possessed, like Bartleby, something to lose in the first place, the loss of which should be a grievable act, the solution for which, like we saw in the case of Bartleby’s dispossession, is recuperation and restoration.

This is also why Murieta is shown to allow his group to rob and kill Chinese miners in the novel. Numerous scenes depict such violence: “The miserable Chinamen were mostly the sufferers, and they lay along the highways like so many sheep with their throats cut by the wolves. It was a politic stroke. . . to kill Chinamen in preference to Americans, for no one cared for so alien a class, and they were left to shift for themselves” (97). At one point Garcia proclaims: “I love the smell the blood of a Chinaman. . . it’s such easy work to kill them. It’s a kind of a luxury to cut their throats” (64). The presence of the Chinese offers an image of a political category of pure exclusion and dispossession—they are shown not to have the right or capacity for possession in the first place. The Chinese are thus a disposable class, the surplus to be removed and exterminated, a figure in the novel, as Cheryl Walker argues, that allegorizes Indigenous people in the United States.22 As the narrator notes, “The Chinese, beginning to believe that they were singled out for destruction, were seized with a general panic, and, by the fifth of March, might have been seen flocking from the mining districts in hundreds and thousands to the towns and cities” (139).23 It is against this position that Ridge’s Murieta of the historical romance defines his status of white possession, his
individual (liberal) sovereignty. In the language of Abamben, Murieta is the sovereign because he, like the sovereign power of the United States, decides the state of exception.²⁴

Yet the novel also represents Murieta, through the language of sensation, as a frontier terrorist “savage” whose violent dispossession has provoked a feared retribution that cannot be contained. The characterization of Murieta as the terrorist savage can be found in several places. For instance, if Murieta demands recognition of a mutual honor, he is also described as the unrecognizable person in the novel: “he had worn different disguises, and was actually disguised the most when he showed his real features. . . . He frequently stood very unconcernedly in a crowd, and listened to long and earnest conversations in relation to himself” (30-31). In fact, it becomes clear that Murieta is the most powerful when disguised. At one point, he escapes imprisonment by killing a deputy who fails to recognize his criminal identity and frees a member of his banditti when he impersonates an Anglo-American businessman, “Mr. Harrington” (20, 95). Furthermore, Murieta appears vulnerable when he seeks recognition—the successful identification of Murieta is what ultimately leads to his death. Yet Murieta cannot help but divulge his identity, repeating the refrain “I am Joaquín Murieta” in several places in the novel, despite the danger he incurs in revealing his identity and whereabouts. The function of these scenes of disguise and misrecognition is to suggest that Murieta is dangerously un-policable or excessive to forms of settler surveillance and state repression. He is everywhere and nowhere all at once, the subject who dangerously defies state violence.
He is also shown to give up his attempts to restrain his comrade Garcia’s genocidal violence against the Chinese and “Digger” Indians. Murieta, in other words, stops caring about proving his honor. At one point toward the end of the tale, Murieta’s group come upon a group of Chinese miners who beg for their lives to be spared.

“Joaquín was disposed to spare them, but, not wishing to leave his portrait impressed upon too many memories which might prove some day quite too tenacious for his good, he concluded to kill as well as rob them” (133). No longer the sublime hero, Murieta the sensationalized criminal seeks not to elicit recognition from settlers but to terrorize them:

“Around San Andreas, Calaveritas, and Yackee Camp, numerous thefts and robberies had been committed for several weeks past. Property was missed, but no one knew whither it was gone. Men were murdered, and the bloody hand remained unseen. Yet every one knew that thieves and murderers walked unknown in the midst of the community. A strange dread hung over every face and gave vigilance to every eye. The fearful shrunk back from a danger which they could feel but not see” (110). This image of Murieta as the terrorist rebel serves the purpose of cautioning settlers and the settler state to respect the autonomy of the conquered unsovereign savage.

The cost is much too high not to, and settler vigilance will not be enough, it is suggested. Expanded forms of state violence hailed by proper settler democratic processes would be required to get the job done:

So burdensome were the tributes levied upon the citizens of the whole State by the robbers, and so ceaselessly did they commit their depredations that it became a fit subject for legislative action. A petition! Numerous signed, was presented to the Legislature, praying that body to authorize Captain Harry Love to organize
a company of Mounted Rangers in order to capture, drive out of the country, or exterminate the desperate bands of highwayman, who placed in continual jeopardy both life and property. (145)

Alemán points this out when he writes, “it is not lawlessness that causes social anarchy in Murieta or California; in fact, it is just the opposite. The Anglo- Americans in the novel follow the letter and spirit of American laws that systematically worked to dispossess California’s Mexican and Native Americans” (80). If Murieta was the sovereign individual deserving of recognition, he is now the enemy combatant, a stateless terrorist savage, to be contained and eliminated. If he was the sovereign deciding the state of exception, he is now shown to be the subject it targets.

If Ridge’s point, then, is to demonstrate how Murieta is a sovereign subject, the simultaneous image of Murieta as the US nation’s unsovereign stateless enemy combatant, creates a second formal paradox in the novel. The suggestion made through the mode of sensation that Murieta be respected out of fear of his rebellion, implies that Ridge acknowledges that the demand made through historical romance for Murieta to be recognized as human is already always foreclosed in settler society. In the eyes of settler society, Murieta should be respected not because he is human, but because he is dangerously inhuman all along. It is thus his presumed savagery, highlighted through sensational language, that must be respected less settler security be jeopardized. Yet not to demand recognition of Murieta’s humanity, leaving only this image of terrorist savage, would endorse the position of total annihilation of Indigenous sovereignty, fully exposing US sovereignty as an illegitimate form premised on genocide. That Ridge must use both strategies rather than one, despite the antagonism they form, points up the political
ontology of the Indian as one whose existence, which is tied to land-bases that settler colonialism seeks to enclose, constitutes a threat to the US nation, a threat that makes the Indian a surplus or disposable subject the only solution to which is elimination.

This formal paradox and the view of Indianness it reveals can be best approached when the novel depicts Murieta’s beheading. Here, the novel asks readers to both identify with (grieve) and take pleasure in the dismemberment of Murieta as the sovereign individual/terrorist savage. Such a dissonance the novel itself acknowledges when the narrator voices reservations over its use in describing Murieta and Garcia’s deaths: “I must shock the nerves of the fastidious, much against my will, by stating that he [Captain Harry Love] caused the head of the renowned Murieta to be cut off” (156). Despite this misgiving, however, the narrator quickly indulges the reader describing the sensational details of the dismemberment:

His hand, however, was offensive, and was preserved—that terrible, three-fingered hand—which had dyed itself in many a quivering heart—had torn with its ruthless talons the throats of many an agonized victim, and had shadowed itself forth upon the horrified imaginations of thousands who only knew that it existed. . . [Murieta’s] head was also exhibited in a glass case, not to prove its identity (though even that was done) but to give the public the actual sight of an object which had flung a strange, haunting dread over the mind, as if it had been a conscious, voluntary agent of evil. (156)

This tension between Murieta’s death as grievable and pleasurable, between Murieta as the sovereign individual and the killable terrorist, embodies how the category of the sovereign individual in which Ridge wishes Indigenous people would be counted is
premised on the dispossession of Indigenous people in the first place. To be the settler is to dispossess the Native, a relationship for which there is no structural resolution despite Ridge’s best efforts to imagine one, or as Moreton-Robinson describes the settler/Native asymmetry, “You cannot dominate without seeking to possess the dominated. You cannot exclude unless you assume you already own” (xxiv). Murieta cannot call for his dispossession to be grieved from within the very category produced by the erasure of Indigenous people. It’s in this way that Murieta is the ungrievable subject, or as Byrd explains: “Indians are lamentable, but not grievable. . . The lamentable is pitiable, but not remediable. It is past and regrettable. Grieving, on the other hand, calls people to acknowledge, to see, and to grapple with lived lives and the commensurable suffering” (38). Sensationalizing Murieta, which negates the image of the sovereign Murieta, thus serves to acknowledge how Native dispossession engenders the meanings of white settler possession, which is to say, the right not to be dispossessed and excluded, or treated like Murieta. If Melville’s “Bartleby” could express grief over the mistreatment of the white worker by appealing to and depending on settler sovereignty, the irresolvable representation of Murieta’s identity in the Ridge’s novel proves the existence and irreconcilable nature of it.

Refusing Settler Democracy

By offering, then, a view of Indigenous sovereignty as the aporia of settler sovereignty, Ridge’s novel comes to narrate the position of those who refused to recognize the legitimacy of the US nation. That is, the novel’s uneven form negatively calls for a defense of Indigenous autonomy that rejects US expansion or incorporation into its democracy. It is the excessive use of sensation that embodies this refusal of the
United States. For instance, the over-sensationalized image of Manual Garcia, or Three-Fingered Jack becomes important for the role it plays in unsettling the politics of novel’s historical romance plot to legitimize US sovereignty:

He was a man of unflinching bravery, but cruel and sanguinary. . . He was different from his more youthful leader, in possessing nothing of his generous, frank, and cordial disposition, and in being utterly destitute of one merciful trait of humanity. His delight was in murder for its own diabolical sake, and he gloated over the agonies of his unoffending victims. He would sacrifice policy, the safety and interests of the band for the mere gratification of this murderous propensity, and it required all Joaquin’s firmness and determination to hold him in check. (16)

Garcia’s sensationalized image, a scandalous image of murdering for the pleasure of it, becomes irreconcilable with the novel’s literary aspirations on which had rested Ridge’s attempt to imagine a reconciliation between Indigenous sovereignty and US state sovereignty.25

What makes Garcia so frightening is not the manifest content of his desire to kill everyone, “so much so that scarcely a man whom he ever met, rich or poor, escaped with his life,” but the disrupting form of Garcia’s sensationalized image of uncontained violence in the novel’s aesthetic structure (84). The excess of sensation, a pleasure in describing Garcia’s actions, can be said to express the novel’s acknowledgment of Indigenous sovereignty as the impossibility of US sovereignty, a tension the novel’s irresolvable narrative structure has already laid bare. In this way, the excessive sensationalism affirms the rejection of US sovereignty as an illegitimate colonial project. By intensifying its own narrative dissonance through overly sensationalized images of
violence, *Murieta* points up how US sovereignty is constituted and cohered through colonial violence, not its prevention or reconciliation, and that the demand for treaties to be honored is the demand the US nation cannot satisfy less it confronts its own illegitimacy.²⁶

By way of comparison, if “Bartleby” calls for the redemption of the settler worker through Native dispossession, *Murieta*’s unresolved formal structure calls for the rejection of a nation premised on such genocide, an aesthetics that encodes what Audra Simpson calls Indigenous refusal, or what Glen Coulthard theorizes as an Indigenous politics of rejecting liberal recognition. Its uneven form encodes the demand for Native liberation as the refusal of settler sovereignty manifested by the fight for Indigenous autonomy.²⁷ If Bartleby’s restored settler sovereignty is Murieta’s dispossession, Murieta’s liberation would free Bartleby for it would destabilize a structure in which settler owners exploit settler workers through the illusion of a shared “humanity” or settler sovereignty as shared power creating intra-settler equality

*Ruiz de Burton and Settler Popular Sovereignty*

If in Melville’s “Bartleby” we learn how settler democracy manages the conflict among settlers, and in Ridge’s *Murieta* we learn how settler sovereignty is constituted by the recognition and erasure of Indigenous sovereignty, I want to end by looking at Ruiz de Burton’s novel *The Squatter and the Don* that holds together in its vision of Californio dispossession this relationship between intra-settler conflicts and colonial dispossession. Ruiz de Burton’s novel attempts to envision what Bartleby’s grief and occupation had implicitly called for, namely a settler popular sovereignty that could resolve the problem of settlers being targeted for dispossession, whether they were white workers like
Bartleby in New York, or, as Ruiz de Burton sees it, white settlers and Mexican property owners alike in California. Ruiz de Burton ends the story that “Bartleby” began and that Ridge’s Murieta rejected: the story of setter sovereignty promising to resolve the conflicts of the capitalism to ensure its expansion.

Published in 1885, The Squatter and the Don depicts the last stages of dispossession and proletarianization of the class of Mexican property-owners in the decades following the US-Mexico war. The same imagined ranchero property holders who had aided, abetted, and financed Murieta, are facing, in Ruiz de Burton’s novel, not only a state-sponsored squatter invasion, but a new “invader,” monopoly capitalism. White squatters are illegally occupying Californio’s lands, former Spanish titles of ownership are being challenged and ruled invalid in US courts, and monopoly railroads and big banks are breaking up and supplanting older pastoral forms of production. As a member of this class of property-holders, Ruiz de Burton writes The Squatter and Don in order to highlight the plight of Californios, hoping, in the tradition of the protest novel, to arouse support and sympathy from the public.

While Sánchez and Pita’s introduction to novel’s re-publication emphasizes Ruiz de Burton’s powerful critique of monopoly capitalism and imperialism, they, along with scholars to follow, are quick to point out how the novel’s politics fully endorse free markets and liberal democracy. In fact, as several scholars note, Ruiz de Burton seeks to defend against dispossession by appealing to whiteness and supporting the exclusion of Indigenous people and the enslaved. As Alemán explains:

the novel ultimately argues for a new Californio coloniality, one that consolidates Californio whiteness with the whiteness of refined Northerners, victimized
squatters, and displaced Southerners while conveniently forgetting the racialist politics that underlie such an imagined community. The novel levels a scathing critique of U.S. imperialism—not because it excludes Californios, dispossessing them of their land and livelihood, but because it does not include them in the privileged category of white class mobility in the first place. (67)

Or, as David Luis-Brown puts it, the novel’s imagined shared “class status of Californios and Anglos depends on the exploitation of mestizos, Indians, and blacks” (819). And Jose Aranda claims that “For Ruiz de Burton, what is often wrong with the U.S. is not its ideals but those who fail to practice them. Such leaders need only to be reformed to set the nation back on a moral path. Despite good reasons to see the United States negatively, Ruiz de Burton wants her readers to understand that she has a stake in reforming U.S. democracy” (574). Building on these insights, I want to look at how the novel appeals to a form of settler popular sovereignty as a solution to monopoly capitalism. While it is clear that the novel hopes to expand whiteness and settler sovereignty to include Californios in ways that could unite squatter/settlers with Californios in opposition to monopoly, I suggest that this vision is left unresolved or incomplete, and that through this unresolved image of Californios allying with white settlers to fight the state and monopoly capital, we can see how these intra-settler conflicts between the wealth of monopolists and the threat of proletarianization of settler land owners are resolved not by fighting capital but by supporting increased colonial expropriations and exclusions. Ruiz de Burton’s novel offers an important view of what we saw in “Bartleby” but from the other side of the nation and the colonial relation, namely that of settler sovereignty and
class in terms of how intra-settler economic conflicts are resolved through expanded forms of colonial violence of which Ruiz de Burton, and the Californios, were a target.

As Sanchez and Pita have argued, Ruiz de Burton uses romance to imagine a reconciliation between white squatters and Californios. It is the marriage between Mercedes and Clarence that allegorizes the union of the two classes pitted against each other in the fight for land. For the marriage to work and the two groups to co-exist, Ruiz de Burton goes to great lengths to prove the whiteness of Mercedes and the Californios to demonstrate their capacity for property ownership, which white squatters invading California it is already assumed, possess. As Luis-Brown explains, “Squatter’s romantic racialism integrates the Californios—ostensibly white yet racially ambiguous—into whiteness as caste through marital union, overtly expanding whiteness yet covertly subverting concepts of racial purity” (821). The novel also makes a distinction between squatters and settlers to emphasize the connection between whiteness, the law, and property-ownership. Squatters who illegally occupy Mexican-owned lands are shown to be unrefined and repugnant, while settlers who follow the law are cast as respectable and inviting. If Mercedes must prove her whiteness, Clarence must prove he is a settler and not a squatter, for the marriage to work, or the two groups to find reconciliation.

This shared whiteness between the Californios and the white settlers/squatters translates into a shared claim to be the “natives” of California. Simultaneously hailing indigeneity and erasing it, this claim to be native to the lands targeted for theft, whether by squatters or monopoly, becomes the assertion that both white settlers and the Californios should be protected by the state from dispossession. When Don Mariano is asked, “Haven’t you—the cattle owners—tried to have some law enacted that will protect
your property?,” his response is that if only the Californios were treated as native to the
land like white settlers, the Californios would be protected by the law against
dispossession: “It could be done, perhaps, if our positions were reversed, and the Spanish
people—’the natives’—were the planters of the grain fields, and the Americans were the
owners of the cattle. But as we, the Spaniards, are the owners of the Spanish—or
Mexican—land grants and also the owners of the cattle ranchos, our State legislators will
not make any law to protect cattle” (65). The aspiration for this protected status from
dispossession, the status of whiteness, leads Don Mariano’s son Victoriano to claim
facetiously, “I wish we were squatters.” (74). The Californios as landed property holders
should expect to enjoy more privileges and protections than the landless not-quite-white
squatters, but are instead being by treated worse. As Alemán explains, “the narrative
consolidates the privileges of Clarence’s racial whiteness with the cultural whiteness of
Californios as a way of arguing for their sociocultural position above Anglo squatters”
(69). Ruiz de Burton’s goal, then, is to envision how proper US white settlers (not
“illegal” squatters) and the Californios can come together to fight against the state and
monopoly capitalism that sets squatters against the Californios in the first place. As Don
Mariano says, “No, I don’t blame the squatters; they are at times like ourselves, victims
of wrong legislation, which unintentionally cuts both ways. They were set loose upon us,
but a law without equity recoils upon them more cruelly. Then we are all sufferers, all
victims of a defective legislation and subverted moral principles” (74). Shared whiteness
becomes shared nativeness becomes shared white victimization. Together, Californios
and white settlers are, as the novel decries in its last line, the “white slaves” to monopoly
capitalism (344).
Using the romance, then, to claim white victimization for the Californios, should allow, as Ruiz de Burton sees it, for greater sympathy and outrage from white audiences. Expected to be protected by their whiteness, the Californios are denied this recognition. Like Bartleby, they are not only abandoned but targeted by the state. Ruiz de Burton wants to make the same claim, then, that is made in “Bartleby” about the settler worker: targeting rather than serving the white settler dangerously fails to uphold the asymmetry between settler sovereignty and the unsovereign “savage.” Don Mariano laments this when he describes Californio dispossession through the language of the vanishing Indian: “I am afraid there is no help for us native Californians. We must sadly pass away. The weak and the helpless are always trampled in the throng. We must sink, go under, never to rise” (164). John Gonzalez points out how Ruiz de Burton suggests that the evil of monopoly capitalism lies in how it does not uphold the asymmetry of the colonial relation that, as the novel intimates, creates categories of white possession defined against Native and Black dispossession: “the railroad monopoly functions as an imperium in imperio that threatens to replace the nation’s white citizenship with the corporate empire’s white slavery. Delinking class difference from racial [and colonial] difference, corporations transform white Californios into Indians, white workers into the structural equivalent of black or Chinese workers, and U.S. citizens into colonial subjects” (162). Like the grief felt over Bartleby’s removal and incarceration, or Murieta’s dispossession, Californios dispossession is meant to register as grievable because they are a class of people, as the novel as tried to demonstrate through the romance, not meant for a life of dispossession. “Whiteness,” in the novel, writes Marcial Gonzalez, “correlates with an escape from forced proletarianization” (50). As Sanchez and Pita explain, referring to Gabriel’s
descent into proletarian labor, “it is this change in class status, from upper class to working class, from “Don” to “hod carrier” that constitutes the central resentment at work in the novel” (33). Like Bartleby’s wasted body in prison, Gabriel’s broken body as a manual laborer is meant to be received as grievable and given sympathy.

Yet by the end of the novel, Ruiz de Burton turns away from the language of romance to what Sánchez and Pita call historical discourse through which Ruiz de Burton offers a didactic condemnation of monopoly capitalism, leading to a call to action, or populist uprising. The narrator proclaims: “It seems now that unless the people of California take the law into their own hands, and seize the property of those men, and confiscate it, to reimburse the money due to the people, the arrogant corporation will never pay.” (338). The question becomes as Aranda puts it, “How do we make sense of a romance narrative that finds no closure in the marriage plot but instead evolves into a didactic form that self-consciously recruits a mass collective response to the political and economic machinations of actual, historic monopolists?” (14). For Sanchez and Pita, this lack of closure indicates how the novel cannot imagine a resolution to monopoly capitalism, even though it has offered a resolution to the antagonism between squatters and Californios:

In the novel’s concluding chapter, as we have noted, the narrator becomes one more character, a commentator of current affairs in California. Once the Californio society of the past has been effaced, and once the romantic closure has been secured, there remains the new ‘invader,’ the railroad monopoly, that is dispossessing and disempowering all Californians alike. This historical conflict lies outside the purview of romance and cannot be ‘generically’ resolved. Faced
with this arrow of time, the narrator can only restate his/her denunciation of
corruption and immorality at the highest levels and end with a cynical,
apocalyptic view of the future, with no Clarence, no white knight, in sight to offer
resolution or restitution, or to overcome the social conflicts in the historical
present. (48)²⁸

In other words, if the romance plot sought to express a shared white victimization
inclusive of Californios for which grief and sympathy would be given, Ruiz de Burton’s
choice to take up a different register at the novel’s end, one that calls for a populist
uprising, marks the former’s failure to arouse concern for the Californio’s plight. Tereza
Szeghi argues that the “sentimental strategy,” of the novel is, “an attempt to pull on
readers’ heartstrings and inspire them to act on behalf of a wronged minority group
before it is too late. At the same time, this tactic runs the risk of backfiring by confirming
the presuppositions of Anglo American readers and essentially excusing them from
taking action” (112). That the novel turns into a didactic call for settler popular
sovereignty in the form of an uprising of settlers (small capitalists) who would seize and
redistribute the property of monopoly capitalists, demonstrates the shortcoming of the
romance to express Californio dispossession as white victimization. In other words, Ruiz
de Burton doesn’t put her trust, in the end, in the romance as a structure of feeling
convincing readers that squatters and Californios are equivalent white slaves to monopoly
capitalism.

The novel instead calls for unison of “white slaves” taking action in a settler
vigilante uprising through the language of historical discourse or a populist realism. The
populist image of the “people” becomes the novel’s resolution to Californio
dispossession and not the national allegory of marriage and language of romance. It is this image of the people as settler popular sovereignty that Ruiz de Burton hopes Californios can be counted among. The problem is that it has been this settler popular sovereignty all along that is the cause of the Californio’s dispossession. Ruiz de Burton calls for the law of property to be broken, even as she demands it be respected by squatters. The very thing the novel hails as the solution to Californio dispossession is also the cause of it. In other words, the novel imagines that Californios would be included in a settler popular sovereignty when in fact they are already the targets of it. Popular uprisings, as they historically took place, did not nor would not go after the property of monopolists. They instead were white riots, seeking to terrorize and dispossess conquered and racialized populations. What this formal paradox attests to, then, is that squatters are not the victims of monopoly, but are in fact the shock troops paving the way for its entrance. As Don Mariano points out: “If these railroad men will only let us have the Texas Pacific all will be right, but if not, then the work of ruining me begun by the squatters will be finished by the millionaires” (288). In this way, the lowliest squatter stands on the same side of the colonial relation as the richest monopolist, and on the other side is now the Californios who are targeted for proletarianization, colonization, and racialization, where they join Indigenous people, mestizos, and The enslaved. As Alemán puts it, “the novel tries to forget that Clarence is an Anglo profiting from Manifest Destiny,” even at is suggests squatters and Californios can unite against monopoly capitalism (69).

What *The Squatter and the Don* shows, then, through its abandoned romance plot, is that settler popular sovereignty aspires to create and maintain an inclusive and
egalitarian liberal democracy not by resisting the capitalist relation, that here has reached the stage of monopoly, but by supporting and/or participating in colonial expropriations and exclusions. It offers the image of settler popular sovereignty that “Bartleby” indirectly invokes in its grievable image of the forlorn white worker. The squatter has been driven by the value-form to steal the land of the Californios in first place, and when the monopoly-form catches up, squatters will not so much turn against capital but will double-down on white supremacy and settler sovereignty through colonial and racial dispossession. In this way, we can see how *The Squatter and the Don* portends what would come to pass in the years to follow in the labor politics of California. Settler popular sovereignty would drive white workers and settler farmers to fight against inequality by fighting for the ongoing genocide of Indigenous people, the racial exclusion and violence against mestizos, and the removal and banning of the Chinese, actions that were formalized in the Chinese Exclusion act of 1888. Settler popular sovereignty, in other words, is forged through intensifying colonial violence. It seeks to reduce the conflict between labor and capital by coming together to support colonial dispossession. Ruiz de Burton’s attempt to appeal to this dream becomes the appeal to the same force that targets her community for dispossession. She writes from the point of view of a settler, while also finding herself the target of colonial violence that produces settler sovereignty as the site of power in which she expects to find solidarity with other settlers. This antagonism has manifested in the tension between the romance and populist realism. The non-solution of this tension embodies the asymmetry of the colonial relation Ruiz de Burton is caught in the middle of.

If “Bartleby” laments the emergence of the capitalist relation and its creation of
the conflict between an owning-class and laboring-class, Ruiz de Burton shows how its later stages—here the generalized or monopoly form—continues to be managed by the asymmetry of the colonial relation. This makes visible us how settler colonialism creates the condition for the emergence of the market, but also how it continues to maintain and manage its intra-settler conflicts. As Manu Vimalassery puts it, “the vaunted equality and republicanism of settlers arise from the maintenance of colonial relations.” (304). It has been, then, the asymmetry of Ruiz de Burton and Ridge’s novels that lays this bare the relationship between colonial dispossession and settler sovereignty, a relationship in which one side there is synthesis, inclusion, recuperation, redemption, reform, and, on the other, stale-mate, asymmetry, exclusion, violence, and destruction. As Byrd explains, “the paradox of settler colonialism” is “where inclusion, symmetry, and equation function as the basis for rights on the one hand and termination of Indigenous lives and nations on the other” (152). In other words, as an example, if Bartleby was the worker who had occupied Wall Street in the 1840s, he, if not imprisoned, might have been participating in the New York City white riots in 1863, or, if not, heading west to homestead—occupy—his free 160 acres, perhaps in California, and it is this structural problem of pursuing freedom by supporting colonial and racial violence that Ridge and Ruiz de Burton help us see through the uneven narrative forms of their novels.
Chapter 2

Slavery, Whiteness as Policing, and Black Abolition in Martin Delany’s Blake; or the Huts of America

Three months after Martin Delany’s Blake was serialized in The Anglo-African Magazine (January to July of 1859), John Brown and his 21 anti-slavery fighters, inspired by previous slave rebellions, attempted to incite what Delany’s novel had imagined and called for, a large-scale insurrection in the South and beyond. While most Northern abolitionists (with some exceptions like Brown and his supporters, one of which was Delany himself) disavowed the support of violent slave rebellion and instead believed moral persuasion and legislation could end slavery, Delany’s novel had envisioned mass insurrection as the only pathway to liberating enslaved Africans from a global system of racial slavery. In fact, when compared to other literary fictions of slave rebellion like Melville’s “Benito Cereno,” Douglass’ The Heroic Slave, or Stowe’s Dread, which represent the threat insurrection posed to the coherence of the US nation, Blake is premised on the inverse assumption that, as scholars of the novel Adenike M. Davidson and Eric Sundquist have noted, the stability of US nation stood in the way of the struggle of the enslaved to assert their right to self-determination. Compared to the fictions of Melville, Douglass, and Stowe in which slave rebellion is represented as an event contained on a ship bounded by the ocean, or in the isolated swamp deep in the woods, spaces allegorizing the nation-form and the place of slave rebellion within it, Blake doesn’t imagine how the enslaved can find a place within a reformed, restored, or fulfilled US liberal democracy. It imagines instead, as the first Black nation novel, how the enslaved could take an insurrectionist path out of it.
A contemporary of Delany who also shared this assumption and supported slave insurrection as a means of emancipating the enslaved was Karl Marx. In the same years Delany was drafting *Blake*, Marx was living, after the failed revolutions of 1848, as a political exile in London where by day he studied in the British Library and by night he put together a meager living writing news correspondence for New York and German newspapers. Although far removed from the politics of antislavery action, unlike Delaney who was in the thick of it, Marx was nonetheless interested in the role of slavery in capitalism—but only to the extent that it helped him better understand the structure of (white) wage slavery. “As long as the English cotton manufactures depended on slave-grown cotton,” writes Marx in October of 1861, “it could be truthfully asserted that they rested on a twofold slavery, the indirect slavery of the white man in England and the direct slavery of the Black men on the other side of the Atlantic” ("British Cotton Trade" 39). Marx closely followed the Civil War and wrote about the role slave rebellion played in galvanizing white worker movements in the North and in Europe. After John Brown’s raid, Marx writes to Engels, “In my view, the most momentous thing happened in the world today is the slave movement—on the one hand, in America, started by the death of [John] Brown, and in Russia, on the other . . . Should the affair grow serious by and by, what will become of Manchester?” ("Letter to Engels" 17). By the end of war, in an address to Lincoln on behalf of the First International, Marx optimistically writes: “The working men of Europe feel sure that, as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American Anti-slavery War will do for the working classes” ("Address to Lincoln" 154). The enslaved liberating themselves
from formal slavery was intertwined, as Marx saw it, with wage slaves freeing themselves from exploitation.

That both Delany and Marx could call for and support large-scale slave revolt in a moment when the mere thought of slaves conspiring conjured up fears in the minds of Northerners and Southerners alike of what happened in Haiti in 1793 being repeated in the United States, derived from how they understood the modern world. In Delany’s fiction and in Marx’s writings, modernity is approached as a global structure premised on a violent antagonism. For Delany, the antagonism is slavery, while for Marx it is wage labor. For Marx, if capitalism had transformed the “definite social relations between men” into the “fantastic form of a relation between things,” the reification of human relations, his project, particularly in *Capital*, is to offer a conceptual map of the structure or immanent laws of capitalism that in the immediate experience of its subjects are concealed by the appearances, or what Marx calls the “real abstractions,” of exchange-value. (*Capital* 165). On the other hand, to imagine mass insurrection, Delany must map where the enslaved as a class or group begin and end in the modern world. Narrating mass insurrection becomes the same as drawing up a view of the Black nation—a picture not of a future autonomous nation of former slaves, but rather the class or group identity of the enslaved as determined by a global structure of slavery. The narrative attempt to envision mass insurrection becomes the narrative problem of how to see slavery as a structure and the Black slave as a position.

With this as its narrative problem, I want to look at the ways Delany’s novel represents the world of liberal capitalism from the standpoint or position of the Slave. Because it shares a similar premise, and, in the language of Lukács, an aspiration to map
the totality of a global system of oppression, I also want to compare Delany’s novel to Marx’s view of wage labor, posing the question of how does Delany’s story of slavery compare to Marx’s story of wage labor exploitation? If Marx’s theory of wage labor totalizes what capitalism atomizes and thus mystifies, Delany’s narrative map of slavery is one of incommensurability produced by the novel’s formal structure of unresolved tension, dissonance, disunity, and unevenness. Readers of Blake have often acknowledged such formal failures, explaining them as the result of Delany’s didacticism and focus on politics rather than attention to poetics. Yet these formal failures are what create a cognitive map of slavery that forecloses narrative synthesis, embraces formal tension, and suspends ideological closure.

I argue that this incommensurable formal structure is not so much an aesthetic shortcoming as it is the aesthetic embodiment of the negative dialectical structure of slavery itself. A negative dialectic, as Fredric Jameson describes it, is “a movement of negation that can never reach a synthesis, a negativity that ceaselessly undermines all the available positivities until it has only its own destructive energy to promote” (56). This is how the novel comes to represent the dispossession of the enslaved—as a relation or structural position of pure negation, what Afro-pessimist theorists call social death in which enslaved Africans, as Frank Wilderson writes, “are not recognized as a social subject and are thus precluded from the category of ‘human’—inclusion in humanity being predicated on social recognition, volition, subjecthood, and the valuation of life” (8). For the problem of social death, as a negative dialectic, there is no solution or synthesis to be found within the world based on this negation. Blake’s incommensurable vision of slavery, I will demonstrate, formally makes explicit this negative dialectical
relationship between anti-Blackness and US (white) democracy. That is, the forms of dissonance in the novel’s narrative structure register the way slavery is not so much a stage of forced labor, but rather a form of social exclusion or social death in the way that Orlando Patterson, Saidyia Hartman, and more recently Frank Wilderson and Tiffany King suggest slavery is less of a labor relation than a relation of terror and ontological exclusion in which people of African descent are positioned as objects to be owned by a master-class.

It is through such a narrative form that Blake helps to historicize the role of anti-Blackness as a constitutive structure of expropriation and exclusion in liberal capitalism. The accumulation of the Slave’s body (economic) and the exclusion of the Slave’s self from liberal democracy (libidinal or symbolic), anti-Blackness serves as a structure of what Marx called primitive accumulation that both creates and sustains the conditions for the value-form.\(^{10}\) The novel’s incommensurable form mediates this foundational and ongoing role of anti-Blackness in the United States insofar as anti-Blackness constitutes and maintains whiteness as a shared status of possession and power harmonizing the inequalities and conflicts among whites encountered in the value-form (accumulation by exploitation) and liberal democracy. Furthermore, because Blake represents the structure of anti-Blackness as a negative dialectic, the novel offers a radical view of modernity that rather than envisioning its completion or synthesis, like we see in the work of Marx or in the views of other abolitionists or labor reformers at the time, imagines, as Fanon would call for a century later, the dissolution of what is an irreconcilable, or structurally irresolvable, relationship between (white) liberal humanity and Black social death on which the project of modernity rests.\(^{11}\) This view of dissolution, as this chapter will show,
expresses and affirms the logic and aim of radical abolitionist and insurrectionist political events and actions of Delany’s historical moment that fought to overcome this negative dialectic bind of slavery by dismantling the institutions of white supremacy holding the United States together.

The plan of this chapter, then, is to focus on three instances of formal incommensurability in Blake, which when read together, bring into view its negative dialectical mapping of anti-Blackness. The first instance points up how anti-Blackness relates to settler colonialism, the second represents anti-Blackness’s role in the formation of “free” wage labor, and the third instance demonstrates how the Black slave’s political ontology of social death gives life to the forward-moving, linear-progressive aspirations of modernity. In examining these formal impossibilities, the chapter will compare what they suggest about anti-Blackness to Marx’s understanding of the relationship between slavery and capitalism and to the competing perspectives of abolitionists at the time who called for the end to formal slavery but not necessarily the abolition of the institutions of white supremacy.

Entangled Dispossessions

Included in the novel’s plot of insurrection in the South is a small chapter exploring the place of indigenous nations in the plan to liberate the enslaved. Although brief, the chapter nonetheless contains a formal incommensurability that reveals much about the interlocking relationship between slavery and settler colonialism. While traveling from plantation to plantation disseminating the secret plan of insurrection, Blake makes his way to “the Indian Nation near Fort Towson, Arkansas” where he visits with Mr. Culver, a slaveholding “Chief of the United [Choctaw] Nation” (86). The point
of the visit is to determine if the Choctaw will support a general insurrection of slaves, or as Blake asks Mr. Culver, “What I now most wish to learn is, whether in case that the Blacks should rise, they may have hope or fear from the Indian?” (87). Mr. Culver answers by describing how the enslaved share a more horizontal relationship with their Choctaw masters than slaves experience in the South: “the difference between a white man and Indian holding slaves. Indian work side by side with Black man, eat with him, drink with him, rest with him and both lay down in shade together. . . In our Nation Indian and Black all marry together. Indian like Black man very much, only he don’t fight ‘nough. Black man in Florida fight much, and Indian like ‘im heap!” [sic] (86).

While Mr. Culver claims that slaves are treated more like subordinated laborers of the community than as racial others, his decision nonetheless to own slaves results from what he believes is the inability of slaves to fight and win their freedom. Here, through the voice of Mr. Culver, Delany ventriloquiizes a dominant anti-Black racial ideology that represented people of African descent as persons naturally servile or susceptible to domination, thus making them predisposed to enslavement. In his study on the origins of slavery and the Black radical tradition, Cedric Robinson describes the formation of this ideology: “the ideograph of Blacks came to signify a difference of species, an exploitable source of energy (labor power) both mindless to the organizational requirements of production and insensitive to the subhuman conditions of work” (82). In voicing this view, Mr. Culver, like all slaveholders, blames slaves rather himself for their dispossession, thereby naturalizing the power disparity of the master-slave relation of the South.
Delany has invoked this white supremacist myth in order to dispel it by proposing that slaves are enslaved not because of natural “servility” but because they lack the means to defend themselves. Blake corrects Mr. Culver: “You make, sir, a slight mistake about my people. They would fight if in their own country they were united as the Indians here, and not scattered thousands of miles apart as they are” (86). Through the voice of Blake, Delany suggests that if slaves were to possess a land-base and a national identity like Native nations of the Southeast, they would be successful in resisting and freeing themselves from slavery. In fact, Blake goes so far as to claim, by citing the example of African nations who have defended their lands against European powers, that Native groups have failed—despite being in possession of a land-base and national identity—to defend against colonial conquest. Echoing dominant settler ideologies of the “vanishing Indian,” Blake tells Mr. Culver, “you should also remember that the Africans have never permitted a subjugation of their country by foreigners as the Indians have theirs, and Africa today is still peopled by Africans, whilst America, the home of the Indian—who is fast passing away—is now possessed and ruled by foreigners” (86). If Delany demystifies a common anti-Black view which held that African peoples were predisposed for servitude, he does by invoking an anti-Indian colonialist trope whose ideological function was to legitimate Indigenous genocide. “This is true, sir, true!” Mr. Culver is shown to acknowledge, “The Indian, like game before the bow, is passing away before the gun of the white man!” (87). Delany, speaking through Blake, implies that if what he identifies as tools of self-determination—a territorial land-base and a national identity—were in the hands of enslaved Africans, they could do what Native nations have not been able to do
in North America, namely defend against and win their freedom from white colonizers and slaveholders.

In this exchange, then, Blake and Mr. Culver each blame the other’s community for failing to defend against colonial and racial dispossession. They also suggest that this failure is the cause of the other’s dispossession and exclusion. From Blake’s perspective, if Native nations would have held back white settlement, there would not be the space available for the importation and exploitation of the enslaved, just as, from Mr. Culver’s perspective, if the enslaved were willing to fight against their masters, there would be no slave-based economy and thus no slaveholding planter class occupying Indigenous lands. Why does Delany turn to an anti-Indian ideology to dispel an anti-Black ideology, and why is it expressed that the cause of each group’s oppression lies in the actions of the other rather than in those of white colonizers and slaveholders?

Instead of reading the conflict in this scene for what it might say about Delany’s views on Native slaveholders, I want to focus on the way in which the conflict manifests a formal bind in the novel’s strategy of challenging anti-Black ideologies. To use an anti-Indian ideology to dispel an anti-Black ideology and to contend that one group’s oppression is the fault of the other’s failure to defeat colonialism or enslavement, falls short of dispelling dominant anti-Black ideologies and instead ends up offering an image of the relationship between slavery and settler colonialism as a pure negation. That is, there is no manifest vision or solution in this scene to either the negation of the enslaved (anti-Blackness) or the negation of Indigenous peoples (anti-Indianness). This image of pure negation, however, does not so much express a view of defeatism as it formally embodies the co-constitutive and mutually reinforcing structural relationship between
slavery and settler colonialism. The pure negation of Delany’s attempt to dispel anti-Black ideologies mediates how each of these structures of negation presuppose the other in the US context: settler colonialism and slavery emerged as intertwined and interdependent processes of colonial and racial dispossession. Slavery made possible settler conquests, just as the enclosures of Native lands and the attempted elimination of its peoples paved the way for and maintained slavery.

By the 1850s, this co-constitutive relationship between slavery and settler colonialism had come to shape the South as a settler-slaveholder imperial project. As the South’s plantation economy grew, it not only created inequality among the South’s white population, but overtime exhibited a falling rate of profit, economic crises, financial loss, and increased competition, all of which, as a result, drove slaveholders and landless whites to enclose lands in the West (like Texas and the greater Southwest), and to look Southward to do the same in the Caribbean and Central America like in the filibustering attempts of Narciso López in Cuba in 1850 and 1851 and William Walker in Nicaragua 1855-56. Seizing more lands made up for losses and provided opportunities for potentially dissatisfied poor whites to become slaveholders themselves. This process of settler colonial expansion, as it had done before, further increased the demand for Black slave labor. In fact, the enclosures of Native lands and the stealing of African bodies served as two interlocking forms of speculation. When the settler state and/or settler vigilantes (or squatters) of the South enclosed Indigenous lands, they presupposed the availability of Black slave labor, just as when slave-catchers and slave-traders made trips to Africa, they assumed land would be made available for the expansion of a plantation economy dependent on slave labor. Or, put slightly differently, it was the perceived
limitless availability of enslaved Africans that served as the precondition for further land enclosures, just as much as new land enclosures sent ships to Africa to be filled with human chattel. Even after the slave trade was abolished in 1807, this interlocking speculation continued. Slaveholders of the Upper-South region began reorganizing the model of their plantations to produce and sell slaves in addition to using them as laborers necessary for cash-crop production. The Upper-South depended on the systematic rape of female slaves, as historian Walter Johnson argues, to breed and export slaves to a Deep-South economy that was constantly expanded westward and southward through colonial enclosures (404).17 The internal trade, as it came to be known, filled the void that stealing bodies from Africa had left behind.

If Blake and Mr. Culver’s brief exchange represents this co-constitutive relationship between slavery and settler colonialism through a formal negativity, the same conversation yields a view of the entanglement of the two groups’ struggles against these intertwined structures of dispossession. Moments after using an anti-Black ideology to justify slavery, Mr. Culver alludes to the entangled relationship of struggle for liberation between the enslaved and Indigenous people in the Seminole wars in which communities of marooned slaves joined Native groups to fight and defend against enclosures of land and kidnapping of bodies: “The squaws of the great men among the Indians in Florida were Black women, and the squaws of the Black men were Indian women. You see the vine that winds around and holds us together. Don’t cut it, but let it grow till bimeby, it git so stout and strong, with many, very many little branches attached, that you can’t separate them” [sic] (87). Despite owning slaves, Mr. Culver is presented as an accomplice in the coming insurrection, if only because, as the scene has made clear,
Native nations share a mutual interest with the enslaved in resisting the expansion of a settler colony that is also a slave estate. As a result, Blake shares the secret plan of insurrection with Choctaw slaveholders and skips personally visiting their slave communities. Blake doesn’t visit the slaves among the Choctaw because he assumes they will be freed upon the event of insurrection which promises to dismantle the same structure targeting Indigenous people for elimination and Black people for enslavement. If the enslaved were to revolt and destroy the South’s slaveholding class, such an event, as this scene implies, would also abolish the South’s settler colonial project of eliminating Indigenous peoples to enclose the lands necessary for cash-crop production premised on slave labor.

This vision, then, of an entangled struggle in which the future of indigenous nations and the enslaved appears interdependent—if one succeeds in their rebellion so does the other just as if one fails both fail—registers the way in which the co-constitutive relationship between slavery and settler colonialism ties together the struggles of the peoples these structures target. Mass insurrection will not only liberate the enslaved. It will also unsettle indigenous lands precisely because slavery and settler colonialism are of the same totality of colonial and racial dispossession. The pure negation of Delany’s strategy to dispel anti-Black ideologies combined with the scene’s vision of entangled struggle offer an important systematic view of how anti-Blackness, as a structure of expropriation and exclusion, must be approached, if it is to be understood at all, in relationship to Indigenous dispossession precisely because together they form a totality of colonial-racial domination that both creates and maintains the conditions for exchange-value (market society) and the institutions of (white settler) liberal democracy.
Enslaved Africans and White Workers

If Delany defies national borders and offers an international vision of slaves preparing and organizing for mass insurrection, he does so by splitting this vision into two distinct sections, each of which focuses on one national context. The first section follows Blake’s fugitive movements in the South where he works to spread the secret plan for insurrection, agitating and recruiting co-conspirators across the land. It ends with Blake suspending his revolutionary plans to help his family and close friends escape to Canada. In the second section, the plot travels to Cuba where, after freeing his wife from slavery, Blake begins to organize and prepare an insurrectionist army for impending military action against the island’s slaveholding class. In each of the sections, Delany explores a major barrier that must be overcome for insurrection to arrive. In the South, the barrier identified is the pitfall of the “good master,” what historian Eugene Genovese has described as “the paternalism in the Old South.” This governing strategy falsely promised manumission and better treatment of the enslaved in order to elicit from them greater accommodation to the master-slave relation, which, in doing so, as Delany believed, abated the revolutionary anger of the enslaved. In the novel’s depiction of Cuba, the barrier to be reckoned with is the direct force of the slaveholding class, or, put inversely, the problem of how Blake can create, train, and deploy an army of slaves strong enough to defeat their masters. Rather than treating these two sections as separate representations of two distinct national contexts, I read them as coming together in the novel to form an unresolved formal tension between the two plots of insurrection, one that points up the role of white supremacy in forming an asymmetry of power between
“free” white workers and enslaved Africans that constitutes and maintains capital’s relationship to wage labor in the United States.

To see this formal tension and the asymmetry it reveals, we have to first understand why the novel imagines paternalism in the South and direct force in Cuba as barriers to mass insurrection. In spreading the plan of insurrection in the South, Blake explains that the great obstacle to overcome is “this confounded ‘good treatment’ and expectation of getting freed by their oppressors, that has been the curse of the slave. All shrewd masters, to keep their slaves in check, promise them their freedom at their, the master’s death, as though they were certain to die first. This contents the slave, and makes him obedient and willing to serve and toil on, looking forward to the promised redemption” (127). Historically, manumission and promises of better treatment were used by US slaveholders, particularly after the abolishment of slave trade, to abate anger and unrest among their slaves. While the image of the “good master” might reflect a historical shift in how slaveholders managed slave populations in the South, it also stands in for, I suggest, the belief held among many Northern abolitionists that liberal democracy and market society offered freedom to the slave through wage labor and formal political equality.¹⁸

This belief rested on calling for the recognition of the slave’s humanity and affirming liberal democracy’s promise of universal humanism, an idea that abolitionists radically asserted at the time, and that set them apart from most other nineteenth-century Americans. Yet Delany shows how recognizing the slave’s humanity could be used as a tool of oppression in the hands of the “good master” figure, whether of the South or the North. As Major Armsted acknowledges, “Southerner as I am . . . I can joke with a slave
just because he is a man” (63). His reason for doing so, he confesses, is that “good treatment begets more labor from the slave than bad. A smile from the master is better than cross looks, and one crack of a joke with him is worth a hundred cracks of the whip. Only confide in him, and let him be satisfied that you respect him as a man, he’ll work himself to death to prove his worthiness” (63, 64). By using the slaveholding figure of Major Armsted to express a view which affirmed the slave’s humanity, the same view held by Northern abolitionists, the novel scrutinizes the assumed freedom found in the formal equality of liberal democracy, suggesting that the inclusion of the enslaved in liberal democracy might instead serve to extend anti-Blackness in order to maintain white profits rather than liberate the enslaved.

Delany had made this point a few years earlier when he sharply criticized Harriet Beecher Stowe. In a letter to Frederick Douglass (Pittsburg April 15th 1853), Delany asserts that Stowe and her publisher Messrs. Jewett & Co should pay a portion of the proceeds from the sale of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to an escaped slave living in Canada named Father Hensen on whose life, Delany had alleged, Stowe had fashioned her novel (230). “I am of the opinion that,” Delany writes, “Mrs. Stowe has draughted largely on all of the best fugitive slave narratives—at least on Douglass’s, Brown’s Bibb’s, and perhaps Clark’s, as well as the living Household of old Father Henson. . . But these draughts on your narratives, clothed in Mrs. Stowe’s own language, only make her work the more valuable, as it is the more truthful” (italics in original 231). As a result, Delany found little to no value in the political work of Stowe’s fiction: (March 20 1853) “in all due respect and deference Mrs. Stowe, I beg leave to say, that she knows nothing about us, ‘the Free Colored people of the United States,’ neither does any other white person—and,
consequently, can contrive no successful scheme for our elevation; it must be done by ourselves” (italics in original 224). Although Stowe’s fiction might have highlighted the humanity of the enslaved by calling on readers to empathize with the plight of those held in bondage, it does so, as Delany sees it, only by exploiting the slaves whose stories Stowe had plagiarized for profit. It is the shared interest in profit, whether it be economic or symbolic, that leads white slaveholders and white abolitionist authors like Stowe to share in the exploitation Black bodies and lives through either the production of cash-crops or literary best-sellers.

The “good master” figure also serves to call into question the view of wage labor as a site of freedom for formerly enslaved Blacks. This view was best expressed in Douglass’ Life and Times (1845) where he represents his entrance into the wage labor market as a last step sanctioning his emancipation from formal slavery. The novel’s skepticism of wage labor can be seen when Major Armsted’s voices a scandalous desire to extend slavery to include white workers. In the same conversation in which Major Armsted has declared his recognition of the slave’s humanity, he also announces to fellow slaveholders Judge Ballard and Colonel Franks that, “I would just as readily hold a white as a Black in slavery, were it the custom and policy of the country to do so. It is all a matter of self-interest with me” (64). Armsted’s wish to enslave white workers echoes fears held by white workers at the time that the South’s slaveocracy was willing not only to formally enslave them alongside Black workers, but through increased competition for available lands, and the lowering of wages, debase white workers by treating them as interchangeable with the enslaved. This fear came to be expressed as “white slavery,” a discourse that circulated in the print culture of labor reform papers from the 1830s to the
1860s. For instance, Walt Whitman participated in these discourses, warning in an editorial of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (1847) of the dangers of slavery in terms of making “white slaves” out of white workers:

> We wish not at all to sneer at the South; but leaving out of view the educated and refined gentry, and coming to the “common people” of the whites, everybody knows what a miserable, ignorant, and shiftless set of beings they are. Slavery is a good thing enough, (viewed partially,) to the rich — the one out of thousands; but it is destructive to the dignity and independence of all who work, and to labor itself. An honest poor mechanic, in a slave State, is put on a par with the negro slave mechanic — there being many of the latter, who are hired out by their owners. It is of no use to reason abstractly on this fact — farther than to say that the pride of a Northern American freeman, poor though he be, will not comfortably stand such degradation. The influence of the slavery institution is to bring the dignity of labor down to the level of slavery, which, God knows! is low enough. (209)

Major Armsted’s desire to enslave white workers also reflects the anxiety, often left unsaid by those decrying white slavery, that wage labor could not be reformed and was nothing more than an indirect form of slavery for which more radical changes would be needed. In his essay, “The Laboring Classes,” (1840), Orestes Brownson had held this view, prefiguring Marx’s critique of labor power: “one thing is certain; that of the amount actually produced by the operative [worker], he retains a less proportion than it costs the master to feed, clothe, and lodge his slave. Wages is a cunning device of the devil, for the benefit of tender consciences, who would retain all the advantages of the slave system,
without the expense, trouble, and odium of being slave-holders.” (12). From this, Brownson calls for radical transformation and not just land reforms or better working conditions: “But the evil we speak of is inherent in all our social arrangements, and cannot be cured without a radical change of those arrangements” (14). Yet the novel mentions this fear of white enslavement not to compare the plight of white workers to that of the enslaved Africans, but to reject the notion that wage labor and formal equality of liberal democracy offered them pathways to liberation.21

Here Delany raises the question of how could the slave hope to be freed through wage labor and its promise of formal equality when white workers—whose humanity was never under question in the first place—could be treated as white slaves by rich white property holders pursuing their “self-interest”? For Major Armsted—whose profit-making enterprise and social existence as a Southern slaveholder depends on white supremacy—to claim that he wishes to ignore the privileges of whiteness among white workers and instead treat them no different from the enslaved would have been received at the time, as Whitman makes clear in his editorial, as an absurdity and affront to what Roediger, borrowing from Du Bois, calls “the wages of whiteness.” The image of Major Armsted’s supporting white slavery would have confirmed and raised Northern workers’ suspicions of the South’s anti-republicanism aristocracy, while also showing how the logic of capital brings together the property-owning classes of the South and the North in opposition to white labor. More importantly, however, it reveals how there could be no outlet for the enslaved “freed” by wage labor to decry the wages of slavery when the labor politics of wage laborers were already saturated with the discourse of white slavery which was premised on anti-Blackness and exclusion in the first place.
For instance, Armsted declares that the formal equality in the North between white workers and capitalist unwisely does not respect what should be considered natural class distinctions among the oppressor and the oppressed. After the Judge suggests that the enslaved, due to a “disposition peculiar to their race,” desire recognition from their white oppressors, Armsted argues that this same ascribed behavior of submitting to arbitrary hierarchy can be found and should be upheld in European peasants, poor whites of the South, and Northern white workers (63). As Armsted explains, “Not peculiar to them, Judge, but common to mankind. The Black man desires association with the white, because the latter is regarded his superior. In the South, it is the poor white man with the wealthy and in Europe the common with the gentlefolks. In the North, you have not made these distinctions among the whites, which prevents you from noticing this trait among yourselves” (63). By raising this specter of a slaveholding capitalist threatening to ignore whiteness by enslaving whites and Blacks without distinction, the novel expresses a skepticism of the argument that the formal equality of waged work afforded opportunity and mobility for emancipated slaves. If these distinctions or hierarchies between white property owners and landless proletarian white workers conjured up images of white slavery in the first place, then Major Armsted’s desire to preserve rather than abolish these distinctions accentuates how the desire of white workers to do away with them is premised on preserving racial hierarchies between whites and Blacks. That is, how could white workers feel free, that is to say, feel white through wage labor if emancipated slaves competed on the same footing to sell their labor power in the job market?

The answer implied in Major Armsted’s alarmist call for white slavery is that white workers wouldn’t feel free and would thus demand to be given preferential
treatment over Black workers. If they called themselves white slaves, it was only to emphasize how their assumed status of “freeman”—politically free and economically independence—was under threat of being violated or not honored. In fact, the more wage labor became dominant in the 1850s, the less white slavery was used to voice dissent, and the more “white free labor” by 1860 came to be a sign of one’s free status that was to be defended, even if it was in need of reform. Delany’s critique of wage labor, then, shows how wage slavery is a form of oppression for all workers, and, more dangerously, how the slave entering wage labor will not result in Black workers being treated equally, but will continue to depend on racial difference. If expansion of formal equality or the democratization of whites after the Revolutionary war was premised on anti-Blackness, the entrance of the enslaved, the novel suggests, into the wage labor relation might bring an end to the formal enslavement of people of African descent, but it wouldn’t promise to end the racialization process. The novel’s image of the “good master” thus serves as a warning that the enslaved would remain excluded and dispossessed in the national wage labor market to come as its informal, unwaged, surplus population. If whiteness as anti-Blackness had shaped the wage laboring class, this division between inferior and superior would be upheld and continued going forward.

To overcome, then, these barriers to insurrection and liberation, the trap of liberal democracy and false promise of wage labor, enslaved Africans must form, Delany intimates, a revolutionary group identity that can lead them to reject any form of accommodation to white supremacy and instead opt for mass insurrection and the creation of a self-determining Black nation. To do this, Blake teaches slaves how to see themselves as a class of people unified through racial exclusion and dispossession. If
slaves do not see themselves as a class, the danger is that the desperation and anger among slaves could be disarmed and pacified, as mentioned above, through discourses of individual emancipation or the promises of better treatment. This is what happens in Kentucky, the only state where Blake is unsuccessful in spreading the plan of insurrection. As Blake recounts, “you can’t move them toward a strike?,” precisely because, as fellow insurrectionist Andy explains, Kentucky is where “de slaves in dat state was de bes’ treated uv any, an’ dat bin all ‘long spectin’ to be free” (127). Blake tells his co-conspirators that if the slave’s rebellion is understood as a battle between the individual slaveholders and slaves, “There is no danger that a ‘good master’ or mistress will ever be harmed by the slaves,” precisely because no slave, “could muster up courage enough to injure a ‘good master’ or mistress” (128). Yet if slavery is seen as a relation of power between groups, slaves will come to understand that only general insurrection can deliver their liberation. As Blake relates to his fellow conspirators, “But mature reflection drove me to the expedient of avenging the general wrongs of our people, by inducing the slave, in his might, to scatter red ruin throughout the region of the South” (128). The general insurrection is the struggle against the “general wrongs” done to slave rather than the fight against their individual masters. In approaching this view of slavery as a relation of power and not the attitude of the individual slaveholder, Andy, a fellow slave of Colonel Frank’s plantation and follower of Blake, has a change of heart toward his master. Speaking about his “benevolent” mistress, Andy exclaims, “I bleve I could chop off Miss Mary’ head; an’ I likes hur; she mighty good to we Black folks” [sic] (127). Notwithstanding the sensational language and flaming of white fear expressed in Andy’s declaration, the point is that an insurrectionist consciousness teaches the enslaved to
target the category of the master in which, whether “good” or bad, slaveholders profit and derive their power from the violent negation of the enslaved.

Dramatizing how enslaved Africans must learn to see the “general wrongs” of slavery in order to rise up and destroy a class of white masters reveals that what the figure of the “good master” as the perceived primary barrier to insurrection has represented all along, as Delany poses it, is the problem of hegemony. That is, the novel implies that the enslaved giving their consent to be ruled serves as the major obstacle standing in the way of liberation. This is why the proposed solution is class- or group-consciousness raising through systematic thinking, which is seen as a remedy for what Delany sees as a false consciousness among slaves that has led them to accept the slave relation. Yet, while scholars of slavery and slave rebellion concede that hegemony did play a role in abating and controlling slave rebellion, direct force and repression were much more central to upholding slavery. It was primarily direct force that contained slave populations not the hollow promises of freedom. Direct force compelled slaves to labor and it terrorized slaves into deferring their attempts to escape or revolt. Why, then, does Delany emphasize the problem of hegemony rather than direct force as the principal barrier to mass insurrection in the South? What does it mean, for example, that Blake at one point wishes that slaves be treated more harshly in order to commit them to the cause of insurrection: “A ‘good master’ is the very worst of masters. Were they all cruel and inhuman, or could the slave be made to see their treatment aright, they would not endure their oppression for a single hour?” (127).

One answer is that positing hegemony as the primary barrier to mass insurrection plays a role in Delany’s alternative vision of Black humanity outside of the
discourses of liberal humanism.\textsuperscript{25} Compared to the slave narratives of Douglass, the protest fiction of Stowe, and the essays and speeches of Northern abolitionists that asserted the slave’s humanity by demonstrating how slavery violated liberal democracy’s universal humanism, Delany maintains that slaves’ humanity lies in their capacity to be a self-determining people who when liberated would compete with rather than be saved by US (white) democracy. The slaves of Delany’s novel are human not because they desire recognition from white democracy, but because they demand separation, or full-autonomy, from it. If read this way, the novel’s suggestion that false consciousness is to blame for preventing mass insurrection has less to do with thinking that the enslaved were unaware of the violence of their situation than it does with disproving white supremacist racial ideologies which held that people of African descent lacked the capacity for civilization, culture, and community. At one point, Blake surmises that US slaves need to be enlightened as a prerequisite for liberation: “Light, of necessity, had to be imparted to the darkened region of the obscure intellects of the slaves, to arouse them from their benighted condition to one of moral responsibility, to make them sensible that liberty was legitimately and essentially theirs, without which there was no distinction between them and the brute. Following as a necessary consequence would be the destruction of oppression and ignorance” (101). This call for group consciousness among the enslaved contains the assumption that the presence of a community and culture—a Black nation—already exists among them. Delany thus locates the slave’s humanity not in the fact that they might find inclusion in liberal democracy as fellow citizen-subjects or market actors. The slave’s humanity lies instead in the presence of slaves as an already existing nation of people temporarily held in bondage.\textsuperscript{26}
A second answer is that imagining the enslaved overcoming hegemony serves as the novel’s solution to the unique problem found in a settler colony like the United States of nonenslaved workers serving as the policing force of the enslaved class, or how white labor actively participates in upholding and maintaining the racial zoning that presupposes wage labor relation. In striving to secure what they believed was their right as settlers to become independent property holders, whether that meant becoming slaveholders in the South, or small farmers in the North, “free” workers of the United States labored as the rank and file—formally and informally—in the institutions tasked with policing the enslaved in order to prevent or contain escape, rebellion, and insurrection. In the North, this often took the form of white workers terrorizing through riots the communities of free Black Americans in order to disenfranchise the Black property holders who could vote and to discourage Black mobility which ensured white advantage in the marketplace. In *Black Reconstruction*, W.E.B Du Bois points out how in the South “the system of slavery demanded a special police force and such a force was made possible and unusually effective by the presence of the poor whites . . . the great planters formed proportionately quite as small a class but they had singularly enough at their command some five million poor whites; that is, there were actually more white people to police the slaves than there were slaves” (12). Through this policing role, white workers of the South (and the North), came to be rewarded for supporting slavery and settler colonialism.

These rewards were not only economic benefits in terms of sharing in the profits of a US empire—higher wages compared to European workers and access to stolen land and bodies that could aid white workers escape proletarian status—but also
socio-symbolic benefits, an ontology of whiteness, what Wilderson argues is the category of the Human itself, or what Du Bois refers to as the psychological wage of whiteness, that free workers shared with the very same property holding class that exploited them.

Du Bois explains that for the white worker, the policing of the enslaved:

fed his vanity because it associated him with the masters. Slavery bred in the poor white a dislike of Negro toil of all sorts. He never regarded himself as a laborer, or as part of any labor movement. If he had any ambition at all it was to become a planter and to own [slaves]. To these Negroes he transferred all the dislike and hatred which he had for the whole slave system. The result was that the system was held stable and intact by the poor white. Even with the late ruin of Haiti before their eyes, the planters, stirred as they were, were nevertheless able to stamp out slave revolt. . . Gradually the whole white South became an armed and commissioned camp to keep Negroes in slavery and to kill the Black rebel. (12)

Policing of the enslaved, then, was not simply something white workers were tricked into doing that worked against their interests as exploited wage laborers or tenant farmers. Rather, it was a constituent feature of the white worker’s position in a US settler colonial class structure. A “free” worker became white through a set of negations, one of which was the negation of the Black slave—a negation consisting of bodily dispossession and political exclusion—both of which were made possible first and foremost by the use of violent direct force, not hegemony. In this way, white workers formed a relationship of antagonism with enslaved Africans. It is this anti-Blackness, Frank Wilderson argues, that creates a situation in which “white people are not simply ‘protected’ by the police, they are the police” in US white democracy (82). For the novel to envision false
consciousness among slaves rather than an army of white slave patrols as the obstacle to
insurrection is telling of the novel’s attempt to narratively suture this asymmetry between
white workers and the enslaved in which white labor works to uphold and maintain
through terror and force the racial zoning that presupposes wage labor relation.

Yet this asymmetry comes to be made explicit when the narrative travels to
Cuba where its vision of insurrection leaves behind the problem of hegemony and
focuses on direct force. Although presented as autonomous contexts separated by
geography, national boundaries, distinct obstacles, and unique class structures, Delany’s
plot of insurrection in Cuba serves as a space of speculation where what was left unsaid
in the US context can be imagined and addressed. Locating the two problems of
hegemony and direct force in spatially distinct contexts is not merely Delany’s attempt to
reflect the historical circumstances slaves faced in Cuba or the United States. The plot of
insurrection travelling to Cuba instead comes to form the other half of what is an
unresolved formal tension in the novel’s map of international mass insurrection that
marks the presence of this asymmetry of power between white workers and enslaved
Africans in the United States.

To approach how the novel’s two plots of insurrection create an unresolved
formal tension, we must very briefly understand why direct force is emphasized in the
novel’s plot of insurrection in Cuba. If in the United States, slaves are depicted as an
autonomous group in their efforts to prepare for insurrection (the exception being Native
groups as already mentioned), in Cuba the novel imagines how the enslaved and free
workers of the island come together in order to defeat the increasingly violent (rather than
“good” like in the US South) slaveholding class. Initially, divisions among the enslaved and nonenslaved workers beset the organizing of the insurrection:

The political relations of the colony were peculiar, and singularly mischievous and detrimental to the best interests of this class of inhabitants [the enslaved]. The four great divisions of society were white, Black, free and slave; and these were again subdivided into many other classes, as rich, poor, and such like. The free and slaves among the Blacks did not associate, nor the high and low among the free of the same race. And there was among them even another general division—Black and colored—which met with little favor from the intelligent. (276)

What free workers of color come to learn is that racial exclusion unites them with the enslaved class of Cuba. Plácido, a free worker of color and the movement’s poet and co-leader, tells Blake: “Ah, cousin, though you consider us here free—those I mean who are not the slaves of white man—I do assure you that my soul as much as your pants for a draft from the fountain of liberty! We are not free, but merely exist by sufferance—a miserable life for intelligent people, to be sure!” (196). As the preparations for insurrection mount and white defenses against it are consolidated, free workers of color are increasingly policed and brutalized. Plácido, for example, is publicly beat by a transplanted American book shop owner and Ambrosina, the daughter of one of the wealthier families of free persons of color, is publicly whipped by an American dry goods shop owner. Here free persons of color are being policed and repressed in public spaces as though they share the same status as the enslaved. The novel imagines that if one is not white, one is not free, regardless of one’s laboring position—whether free or enslaved.28
By encountering direct force, policing, and repression, free workers of color, the novel shows, learn how to be accomplices to the island’s slaves in their goal of insurrection. During the celebration of carnival, the island’s oppressed nonwhite population come together through racial separation in what are the beginnings of the Black nation:

Never before had the African race been so united as on that occasion, the free Negroes and mixed free people being in unison and sympathy with each other. . . There was a greater tendency to segregation instead of a seeming desire to mingle as formerly among the whites, as masses of the Negroes, mulattoes and quadroons, Indians, and even Chinamen, could be seen together, to all appearance absorbed in conversation on matters disconnected entirely from the occasion of the day. (245)

There is also the choice for the marriage of the slaves Gofer Gondolier and Abyssa Soudan and the marriage of free persons of color General Juan Montego and Madame Cordora to be held together, which serves to symbolize the political marriage between the two classes. The choice for the marriages to take place “at the same sacred hymeneal altar. . . was received with great favor among the high and low classes, especially the slave portion of the Black inhabitants, and their social relation was now regarded as a mutually fixed reality” (276). Free workers of color reject the potential rewards of allying with white slaveholders and instead enter into a racial compact led by rebellious slaves. This racial solidarity which overcomes class divisions serves as the staging ground, the precondition for, the coming insurrection.
The irresolvable formal tension between the novel’s two plots of insurrection comes into view, then, when we see how the image of racial unity that overcomes class divisions among Cuba’s free workers of color and slaves serves as the dialectical other to the representation of racial unity of whiteness found in the United States between free workers and property holders. Responding to white supremacy that targets all nonwhites of Cuba, free workers of color and the enslaved forge solidarity through a shared group identity of the Black nation—a group identity of Black resistance to white supremacy. In seeking the promised rewards of future property ownership, preferential treatment in the labor market, and a shared ontological status with their exploiters, free workers of the United States collaborate with the property-owning class by serving as the policing force protecting a white nation premised on slavery and genocide. The racial unity of the Black nation in Cuba becomes the novel’s positive (displaced) image of what was left unsaid and irresolvable in the US context, namely the problem of racial unity of white supremacy that joins together free workers and capitalists in preventing slave rebellion and Black liberation.29

The role of nonenslaved or free workers as the policing class of the enslaved serves as the absent cause of both of the novel’s seemingly separate visions of insurrection. In the US, Delany imagines that slaves face only the problem of hegemony and not an army of white workers collaborating with capital to uphold slavery and settler empire, whereas in Cuba, free workers do not police but are policed and because of this join the enslaved in their shared resistance to white supremacist direct force that targets all nonwhites. Delany takes his story of insurrection to Cuba, in other words, precisely because the historical conditions at the time are devoid of this problem specific to a
settler colony like the United States of the nonenslaved settler workers outnumbering and policing the enslaved in the hopes of becoming slaveholders themselves. The image of free workers of color successfully joining the cause of the slaves in Cuba becomes the novel’s second attempt to resolve white supremacy’s role in the United States of creating an asymmetrical relationship between free workers and the enslaved in which free workers are constituted as white precisely by loyally working to contain the rebellion and struggle for liberation of the enslaved and free Black workers. That the novel offers two distinct images of insurrection, each of which negate the other, even as they are responses to the same problem, shows that in the end there is only a pure tension in the novel’s attempt to envision how free and enslaved workers relate. In representing the place of white labor in the novel’s map of slavery, Blake offers no resolution, no way out, a negative dialectical dead end that nonetheless points up a way of understanding the way in which white supremacy zones populations into uneven ontological categories, a differentiation on which depends a wage labor system in which white workers receive social recognition in and through their relationship to capital, while the enslaved exist in the category of nonrecognition as capital’s fungible commodities and subjects of social death. In other words, it is this racial unity through policing of Black rebellion that resolves in the US context the labor/capital contradiction, or the conflict of worker exploitation in ways allowing for the reproduction and thus expansion of the capitalist relation. Workers consenting to their relation to capital and the stability this consent creates—that is necessary for the reproduction of the wage labor relation—arrives through this white solidarity of working to keep African people positioned as slaves by policing and containing their rebellion.
From this, we can see that this tension in the novel’s map of insurrection shows how a constituent element of the free worker and his wages of whiteness in the United States is to defend his free status or claim to unenslaveability by working to police black rebellion. For free labor to mean white labor, the white worker must defend capital by policing the threats against it, namely slave fugitivity, insurrection, and autonomy. Consent that creates stability as a necessary condition for the reproduction of wage labor comes not from the fact that workers are bribed, but from forging this unity through policing black rebellion. Counterrevolution creates consent. In this way, we can also see that it is Black resistance, the Black radical tradition, that shapes capitalism’s form.  

While certainly the economic exploitation of slave labor produced value for capitalism, it is the resistance against slavery, the struggle for Black liberation, that provokes a white solidarity through policing such rebellion that is then generative of the consent and thus stability needed for capital to effectively exploit wage labor on an expanding scale.

**Slavery in Marx’s Map of Capital**

Like we see in Delany’s novel, Marx’s conceptual view of capital also registers the asymmetry between free workers and the enslaved, but unlike Delany, Marx offers a vision of this asymmetry’s synthesis or structural resolution. Examining sections of the *Grundisse, Capital*, and his writing on the Civil War, we can see how Marx’s attempt to understand wage labor leads him to offer a view of the unfree zones of slavery in capitalism against which he totalizes or synthesizes his map of the value-form and its negation to come, namely communism.

In the *Grundisse*, unpublished notes written between 1857 and 1861 that later would become *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*, Marx
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dedicates a section exploring the prehistory of capitalism. While one goal of the section is to demonstrate how capitalism is neither timeless nor universal but an historical social formation. This requires that Marx explains how the conditions of capitalism, what he calls its presuppositions, emerged from the past yet are categorically distinct from former modes of production. One of the primary presuppositions of capitalism is the creation of a class of propertyless workers who are “freed” or divorced not only from society’s means of production, but also “freed” from being the means of production themselves as slaves or bondsman. Once a pool of propertyless free workers exist, the exploitation of labor-power, which is also the accumulation of surplus value, can take place, creating a situation in which capital creates its own presuppositions. As the well-known formula goes, the owners of the means of production, the capitalists, pay an up-front price for the free worker’s labor-power. The free worker is then organized and made to labor in the production process in a way that adds more value to commodity produced than the value paid to worker in the form of wages. This difference, unpaid wages, is absorbed as surplus value by the capitalist class, enriching them while further impoverishing the working class. While the free worker and capitalist appear to relate equally in their exchange of one commodity for another, labor-power for wages, Marx emphasizes how structurally free workers as a class relate asymmetrically to the class of capitalist property owners. It is this appearance of equality, what Marx calls in the Grundisse a “necessary illusion,” and in Capital, the commodity fetish, that conceals the power disparity between worker and capitalist, making possible accumulation by exploitation, or capital as such. This illusion of equality is what distinguishes capital from its prehistory, or prior modes of production.
In emphasizing this point, Marx suggests that if workers were to see their labor power in concrete terms, as it is actually valued in capital, the exchange relation would not be possible: “So long as both sides exchange their labour with one another in the form of objectified labour, the relation is impossible; it is likewise impossible if living labour capacity itself appears as the property of the other side, hence as not engaged in [equal] exchange” (464). It is in this moment that Marx is compelled to acknowledge an exception to the very rule he has just defined. He must address the on-going presence of slavery in capitalism, which unlike wage labor, doesn’t rest on “necessary illusions,” or hegemony. It depends on naked direct force. He reconciles this conceptual dilemma in which on the one hand Marx asserts that capitalism depends on formal equality, while on the other he recognizes that capitalism works perfectly well using slave labor, by claiming that slavery is merely an anomaly: “The fact that slavery is possible at individual points within the bourgeois system of production does not contradict this. However, slavery is then possible there only because it does not exist at other points; and appears as an anomaly opposite the bourgeois system itself” (464). Marx considers capital and slavery two distinct structures, both temporally and systematically, yet he also admits that slavery continues to exist within capital insofar as forms of unfree labor exist side by side wage labor. His quick answer of contending that slavery is an anomaly in capitalism begs the question of why cannot Marx think of slavery and wage labor as temporally co-present forms of accumulation in his map of capitalism?

He cannot see them as co-present forms because Marx views capitalism from the standpoint of wage labor. Slavery appears to Marx as a stage of the past, even as it has an ongoing presence in capital, which he recognizes, precisely because slavery exists
as a distinct structure of domination on which rests capital’s structure of wage labor exploitation. What Marx represents as a relationship in which slavery is understood as temporally prior to wage labor is his way of accounting for how slavery is at the same time external to, while also constitutive of wage labor exploitation. The illusion of formal equality required for exchange-value depends on the on-going production of unfree, dispossessed populations. The dissolution of slavery does not pave the way for the emergence of “free” workers. Rather, the creation and maintenance of free workers available for exploitation is premised, as Delany’s novel has also shown, on the ongoing production of racial difference in which social recognition among white citizens is determined by the nonrecognition of the excluded Black slave.

A few passages later, Marx offers a more direct view of this on-going and foundational relationship between the maintenance of free workers necessary for accumulation by exploitation and the production of unfree Black subjects. After repeating that slavery must be suspended for wage labor to exist, Marx explains how the free worker and capitalist share the same political ontology of the independent self-possessive individual precisely through the act of exchange:

Living labour capacity belongs to itself, and has disposition over the expenditure of its forces, through exchange. Both sides confront each other as persons. Formally, their relation has the equality and freedom of exchange as such. As far as it concerns the legal relation, the fact that this form is a mere semblance, and a deceptive semblance, appears as an external matter . . . [The free worker] sells the particular expenditure of force [labor power] to a particular capitalist, whom he confronts as an independent individual. It is clear that this is not his relation to the
existence of capital as capital, i.e. to the capitalist class. Nevertheless, in this way everything touching on the individual, real person leaves him a wide field of choice, of arbitrary will, and hence of formal freedom. (*Grundisse* 464)

Marx then further clarifies the meaning of the free worker’s political ontology by defining it against the status of the slave. “In the slave relation,” writes Marx, the slave “belongs to the individual, particular owner, and is his laboring machine. As a totality of force-expenditure, as labour capacity, he is a thing belonging to another, and hence does not relate as a subject to his particular expenditure of force, nor to the act of living labour” (*Grundisse* 464). Unlike the free worker, the slave is not a subject in his relationship to capital but a thing, or better put, the political ontology of the Black slave is to exist as the object to be possessed by another. The dispossession of the slave’s body, which is also the ownership of it by another, determines and gives meaning to the shared status of “free” persons, whether the free worker or the capitalist, confronting each other in the act of exchange. To be free, to be a person in the market, comes to mean possession of one’s self, which, as Marx has revealed, is a category of social existence defined against the status of dispossession of the Black slave who lives as object to be possessed by another. As Marx continues, “In the slave relation the worker is nothing but a living labour-machine, which therefore has a value for others, or rather is a value. The totality of the free worker’s labour capacity appears to him as his property, as one of his moments, over which he, as subject, exercises domination, and which he maintains by expending it” (*Grundisse* 464-465). Defined against the dispossession of the slave, the free worker is transformed into a recognized, self-possessive subject precisely by owning, holding domination, over his labor power and any other commodities the free worker can
purchase through exchange, including potentially slaves. What “confronting each other as persons” means, then, is to possess the capacity to possess, a status that is the product of the incapacity of the slave to possess, since the slave is made to live as an object to be possessed by another. The (real) appearance of equality between free worker and capitalist forged through their shared capacity of possession/ownership rests on the dispossessed body and self, or the unfree status, of the slave.

A few years later, after the Civil War, in his chapter “The Working Day,” from *Capital*, Marx acknowledges how this production of ontological difference between free and unfree subjects serves to maintain an exploitable working class. Of the many things the chapter addresses, Marx is primarily concerned with understanding the tension between capital’s drive for self-valorization and the reproduction costs of the worker—the contradiction between over-working the worker and the drive to extract the most amount of surplus value from the worker’s labor. Once again, Marx turns to the slave’s situation in order to understand this contradiction of wage labor. “The slave-owner buys his worker in the same way as he buys his horse. If he loses his slave, he loses a piece of capital, which he must replace by fresh expenditure on the slave-market” (*Capital* 345). While it might appear costly to the slave-owner, Marx notes how over-working the slave to point of death to maximize profits is not a problem when there exists a large surplus or “preserves” of slaves available for purchase. Using US slavery as his example, Marx explains how surplus populations are the lever for surplus value:

Hence the Negro labour in the southern states of the American Union preserved a moderately patriarchal character as long as production was chiefly directed to the satisfaction of immediate local requirements. But in proportion as the export of
cotton became of vital interest to those states, the over-working of the Negro, and sometimes the consumption of his life in seven years of labour, became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products, but rather of the production of surplus-value itself. *(Capital 345)*

Marx asserts that the role of surplus populations elsewhere in capitalism offer the capitalist the same opportunities for over-work, citing bakers in London and agricultural workers from the countryside.

Yet in this same section in which Marx has talked about the law of surplus value determining cotton-production in the South, he comes to the conclusion that there are limits to the over-working of wage laborers in ways that there are not for slaves. Such limits are set not by capital but by civil society, that is, the social value of the free worker’s life overrides its economic value in capital:

*Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so. Its answer to the outcry about the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of over-work, is this: Should that pain trouble us, since it increases our pleasure (profit)? But looking at these things as a whole, it is evident that this does not depend on the will, either good or bad, of the individual capitalist. Under free competition, the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him. *(Capital 381)**

It is (civil) society here that places a limit on the political economy of working laborers to death for profits. Yet as his previous remarks on slavery highlighted, no such limits are
placed on the over-working of slaves precisely because slaves do not share the same political ontology as the formal free wage laborer.

Where do such limits arise from if they violate the laws of the profit-motive? If the immanent laws of capitalist production operate as a “coercive force external” to the capitalist, it follows that the capitalist would have no interest in preserving the life of the worker so long as surplus populations were available. What protects the free worker, then, from over-work are not the laws of exploitation but the laws of white supremacy. Over-working of free worker places him or her much too close to the disposable unfree slave (for whom outcry against the slave’s treatment has more to do with the fear of insurrection than with treating the slave fairly). Capitalists have obligations to respect the “health and the length of the life of the [free] worker” if only because the illusion of formal equality, “confronting each other as persons,” depends on the free worker being treated like a subject and not an object like the unfree slave.

For instance, labor reformers had understood these laws of white supremacy perfectly well when they condemned the inequality of wage labor using the language of white slavery. In a rejoinder to the perspective of abolitionism, George Evans in 1844 claims, echoing a very common view at the time, that wage labor treats white workers worse than enslaved Africans:

I beg you to bear in mind that thousands in the cities are continually tortured by the same agonizing system. This is an evil of the first magnitude, about which the Black slave knows nothing; and this can afford you but a faint idea of the miseries of a city tenantry, which the Black has never dreamed of. This, however, may lead
you to understand why I have contended that the landless white is in a state of slavery quite as galling as that of the Black. (360)

In calling attention to white slavery, labor reformers hoped to curb the profit motive’s targeting of white bodies in ways that it was left unrestrained to accumulate and enslave Black bodies. Claiming wage labor as white slavery further emphasize the free, self-possessive, human status of the white worker, or as Roediger explains “the comparison could lead to sweeping critiques of wage labor, as ‘white slavery’ but it also could reassure wage workers that they belonged to the ranks of ‘free white labor,’” (47) and furthermore that the “existence of slavery. . . gave working Americans both a wretched touchstone against which to measure their fears of unfreedom and a friendly reminder that they were by comparison not so badly off” (49). The same held true for non-slaveholding poor whites of the South. Johnson points out how in the 1850s, “The question was whether these degenerate white men would have slaves or becomes slaves,” which is to say, white democracy and market exchange reach a limit when capital threatens to treat white workers and the enslaved as equally disposable populations (394). What the discourses of white slavery and Marx’s reflection on civil society’s relationship to the profit-motive reveal is that the free worker must be treated in the market as a subject in possession of his or her body and self, or accumulation by exploitation does not work, and workers retain this status only through the upholding of slavery.

In his attempt, then, to demonstrate the temporal and structural distinction between wage labor and slavery, Marx ends up offering a very similar view of the structural asymmetry between free workers and the enslaved that Delany had made explicit through his novel’s irresolvable narrative map of insurrection. Like Delany, Marx
proves how capital, the accumulation of value by exploitation of wage labor, structurally depends on the production of ontological difference between free and unfree subjects, or the racialization of social categories of existence in which whiteness is a cross-class status of possession determined by the object-status—a dispossessed state of being—of Blackness. In this way, we see how it is through the social death of slavery that white labor can define itself as being both victimized and saved by capital, both a target of capital’s violence and a collaborator helping to carrying it out.

*Synthesis or Abolition?*

For Marx, the solution to this asymmetry between free workers and the enslaved can be found in capitalism’s dialectical forward movement. The universalization of wage labor, as Marx sees it, will overcome white supremacy. At the end of the “Working Day” chapter, Marx famously offers a vision of white and Black working-class unity: “In the United States of America, every independent workers’ movement was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a Black skin” (*Capital* 414). While often read as Marx calling on white workers to forge solidarity with Black workers, his point is instead to show how slavery had held back or slowed down the dialectical movement of capitalism in which once all workers become wage workers, the socialization of the working class can take place in ways that workers can organize and amass the power necessary to seize control of a modern world they have created through their labor. As Marx continues in the lines that follow, “a new life immediately arose from the death of slavery. The first fruit of the American Civil War was the eight hours’ agitation, which ran from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California, with the seven-
league boots of the locomotive” (Capital 414). With the abolition of formal slavery, workers would now meet each other on the same footing as equally rather than differentially dominated proletarians. The universalization of exchange-value subsumes and thus dissolves former modes of production, transforming prior categories of oppression like slavery into a new singular category of the exploited wage worker. The abolishment of formal slavery opened the door for the full realization of the next stage in the dialectical movement of capitalism in the United States. “If the North lets the South go,” writes Marx in a piece for the German newspaper Die Presse in 1861, “it then frees itself from any association with slavery, from its historical original sin, and creates the basis of a new and higher development” (“The Civil War in the United States” 55). If Marx pays heed to the role of white supremacy in which populations are zoned into categories of the free and unfree in capital, he treats it as a stage that the value-form overcomes in capital’s march toward higher forms of development rather than what Delany has shown to be an ongoing and temporally co-present form of domination in capitalism.

Unlike Marx, then, Delany’s negative dialectical representation of the asymmetry between free workers and enslaved Africans reveals how the production of ontological difference is not to be resolved through the inclusion of the enslaved within the wage labor relation (a synthesis of the working class). It is to be dismantled through the destruction of the institutions of white supremacy on which rests capital. If the formal tension found between the novel’s plots of insurrection suggests that white supremacy creates an irresolvable asymmetrical relationship between white workers and enslaved Africans in which white workers serve the interests of capital by policing the enslaved,
this doesn’t so much indicate that slaves lacked the ability to foment insurrection and liberate themselves as it points up what conditions would need to be met to do so. White workers defecting from their role of policing slaves as well as the enslaved using force to liberate themselves and building autonomy from instead of seeking inclusion within liberal democracy and the wage labor relation are the conditions highlighted through this formal tension that if met would dismantle slavery and its superstructure of white supremacy. The latter condition, of course, was greatly feared by white America in the 1850s, and while less publicly feared, the former might have been just as terrifying because without the allegiance of white workers serving as a garrison force nothing stood in between slave insurrection and the destruction of white property and power. Johnson notes that as the inequalities of the plantation economy intensified in the 1850s, “it was the non-slaveholders who came to be seen as ‘a problem’ in the era of the ‘Negro Fever.’ . . . Although few slaveholders had the bad judgment to come right out and say so, there were grave doubts circulating through the South about the loyalty of non-slaveholders to the existing order, especially after 1857” (376).

In one brief scene, the novel conjures up this image of disloyal white workers potentially abandoning and betraying their allegiance to white supremacy. When Blake is leading family members and other slaves of his plantation out of the South to the freedom of Canada, they must at one point cross the Mississippi river and require a ferry. Upon approaching the boat, its operator, a white ferryman, asks if they are free slaves because if not, as he says, “I be ‘sponsible for ‘em ‘cording to the new law called, I ‘bleve the Nebrasky Complimize Fugintive Slave act, made down at Californy, last year,” which, as the ferryman tells the slaves, he is “‘bliged to fulfill . . . by ketchin’ every fugintive that
goes to cross this way, or I mus’ pay a thousand dollars, and go to jail till the Black folks is got, if that be’s never” [sic] (139-140). In response to the ferryman’s voiced commitment to policing the enslaved, Blake questions the legitimacy of a structure like white supremacy that seems to leave the ferryman poor even as it asks him to uphold it: “My friend, . . . are you willing to make yourself a watch dog for slaveholders, and do for them that which they would not do for themselves, catch runaway slaves? Don’t you know that this is the work which they boast on having the poor white men at the North do for them? Have you not yet learned to attend to your own interests instead of theirs?” (140). Blake then offers the ferryman “five half eagle pieces” which he calls his group’s “free papers” that the ferryman gladly accepts, agreeing to transport the fugitives across the river. Here the white ferryman has not so much come to aid fugitive slaves in betraying his duty to police fugitive slaves as he been instead bribed by them, mimicking and mocking how white supremacy bribes him not with economic benefits in his particular case but with the political ontology of whiteness which he upholds by dutifully policing slaves—a status that if not honored could also land him prison.

The white fear this scene invokes is that whiteness could potentially reach a breaking point in terms of enlisting white workers to police the enslaved when the price of doing so is shown to be far too costly than any of the benefits, whether economic or symbolic, promised to white workers. Blake making the ferryman an offer that out bids white supremacy registers what all white property holders, and in particular slaveholders, feared: that white workers would come to learn how it is not in their interest as proletarian laborers to police and support a structure of white supremacy on which rests the very wage labor system that exploits them. In other words, if unity in policing black
resistance forms white solidarity as the linchpin of capitalism, this scene suggests that black resistance is also a catalyst for white workers betraying this unity and all that it upholds. That is, if the novel’s two plots of insurrection form an irresolvable formal tension revealing an asymmetry between white workers and the enslaved, here in this scene the novel offers a view, to the consternation of those benefitting from white supremacy, of this asymmetry’s potential destruction. Unlike Marx who believed that the logic of capital itself would unite white and Black workers, Delany’s novel shows how white workers abandoning their posts as the watch dogs for slavery, combined with the enslaved taking insurrectionist and fugitive actions, threaten to destabilize the very institutions of white supremacist direct force that uphold and maintain the capitalist relation in the first place.

White Modernity and Black Abolition

If Delany represents anti-Blackness as a structure of violence for which there is no resolution, while Marx sees the wage labor relation as a stage in which racial asymmetries are overcome on the way to labor’s global confrontation with capital, how does the story, so to speak, of modernity end for each writer? From the standpoint of the wage worker who confronts the capitalist as a fellow person, emancipation from exploitation becomes a project of recuperating and then fulfilling the promises of a European modernity. This view can be found in a few places in Marx’s work. In his address to Lincoln on behalf of the First International, Marx is hopeful that the abolishment of formal slavery will turn white workers into proletarian revolutionary actors whose unity with European workers sets the stage for working class liberation:
While the working men, the true political power of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic; while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned labourer to sell himself and choose his own master; they were unable to attain the true freedom of labour or to support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation, but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war. ("Address to Lincoln" 154)

Marx recognizes how white supremacy maintains the illusion of formal equality necessary for exploitation, yet this sense of “pride” in paradoxically being able to choose one’s master is considered by Marx a false consciousness rather than a structural antagonism. Since wage workers hold the “true political power,” Marx implies that Black freedman become revolutionary actors once they enter the wage relation where they are unified with other workers through a shared material opposition to capital (exploitation).

Viewing the wage labor relation as the site in which the production of difference is overcome allows Marx to complete or totalize his map of capitalism as a stage paving the way for the future emancipation of Humanity. In the latter chapters of *Capital*, Marx envisions the completion of capitalism in order to imagine its synthesized negation, a future mode of production based on cooperative labor:

The centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. The capitalist mode of appropriation, which springs from the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private
property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labour itself. \textit{(Capital 929)}

The pathway to communism, which isn’t a preconceived place so much as it is the unrepresentable negation of capitalism, requires, according to Marx’s dialectic in this instance (which comes to change later in his life), the universalization of wage labor. In other words, to arrive at a social formation based on cooperative labor and free association, the world’s populations must be first transformed into organized laborers who have the political power to realize the total negation or defeat of capital whose “achievements” are preserved and retained in the construction of a new mode of production based on communal ownership and cooperative labor.

While Marx condemns and decries the violent means by which the masses are made into wage laborers, he nonetheless understands this process as a modernizing force insofar as it creates the conditions out of which can emerge a mode of production wherein universal human emancipation is possible. As he continues:

The transformation of scattered private property resting on the personal labour of the individuals themselves into capitalist private property is naturally an incomparably more protracted, violent and difficult process than the transformation of capitalist private property, which in fact already rests on the
carrying on of production by society, into social property [communism]. In the former case, it was a matter of the expropriation of the mass of the people by a few usurpers; but in this case, we have the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people. (930)

The solution to the free worker’s dilemma of exploitation, of indirect slavery, of alienation, of being robbed of one’s labor power and time, is envisioned in Marx’s completed map of capital: the very conditions that create the asymmetry between free workers and capitalists not only will set the workers free but will have transformed them through exploitation and the struggle against it into modern emancipated subjects. They are made into persons of the same status as the oppressors, yet this status of the modern human subject is not destroyed in the negation of capital. It is recuperated as the ground on which the next stage of development will be erected. While the free status of the wage laborer (which is not offered to the slave because it is premised on the slave’s social death), might be the mechanism through which the worker is exploited in capitalism, it is also what gifts the free worker his or her shared humanity with the capitalist. What capital grants wage laborers when it “frees” them from former modes of production, their humanity, is the same as what capital attacks when it exploits them. Capitalism, for Marx, both creates and threatens to destroy a modern humanity that its next stage will recuperate and affirm.

Marx must see slavery (or anti-Blackness), then, as a stage, even as at moments he reveals it is a founding antagonism, precisely because Marx, from the standpoint of the wage laborer, imagines modernity as a project to be resolved rather than one to be dismantled. 35 Marx offers this stagist view most clearly in the preface to A Contribution
to the Critique of Political Economy (1859) which was published in London the same year Blake was serialized in the United States:

In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals’ social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.

If capitalism violently ushers in a modernity premised on antagonism, communism, which goes unnamed in his passed but is implied, is the solution to it. The modernity that capitalism creates has a resolution in which the social categories produced by capital such as the modern subject with the capacity to possess and not to be dispossessed are not only recuperated but are to be affirmed in the synthesized stage to come. Because Marx has in mind the future synthesis of capitalism, or an image of how capitalism leads to the fulfillment of modernity, this prevents him from fully conceptualizing and accounting for the ongoing material role of white supremacy or the racialization of populations into categories of ontological inferiority and superiority in his map of capitalism.  

If Marx’s story of wage slavery ends in reconciliation at a higher level, Delany’s global vision of insurrection ends without an ending. The event of insurrection the novel promises to narrate that would complete its image of slavery never takes place
in the novel. Famously, it ends showing the slaves of Cuba preparing and planning for an insurrection that never emerges. It is always yet to come: “That the time to strike was fast verging upon them, from which, like the approach of the evening shadow of the hilltops, there was no escape. It would overtake them whether or not they desired it, though in accordance with its own economy, would be harmless and unfelt in its action and progress” (292). The last scene is of the slave Gondolier who leaves a meeting of conspiring slaves and free workers of color in which it was discussed that violent action was imminent to avenge recent acts of violence done to free workers of color in Cuba. The novel’s last lines are not of rebellion or insurrection, but the threat of it: “Gondolier, rejoicing as he left the room to spread among the Blacks an authentic statement of the outrage: ‘Woe be unto those devils of whites, I say!’” (313). One simple explanation put forth for the novel’s unfinished ending is that Delany, for reasons unknown, either didn’t complete the last chapters of the novel, or if he did, they have been lost to history. Still, if treated as a completed narrative (a full version of Blake was serialized with Delany’s permission in The Weekly Anglo-African from November 1861 to May 1862), its so-called failed ending begs the question of why does a novel whose scope of vision covers every scene of Atlantic slavery fall short of offering a manifest or positive image of insurrection?

While most scholars are satisfied with the answer that Delany simply didn’t finish the novel, Susan Kay Gillman, in her study on slave conspiracy, has suggested that Blake’s failure to represent insurrection, combined with its historical anachronisms and elisions of slave rebellions within the novel’s temporal frame, serves as a “clarion call for future liberation. The simultaneous impossibility of slave revolt in any of [the novel’s]
temporalities paradoxically provides the means of its invocation, just as the truncated, non-ending of the novel works to underscore the absent representation of revolution” (111). Building on this, I read the novel’s non-ending, its stopping short of providing an image of the insurrection, as a third instance of an irresolvable formal tension, one that crystalizes what Marx believed would be dissolved by the value-form, namely the founding antagonism of anti-Blackness in the project of modernity. Where this irresolvable formal tension lies is in Delany’s attempt to synthesize or offer a totalized view of a world based on slavery by narrating the very event that if successful aims to dismantle this world. In not offering an image of insurrection, the novel might fail to narratively totalize a world based on slavery, yet such a failure becomes the acknowledgment that the political ontology of Blackness is the negated position against which this world has been constituted. The novel’s non-ending narratively registers and pre-figures Afro-pessimism’s conceptual claim that the social death of the enslaved is the constitutive exclusion on which rests the very same modern liberal world the novel sets out to map in its goal of narrating mass insurrection. In this way, by not providing a positive image of the insurrection, the novel suggests that there is no escape or path to liberation for the slave without also dissolving the superstructures of a world built on the infrastructure of anti-Blackness.

Unlike other antebellum literary fictions and abolitionist discourses which wrote a place for the slave within an imagined reconciled white nation, or the stagism of Marx’s dialectic which sees that the same modern world that exploits wage laborer will lead to their redemption and emancipation, Blake’s nonrepresentation of insurrection demonstrates that there is no synthesis or movement forward out of social death from
within the very world determined by it. Fanon had called this dilemma the manicheanism of the white settler colonial world: “this world [is] divided into compartments, this world cut in two is inhabited by two different species” (40). The relationship between these “two different species,” or zones of social existence—a settler-master class and the colonized and enslaved—are structurally irresolvable, a negative dialectic: “The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in service of a higher unity. . . they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for the two terms, one is superfluous” (38-39). By suspending synthesis, the novel’s unfinished story of insurrection ends up emphasizing and not falsely resolving this manicheanism of the Black slave’s social existence.

The novel even dwells on its unfinished ending, auto-referentially foregrounding the very tension it has created in deferring the representation of the insurrection. In the last pages of the novel, a (white) eyewitness to the celebrations of King’s Day describes that, “as it is the sights, the sounds, the savage shrieks, the uncouth yells suggest very uncomfortable thoughts of Negro insurrection. . . It would be easy on King’s Day for the Negroes to free themselves, or at least to make the streets of Havana run with blood, if they only knew their power; Heaven be praised that they do not, for who can count the lives that would be lost in such a fearful struggle?” (301). By mimicking an anxiety-ridden white perspective that fears a violent insurrection waiting in the shadows, the novel emphasizes the global significance of the very event Delany promises but stops short, in the end, of narrating. The nonrepresentation of insurrection becomes the affirmation of what the insurrection portends for a world premised on the
slave’s social death: such a world’s undoing, the master’s destruction, the dismantling of
the slave relation itself, or, as Fanon had argued, “the destruction of the colonial world,”
which, as he explains “is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone [white
supremacy], its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country” (41).

It is in this way, then, that Blake’s narrative logic expresses the same logic
found in radical abolitionist and insurrectionist actions of the 1850s. These actions
attempted to accomplish the very same goal the novel’s negative dialectical form makes
explicit, namely the abolition rather than (false) reconciliation of modernity’s
asymmetrical zones of social existence. This logic of genuine or revolutionary abolition
could be found, for example, in Nat Turner’s insurrection or John Brown’s raid on
Harper’s Ferry, or Douglass’ violent fight with Covey, to name only a few. While
certainly not equivalent, these events nonetheless shared the similar goal of using force to
negate white supremacy’s violent negation of the enslaved. The novel’s last image of
Ambrosina wishing to burn the city, “I wish I was a man, I’d lay the city in ashes this
night, so I would” (313), and of Gondolier proclaiming that, “as they shed the blood of
our brother two days ago by dashing him on the pavement, and the blood of our sister
here today by a horsewhip, I would like to shed theirs with a knife,” also express this
same desire for revolutionary abolition. This is what Gondolier understands and voices
when he rejects Madame Barbosa’s plea for nonviolence and peaceful resolution to the
problem of slavery: “Thank you, Madame, for the advice . . . But we have a race of devils
to deal with that would make an angel swear. Educated devils that’s capable of
everything hellish under the name of religion, law, politics, social regulations, and the
higher civilization; so that the helpless victim be of the Black race. Curse them! I hate
‘em! Let me into the streets and give me but half a chance and I’ll unjoin them faster than ever I did a roast a pig for the palace dinner table” (312). These calls for destruction that end the novel correspond to what its incommensurable narrative map already lays bare: the negative dialectic relation of slavery is not to be (falsely) synthesized in a higher stage of development or reconciled by liberal democracy—it is to be dismantled as a condition for the creation of an alternative humanity.

In this way, Blake formally encodes a radical standpoint often ignored and erased, or when noticed, demonized and disparaged, that was taken up by some in the antebellum period, a standpoint from which its revolutionary actors—the enslaved and their accomplices—imagined and struggled towards not the improvement or resolution to but the abolition of a white setter modernity in their attempts secure Black liberation. In fact, it was this standpoint and its politics that, whether its actors called it as such or not, had come the closest to fulfilling Marx’s much earlier definition of communism found in The German Ideology: “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence” (Part 1. Section A). Delany’s one and only entrance into the tradition of novel-writing thus results in directing readers away from (false) resolutions found in the bourgeois aesthetic that the nineteenth-century novel plays a central role in constituting toward the logics of on-the-ground revolutionary movements or events that sought to overcome by dismantling and therefore abolishing the social relations of an anti-Black, settler-colonial capitalist modernity that his novel has revealed have no structural resolutions
Chapter 3

Remaking Settler Colonialism and Slavery in the Age of Industrialization

In the Great Strike of 1877, 80,000 railroad workers and an estimated 500,000 other workers across the nation revolted for better wages and improved working conditions. The strikes crippled cities like St. Louis, Chicago, and Pittsburg and left over a hundred workers dead at the hands of state militias, police, and federal troops. In fact, it was only the second time in US history (up to that point) that federal troops were required to put down striking wage laborers—acts of rebellion that owners and state authorities called domestic insurrections. To the owning class, the strikes of 1877 and the many more that followed throughout the late nineteenth century dangerously portended a possible workers’ revolution. These labor rebellions and the fears they produced kick-started a new era of class conflict, one that shattered the nineteenth-century dream of creating an egalitarian white republic.

This new period of class conflict indexed an underlying change in the relationship between wage labor and capital beginning with the crisis of 1873. As economist Giovanni Arrighi has shown, capital entered a period of crisis from 1873-96 in which inter-capitalist competition led to overproduction and a system-wide falling rate of profit. The centralization of capital through the rise of corporate capitalism or vertical integration became the solution to this crisis. As a result, capital gained more power over labor. Referring to the US context at this time, Arrighi argues that “the processes of proletarianization and ‘enforced’ concentration of capital, encouraged by the fall in prices and the rate of profit, completed the subordination of labour to capital by drastically reducing such opportunities for subsistence outside of the wage-labour relation” (7).
Capital increasingly absorbed workers into the wage labor relation, leading the absorbed, or fully proletarianized workers, to depend on capital to reproduce themselves.³

In the United States, as a settler colony, this reduced opportunity for subsistence outside of the wage labor relation meant losing access to (stolen) land as a means to either escape proletarian life or, at a minimum, to partially reproduce life outside of it. Staving off proletarianization, in other words, depended on the dispossession of Indigenous lands. With less access to land, however, and increased absorption of workers into the wage labor relation, labor not only lost some of its material leverage against capital, but also confronted a growing absolute inequality, a conflict of power, between owners and workers that previous dreams of realizing a white republic had always promised to avoid.⁴ Without the expectation of property through land, the dream of achieving settler democracy, in which access to Indigenous lands ensured egalitarian social relations among settlers, came to be dashed on the shore of capitalism’s expanding and maturing value form.⁵ In short, settler sovereignty as a position of shared power across class divisions began to falter in its function of resolving the conflict of exploitation between labor and capital and the crisis of the reproduction of the capitalist relation.

In combination with this faltering of settler sovereignty, the emancipation of slaves and Reconstruction policies that followed challenged the meanings of wage labor as free or white labor. Reconstruction promised to include freed slaves within the categories of free labor and citizenship that had been forged by anti-Blackness in the first place. Admitting freed slaves within such categories undermined the way they served to produce a workforce of white labor that consented to and defended capital. W. E. B. Du
Bois and Saidiya Hartman have highlighted in their work on this period how emancipation required the reconfiguration of the ways whiteness was to be defined, lived, and used to control wage labor. A central anxiety of both a Southern planter class and white labor was how, as Hartman contends, “this laboring class [of freed slaves would] be incorporated in the [white] body politic as citizens while maintaining the integrity of whiteness?” (162). How could wage labor continue to signify as free or unenslaveable labor for which consent and loyalty were offered to capital if Reconstruction policies promised to give former the enslaved the same rights and opportunities as white workers?

Another way of saying the above is that the crisis and then subsequent centralization of capitalism from 1873 and on, in which wage labor was increasingly absorbed, disciplined, and alienated, appeared to outpace the capacity of settler sovereignty and whiteness (as positions of shared power over the dispossessed) to maintain the necessary intra-settler cohesion at these sites of power to reproduce the capitalist social relation. If, as I have argued in earlier chapters, these positions had enabled the emergence of the capitalist relation earlier in the century, its expansion in response to crisis had threatened to break these positions. What happens, then, when capital’s expansion outpaces the ability of settler sovereignty and whiteness to maintain the necessary intra-settler equality to secure the reproduction of the capitalist relation? One of the consequences, as outlined above, was that labor began to revolt in a much more formidable way, creating costly instability within the process of the reproduction of the capitalist relation, threatening to hinder its ability to expand into more mature forms. This instability, however, recursively required the reinforcement of the structures of dispossession that cohered these categories stabilizing the capitalist relation in the first
place. It is this recursive relationship that this chapter will explore through the reading of late nineteenth- and turn-of-the-century melodramatic narratives of Native and African American writers.

While we often study realism and naturalism as the modes of representation that historicize this transformation from market to industrial capitalism, I want to show how the melodramatic narratives of Alice Callahan (Muscogee), Simon Pokagon (Potawatomi), and African American writer Nat Love map how capitalism’s expansion in the late nineteenth century rested on upholding and reproducing Native dispossession and anti-Blackness. All three narratives contain both popular modes of melodrama in tension with forms of realism at a time when these modes of representation had been increasingly defined against one another in the literary marketplace. I argue that this contradictory combination of melodrama and realism crystallizes and thus offers a view of the role of colonial and racial dispossession in consolidating positions of shared power among settlers that allowed for capitalism to expand into a more mature form of accumulation and subsequently emerge as the twentieth century’s hegemon. The generic tensions between melodrama and realism in these novels, in other words, offer literary maps of the relationship between reproducing forms of dispossession and consolidating settler sovereignty and whiteness as positions through which class conflicts could be sufficiently overcome to ensure capitalism’s expansion moved forward without catastrophic rebellion or refusal of labor.

While realism and melodrama are not necessarily mutually exclusive modes of representation, particularly in earlier forms of realism, as Peter Brooks maintains, they do begin to be defined against one another by the late nineteenth century. It is this
opposition that helps explain how their combined use in the narratives of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love form generic tensions that embody how ongoing forms of Indigenous dispossession and anti-Black abjection played a constitutive role in ensuring capitalism’s expansion in response to crisis. Realism’s claim to represent the truth or essence of social life derived from the way in which its practitioners defined it against the naïveté and fabrication of melodrama. William Dean Howells’ famous definition of realism as “let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know” (500), stood in opposition to melodramatic “novels that merely tick our prejudices and lull our judgement, or that coddle our sensibilities or pamper our gross appetite for the marvelous . . . [which] are not so fatal, but they are innutritious, and clog the soul with unwholesome vapors of all kinds” (497). Because melodrama catered to readers, it couldn’t, it was believed, represent the truth of social life. The verisimilitude of realism came to signify as a more truthful form of representation, in part, from the way it was defined against the way melodrama was seen to lie to readers by indulging their interests and desires.

Realism, it should be remembered, had emerged in response to this new era of class conflict resulting from the above outlined changes in capitalism. While many scholars of a Lukácsian tradition argue that realism, in particular earlier forms of it, offered a critical view of these changes in class relations, others have shown how realism concealed them. Instead of representing how class relations underpin the atomized experience of life under capitalism, realism reproduces the experience of class as a static identity rather than a dynamic power relation between owners and the propertyless. As Amy Kaplan argues, the schools of realism and naturalism practiced by authors like
William Dean Howells, Henry James, Mark Twain, and Frank Norris, among others, sought “to construct a homogeneous and coherent social reality by conquering the fictional qualities of middle-class life and by controlling the specter of class conflict which threatens to puncture this vision of a unified social totality” (21). Realism and naturalism offered coherent, aestheticized identities of the experience of class conflict but not views of the imbalance of power producing the conflict, thus accommodating readers to the new realities of increased class inequality. A great example of this is Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* in which the class conflicts in the cattle industry are aestheticized for middle-class readers. Wister transformed the melodrama of the dime novel Western into literary realism that resolved the specter of class conflict. The novel shows how the wage laborer as cowboy in the West, could, through hard-work, defense of property, and loyalty to owners, become an owner himself, putting at ease middle-class readers who worried that labor was angry and rebellious about new changes in capital’s form.

Realism’s project, then, of representing the truth of social life, which is to say, an image of unified social reality concealing the reality of class conflict, depended, in part, on defining itself against the “deception” of melodrama.

The narratives of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love do not regard this opposition between melodrama and realism. They instead treat both modes as necessary for telling their stories rather than writing from the premise that the use of realism depends on disavowing melodrama or inversely that writing in the genres of sentimentalism and sensation would be compromised by modes of realism. This disregard for the opposition between realism and melodrama is a symptom of the history these novels represent, namely the antagonism of maintaining the dispossession of lands and lives to ensure
capitalism’s successful reproduction in response to the expansion of its scope and power over labor. To claim that the novels of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love map the history of dispossession’s role in reconsolidating settler democracy’s capacity to prevent class conflict during the time of capitalism’s late-nineteenth expansion, helps broaden our understanding not only of the relationship between histories of dispossession and capitalism, but also how literature at this time represented or not this relationship. We also see, I suggest, that these melodramatic narratives bring to light the underlying asymmetries of the colonial and slave relation that the major works of realism and naturalism conceal in their focus on intra-settler class conflicts. These narratives also show how resistance to dispossession threatened to unsettle the way capitalism secured the necessary stability for its reproduction as the United States emerged after the turn-of-the-century to become the world’s next hegemon or center of capitalism’s world-system.11

Assimilation as Elimination in Wynema

The first novel written by a Native American woman, Alice Callahan’s Wynema (1891) envisions how white settlers can learn how to forge peaceful co-existence with Indigenous America in a moment when the settler state’s genocidal campaign of Indian Pacification had culminated in the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. The novel’s protagonist, Genevieve Weir, a white missionary-teacher sent to establish a school in the Muscogee nation, serves as a model for the novel’s white readers of how to shed bigoted perspectives of the Muscogee in order to be ally of the “poor Indians.” As Kara Mollis argues, the novel envisions that assimilation must cut both ways for peace to be achieved.12 Her guide and mentor in Indian country is Keithly Gerard who, with several
years of experience teaching among the Muscogee as a Methodist preacher, trains and tutors Genevieve, and white readers, to recognize capacity of the Muscogee to live their cultural traditions while also helping them assimilate to bourgeois family relationships and liberal democratic values.

Key to white settlers like Genevieve forging peace with the Muscogee is sentimentalism. Genevieve and Keithly, along with the white reader over their shoulders, learn to cultivate feelings of sympathy, good-will, and affection toward the Muscogee. Critics have argued that the novel’s sentimental plot sought to reconcile past and prevent future violence between settlers and Indigenous people. Susan Bernadin suggests that Callahan was following the example of previous sentimental novels that explored racial injustice, most notable of which was Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona*. As Bernadin argues, “Callahan adapts conventional plots of courtship and union in the service of mending rifts in national race relations. Like her Anglo predecessors, Callahan uses key tenets of the sentimental ethos—evangelism, domesticity, motherhood—to model her vision of a future interracial ‘national community’” (211). Sean Teuton contends that Callahan’s vision in the novel is “that Indigenous people may be resilient enough to cast off their outmoded cultural behaviors to achieve full citizenship in the American nation in this first Indigenous novel of assimilation” (319). While critics recognize the sentimental plot represents assimilation as a resolution to colonial violence, what they haven’t taken adequate notice of is how it also historicizes assimilation at this moment as a more “peaceful” method of Native elimination. That is, the novel’s sentimentalism inscribes the structure of feeling of assimilation as a state-sponsored method of indirect elimination of Indigenous people that ensured greater stability for settler democracy at this time of
capitalism’s expansion. When sentimentalism is read in relationship to the novel’s other narrative strategy of reform realism a generic tension appears. While this bind between sentimentalism and realism may or may not register Callahan’s misgivings about assimilation (as critics tend to focus on in their biographical criticism of the novel), it more importantly, I suggest, maps how capitalism’s expansion drove forward the need for more indirect or “peaceful” forms of Native elimination.

Before arriving at this point, however, we must first understand how assimilation emerged as a state-sponsored strategy of indirect elimination. In a period when genocidal campaigns of the settler state in North America had culminated in violent massacres and concentration camps (the reservation system at this time), new forms of managing occupied Indigenous nations within US national borders emerged to ensure greater stability for the national economy. US leaders began to treat Indigenous insurgency as internal disruptions rather than threats from foreign nations. They also had come to see that methods of direct violence induced costly and unstable Indigenous insurgency. More indirect methods like assimilation were in need to prevent these internal threats from challenging the stability of the nation. “As a technique of elimination,” Wolfe points out, “assimilation is more effective than either homicide or a spatial device. Unlike homicide, it does not jeopardise the settler social order, since the policy is invariably presented, in philanthropic terms, as offering Natives the same opportunities as are available to Whites” (34). The Allotment policy of 1888 embodied this turn to a strategy of elimination through forced incorporation that, it was believed, would be less costly not only economically but also in terms of the internal peace of the nation.

The goal of allotment, then, was to continue to remove Indigenous peoples from
their lands but in ways opposed to direct military or vigilante violence. As Patrick Wolfe argues, “allotment, in sum, had two inseparable ends: the abolition of tribal government and the assimilation of the individual Indian. It was not so much an alternative to removal as its completion” (40). Elimination by forced incorporation reinforced and ran parallel to the long history of military campaigns that removed Indigenous people through death and imprisonment. Key to forms of state-sponsored assimilation like allotment policy was embedding white settlers in Indian country. In this way, they could serve as the police of Indigenous rebellion, while also encouraging and coercing Indigenous peoples to take up private property ownership and bourgeois family relations.

*Wynema* shows how sentimentalism serves as the structure of feeling of this campaign to embed settlers among the colonized with the goal of breaking up land-bases and managing Indigenous insurgency in less costly, more stable ways. While Keithly’s advice to Genevieve, “If you dwell among the Romans, you must abide by their laws and follow their customs whenever practicable” (18), demonstrates a desire for cultural understanding, it also reveals the tactic required to carry out indirect methods of elimination. Through good feelings, settlers like Genevieve and Keithly aid in campaigns of elimination but through more stable (for settlers) forms of forced incorporation rather than outright military extermination.

Indeed, the novel makes clear how Keithly’s role is to surveil and police potential unrest and rebellion, and how the success of this role depends on cross-cultural relationships built up through sentimentalism. In one scene, the father of Wynema, Choe Harjo, relates how the Muscogee are angry that their delegates have stolen head-right money that was to be paid out in exchange for ceding land, relating that “They say if
these men do not explain their conduct, they will investigate the matter and ‘make it hot’ for them when they get back. I fear trouble and bloodshed will yet result from this” (31). This scene illustrates how Keithly’s intimate relationship gives him a greater ability to recognize such unrest and the power to suppress it. This intimate relationship won through sentiment allows Keithly to be a spy: “the people in and around my school are holding secret meetings and passing resolutions that, if carried out, will seriously incommode these criminal officials. I attended one of their meetings the other evening and felt rather uncomfortable over the warmth and feeling they expressed” (31). It also allows him to be an informant. He recounts a story he has heard from a speech delivered by an “old, gray-haired Indian” in one of these secret meetings (31). The story recalls a moment years earlier before the forced removal of the Muscogee when a delegate disobeyed the collective will of the community and sold land in exchange for land west of the Mississippi. The people treat the delegate as a traitor and kill him as punishment. Keithly’s point in reporting the story is to suggest that he has uncovered how such feelings of violent retribution for dispossession are still very much present among the Muscogee despite the appearance of pacification and good feelings toward white settlers. With this advanced knowledge garnered through his embedded position among the Muscogee, such rebellions can be more easily managed.

While settlers gaining cultural knowledge may help shed bigoted views, it also serves as a tool helping them censor activities that might incite rebellion. We see how Keithly weaponizes his knowledge of ceremonies to determine which are tolerable and which are to be squashed:
The ceremony to-day was simple and innocent; there was no harm done to any one—and if it please them to keep such a custom, I say, let them do so. Now, if it were the scalp-dance or war-dance or any of their ceremonies calculated to harm themselves or others, I should use all my influence in blotting it out; but these Indians have long ago laid aside their savage, cruel customs and have no more desire to practice them than we have to see them do so. (28)

Opposed, then, to the direct violence of the soldier, Keithly is the sentimental, culturally sensitive agent of counterinsurgency preventing rebellion. In a context when the Ghost Dance mobilized pan-Indigenous rebellion, sentimentalism in the novel serves as the vehicle for preventing violence not because it engenders cross-cultural sympathy (as maybe Callahan wanted readers to learn), but because it allows settlers to subdue insurgency before it can get off the ground.

If sentimentalism is the affective register facilitating indirect forms of elimination, the novel draws attention to the ways such forms of elimination become important for generating greater social stability in which settlers could better resolve conflicts arising from capitalism’s expansion. One of these conflicts the novel addresses is that of patriarchy among white settlers. During this period, white middle- and upper-class women’s struggles for greater inclusion in settler democracy, a struggle Genevieve embodies in the novel, were animated not only by the formal enfranchisement of former slaves but also by capitalism’s expansion. While Melissa Ryan contends that the novel’s comparison of (white) women’s struggle for inclusion to Native struggle against colonialism draws out a “shared experience of dispossession and misrepresentation” (42), it should be understood that Genevieve gains greater inclusion in settler democracy
because of and through her counterrevolutionary role embedded among the Muscogee.15 That is, she demands to be recognized as a self-possessive, rational, and modern subject \textit{precisely through} her role as an agent of assimilation.16 She treats her structural position, a minoritized subject \textit{within} a colonizing class, as equivalent to the position of the people being colonized, in her fight against patriarchy.

Of course, the novel’s sentimentalism presents Genevieve’s demand for inclusion as equivalent to Wynema’s desire for assimilation. Yet the fight for inclusion in settler democracy and the fight not to be eliminated are not equivalent. To see them as equivalent conceals the more important relationship the novel has also highlighted, namely how the success of assimilation as a more “peaceful” form of elimination has enabled or generated a resolution to Genevieve’s intra-settler conflict with her patriarchal husband Maurice. Genevieve gains strength and power to demand greater inclusion in settler democracy, resolving the conflict of patriarchy within her colonizing class, from her work as a colonizer implementing indirect methods of elimination. The key to Genevieve’s success in demanding inclusion is not that she sees how her situation is parallel to Wynema’s, or that readers see this parallel. Rather, it is in seeing how Genevieve’s work as an agent of more stable forms of elimination enabled her confrontation with Maurice and thus a resolution to her gendered exclusion from sharing power with her fellow white male settlers.

If the novel’s sentimentalism appears to endorse and legitimate this enabling relationship between assimilation and resolution to intra-settler conflicts, what does it mean that the novel also contains moments of realism that formally clash with its sentimentalism? What does it mean that realism breaks in on the novel’s sentimentalism
interrupting its formal coherence? The realism of the novel can be found in the moments when characters read from newspaper accounts or relate second-hand stories, mostly white characters repeating the stories of unseen Indigenous people. The novel’s realism echoes the language of reform journalism. Newspaper accounts voice informed political views on contemporary issues that intervene in debates on topics like allotment and the “Indian problem.” In these moments, the novel often recounts and describes the violence committed against Indigenous people as well as their actions of resistance and rebellion. Maria Windell suggests that this tension between sentimentalism and realism allows Callahan to undermine the binary of assimilation or resistance: “Wynema’s sentimental realisms disrupt sentimental/realist and assimilationist/traditionalist or resistant binaries and complicate the association of ethnic women writers with a sentimentalism that is presumed assimilationist” (246). Adding to the work of critics like Windell and others who have pointed to the novel’s formal contradictions as sites where the novel’s assimilationist politics break down, I read the place of realism in the novel as forming a generic tension with sentimentalism that registers the antagonism found in achieving greater stability for settler democracy precisely through indirect but no less violent forms of elimination.  

The novel’s generic tension between a sentimentalism of counterinsurgency and a realism of social protest rehearses the dynamic opposition between forging settler stability and pursuing the elimination of Indigenous people. This generic tension, then, not only undermines the novel’s politics of endorsing assimilation, but it also serves as a map offering a view of the way that capitalism’s expansion at this time and the way the conflicts it produced came to be resolved depended on the settler state innovating its methods of elimination.
For instance, when Robin reads to Wynema an article from the *Cherokee Telephone* that relates recent mistreatment suffered by Indigenous people, the question of stolen land it raises interrupts the sentimental plot’s vision of the “peaceful” incorporation of Indigenous people in the United States:

Remember, too, that for every acre of land the United States government holds today, which it acquired from the Indians of any tribe, from the land of Columbus, it has not paid five cents on the average. The Government owes the Indians of North America justly today, ten times more than it will ever pay them. Search history and you will find that these are facts and figures and not mere sentimentalism.

(98)

It is implied that the wealth of the United States depends on the land taken by force from Indigenous nations and that to repay Indigenous peoples for stolen land is not possible precisely because the value to be returned would make the United States impossible.20 Here, through the voice of the newspaper editor, the novel questions its own use of sentimentalism, suggesting that it functions to conceal the histories of dispossession and coercion that have yet to be materially resolved.21 The coherence of the sentimental plot is thus interrupted in a moment like this when it is brought to light that sentimentalism conceals historical truths and that the problem of dispossession the sentimental plot had promised to resolve appears irresolvable. If sentimentalism is the vehicle for a more peaceful elimination/colonization that enables greater stability for settler democracy, then the relationship of realism to sentimentalism as interruption formally dramatizes how the coherence of settler democracy through which conflicts among settlers can be resolved structurally rests on the violence of Indigenous colonization. The stability of the former
isn’t possible without violence of the latter. If this relationship must be disavowed for
settler democracy to appear and be lived as a legitimate position of power in which to
overcome conflicts, Wynema makes legible the antagonism structuring this relationship
through such moments of realist language interrupting the coherence of the novel’s
sentimental plot.22

This generic tension the novel self-referentially reflects on when it stages the
limits of sentimentalism to resolve the problems of violence between settlers and
Indigenous people—the very problems for which the good feelings of sentimentalism
first appeared as the solution. When Carl Peterson, a fellow white missionary-teacher of
Keithly and Genevieve, travels to South Dakota to help broker peace between the Lakota
and the US military, (a conflict alluding to the recent Wounded Knee massacre that took
place only months before the novel is published), his appeal for peace through a language
of sentimentalism breaks down. Peterson arrives with feelings of good-will and
sympathy: “I came to cast my lot among your misguided and mistreated people, to do all
I can for them, toward reconciling them to my people and to the Government. I came by
the military camp and informed the commander of my object, and he let me pass. I shall
not be harmed” (83). With such feelings, he begs the Lakota to disarm and surrender
themselves to reservation life: “Go into the reservation and surrender your fire-arms,
friends . . . Place yourselves in a submissive attitude, and the Government will protect
you; you will not be starved again, for those criminal agents have been discharged and
better ones employed” (80). However, the leader of the resisting Lakota, Wildfire,
responds by suggesting that reconciliation is impossible with a state premised on the
elimination of the Lakota: “let this arm wither, let these eyes grow dim, let this savage
heart still its beating, when I stand still and make peace with a Government whose only policy is to exterminate my race” (81). In contrast to Peterson’s call for peace, Wildfire’s call for violence shows how cultivating feelings of mutual sympathy appear naïve and useless when confronting a state pursuing a policy of elimination. Peterson’s sentimentalism also prevents rather than enables an understanding of Indigenous people’s situation. As Wildfire reminds Peterson, “You are kind, and you mean well, but you can never understand these things as I do. You have never been oppressed” (85). 23 This staging of the failure of sentimentalism clashes harshly with other moments when it is suggested that forging bonds through good feelings is the only way to prevent violence and help Native people co-exist with settler society. Wynema thus highlights the shortcomings of its own sentimentalism to generate peace between settlers and Indigenous people. It questions its own narrative strategy that imagines assimilation as the enabling device not only for peace between Indigenous peoples and settlers, but also for settlers to resolve intra-settler conflicts.

Here is where I maintain, then, that it is through the staging of the failure of its own sentimentalism that the novel confronts the implication of what its generic tension between sentimentalism and realism has already brought to light, namely how the internal peace of settler society is a fiction when it depends on the violence of Native elimination. The implication is that this stability (that sentimentalism plays a role in producing) cannot hold or must constantly be remade when it is premised on methods of elimination that are met with resistance. This stability, in other words, requires constant vigilance and counterrevolutionary violence as its constituent element. Native elimination, whether through indirect methods or not, produces resistance and thus the potential for instability
at all times. The project of creating internal stability in which intra-settler conflicts could be overcome at this time of capitalism’s expansion faced the contingency of resistance to elimination or the defense of Native sovereignty. Just as the success of assimilation to carry out the project of elimination without inducing further rebellion and instability animated Genevieve’s demand for greater inclusion in settler democracy, resistance would unsettle the conditions animating Genevieve’s attempt to resolve the conflict of patriarchy among settlers. In other words, if indirect forms of suppressing insurgency and achieving elimination generated greater stability in settler democracy as a requisite in helping to manage capitalism’s expansion, defenses of Native sovereignty posed a roadblock to this stability and the expansion it afforded.

This contingency of Native sovereignty in the movement of capitalism to higher stages of accumulation comes into full view in the tension between the sentimental plot’s closing vision of racial harmony and successful assimilation and the novel’s closing denunciations and condemnations of the United States. The former vision suggests that assimilation leads to a reconciliation and peaceful future between settlers and Indigenous people: “[t]here they are, the Caucasian and American, the white and the Indian, and not the meanest, not the most ignorant, not the despised; but the intelligent, happy, beloved wife is Wynema, child of the Forest” (104). The latter suggests that settler futurity will always be haunted by its original sins of colonial dispossession. As the narrator warns, the United States “will surely be visited with troubles and sorrows and afflictions, as it has afflicted and troubled the poor, untutored savage” (102), and that “there will be wars and pestilence, anarchies and open rebellions. The subjects of the Government will rise up in defiance of the ‘authorities that be.’ Oh, it will be trouble—trouble!” (102). These
final visions of simultaneous peace and instability carry the novel’s generic tension between sentimentalism and realism to an end but without ideological closure. It is the contingency of Native sovereignty in the futurity of settler capitalism that produces this refusal of ideological closure. If the drive for stability means completing elimination or removing the threat of resistance, then settler futurity or capitalism’s successful expansion (which depend on this stability) will always be haunted by the specter of Native sovereignty. Defending Native sovereignty disrupts settler sovereignty as the position of shared power through which conflicts among settlers are resolved. Which is to say, if the novel’s generic tension between sentimentalism and realism maps the irreconcilable relationship between Indigenous dispossession and the coherence of settler sovereignty and hence capitalism’s reproduction, it also shows how the defense of Native sovereignty threatened to halt this reproduction precisely by destabilizing settler sovereignty and its capacity to enable settlers to overcome internal conflicts.

*Native Elimination, Romantic Anticapitalism, and Alienated labor in Queen of the Woods*

If Callahan’s novel maps how changes in the methods of elimination related to the securing of greater stability for settler democracy and capitalism’ expansion, Pokagon’s novel represents how colonization was constitutive of the ideologies resolving the problem of alienated labor. That is, Pokagon’s *Ogimawkwe Mitigwaki* or *Queen of the Woods* (1899) responds to and offers an important map of the ideologies of romantic anticapitalism and their role in resolving the problem of worker alienation. Like we see in Callahan’s novel, *Queen of the Woods* uses both sentimentalism and realism to appeal to white readers’ sympathy. However, a tension forms between these two modes of
representation that becomes telling of the historical ground to which the novel responds. This tension demonstrates how one of the more important strategies for managing worker alienation in the late nineteenth century—romantic anticapitalism—rested on Native elimination. It also, inversely, shows how Native sovereignty is the troublesome contingency within this process of generating/reproducing ideologies, like romantic anticapitalism, that secure labor’s support of capitalism during this period of its rapid expansion.

*Queen of the Woods* is ostensibly a melodramatic temperance novel that tells the story of how settler colonialism weaponizes alcohol to attack and decimate Pokagon’s family and nation. Pokagon uses sentimentalism, in particular the Vanishing Indian trope, to lament and elicit empathy for this destruction. In fact, Pokagon dedicates his novel to Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* signaling the generic tradition in which he writes his novel, one that decries but also legitimizes the passing of Native people as tragic but inevitable. The Vanishing Indian trope serves as a convention within the genre Indigenous historian Jean O’Brien calls a “lasting” narrative. Indigenous characters in lasting narratives surrender their land to settlers before passing away, a symbolic act sanctioning the dispossession and erasure of Indigenous sovereignty, while authorizing settler sovereignty, history, presence, and futurity. “Such narratives,” writes O’Brien, “performed the cultural and political work of purifying the landscape of Indians, using a degeneracy narrative that foreclosed Indian futures. Through the multilayered process of ‘lasting,’ non-Indians argued for a rupture that enabled their own modernity and demonstrated their progress” (143). Lasting narratives are as old as settler colonialism itself, the most famous of which is Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, yet by the turn-of-
the-century they came to serve a more specific purpose of counterposing the Indian as either the noble or hostile savage to a new capitalist modernity. Lasting narratives wrote Indianness as either a state of savagery opposed to modern progress or a state of romantic unity and egalitarianism found in nature untouched by the evils of capitalist abstraction and alienation.

It must be remembered that at this time the centralization of capitalism entailed more forceful forms of abstraction, atomization, and thus alienation. This anxiety of alienated life manifested in discourses of a closed frontier. The worry was that a closed frontier, as a process of Indian removal to make land available for settlers, signaled the end of the egalitarian dream of settler democracy. In this moment, then, when the frontier came to serve less as an actual place to escape proletarian life, it would emerge nonetheless as a space on which fantasies of escape and refuge from alienated labor could be projected. While this is often called the mythologizing of the West, it was the retooling of a long-standing ideology of settler indigenization in response to transformations of capitalism at this time.24 As the prospect of acquiring land as the means of becoming an owner or of producing one’s life outside of the wage labor relation dimmed, settlers indigenized themselves in the imagined spaces of a frontier where they found refuge from and resisted the alienating forces of capitalist modernity.

Theorist Iyko Day in *Alien Capital* offers a useful framework for understanding how capitalism’s expansion beginning in the late nineteenth century depended on the racialization of capitalism’s abstract and concrete qualities. The abstraction of labor that produced alienation was racialized in the form of the threatening alien Asian laborer, while the concrete side or use value of labor was racialized as white. In this way, white
labor sees the cause of capitalism’s alienating effects not in capitalism’s form itself but in the racialized populations of Asian workers. Racializing capitalism’s abstract and concrete qualities depended on settler indigenization in the form of what Day calls romantic anticapitalism in which white settlers indigenize themselves as persons living in an organic, unified, concrete state of nature, or temporal/spatial location of the “noble savage” opposed to capitalist modernity. As Day explains, “what romantic anticapitalism offers is an ideological framework for settler colonialism to respond to economic and technological crises by imagining whiteness through indigenizing tropes of purity and organic connection to land that function to distort and deflect responsibility for capitalist modernity” (36). Settlers indigenizing themselves in the spaces of an imagined Indian nature could also be described as a form of Phillip Deloria Jr calls, “playing Indian” in order to cohere white settler identity as it faced changes in modernity.25

Pokagon’s sentimental plot offers white readers such images of romantic anticapitalism and thus invites settler indigenization. While Pokagon represents his community’s destruction for reasons of gaining sympathy from white readers, this representation nonetheless participates in the vanishing Indian trope which invites white readers to project themselves onto the lives of Pokagon’s Indian characters where they can play out fantasies of finding refuge from alienation. One of the opening scenes of the novel illustrates this ideological work:

On my return home from Twinsburg, O. where I had attended the white man’s school for several years, I had an innate desire to retire into the wild woods, far from the haunts of civilization, and there enjoy myself with bow and arrow, hook and line. . . from various conversations with educated people of the white race, I
have come to the conclusion that there is a charm about hunting and fishing, planted deep in the human heart by Nature’s own hand, that requires but little cultivation to lead the best educated of even the most civilized races to engage heartily in the sport. (99)

This is the language of romantic anticapitalism. Suggesting there is a charm to subsistence modes of production appeals to white readers’ fantasies of escaping the abstractions of capitalism. The charm of hunting and fishing is the feeling of concreteness they offer in a world of increasing abstractions, commodity culture, and alienated labor. For these spaces of nature or the Indian frontier to be lost as the novel shows later, invites readers to see the Indian’s fight to save such spaces as their fight for refuge from capitalist modernity. White readers can play Indian against the forces of modernity, but instead of actual elimination, they can find catharsis in the feeling that they live opposed to the alienation that has come to surround them.²⁶

If intemperance in the novel allegorizes market exploitation, it is easy to see, then, how the novel invites white readers to project their desires to resist exploitation onto Pokagon’s sentimentalized fight against intemperance. Because sentimentalism tries to generate sympathy from white readers, it asks them to see themselves in the Indian characters under attack by exploitation. The narrative strategy of sentimentalism is such that white readers are asked to see themselves or their own children in the image of Pokagon’s son passing or his daughter’s drowning. Yet in this move to sympathize by comparing one’s self to the plight of the Indian character, a false equivalence between settler and Native takes place. Sympathy for the Indian character’s victimization becomes a lament for settlers who fear exploitation has undermined their sovereignty as settlers.
As sympathy is gleaned from white readers, the conditions of colonialism that the novel seeks to highlight are effaced in the sentimental plot. The fight against elimination is erased and is replaced by the fight for settler sovereignty against exploitation. Losing the fight against intemperance or the vanishing of the Indian completes the ideology of romantic anticapitalism. Not only is the Indian disappeared and settler futurity sanctioned, but in projecting themselves onto the Indian characters, the lost fight of the Indian becomes the ongoing fight to preserve the frontier/Nature as the concrete, unity, and autonomy outside of/opposed to alienated life of capitalism.

Yet, importantly, Pokagon doesn’t finish the sentimental plot with the Indian vanishing and losing his or her battle with oncoming civilization. Like we saw in *Wynema, Queen of the Woods* veers away from its sentimental plot and introduces a language of realism through which it continues the critique of intemperance as stand in for exploitation. Specifically, Pokagon breaks out of the frame of the sentimental plot and offers direct critiques of the alcohol industry and the state’s role in supporting it. The language of these direct critiques is cut from the same cloth of muckraking journalism and its condemnation of monopoly enterprises at the time. Recounting to the reader the vision he has seen in a nightmare/dream, Pokagon describes alcohol as an invading, conquering monster dressed in the US flag and stamped with its seal:

I beheld marching among the mighty throng the most vicious-looking creature my eyes ever beheld; no brush of ‘mautchi manito’ (the devil) could paint his wicked ‘kinjig’ (face); no language of ‘Kitchiiskuto’ (hell) could describe it. About his form was wrapped ‘wabeyon’ (a blanker) with ‘anongog’ (the stars) and stripes thereon, among which was outline and American ‘migisi’ (eagle), with wings half
spread, while across ‘nikatigwan’ (his forehead) deeply impressed, I read, ‘United States and City Seals’ . . . Thus clothed with civic and national emblems, the despot marched forth . . . defiantly treading, with feet of steel, upon beating human hearts that were yet struggling in ‘miskwi’ (their own blood). (176-7)

If the novel’s sentimentalism allows white readers to resolve the conflict of alienated life under exploitation, the muckraking critique of exploitation suspends this ideological work. It forms an impasse with the sentimental plot and its ideology of romantic anticapitalism. The Indian never vanishes in Pokagon’s novel because Pokagon as narrator turns into a muckraking journalist. Without this ideological closure, the vision of romantic anticapitalism offered to white readers that the novel begins with dissolves by its end. While muckraking language is not incompatible with the sentimental novel, particularly the social reform sentimental novel, its presence in Pokagon’s novel makes impossible the ideological work of its sentimentalism.

Phillip Deloria Jr. suggests that such formal tensions in Pokagon’s novel index the contradictions of the Pokagon’s targeted audience and literary marketplace:

Pokagon’s slippages of form, style, and language point to a complicated, ambivalent cultural politics, one in which he sought opportunities to speak to non-Indian Americans through resonant ideological tropes: primitivism, temperance, sentimentalism, Christian brotherhood, and racial tolerance. At the same time, however, Pokagon clearly wanted the reader to understand the consequences of history and to know something of Indian dispossession and struggle. . . How to guide the content of readers’ engagement with the Indianness coded in the novel?
How to use the familiar tropes to speak to readers in ways that allowed them to see Indian histories? (viii)

Yet I contend that the generic bind between sentimentalism and the muckraking language is not merely a matter of audience. Rather, it encodes the underlying contingency of romantic anticapitalism as an important ideology securing labor’s support of capitalism at a time when more intense forms of abstraction and alienation emerged. This contingency is of course Indigenous resistance to elimination, or Native sovereignty.

The muckraking realism forms a generic bind with the novel’s sentimentalism through the way it treats the temporalities of colonialism and capitalism as co-present rather than as stages, with the latter replacing the former. It does this in two ways. The first is how Pokagon’s muckraking voice suggests that resistance to elimination is co-present with settlers’ resistance to new forms of exploitation. Pokagon warns that alcohol is an invading monster targeting simultaneously Indigenous people and settlers: “He is now fully satisfied the mighty Kraken is not in the sea, but on the land, and that the dreaded monster regards not age, race, or condition, but tramples down alike both chief and king; the white man in his palace, and the red man in his hut; alike the gray-haired sire, and the little son of tender years” (178). By placing the settler and Native on the same level of being targeted by exploitation, Pokagon traverses the temporal divide between colonial and capitalist relation that the novel’s sentimental plot has tried to reinforce. The sentimental plot which seeks sympathy from white readers for the vanishing Indian writes the temporality of the colonial relation as completed or finished. Colonialism is over when the project of elimination has been completed, at which point the settler takes the Indian’s place, marking the arrival of the capitalist relation. Romantic
anticapitalism depends on this temporal break or linear stagism between colonialism as a past and completed project ushering in the emergence of capitalist modernity. That is, settler indigenization as a way to access refuge from alienation in an Indian nature depends on this temporal framework in which the time of colonialism precedes the time of capitalism. Yet suggesting that Natives and settlers are targeted as the same time unsettles this linear temporality of capitalist modernity, or the way the settler of modernity replaces the Native of a romantic past when the settler goes to indigenize himself against alienation.

The second way the novel unsettles the temporal divide between colonialism and capitalism on which depends romantic anticapitalism is how the muckraking narrative voice treats the destruction of Native and settler society as intertwined and contemporaneous. If the generic expectation of the sentimentalized vanishing Indian plot is to envision the total destruction of Pokagon’s family and nation, the muckraking voice inverts this expectation by offering images of the destruction of the United States. Instead of envisioning only the vanishing of the Indian race, the novel offers an apocalyptic vision of exploitation’s impact on settler society:

Pokagon believes with all his heart, that if some dire ‘nibowin’ (contagion) should sweep our land as disastrous to health and life as the alluring cup, that those wild scenes which were enacted in London during the great plague there, would be repeated here. Business would be paralyzed; social gatherings cease . . . My dear white friends, Pokagon is fully convinced; yes, he doth know that this firewater of ‘anamakamig’ (hell) should give you greater cause for alarm than any ‘nobowin’ (disease) that has ever visited our shores. (180)
It was common among vanishing Indian narratives for Indian characters to suggest that just as apocalypse has visited them, so too would it, like a curse, befall settler society at some point in the future. *Wynema* makes this move as we saw in its ending. While this common trope appeared to denounce the crimes of settler society, it functioned to legitimize elimination by affirming that settler conquest had delivered an inevitable settler futurity. Yet here Pokagon as the muckraking narrator inverts this trope. What he asserts is not that just as the Indians of the past were destroyed, settlers of his time would face a similar fate. Instead, he suggests there are co-present destructions taking place. His voice is a contemporaneous voice bearing witness to exploitation’s attack on settlers. He is not the vanishing Indian of the past cursing settler society from the grave. The muckraking voice does not follow the linear temporality on which romantic anticapitalism depends. The end of Native society does not give birth to the beginning of settler society. Rather, there is a co-presence of the terminal endings of both societies. They appear in the novel structurally and temporally intertwined.

If Indian characters are not viewed, then, as vanishing but as co-present actors in their battle against colonialism, settlers cannot find refuge from capitalism in the spaces of an Indian nature that the novel’s sentimentalism had initially represented. For romantic anticapitalism to work, Indians have to vanish. Put slightly differently, romantic anticapitalism doesn’t work when colonialism and resistance against it are shown to be co-present with capitalism. The temporality of the colonial relation must be experienced as preceding and constitutive of the temporality of a settler capitalist present. In Pokagon’s novel, however, Indians break in on this present in their struggle against elimination, refusing the way in which sentimentalized vanishing Indian tropes helped
settlers accommodate themselves to capitalism. If the temporality of the Indian, the temporality of colonialism, appears intertwined with a capitalist modernity, the settler worker cannot find refuge from alienation in the space of a premodern, organic Indian frontier.

In this way, the generic bind between the novel’s sentimentalized vanishing Indian plot and its muckraking realism gives form to the way romantic anticapitalism as a central ideology cohering settler sovereignty (that capitalism’s expansion had strained) not only depended on elimination. It also shows how resistance to elimination, or Native sovereignty, made impossible the ways romantic anticapitalism helped racialize capitalism’s abstract and concrete qualities that helped white labor to side with capitalism by seeing its abstractions embodied in the menace of Alien labor.29 In this way, the novel doesn’t reproduce colonialist tropes of the vanishing Indian, nor does it offer a positive image of Native sovereignty. Rather, its generic bind demonstrates the illegitimacy of settler sovereignty (how it depends on elimination/made impossible by Native sovereignty) precisely in the moment when capitalism’s expansion had strained the capacity of this position of power to promise settler workers autonomy or semi-autonomy from proletarian life through the expectation of property. In doing so, Queen of the Woods hails the specter of catastrophe for capitalism, namely not only Indigenous rebellion but also labor rebellion.

In other words, with an understanding of how its generic bind reveals the illegitimacy of settler sovereignty, the novel can be said to offer an important intervention in the debates of the period on how labor should respond to capitalism’s expansion. A leading and typical voice for white labor, Henry George, had argued in his Poverty of
Progress that capitalism’s growth was premised on the production of inequality between labor and capital and that the solution was for the state to nationalize or de-privatize land to be equally distributed among all settlers. Underpinning this view was the assumption that the state had the obligation to ensure the integrity of settler sovereignty rather than the profit-motive of capitalism. In the context of this kind of demand, the novel’s mapping of the illegitimacy of settler sovereignty suggests that the settler state’s goal was not to ensure intra-settler equality but to advance the interests of capital. Pokagon questions why the state doesn’t tackle the problem of intemperance as allegory of exploitation: “if there is any reasonable excuse why partisans, politicians, and statesmen should not tread upon the neck of that soulless ‘mawtchi’ (tyrant) of humanity” (187). He continues, “my petitions have always been answered, but not in the voice of ‘animiki’ (thunder), nor emblazoned in characters of living ‘ishkote’ (fire) across ‘wawkwi’ (the heavaens), but in murmurs soft and low it has fallen upon ‘nin gomowin odaw’ (my waiting heart) as gently as the dews of evening upon the grass and flowers, whispering in ‘nintchitchang’ (my soul), ‘Pokagon, there is no good excuse’” (187). While this passage, and others like it in the novel, might sound like reformist appeals for an improved democracy, they take on much more radical meanings when set against the backdrop of the novel’s generic tension that brings to light the contingency of romantic anticapitalism as the ideology reconsolidating settler sovereignty. Suggesting that the settler state will not defend settler workers from the monster of exploitation reinforces the way muckraking realism has already unsettled the politics of the novel’s romantic anticapitalism that promises settlers’ refuge from exploitation.
In this way, Pokagon’s open critique of the state and its role in enabling exploitation’s targeting of settler laborers draws white readers’ attention to the contradiction of the settler state in its role of managing capitalism while also maintaining colonialism. It upholds the colonial relation, which gives power to all settlers over the colonized, but at the same it protects the capitalist relation, which gives power to owners over workers. The state’s task, then, in defending settler sovereignty as shared power across class divisions doesn’t come to mean ensuring economic equality. It means instead only ensuring labor sides with capital as a requisite for capitalism’s expansion. Pokagon’s novel thus offers a way of seeing settler sovereignty not as a position of power generative of egalitarian social relations among settlers—as the dream of settler democracy had always promised—but one in which inequality between capital and labor was not only permissible but cultivated, legitimated, and managed precisely through settler sovereignty in order to ensure capitalism’s successful expansion.

_Slavery After Slavery in The Life and Adventures of Nat Love_

If Callahan and Pokagon represent the role of colonial relation in the expansion of capitalism at the turn-of-the-century, Nat Love’s _The Life and Adventures_ (1907), an autobiography of a former slave turned wage laboring cowboy, maps the way the slave relation did not end with formal abolition, but continued in its function of cohering whiteness to ensure labor didn’t turn the conflict of exploitation into catastrophe for capital at this time. Love’s narrative details how in the years following emancipation, he flees the conditions of tenant farming in the South for the life of a cowboy and then Pullman porter in the West. It follows the conventions of the slave narrative by describing Love’s entrance into the wage labor market of the West as his escape from the
conditions of slavery in the South, a lateral geographical movement, but a movement nonetheless from bondage to freedom. Yet Love also uses the conventions of the dime-novel western that sensationalize and commodify his experience of freedom on the frontier as a wage laboring cowboy and Pullman porter. In the tradition of the slave narrative, Love’s story of freedom demands he be recognized as human, or be counted as a fellow free citizen of the nation, while the dime novel sensationalism commodifies Love’s experience of escaping slavery as a performance of freedom for the pleasure of his audiences. A tension forms between these narrative strategies. The realism of the slave narrative clashes with the melodrama of the dime-novel sensationalism. In other words, Love’s slave narrative as autobiography depends on a form of realism that convinces readers that the capitalist relation and liberal democracy are capable of incorporating former slaves as wage laborers and citizens. The dime novel sensationalism, however, serves as an aesthetic disruption to the realism of Love’s slave narrative. It presents Love’s experience of escaping slavery and working as a wage laborer not as evidence of his freedom and inclusion in humanity—a demand to be recognized as an equal to white audiences—but as a literary commodity to be consumed by white audiences.

This tension between demanding one to be recognized as human and commodifying one’s story of freedom to be consumed, I suggest, formally encodes the role anti-Blackness plays after emancipation in sustaining and reinforcing notions of wage labor as white labor despite labor’s increasingly full subordination to capital from 1873 and on. The subsumption of the labor process required producing consent and the commitment of labor to defend capital against colonial rebellions from below. For
capitalism to expand with the consent of labor, the ontological hierarchy between whiteness as freedom and blackness as slaveness, or as Frank Wilderson describes as “being for the captor” had to be reinforced and guarded (2). The generic tension of Love’s narrative helps us understand the way the capitalist relation depended on reproducing the slave relation through new means not only for economic reasons of the hyper-exploitation of Black labor, but perhaps more importantly for reasons of maintaining the integrity of whiteness as a cross-class position of shared power on which the reproduction of the capitalist relation rested.

To see how this tension forms in the novel and how it maps this antagonism, we have to understand how Love’s slave narrative seeks to convince readers that freed slaves could become wage laboring citizens. As a post-emancipation slave narrative, Love’s autobiography exemplifies what Hartman shows was the expectation of slaves after emancipation to see freedom as a gift from the very state and democracy that had enslaved African people in the first place. As a “gift,” freedmen were under the obligation of paying it back through obediently laboring in forms of involuntary servitude, from tenant farming to under-waged labor. As Hartman explains, “involuntary servitude and freedom were synonymous for a good many of the formerly enslaved . . . the whip was not to be abandoned; rather, it was to be internalized” (140). In this way, freedom meant placing the responsibility and burden of overcoming inequality and violence on former slaves themselves rather than blaming their unfreedom on the ongoing structures of white supremacy and capitalism. Hartman poses the question many former slaves confronted, “was the only difference between freedom and slavery to be ascertained in the choice to labor dutifully, bend’s one’s back joyfully, or act willingly as
one’s own inquisitor?” (141). This indirect form of domination complemented and reinforced ongoing forms of direct violence the state and white vigilantes used against the Black community: “consent cloaked coercion, and relations of domination and exploitation were masked by the designation ‘free will.’ The contract enshrined involuntary servitude as freedom and reduced the free worker to a debtor, peon, and bonded laborer” (147). Hartman’s point, then, is that slavery didn’t so much end as it was continued through new techniques and methods layered on top of old ones. Direct violence and terror continued with added strategies of fashioning obligation of the still enslaved.

Love’s slave narrative plot showcases this “fashioning of obligation” in its representation of his commitment to possessive individualism and investment in free labor as means of upward mobility. When Love and his mother pick wild berries to sell at the market to supplement their poverty earnings as tenant farmers, wild pigs eat their day’s work, leaving them in a dire situation with a day’s worth of labor wasted. Love shows how his self-motivated attitude overcomes the set-back:

now the fruit of our labor was gone and the disappointment was great. . . So I said, ‘Well, there is no use grieving over spilt milk. If we had not had them we could not have lost them, and there are plenty more of the same kind for the picking,’ Mother turned toward me, and said, with a look I will always remember, ‘My boy, whatever happens, you never get discouraged.’ I did not see the use of losing courage and I think the only time I weakened was when father died, as he could not be replaced. (34, 35)
If here Love emphasizes how his own efforts and attitude produce his freedom, he soon comes to see the West as the space in which these efforts and attitude will be most fully rewarded. “On our own ranch, among my own companions my position was as high as a king, enjoying the trust and confidence of my employers and the homage of the men many of whom were indebted to me on occasions when my long rope or ever ready forty-five colt pistol had saved them from serious injury or death” (70). The West appears as the terrain of idealized abstract free labor, a colorblind free market, in which laborers sell their skills and abilities in exchange for fair compensation. The more skilled and abled, the higher the compensation or reward.

Love works as a cowboy contracted to move herds of cattle to market. He repeatedly emphasizes how his skills at reading branding signs, riding, and shooting make him employable over others and that he is an irreplaceable laborer. As Love suggests

My expertness in riding, roping and in the general routine of the cow boy’s life, including my wide knowledge of the surrounding country, gained in many long trips and with herds of cattle and horses, made my services in great demand and my wages increase accordingly. To see me now you would not recognize the bronze hardened dare devil cow boy, the slave boy who a few years ago hunted rabbits in his shirt tail on the old plantation in Tennessee, or the tenderfoot who shrank shaking all over at the sight of a band of painted Indians. (70)

While the West hasn’t given him land, it has given him skills that function as property in terms of the means of carving out a space of semi-autonomy in the labor market to ensures one’s superiority over other laborers. By showing this to readers, Love fulfills the
expectations of the slave narrative that asks readers to see Love no longer as a slave but as a fellow free citizen and wage laborer.

Indeed, as a free laborer, Love must also prove he is a good defender of property and enforcer of whiteness. If as a slave he was the chattel, now as a wage worker he proves that he has switched places and is the free laborer chasing, catching, and defending with his life the company’s stock against cattle wrestlers and Indigenous people looking to expropriate property. Love describes how he is fully committed to this task of sacrificing his life to defend the property of the cattle companies: “It was our duty to save the cattle, and every thing else was of secondary importance” (54). In both of these ways of showing his marketable skills and abilities, and his commitment to defending property, Love works not only for wages but for the status that waged labor promises to offer, that is, of whiteness. Love’s pride in defending his company’s property, even risking life and limb to do so, becomes the badge, he hopes, of his inclusion into this category of free labor as white labor: “We did not care much for ourselves, as we were always read and in most cases anxious for a brush with the Indians, or for the other dangers of the trail, as they only went to relieve the dull monotony of life behind the herd. But these cattle were entrusted to our care and every one represented money, good hard cash” (63). In this category, the free laborer can make claims to unenslaveability or immunity from full subordination to capital. The slave narrative thus details Love’s move from the position of slave to the position of freedom or whiteness, a move indexed by his success as a wage laborer. He has demonstrated that he is capable of occupying this position and that this position is capable of absorbing him.
While his slave narrative works to convince readers that Love should be counted as equally or many times a more adept laborer and citizen, his autobiography also uses dime-novel conventions that commodify these his life-experiences as a cowboy and later Pullman porter. Like Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show, someone Love claims to have met and know personally, Love sells the Western experience of frontier freedom and mobility:

I am naturally tough as I carry the marks of fourteen bullet wounds on different parts of my body, most any one of which would be sufficient to kill an ordinary, but I am not even crippled. It seems to me that if ever a man bore a charm I am the man, as I have had five horses hot from under me and killed, have fought Indians and Mexicans in all sorts of situations, and have been in more tight places than I can number. Yet I have always managed to escape with only the mark of a bullet or knife as a reminder. (103-4)

Dime-novel conventions help Love to commodify his experiences in sensationalized form to be consumed/enjoyed by the audience. Expressing his life experiences in such a way works against the way the conventions of the slave narrative signal Love’s successful inclusion in wage labor. Love sensationalizes moments of autobiography for the sake of the pleasure they provide. Like how a commodity is produced not for its use-value but for an exchange-value, these slippages where Love sells his life experiences are offered not to document the evidence of his humanity as a free or unenslaveable subject but to indulge his audiences. While it might be easy to say that Love was merely trying to sell more copies of his narrative by commodifying his life experiences, this is too simple of an answer. When read in relation to the aims of his slave narrative, these moments of
selling his life experiences create a strange formal effect. They undermine the truth-factor of his slave narrative on which rests his demand to be recognized as human, that is, as unenslaveable in his new role as free laborer in the West.

In other words, the way Love narrates these experiences in order to be consumed for pleasure troubles the aims of the slave narrative plot which seeks to prove Love’s humanity marked by his inclusion in wage labor. How can the narrative demonstrate Love’s successful ascent to positions of equality and freedom when it also turns his life experiences into objects of entertainment and pleasure? One contradicts the other. Asking to be recognized as human, as a free, self-possessive subject through his success as a wage laborer becomes incompatible with the strategy of writing his life as a commodified performance of freedom to be consumed by readers. The latter labors for the audience, while the former makes demands on the audience. This tension, however, becomes a formal symptom, I suggest, marking the history of how the slave relation after the emancipation continued to underpin the production of wage labor as white labor. The way Love uses sensationalism to commodify his life for the pleasure of audiences analogizes the way the slave relation, in which the Slave is positioned through direct violence as an object to owned, was reproduced after emancipation in order to continue to cohere whiteness as a position managing the conflict between labor and capital. For as much as Love seeks to prove through his slave narrative that his success as a wage laborer indexes his escape from slavery, the dime novel sensationalism dramatizes the way Love continues to be positioned as a “being for the captor,” or an object to be owned for reasons of providing symbolic value to white settlers through which the internal conflicts of class, like labor’s conflict with capital, could be resolved.
What do I mean that Love remains positioned as a Slave and that the tension between his narrative strategies of the slave narrative and dime novel sensationalism reveals this? When Love becomes a Pullman porter mostly because the cattle industry has shed cowboy labor required for moving cattle to the market, he attempts to convince readers that his new line of work is an extension of his status as free laborer. There are long passages when he moves away from speaking about his life and takes on the voice of an advertiser for the Pullman company and the railroad industry in general. “The modern Pullman sleeping car is a veritable palace on wheels furnished in the best materials, without regard to expense, comfort, convenience and the safety of the passengers being the main object. . . Fine carpets cover the floors, the seats and charis are upholstered in the best and softest material, while every convenience is provided for the use of the lucky mortal who is called across the continent on business or pleasure” (137). He also sells the romanticized image of Western America: “I always say to the traveling American, ‘See America.’ How many of you have done so? Only those who have seen this grand country of ours can justly appreciate the grandeur of our mountains and rivers, valley and plain, canyon and gorge, lakes and springs, cities and towns, the grand evidences of God’s handiwork scattered all over this fair land which waves the stars and stripes” (144-5). In these two passages, Love sells status and nationalism. It is in this commodified narrative voice that he expresses the way his job as a Pullman porter is to be an object for another, a being for the captor, rather than a free wage labor as Love wants readers to believe. In his own autobiography which convinces readers of the freedom he found as a Pullman porter, Love reveals his unfreedom demonstrated by the fact that he continues to labor for the railroad industry by selling the experience of
westward travel, suggesting that the railroad company still owns his life not only or just his labor since in the story of his own life—which he writes himself—he promotes and thus serves the interest of the railroad industry just as much as himself. His life experience is treated as equivalent and fungible to the commodity of train travel he sells in his narrative. In doing so, this commodification of his life experience works against the way Love maintains that he achieves freedom through his work as a Pullman porter. What we see in this disruption is how Love, as both a cowboy and Pullman porter remains positioned as a Slave, even though he receives wages for his labor. His work as a wage laborer is secondary to his primary role to serve as a being for the captor. He remains positioned as a Slave even as he attempts to convince readers he is free through wage labor.

If this tension shows how Love continues to be positioned as a Slave, we see, then, how Love within this position produces the symbolic value cohering whiteness as it came to be strained by capitalism’s expansion. For instance, Love learns from his manager that “the whole secret of success,” of the Pullman porter, “was in pleasing all my passengers. I told him I thought it was all right about pleasing two or three passengers but when it came to pleasing a whole car full of passengers, that was another matter” (133). There is a difference between attending to the needs of individual travelers and pleasing them as a group. Everyone must be pleased or no one is pleased becomes the task of the job. While Love says he is there for the money and it is his choice, the role of the Pullman porter as the minstrel figure is shown to serve to affirm white superiority and black inferiority, the master-slave relation dramatized in the rituals of the train car service where white passengers enjoy access to the freedom of mobility and status of superiority.
against the immobility and subservience of an all-black porter staff waiting on them hand
and foot. It is not about exploitation of labor power here as it is about rehearsing the
master-slave relation to affirm the integrity of whiteness at this time.

In another example of this, Love describes how the Pullman porter knows no
boundaries in terms of his dedication to serving white passengers. The Pullman porter
must be expected to serve as an entertainer and nurse to white passengers:

The Pullman porter of today must be a very versatile sort of a person, he must
have plenty of patience, be a good judge of human nature, quick, kind and
observant. Many are the times a gouty and crusty passenger has traveled in my
car, who was in such a bad humor that it was next to impossible to please him, yet
before he had ridden a hundred miles with me, I had him in good humor and
laughing with the rest of the passengers. ‘Laugh and the whole world laughs with
you.’ It is by no means an uncommon thing for us porters to called upon to turn
nurse for sick or invalid passengers in our car, and often have I watched by the
bedside of a sick passenger, feeding him, giving him medicine, bathing him and in
fact becoming for the time being a hospital nurse, and many are the blessings I
have received from my sick passengers, both men and women, whose pain I have
eased, and their last moments on earth I have cheered. And this, dear reader, we
do in the name of humanity and not in the name of tips. (141)

To work in the name of humanity rather than for wages, which elsewhere Love has
emphasized repeatedly is his motivation for becoming a Pullman (along with the freedom
to travel), expresses the difference between exploitation of the wage laborer and being for
the captor. Willing to do anything necessary to please white passengers not for wages but
for humanity stages the way Black life must remain an object of pleasure and violence against which the cohesion of whiteness or humanity is maintained. While Love suggests in these moments that he overcomes the way is positioned as a Slave, where he is told to labor for humanity and not wages, by convincing readers he is a free wage laborer, the other moments when he commodifies his life experiences reveal his ongoing positioning as a Slave. The commodification of his life that render his experiences as objects of pleasure for readers points up what his slave narrative must conceal in order to make its demand on readers to recognize him as human, namely that blackness continues to position him as a Slave.

The importance, then, of Love’s narrative is how it maps this relationship between producing blackness as slaveness and maintaining the wages of whiteness on which depended the reproduction of the capitalist relation during a time when its expansion intensified labor’s conflict with capital. The conflicts of this expansion Love’s autobiography have demonstrated throughout his story as a wage laborer. The cattle monopolies treated their workers as disposable, expected them to be trampled to death for the production of beef as a commodity, or how these same industries used labor-saving technologies to shed labor, leaving workers superfluous. Love as the wage laborer seeks to convince readers of his obedience, loyalty, and willingness to defend capital despite the way capital has intensified its conflict with labor through an increased subsumption of the labor process. In fact, Love’s story as a wage laborer, from a worker made disposable and then superfluous by the cattle industry to Pullman porter to security guard for a California bank, tracks this expansion of capitalism that increasingly moves toward more abstract forms of accumulation, and Love has shown to have endured it all. Yet the novel
has made visible that what underwrites this appearance of the resolution between labor and capital has been the maintaining of the slave relation, which has registered formally in the moments when Love commodifies the experience of his life he tries to prove is one of freedom. Which is to say, that the tension in these narrative strategies embodies the way the slave relation was reproduced after emancipation not only to extract value from Black labor but to sustain the meanings of wage labor as free labor and thus labor that consents and defends the capitalist relation.

While Love’s autobiography appears to reinforce narratives of whiteness, and for this is considered a minor African American narrative, we can see that it’s generic tension reveals what more serious novels at the time addressed at the level of their content. Love’s narrative structure embodies the violence of the slave relation in which terror and force produce Blackness as slaveness, whereas other African American narratives at the time represented this same violence through manifest images. Charles Chestnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), or Sutton Griggs’ *The Hindered Hand* (1905), or Ida B. Wells writings represented stories of anti-Black violence, demonstrating how its role, among many things, was to ensure the integrity of whiteness as a position of power in the decades following emancipation and Reconstruction. Love’s narrative shouldn’t be seen, then, as a divergence from the concerns of these other African American narratives. The way its formal tension embodies the ongoing role of the slave relation in maintaining whiteness as the site at which labor and capital can be reconciled not only corresponds to the concern of more politicized antiracist writings, but it also offers an insightful view of capitalism’s relationship to slavery, of the wage labor relation’s dependence on anti-Black violence. That his novel slides into this commodified
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language is the way it shows how wage labor cannot be understood without also
confronting the underlying anti-Black violence sustaining it as free or white labor.

Love’s narrative also forms a third piece to the map the novels of Callahan and
Pokagon had drawn up of colonial and racial dispossession’s relationship to capitalism in
the late nineteenth-century. If Callahan and Pokagon represented how ongoing forms of
Native elimination consolidated settler sovereignty as a site of shared power where intra-
settler conflicts could be overcome, such as gendered exclusions from holding settler
power or worker alienation, Love’s narrative illustrates how wage labor didn’t replace
slavery so much as the slave relation remained ongoing as a structurally necessity for
maintaining wage labor as white labor. Love’s narrative reveals how capitalism’s
expansion depended on wage labor remaining consenting labor in the face of increased
exploitation, disciplining, absorption, and superfluousness. By keeping wages white,
wage labor could consent to increased exploitation and overcome the crisis of their
reproduction, thus allowing capital to avoid catastrophic rebellion or refusal. And history
would prove Love’s narrative true: from the turn-of-the-century to the 1920s, European
labor would come to increasingly consent to the wage labor relation through whiteness.
While labor did rebel intensely during this time, these rebellions never became
catastrophic in ways that they could have been if they had been aligned with rather than
opposed to anticolonial rebellion and Black liberation movements.

*Becoming the Twentieth-Century’s Hegemon through Nineteenth-Century Dispossession*

I have argued that Callahan, Pokagon, and Love map the way dispossession
helped (re)cohere the positions of settler sovereignty and whiteness to ensure the
reproduction of capitalism during its time of rapid expansion. As this expansion increased
intra-settler conflicts and crisis, the fortification of settler sovereignty and whiteness ensured that this expansion moved forward without catastrophe. From this we can draw a few conclusions. The first is that the novels of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love offer a view of capitalism that is broader in scope than the view some of the major works of realism and naturalism offer. That is, such works of realism and naturalism focus on the conflict of the wage labor relation which nonetheless remains an intra-settler conflict. Whether realism or naturalism map or conceal class relations is of secondary importance to the fact that their concern solely lies in responding to the changes in the wage labor relation among settlers and how these changes remade settler civil society at the turn-of-the-century. Yet the problem of labor’s conflict with capital is only half of the story of capitalism. It cannot be fully approached without also thinking of its relationship to the colonial and racial structures of dispossession underpinning it. This other half of capitalism’s story is what the works of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love have wrestled with in their attempts to envision solutions to colonial and racial violence.

If in Chapters 1 and 2, Ridge, Ruiz de Burton, and Delany represented how the wage labor relation emerged from the process of colonialism and slavery creating ontological hierarchies between the white settler and the colonized and enslaved, here in Chapter 3 we see how colonialism and slavery were structurally integral to capitalism’s transition to more mature, centralized forms of production and accumulation. The colonial relation and slave relation not only continued to deliver the land and bodies necessary for this transition but also, as the generic tensions in the works of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love have made visible, helped re-consolidate the positions of power of settler sovereignty and whiteness in which the conflict between labor and capital arising
from this new transition of capitalism could be successfully managed. We see, then, how the colonial and slave relation constitute the capitalist relation and how, in turn, the movement of the capitalist relation to higher forms of accumulation dialectically requires maintaining through new means the colonial and slave relations. Assimilation continued the project of Native elimination but in less costly ways. Segregation, state violence, and vigilante terrorism continued to make Blackness mean slaveness. This helps answer the question of how to historicize the relationship between the capitalist, colonial, and slave relation after the formal abolition of slavery or after the period of militarized conquest of Indigenous nations. I have shown how the capitalist relation does not supplant or outgrow the colonial and slave relation but, as the maps of these novels reveal, depends on them for its reproduction as it expands into more mature forms.

Because these novels represent the role of dispossession in consolidating positions of power in which capitalism could expand without catastrophe, they also help explain, in part, why the United States’ national economy emerged as the world’s hegemon in the twentieth century to come. Arrighi suggests that the United States emerged as the world’s hegemon because of a few factors. One of the central causes he cites was the rise of corporate capitalism or the vertical integration of the production process that gave the United States economy the power to outcompete other national economies in replacing the waning British empire. It was “the emergence of this kind of corporate structure in the United States,” Arrighi argues that, “became the effective foundation of a new stage of capitalism on a world scale” in the twentieth century (302). While Arrighi identifies the corporate form as the cause of the United States’ rise to dominance, the works of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love offer a view of some of the underlying conditions in which
corporate capitalism could emerge at the turn-of-the-century. If one of the primary features of vertical integration was the increased absorption of labor as well as the drive to further subsume the labor process to increase productivity, these changes were met with resistance at every step of the way.

Yet, as these novels have demonstrated, settler sovereignty and whiteness began to be remade to ensure the conflicts producing labor resistance didn’t turn into catastrophes preventing the transition to corporate forms of production. For example, it was Andrew Carnegie, the owner of one of the most infamous vertical integration enterprises, his steel company, who had revealed this fear of disloyal workers and the specter of catastrophe. In his famous essay, “The Gospel of Wealth,” Carnegie’s view on philanthropy was less about what to do with surplus wealth than about regaining the consent of wage labor, or ensuring wage labor continued to be lived as white labor.32 Achieving this required reconsolidating whiteness and settler sovereignty, and it is this history of dispossession’s role in doing so that Callahan, Pokagon, and Love’s narratives bring to light. In this way, then, they also narrate how reproducing the colonial and slave relation ensured that the rise of corporate capitalism was more easily achieved, thus clearing the path for the US economy to emerge as the world’s hegemon.

Still, if the generic tensions in the works of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love map how forms of dispossession created the conditions in which US capitalism could emerge as the world’s next hegemon, they at the same time also highlight how resistance to colonial and racial dispossession was always a very real threat to capitalism’s expansion. Resistance to Native elimination and anti-Blackness destabilized the positions of power of settler sovereignty and whiteness through which the wage labor relation could be
resolved to ensure capitalism expanded without facing catastrophic setbacks. If ongoing dispossession delivered the United States the strongest national economy in the world-system, resistance to dispossession held the potential to create the catastrophe that could have made this rise to dominance impossible. In this way, the generic tensions in the works of Callahan, Pokagon, and Love that make explicit the way resistance to dispossession unsettles capitalism’s forward movement, undermine the teleology of the “American century” to come, suggesting it was never inevitable and always irredeemable.
Chapter 4

Recognition, Refusal, and the White Nationalist Welfare State

In the years following the economic crisis of 1929, Native, African, and Mexican American novelists represented the Great Depression as an event unfolding on top of a much longer and uninterrupted history of colonization and racialization. Yet the plight of white workers and small farmers gained attention where the suffering of the colonized and racialized continued, as we saw in Chapter 1 in the case of Ridge’s Murieta, to be ungrievable. In *The Surrounded* (1936), Salish novelist D’Arcy McNickle emphasizes the disparity between the recent economic troubles of white ranchers and the continuous life of dispossession of Indigenous peoples in the 1930s. In one scene, the novel’s protagonist, Archilde, “heard the complaints of the white ranchers . . . but he felt no sympathy. It made one smile to hear them talk about their troubles” (232). In fact, Archilde points out that if white ranchers “would walk through Indian town . . . they would see that one summer was like another. In years of abundance no less than in lean years, the Indians sat in their dark doorways with no expectations, looking out upon a world of meaningless coming and going” (232). In *The Street* (1946), African American writer Ann Petry points out how the wealth of white families in times of economic hardship depends on Black female domestic labor. As a domestic worker for the Chandlers, a white family in the Connecticut suburbs, Lutie Johnson, the novel’s Black female protagonist, observes that because her employer “manufactured paper towels and paper napkins and paper handkerchiefs, why, even when times were hard, he could afford to hire a Lutie Johnson so his wife could play bridge in the afternoon while Lutie Johnson looked after [the family’s son] Little Henry” (29). In *George Washington Gómez* (1936-
Américo Paredes shows the uneven experience of the Great Depression for Mexican Americans of South Texas: “to the Mexican laborer who tilled the American landowner’s fields and orchards, such a thing as a depression was beyond his understanding. He could not imagine a state of things where he would be poorer than he already was. He had heard about the people of Oklahoma, who were leaving their land, getting on their trucks and going west. To the Mexicotexan laborer, anybody who owned a truck was rich” (195). All three novels register a concern that colonized peoples’ longstanding demand for freedom continued to be disavowed precisely in the moment when New Deal reforms rescue working- and middle-class whites from economic crisis. In doing so, these authors ask not only why is there such a disparity in the experience of the Great Depression, but how might literary representation help Native, Black, and Mexican American communities garner the same recognition and redress?

The literary genre to emerge after 1929 representing this demand for redemption from the Great Depression was a revived form of naturalist protest fiction, a political aesthetic, what Theodore Adorno would consider “committed art” distinct from modernist autonomy. As literary historian Donald Pizer points out, the economic crisis of the 1930s helped produce a “new flowering of the naturalist novel” (Twentieth-Century 14). This revival of the naturalist novel was a continuation of how literary naturalism had always been an art of the polemic, an art of protest, in particular the protest against industrial capitalism. Works like Frank Norris’ *The Octopus*, Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Street*, Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, Jack London’s *Iron Heel*, or Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* or *King Coal* highlight conditions of economic oppression in ways meant to shock and alarm a reading public. But where the early
naturalist novel saw only determinism, 1930s naturalist novel sees hope for change. As Pizer argues, “the basic cast of the naturalist novel of the 1930s” was “the diagnosis of an illness and the suggestion of a remedy,” and that this “creates an effect different from that of the naturalistic novel of the 1890s. The concluding impression is not now one of circularity, of blankness and puzzlement. . . It is rather an effect of understanding and therefore of an element of hope” (Twentieth-Century 15).³ Working class writers and authors writing on behalf of the working class turn to naturalist fiction, then, as workerist propaganda that documents conditions of economic determinism in order to advocate for the redemption of workers, whether through reforms from the state or more radically a socialist future. The latter was, of course, the aim of the proletarian novel, which I consider a genre emerging from literary naturalism, whose purpose was to raise class consciousness among a working-class readership to help transform workers from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself.

In this way, like the reform or civic novel of the nineteenth century, naturalist protest fiction of 1930s should be understood as reinforcing the logic of the liberal social contract. Through documentary description of worker abjection and plots of economic determinism, naturalist protest fiction showcases for readers conditions in violation of liberal civil society that the state is expected to correct. Keith Newlin has argued that naturalists “employed the narrative devices of melodrama as an efficacious means to convince readers of the truth of their theses and to elicit sympathy for their protagonists or even . . . to prompt readers to take action to redress social imbalance” (“Introduction” 6). Similarly, Jude Davies suggests that naturalists “interpolate readers as fellow members of the middle-class and offer them access to the public, domestic, and laboring
spaces of those who work manually or who are unemployed” (307). By representing poverty as a spectacle for the reform-minded middle-class subject, naturalism advocates for the amelioration of poverty but not the elimination of the class structure producing such poverty. It advocates, in other words, for reforms as a way to prevent class inequality turning into labor rebellion. As June Howard points out, the representation of worker suffering as spectacle for the middle-class outside observer equaled the politics of the Progressive Era and New Deal reforms to come: “progressive agitation consistently served to channel unrest into movements which did not challenge the fundamental order of society, that is, which reproduced the relations of production; and one can argue that their reforms strengthened the position of the powerful by extending the influence of state apparatuses” (131). If, as Howard also maintains, naturalism anticipated Progressive Era reforms, we can see perhaps why this mode of representation has a revival after 1929 as a vehicle for demanding recognition and redress for the plight of workers and small farmers.

If naturalist protest represents the plight of workers and small farmers in ways that demand redress through state actions, I want to explore how McNickle, Petry, and Paredes use this narrative mode to represent ongoing conditions of colonialism and anti-Blackness. I argue that these writers use naturalism not so much to demand recognition from the state than to show how the state will never offer such recognition to colonized and enslaved peoples in the United States. Their use of naturalism demonstrates how the recognition white workers receive through New Deal reforms is denied to colonized and racialized peoples precisely because the legitimacy of these reforms and the welfare state they create, which maintains harmony between labor and capital, depends on upholding
projects of elimination and social death. They use the very genre at the time most forcefully reinforcing and appealing to the liberal social contract to suggest not only how their communities are positioned as the exterior to this contract in a zone of non-recognition, non-being, and thus outside of the welfare state protections, but how this exclusion and exteriority are constitutive of liberal recognition in the first place. In other words, it is in how they take the very genre garnering recognition for white workers and show how it cannot produce the same visions for colonized people that these authors use naturalist narrative strategies to prove that there is no reciprocity across colonial difference. Their novels thus make visible how colonized and enslaved peoples’ demand for recognition from the US state is a lost cause, that the welfare state does not offer redemption for these groups like it does for white labor because, as a settler state, its job is to secure settler unity between labor and capital, the integrity of the liberal social contract, required for capitalist expansion, a forging of a mutuality between labor and capital enabling US capitalism’s Fordist stage of production.

From this, I will demonstrate that the novels of McNickle, Petry, and Paredes reveal how the welfare state is the project to restore the nineteenth-century dream of achieving a settler democracy. In the welfare state, the security and protections offered to the Fordist worker, a promise of immunity from disposability and a greater share of the value labor produces, seek to achieve a permanent mutuality between worker and owner like was promised in the nineteenth century. Instead of promising workers escape from their proletarian status, New Deal reforms promise that the Fordist worker will make gains precisely through the further growth of welfare state capitalism that depends on colonialism at home and imperialism abroad. The welfare state as restoration of settler
democracy is not the dream of eliminating class difference among settlers but one of forging a more permanent unity despite of it. Furthermore, by demonstrating how the protest novel is a form of asking for recognition from a state and settler public that will never offer it to colonized peoples, these writers offer models, as I will show, of refusing welfare state hegemony that comes to discipline and control white workers. Their works are refusals to seek redemption and freedom in and through the same categories underpinning the welfare state and Fordist production, namely nation-state sovereignty, the nuclear family, the industrial collective or “universal” worker, that are premised on their peoples’ death and elimination.

The Surrounded and the Indian New Deal

D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded* tells the story of how the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation in Western Montana struggle to overcome the disastrous effects of allotment policy, while confronting new changes in the federal government’s relationship to tribal nations in the 1920s to early 1930s. The novel’s protagonist, Archilde Leon, has returned to the reservation after working as a fiddle player in the Northwest. He seeks to reconnect with his Salish mother, Catherine Wolfe and his white father Max Leon, an early settler of the area of Spanish descent. While many critics read *The Surrounded* in the context of modernism, mostly because McNickle himself had travelled and studied in Europe and sought intellectual community with other modernist writers, I maintain that the novel be understand within the tradition of 1930s naturalist protest fiction that demands redemption for poor and working class people feeling the pains of the Great Depression. The novel itself suggests that it is the overrepresented plight of white small farmers and
workers that drives its impulse to document a much longer but overlooked history of abjection among Indigenous people. In response to the economic crisis following 1929, the narrator remarks:

If they wanted to see misery and hopelessness let them look around . . . If they would walk through Indian town—that part of St. Xavier given over to crumbling log cabins and dogs and Indians, with the high brick church overtowering all—they would see that one summer was like another. In years of abundance no less than in lean years, the Indians sat in their dark doorways with no expectations, looking out upon a world of meaningless coming and going. (232)

McNickle uses strategies of naturalist protest fiction to bring attention to and demand justice for what are the novel emphasizes very distinct conditions of colonization the Salish people face when compared to conditions of economic crisis settlers confront.

What are these conditions? Through the story-telling of Old Modeste, a chief and uncle of Catherine, and Father Grepilloux, the local priest, the novel gives an account of the long history of colonialism shaping the present conditions of poverty and unfreedom of the Salish. Modeste emphasizes the role of genocidal military campaigns and the church in colonizing the Salish. Father Grepilloux emphasizes that allotment was a policy that further dispossessed lands and weakened tribal sovereignty and not one ever intended to generate economic prosperity among the Salish people. While Father Grepilloux tries to exempt himself from his own role as colonizer, he nonetheless makes clear: “these people have lost a way of life, and with it their pride, their dignity, their strength. Men like Jeff Irving have murdered their fathers and their sons with impunity. Gross-natured officials have despoiled them, they are insulted when they present grievances” (59). The
point of these stories is to show that what the novel protests are conditions with a much longer history and severity than those of the most recent economic crisis of 1929. The novel’s strategy of representing them, then, has a much different task ahead of itself than that found in novels protesting worker suffering at the time.

There are two ways that McNickle uses naturalist techniques to protest these ongoing conditions of colonialism. The first is the novel’s naturalist plot of pessimistic determinism in which colonialism is the overpowering force that robs Archilde of any choice or agency to be free. As the title suggests, Archilde cannot escape or find freedom in a world determined by settler colonialism. Initially, Archilde appears as the modernist figure who finds refuge from the modern world in the primitive, pre-industrial scenes of Salish land: “He looked toward the mountains in the east, and then upward to the fleckless sky. Nowhere in the world, he imagined, was there a sky of such depth and freshness. He wanted never to forget it, wherever he might be in times to come. Yes, wherever he might be!” (5). Like a Nick Adams of a Hemingway short story, Archilde finds refuge from modernity in the simplicity of the primitive: “Tomorrow he would go fishing. He would look at the sky some more. He would ride his horse. Then wherever he might go, he would always keep the memory of these things” (14). This refuge, however, is quickly shown to be nothing less than a prison, spaces of containment and unfreedom from which there is no escape. Miscommunication and tragic coincidences lead to the murder of Archilde’s brother, Louis, and later Archilde’s capture, and what will be his imprisonment for the deaths of the game warden and sheriff.

The novel’s last scene captures this well in which Archilde embraces and accepts the inevitability of his containment and unfreedom. As the BIA agent Parker tells
Archilde, “It’s too damn bad you people never learn that you can’t run away. It’s pathetic” (297). The response is that “Archilde, saying nothing, extended his hands to be shackled” (297). For Archilde to passively embrace his own capture completes a plot that asks readers to see how the reservation continues to function as a prison where the institutions of the state, the church, and private business police and exploit the Salish people as prisoners on their own lands.\textsuperscript{11} If economic determinism is the concern in 1930s naturalist fiction, McNickle represents a form of colonial determinism as the force underpinning his novel’s fatalist plot ending in containment and impossibility for escape. To represent Archilde as a naturalist figure fated, it seems, to remain contained and imprisoned by forces beyond his control attempts to elicit reader sympathy, but not in the way sentimentalism had done in the nineteenth century in which such sympathy legitimized the “vanishing” of the Indian.\textsuperscript{12} Rather, using a naturalist plot of fatality, the novel demands Archilde be seen in the same way as other proletarian subjects facing conditions of abjection and thus deserving of state recognition and redemption.

Along with its naturalist plot of fatality, \textit{The Surrounded} also uses documentary description to expose conditions of abjection in the reservation. Take for instance the following description that opens one of the novel’s chapters:

It is muddy spring. A horse carries its ride at a heavy legged gallop, throwing clumps of earth far to rearward. The trailing dog keeps to one side, leaping puddles, disdainful of the ooze. Horse and dog, when they reach town, will have pellets of mud hanging from tips of hair, and the dog will seek a dry spot where it can lie down and clean its paw. . . The land, on such a day, is barren. Having been first withered by frost, then crushed by a burden of snow, only the strongest forms
are left standing; only the hardy pines bear their natural aspect, and they seem more black than green. Everywhere on the land is the imprint of ruin, dead grass pressed into mud, and in hollow places leaf forms massed in decay. These are shells and husks. The juices that flowed strengtheningly were blackened and destroyed by the first frost of the autumn [sic]. (167-8)

The land is a naturalist metaphor for the Salish people and colonialism is the long winter that has left the land barren and without, it seems in this description, a hope for renewal or regeneration with the coming spring. Keith Newline suggests that the documentary mode of naturalism, like seen here in this passage, is about a didacticism through affect: “naturalists are more concerned with the symbolic or emotional potential presented by the ‘human document.’ And their descriptions tend to reflect their interest in showing the emotional resonance of a scene, which they then present to the reader as a spectacle for amusement or instruction” (106). It is the focus on objects of ruin, death, blackness, and destruction that evoke feelings of lament and sympathy.

The same documentary mode represents the extreme poverty of the Salish people. For instance, Archilde in one scene confronts Salish women returning from the slaughter house with entrails as food:

When Archilde drove by the slaughter house, a mile out of St. Xavier, he saw women carrying off pots of blood-smeared entrails, and he felt helpless. Once he stopped at sight of a very old woman who was going home with such a feast. A battered washtub, filled with the greenish-blue guts, on which flies were swarming, was loaded on a child’s wagon. The wheels of this cart were of odd sizes and the whole affair swayed on the point of collapsing. The old woman, in
her rags and filth, was really revolting, if one did not remember that she could not help her looks or her condition. Presumably she had not chosen such a life. . . She had to live without decency, like an animal, with nothing to live for, except perhaps an old man who was no better off. He stood before her and could do nothing. (232)

After Archilde asks the woman if she has no food and where she lives, he learns she is also deaf. “She could not even understand that he wished to help. The notion was foreign to her, whether she heard or not. He offered money, held it out to her, even pressed it into her hands; but her fingers were nerveless for lack of recognition. She stood motionless for a long time after he had gone, gazing at the money note in her hand. What did it mean? Her old man, no doubt, would shake his head and scold her for being so foggy” (232-235). Like other naturalist figures of abjection such as Crane’s Maggie or Dreiser’s Hurstwood, the aging Salish woman appears controlled by her circumstances, without agency, and serves for readers as an object of sorrow. Like the land left barren by a long winter, the old woman is rendered a spectacle of abjection for the spectator reader, a relationship in which the documentation of poverty is about eliciting recognition that leads to redress.

That is, it is meant to shock and unsettle readers who as a result are encouraged to support measures of amelioration. As Donald Pizer argues, naturalism was always about “emotive reportage which asked readers to share in the shock and dismay” of the mistreatment of the lower classes. Speaking on the strategies of Crane and Garland says, Pizer says, “the writer’s stress is not on demonstrating the origins of an inescapable prison but on encouraging the reader to accept the idea that conditions within the prison
are intolerable and that its walls must be torn down and its prisoners freed” (“Re-
Introduction” 197). This documentary description becomes the way of seeing the truth of
colonialism countering the ways settlers, as the novel reveals, look at Indians during the
summer festival where dancing Indians are a spectacle for entertainment. “There was
nothing real in the scene [Archilde] came upon. The rows of carriages and wagons were
bad enough, but that wasn’t the worst. The idea was of a spectacle, a kind of low-class
circus where people came to buy peanuts and look at freaks” (216). The image of the old
woman confronts readers with the pitiable truth of colonialism who otherwise are
expecting to be entertained by performing Indians.

However, to document abjection and containment for reasons of shock and
sympathy, is to appeal to a public and the liberal state to remedy such conditions, the
same state causing such conditions in the first place. By representing abjection in
naturalist language, the novel seeks a recognition productive of redress from the state. In
this way, the novel’s naturalism parallels the same logic of recognition that underpinned
the creation of the “Indian New Deal” with the passing of the Indian Reorganization Act
of 1934. With John Collier’s IRA, the state promised to move away from allotment era
policies that had sought to break up the land-bases and communal economies of
Indigenous peoples. Moving away from this, the IRA promised to recognize tribal
sovereignty. If allotment policy sought to transform Indigenous people into individual
private property holders, the IRA was a gesture that these former policies would be
reversed by acknowledging the right of tribes to govern and manage their own
economies. Like other middle-class reformers and moral citizens who advocated for
progressive reforms to ameliorate the conditions entrapping workers, Collier sought
similar reforms for Native America that could bring reconciliation or harmony between settler society and Indigenous peoples. It was from the recognition of the dire conditions among tribal nations, its authors argued, that prompted the Indian New Deal, an attempt to correct the harm done to Indigenous people.

However, the IRA was not a correction but a continuation of allotment policy through its aim of assimilating forms of tribal governance to serve the interests of capital accumulation through uneven development between the United States and the newly recognized tribal nations. Tribal nations could gain federal recognition, aid, support, and guidance only if they set-up governing structures conducive to this uneven development favoring the United States and further impoverishing tribal economies. Mark Rifkin shows how the assimilation practices of allotment paved the way for the assimilation of tribal governing structures:

reorganization foregrounds the existence of tribes as polities but in ways that presume allotment-era ideologies with respect to kinship and residency, resulting in the displacement of existing tribal councils . . . Under reorganization, the sorts of privatization at play in the previous policy help define the boundaries of federally acknowledged tribal identity, naturalizing conjugal homemaking and using the supposedly self-evident distinction between domesticity and governance to normalize liberal assumptions about citizenship, property, and the work of political institutions that then are cast as the foundation for native politics. (184) 

The face of IRA policy in the novel is the BIA agent Mr. Parker who sees his role on the Salish reservation to work with local tribal authorities like the tribal sherriff to indirectly manage reservation life rather than working with Sherriff Dave Quigley who embodies a
former “Old West” method of direct violence. At the level of form, it is the novel’s naturalist mode that encodes the liberal recognition of IRA policy in which it is promised that the state will offer redress and redemption for conditions Indigenous people face that violate the liberal social contract.

But as Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) argues such liberal recognition is a ruse meant to reproduce the colonial relation. The settler state is only interested in ameliorating conditions it has created insofar as such reforms maintain the colonial relation. As Coulthard explains:

In these contexts, the ‘master’—that is, the colonial state and state society—does not require recognition from the previously self-determining communities upon which its territorial, economic, and social infrastructure is constituted. What is needs is land, labor, and resources. Thus, rather than leading to a condition of reciprocity the dialectic breaks down with the explicit nonrecognition of the equal status of the colonized population, or with the strategic ‘domestication’ of the terms of recognition leaving the foundation of the colonial relationship relatively undisturbed. (40)

*The Surrounded*’s naturalist aesthetic is one, then, that legitimizes the settler state and the colonial relation. By seeking recognition from the state, the naturalist strategy cements in place the asymmetrical relation between Native life and settler society by calling for a less violent form of this relationship but not the destruction of the relationship and the forms of life and death it produces.

*The Surrounded*, however, is very much aware of the limits of the IRA and of this logic of recognition. Its political content criticizes what the novel’s naturalist form
appears to legitimize, or put slightly differently, the novel’s political messaging serves as a criticism of the politics of its own naturalist narrative strategy. For example, we see how the novel shows recognition to be a colonial ruse in the allegorical scene of Archil de trying to rescue a dying bay mare. While riding the just outside of the reservation in a location known as the “badlands,” Archilde comes across a lame and starving “aged bay mare” and her young colt (238). Archilde wants to help the ailing mare, but in trying to catch her, the mare resists and he only ends up exhausting her to the point of death. Aware that in helping the mare he is killing her, Archilde nonetheless persists: “he had to show her kindness in spite of herself. It was more important than ever” (240). Archilde feels responsible for her condition: she is a former work-horse of the reservation that has endured many hours of forced labor. Eventually catching her, Archilde grooms, feeds, and waters the mare, but “as everything was coming to a happy conclusion and Archilde was feeling cheered... the perverse creature at the end of his rope suddenly stumbled, pitched forward, and rolled over. She groaned aloud, a final note of reproach for the ears of the man who had taken it upon himself to improve her condition” (242). In this allegory, the bay mare is a figure for Native America, and Archilde, as her pursuer, embodies the settler state. The mare is disposable and wants nothing to do with what made her disposable. As critic Alicia Kent remarks on this scene, “He had taken it upon himself to improve the mare’s condition but fails miserably, invoking... the paternalism of federal policy toward Native Americans” (32). By helping her in spite of herself, Archilde acts in the same way IRA policy treats Indigenous people, namely seeking to help solve a problem that the settler state has caused in the first place.
Archilde sees the mare, however, as naturalism would have him see her, as an object of sorrow and abjection in need of redemption. In this way, Archilde cannot recognize the mare’s refusal. While the allegory lays out a criticism of IRA as a ruse, a ruse of state recognition, it’s also a criticism of naturalist social protest as a mode of seeing colonialism, one that reinforces the logics of liberal recognition maintaining colonialism. It is the way Archilde sees the mare as an object of abjection, the way he feels bad for her from this view of her as abject, that compels him to step in and try to save her in spite of her attempts to refuse such help. Her refusal makes her that much more abject in his eyes, leading to the absurd result of his help being the force that kills her. The allegory of the mare thus demonstrates how the novel’s naturalism, its strategy for demanding recognition and redress for the abject conditions of colonialism, supports the very colonial relation underpinning and producing these conditions. The content of the allegory suggests that the mode through which it is expressed stands in the way of what this content calls for, namely a refusal of the settler state and the colonial relation. That is, we are to learn through this allegory that Archilde cannot recognize this refusal because he himself is caught up in the ruse of recognition: not only does he show he trusts the state agent, Mr. Parker, and appeals to him for justice, but Archilde also see the conditions of colonialism in St. Xavier through the lens of naturalism, which is to say, he sees them as objects of sorrow for which state reforms should remedy. The lesson, then, Archilde doesn’t learn but the reader is to learn is that killing the mare by helping her results from this misrecognition or incapacity to see the mare’s refusal of his help as an act freeing herself from the cause of her demise, which in the allegory, is a turning away from the state and the paternalism of IRA policy.
The mare’s refusal is not the only refusal we see in the novel. Catherine and Elise both enact refusals to recognize the legitimacy of settler law. Catherine kills the park ranger who has killed her son Louis and Elise kills the sheriff who seeks to capture and imprison Archilde. Catherine and Elise do not recognize the authority of these figures. The violence they use against them is in defense of their lands and lives. Formally, these actions of defense are what drive forward the plot. It is not deterministic forces that create coincidences of a fatalistic plot. It is the refusal to recognize the settler state’s legitimacy that creates narrative itself in the novel. Catherine and Elise’s actions put in place the series of events that lead to Archilde’s capture and naturalist containment. If the completion or closure of the plot of fatality suggests a determinism which elicits sympathy, these refusals on which this plot depends reveal how the plot is not so much one of determinism as it is the result of the settler state crushing/containing defenses of Native sovereignty. There is no story of deterministic containment to tell without these acts of refusal or defenses of sovereignty.

Yet, the scenes themselves of Catherine and Elise killing the state authorities in defense of their own land and lives are not described in naturalist language, nor are Catherine or Elise represented as naturalist figures in terms of objects of sorrow for which readers offer pity. When Catherine kills the game warden, “there was no accounting for what happened next. Archilde saw only the final action, not what had led up to it. He was near the warden, watching him stoop to examine Louis. Then he saw the officer bend at the knees. His face was twisted with pain. The old lady had hit him in the head with a hatchet” (127). Archilde goes on to note that “he could not explain how his mother had been able to move without being seen or heard. That was inexplicable” (128).
Catherine’s refusal of the state registers as an action of the plot and not a naturalist object of spectacle. The same is the case in Elise’ killing of the Sheriff. While Archilde, the naturalist figure, is helpless to stop the Sheriff and his own eminent arrest, Elise plots her action beyond the view of the narrator: “what was she up to? Something. Archilde sensed it. He wanted to stop her. He could have reached out his hand and held her back. He stood motionless, seeming to hold his breath” (294). After Elise throws coffee in the sheriff’s face and shoots him, Archilde is shaken and disturbed, but Elise was “unshaken. Calmly she looked down and if Dave Quigley had stirred she would have been on top of him. She talked as calmly as she looked” (295). Here, it is the way in which these refusals of state authority escape naturalist description even as they serve as the catalyst of the novel’s naturalist plot that demonstrates how their formal role in the novel serves as an analogy of the political role of Indigenous feminist refusals of settler state paternalism in this context of the Indian New Deal. Just as the novel doesn’t render these refusals in naturalist language that would present them as objects of recognition, such refusals relate to the settler state as illegible actions. They are not actions seeking external recognition, but are actions internal to the community, a defense of the community through a rejection of the settler state. They are refusals productive of sovereignty through a turning away from the state, which is why the naturalist narrative strategy appealing to the state cannot capture them in its language.¹⁵

The formal role, then, of these feminist refusals in the novel’s narrative structure embodies the logic of what theorist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) calls generative refusals of the settler state. Such generative refusals do not “allow settler colonialism to frame the issues facing Indigenous peoples, and this is
critical because settler colonialism will always define the issues with a solution that reentrenches its own power” (Location 2850). Similarly, Coulthard suggests that “those struggling against colonialism must ‘turn away’ from the colonial state and society and instead find in their own *decolonial praxis* the source of their liberation” (48). In a context in which it appears the settler state’s recognition of tribal sovereignty will rescue Native people from the conditions of colonialism this state created in the first place, the novel registers a politics of generative refusal precisely in the way it represents feminist refusals of state authority as actions integral to the plot but not representable through the novel’s naturalist language. In this way, these feminist refusals as actions defending Native sovereignty, are forms of decolonial praxis serving as the absent cause shaping the novel’s form. This absent presence inscribed in the novel’s form indicates that Native sovereignty lies in not seeking recognition but in refusing the colonial relation altogether as an opening for building autonomy and power that would unsettle this relation in the first place. McNickle’s *The Surrounded* uses naturalist strategies, the same strategies garnering recognition for white workers of the New Deal, to show how the Indian New Deal does not enable but stands in the way of achieving sovereignty. Sovereignty lies in the actions of the community itself and not in how the community relates to, or is legitimated by the settler state. Of course, this form of sovereignty outside of the recognition of the state is always illegible or disavowed by the state. Yet it appears in *The Surrounded* in these refusals that escape naturalism but are what make the narrative possible.

*The Street* and the *New Deal Nuclear Family*
Petry’s *The Street* is a naturalist novel protesting the poverty and exploitation of the Black female domestic worker of Harlem in the 1930s and early 1940s.\(^\text{17}\) It shows how racialization continues to position people of African descent in ways that they serve as a super-exploitable pool of cheap labor, while also filling the ranks of what Marx called the reserve army of the labor, unemployed laborers shed from the production process who exist in superfluity.\(^\text{18}\) For instance, Lutie, the novel’s protagonist, works for several years far from her home in New York as a domestic servant for a wealthy white family in the Connecticut suburbs because her husband Jim, like her father, has become chronically unemployed. Her cheap reproductive labor sustains and underpins the white family’s pursuit of wealth. Her husband being made unemployable, a member of a surplus population, serves as the lever driving down the wages of the employed, helping white business-owning families like those who employ Lutie to accumulate wealth.

Lutie serves as the naturalist protagonist who fights and struggles against conditions which in the end she cannot overcome. The novel’s plot of demise, in other words, begins with Lutie very much committed to the idea that her conditions do not determine her future. As critics of the novel note, she internalizes the “self-made man” myth, believing that her poverty or potential wealth and stability is determined by her choices and individual efforts. She has moved to Harlem and rented a small apartment as the necessary preconditions, in her eyes, for what she believes will be her ascent into the middle-class: “now that she had this apartment, she was just one step farther up on the ladder of success. With the apartment Bub would be standing a better chance” (26). While working for the Chandlers, Lutie comes to believe that if her attitude toward pursuing wealth were to match her employer’s success would come her way as it does for
them: “After a year of listening to their talk, she absorbed some of the same spirit. The belief that anybody could be rich if he wanted to and worked hard enough and figure it out carefully enough. . . She and Jim could do the same thing, and she thought she saw what had been wrong with them before—they hadn’t tried hard enough, worked long enough, saved enough.” (43) It is the deterministic world set against her faith in possessive individualism that elicits a sympathy for Lutie. She also sees freedom and stability in the nuclear family, but is shown to be arbitrary prevented from having one of her own. In this way, she becomes a pitiable mother. However, while Lutie notes that “all through Harlem there were apartments just like this one, she thought, and they’re nothing but traps. Dirty, dark, filthy traps. Upstairs. Downstairs. In my lady’s chamber. Click goes the trap when you pay the first month’s rent. Walk right in. It’s a free country. Dark little hallways. Stinking toilets” (73), she retains a determination to escape such conditions. The novel emphasizes that Lutie doesn’t lose faith in upward mobility for she, not her conditions, determine her success, “the same combination of circumstances [of poverty harming other characters in the novel] . . . None of those things would happen to her, Lutie decided, because she would fight back and never stop fighting back” (57). In fact, Lutie at one point compares herself to Ben Franklin and invokes scenes in his autobiography of being thrifty and self-motivated. Lutie believes that if Ben Franklin could overcome his circumstances, so can she (64).

However, Petry uses this naturalist technique to illustrate how the empathy this strategy seeks to elicit for Black subjects functions to erase not bring attention to Black abjection. Petry demonstrates how the sorrow readers are to feel for the destruction of Lutie’s family is a sorrow not for Black subjects but for white subjects who project
themselves onto Black characters when readers are encouraged through naturalist aesthetics to empathize with their suffering. Saidiya Hartman explains how the enslaved body makes this empathetic projection possible:

the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others’ feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master’s body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion. Thus, while the beaten and mutilated body presumably establishes the brute materiality of existence, the materiality of suffering regularly eludes (re)cognition by virtue of the body’s being replaced by other signs of value, as well as other bodies. (21)

Here Hartman details how the master not only owns the Slave’s body but also his or her suffering. That is, the Slave’s suffering is erased in its hypervisibility. The master owns it as a means of cohering his or her own subjectivity. Referring to plantation social relations, Frank Wilderson points out, “what you find is that the families on these plantations all participate in the regular beating of slaves—children, wives, husbands. . . It sustains the psychic health of the people in the first ontological instance. In the second instance, it gets good sugar cane production out of them—and that could even be questioned” (24). In a moment when the nuclear family merges with Fordist production, and it becomes important to further consolidate this form in which the formal wage worker depends on unpaid reproductive female labor, the novel’s naturalist strategy of eliciting empathy for Lutie and her attempt to rescue her nuclear family rehearses this relationship between the Slave’s suffering and the coherence of the life of the master. In
other words, Lutie’s family is a surrogate for the white nuclear family, and its destruction in the novel, coded in naturalist language, encourages readers to consolidate and uphold their own nuclear families in seeing the suffering of Lutie’s. In this way, I want to show in what follows how Petry uses naturalism to reveal the ways Black suffering enables the cohering of the nuclear family form so central to the welfare state model and Fordist production. She does this by writing within the generic codes of naturalism, while at the same time, including strategies that undermine or block the work of these generic codes.

The first way Petry does this lies in how documentary description of Black poverty is always coupled with a description of white wealth. This relational documentary mode disrupts the way naturalism reifies conditions of abjection. June Howard notes how the imagined reader of naturalism relates to the objects it represents as the bourgeois subject visiting the scenes of poverty and despair of the lower classes:

- the specter of proletarianization itself implies the need for the spectator to slum in determinism in order to learn through vicarious experience what that repellent yet fascinating world of the Other is like. The spectator must try out the role of the brute in order to control it. Thus one of naturalism’s documentary strategies take the form of a virtually anthropological expedition into the alien territory of the working class and the underclass. (151-2)

However, Petry’s relational description works against such ways that naturalism maintains a separation between objects of spectacle and the outside middle-class reformer, a relationship between conditions and spectator that reinforces the class structure producing them both.

For instance, after Lutie finds Bub shining shoes on the street to help earn extra
money, she is upset that he is, at such a young age, is laboring for pay rather than using his time out of school to study or rest. To understand this injustice, the novel focuses on the conditions of luxury and privilege of Little Henry Chandler whom Lutie labored to care for out of necessity to support her own family: “you know that isn’t all there is involved. It’s also that Little Henry Chandler is wearing gray flannel suits and dark blue caps and long blue socks and fine dark brown leather shoes. He’s doing his home work in that big warm library in front of the fireplace. And your kid is out in the street with a shoeshine box” (67). We also see this comparative description when Lutie confronts a man murdered by a white shop owner. After a lengthy description of his poverty and abjection, Lutie imagines how his condition contrasts to the wealthy of New York: “what did he think about when he passed store windows filled with sleek furs and fabulous food and clothing made of materials so fine you could tell by looking at them they would feel like sea foam under your hand? How did he feel when the great long cars snorted past him as he waited for the lights to change or when he looked into a taxi and saw a delicate, soft, beautiful woman lifting her face toward an opulently dressed man?” (196). If naturalist description of Black abjection is meant to elicit an empathy for such suffering through witnessing and recognition, the relational description that brings into view white wealth and power through the same mode of documentary language, disrupts the chances for empathetic projection and thus ownership of Black suffering. In short, the parasitic outside observer of naturalism cannot own Black suffering when his or her role as parasite is included in what is documented or made available as the spectacle for viewing. Thus, where documentary description reifies class identities, Petry’s mode of description shows class as relational. One cannot see Black poverty without seeing white wealth
since the former produces the latter. In this relational documentary mode, there is no
asking for empathy, but rather a demand to see how one’s stability derives from another’s
exploitation and exclusion.

If this relational documentary description disrupts the strategy of eliciting
empathy that erases Black suffering, the novel’s moments of political messaging, true
to the naturalist genre in which the narrator pauses the plot to offer explanatory
perspectives on the themes the novel addresses, ensures readers do not miss this point:

that kitchen sink in the advertisement or one just like it was what had wrecked her
and Jim. The sink had belonged to someone else—she’d been washing someone
else’s dishes when she should have been home with Jim and Bub. Instead she’d
cleaned another woman’s house and looked after another woman’s child while her
own marriage went to pot; breaking up into so many little pieces it couldn’t be put
back together again, couldn’t even be patched into a vague resemblance of its
former self. Yet what else could she have done? It was her fault, really, that they
lost their one source of income. And Jim couldn’t get a job, though he hunted for
one—desperately, eagerly, anxiously. (30)

Here the narrator makes clear that it is the destruction of the Black family that sustains
the coherence of the white nuclear family. Not only the labor but also the
unemployability of Black subjects makes possible the stability of the white family. It is a
parasitic relationship. Here we see, then, how the novel’s content reinforces what its
relational documentary description has already revealed. By doing so, the novel auto-
referentially suggests that its own naturalist description reproduces this parasitic
relationship between whiteness and blackness. In fact, when Lutie hires a lawyer to help
free Bub from his charges of mail theft, the lawyer assures Lutie that he can portray Bub as a victim of his circumstances in order to gain sympathy from the judge (391). Readers learn that Lutie doesn’t need the lawyer but he doesn’t disclose this in order to profit off of her desperation. The novel’s own narrative strategy of documenting deterministic conditions is the same representational strategy the lawyer promises to use to free Bub. In such hands, however, it is shown to be merely a gimmick, something instrumentalized to tug at the heartstrings of a white judge and white audiences rather than a legitimate strategy for confronting Black suffering.

June Howard also notes how in naturalist fiction lower-class subjects receive empathy precisely through the way they are represented as passive objects in relationship to the forces that control them: “The brutes who inhabit determinism are treated as objects rather than as self-aware subjects; they are merely components of the spectacle displayed to the reader” (150-1). Petry uses naturalist description to represent Black subjects as passive objects but in ways that suggest such description conceals or stands in the way of seeing the presence of Black resistance. This is the second way I identify that Petry undermines her novel’s naturalist protest strategy to demonstrate how its politics of representation reinforce rather than reveal Black suffering. For instance, in the scene when Lutie comes across the man stabbed to death by a white bakery store owner, the novel represents the attitude of the man’s sister toward his death as one of resignation. She becomes the object without a say or ability to do anything but endure such deterministic conditions:

it was as though for a fraction of a second something—hate or sorrow or surprise—had moved inside her and been reflected on her face. As quickly as it
came, it was gone and it was replaced by a look of resignation, of complete acceptance. It was an expression that said the girl hoped for no more than this from life because other things that had happened to her had paved the way so that she had lost the ability to protest against anything—even death suddenly like this in the spring. (197)

Yet in this same scene the novel mentions activity hiding in the open that is nothing like the passive resignation of the sister. Readers learn that the community has come together and has a plan of action to defend against such acts of vigilante violence happening again: "'white man in the store claims he tried to hold him up.' 'If that bastard white man puts one foot out here, we'll kill him. Cops or no cops.'" (198). Upon learning this, however, the narrator continues to focus on resignation and other details of abjection that serve as objects eliciting pity from the outside observer of the naturalist tale. Lutie "went home remembering, not the threat of violence in that silent, waiting crowd, but instead the man’s ragged soleless shoes and the resigned look on the girl’s face. She had never been able to forget either of them. The boy was so thin—and she kept thinking about his walking through the city barefooted. Both he and his sister were so young" (198). In doing this, the novel stages how naturalist strategy of documenting abjection as spectacle for the reader forecloses the recognition of the presence of Black autonomy.

In the very scene where the narrator directs readers to the details of passive resignation, the narrator also mentions how the community is already organized and doing the work of redeeming the murdered man in ways that he won’t be redeemed by state that has enabled his murder in the first place. As readers come to see, Lutie, passes by
the bakery shop again the next afternoon. The windows had been smashed, the front door had apparently been broken in, because it was boarded up. There were messages chalked on the sidewalk in front of the store. They all said the same thing: ‘White man, don’t come back.’ . . . Their faces were turned toward the store. They weren’t talking. They were just standing with their hands in their pockets—waiting. (199)

Here like we saw with the feminist refusals in The Surrounded, the novel doesn’t render these actions in naturalist language. That is, there is no language of resignation, of pessimistic determinism, and so on. Furthermore, Lutie notes that “there were two cops right in front of the door, swinging nightsticks. She walked past, thinking that it was like a war that hadn’t got off to a start yet, though both sides were piling up ammunition and reserves and were now waiting for anything, any little excuse, a gesture, a word, a sudden loud noise—and pouf! It would start!” (200). In what appears as a deterministic plot of demise, such actions of Black self- and community defense hide out in the open, undermining the ways Black subjects appear as passive objects for which empathy should be given. In this way, the novel shows how such naturalist strategies asking for recognition are ones defending whiteness precisely by erasing or blocking the confrontation with Black autonomy.

In doing so, the novel seems to suggest that the question should not be how can the novel demand white America see Black suffering or not. It demonstrates how strategies asking for recognition are lost causes when the same state and settler public that would offer this recognition are at war with the people whose suffering they have caused in the first place. In the same scene, the narrator asserts that if only the lynched
man could be seen as a pitiable subject instead of a racialized criminal, such violence would not happen: “The reporter saw a dead Negro who had attempted to hold up a store, and so he couldn’t really see what the man lying on the sidewalk looked like. He couldn’t see the ragged shoes, the thin, starved body. He saw, instead, the picture he already had in his mind: a huge, brawny, blustering ignorant, criminally disposed black man who had run amok with a knife on a spring afternoon in Harlem” (199). Yet the novel has also just revealed that the same forces to which these more sympathetic representations might assuage are waging a war against the Black community. It seems, then, futile to think that more sympathetic representations of Black subjects would compel the same state and public which commits such violence and depends on it for their coherence to begin to protect Black life. As Lutie suggests:

Streets like the one she lived on were no accident. They were the North’s lynch mobs, she thought bitterly; the method the big cities used to keep Negroes in their place. And she began thinking of Pop unable to get a job; of Jim slowly disintegrating because he, too, couldn’t get a job, and of the subsequent wreck of their marriage; of Bub left to his own devices after school. From the time she was born, she had been hemmed into an ever-narrowing space, until now she was very nearly walled in and the wall had been built up brick by brick by eager white hands. (324)

We see how there is no recognition to offer because the state’s task is to keep people of African descent in positions of social death where their lives are not their own to possess, making their labor and their suffering available for settlers to own and benefit from.
A similar disruption to the novel’s naturalist strategy can be found in the role of Lutie’s anger within the plot of the demise of the nuclear family. While trying to secure money to pay for the lawyer who can help free Bub from jail, Lutie is forced to ask Boots for the money. Unknown to Lutie, Boots has been ordered to coerce Lutie into having sex with Boot’s boss the white business owner Junto. Boots, however, intends to rape Lutie once his suggestion that she can exchange sex with Junto for the money she needs, is rejected. Acting in self-defense, Lutie’s anger surfaces and she bludgeons Boots to death with a candlestick:

He was the person who had struck her, her face still hurt from the blow; he had threatened her with violence and with a forced relationship with Junto and with himself. These things set off her anger, but as she gripped the iron candlestick and brought it forward in a swift motion aimed at his head, she was striking, not at Boots Smith, but at a handy, anonymous figure—a figure which her anger resentment transformed into everything she had hated, everything she had fought against, everything that had served to frustrate her. (429)

Here I maintain that Lutie’s anger can be read as the defense of a self not recognized nor positioned as a self allowed to have possession of one’s self, that is, the defense of a body assumed to be open for possession by others, namely the personhood of the Slave.

Hartman shows how the Slave was made to be an object available to be owned by others for whatever reason the master desired. The Slave was denied not only the right to self-defense but the right to have a self to defend in the first place:

The interdiction against self-defense and the inability of a slave to testify against whites permitted the slave to be used in any capacity that pleased the master or
the uses of property also included the sexual violation of the enslaved. The few restrictions placed upon the uses of slave property concerned only the master’s rights of property. Indeed, the dissolute uses of slave property came to define the identity of the captive and hence the nature of the Negro. As well, these actual or imagined usages established the parameters of interracial association. (25)

Using this lens to understand how an element of making people of African descent into the enslaved by stripping them of any rights or means to self-defense, we can see how Lutie’s anger becomes a disruption to the ways her existence itself is owned by a master class and its agents. Her anger thus becomes a figure for the fugitive act, a stealing back her body and existence: “Finally, and the blows were heavier, faster, now, she was striking at the white world which thrust black people into a walled enclosure from which there was no escape; and at the turn-of-events which had forced her to leave Bub alone while she was working so that he now faced reform school, now had a police record” (430). In a plot of demise in which the object of pity for which redress should be offered is the pitiable mother trying to save or hold together the nuclear family, Lutie’s anger prevents the closure of this plot. Lutie kills Boots and buys a ticket to Chicago to avoid imprisonment. She abandons Bub, leaving him with the state. By leaving her son, Lutie no longer serves as the sympathetic naturalist protagonist in terms of readers seeing her as one who tried to save her family but couldn’t because of conditions beyond her control. Instead she appears to choose to save herself rather than her son. Her act of defending herself, a fugitive act, registers formally in the way her anger disrupts a plot that would present her as an object of empathy for readers to use to cohere the nuclear
family. The closure of this plot in which Lutie would trade sex for the money to save her
son, or where she would risk arrest for murder in order to pay to bail Bub out of jail,
would demonstrate a commitment to saving the nuclear family model. That her anger as
self-defense has prevented this is a way such fugitivity registers formally in the novel. It
is what prevents the closure of a naturalist plot of demise that would evoke empathy for
and thus legitimize the anti-Black nuclear family.

It is in this way, then, that the novel shows how the nuclear family—that is key to
Fordist production—is ruse of freedom for Black subjects. This form’s very integrity
depends on not only Black labor but maintaining people of African descent in a position
of slavery, of social death. In her reading of Black abolitionist critiques of the nuclear
family, theorist Tiffany King argues not only that “Black people’s entrance into the
category of the [nuclear] familial functions as a ruse of incorporation that conceals the
historical and enduring surveillance and violence to which Black sociality is subjected”
(71), but that “the [nuclear] family is not a grammatical structure through which Black
people can annunciate their human existence.” (79). A naturalist narrative strategy of
generating empathy for Lutie’s destroyed nuclear family supports a form premised on
anti-Blackness. Undermining this strategy becomes a refusal of this form, and it is in this
undermining of its own naturalist strategy where Black autonomy emerges in the text. It
is the force disrupting the stability of forms premised on Black abjection. That is, without
Black labor and social death, there is no white nuclear family holding together Fordist
production model. Petry thus uses naturalism not only to suggest that the empathy it
elicits for Black suffering is always about reproducing whiteness but that Black
autonomy lies in actions that refuse forms of sociality like the nuclear family that depend on Black death.

George Washington Gómez and the Collective Worker

Américo Paredes’ George Washington Gómez represents how Mexicans Americans of South Texas struggle against the colonization of their lands—a white settler invasion and occupation—from the early twentieth century to the 1930s. White settlers enclose the lands, stripping Mexican people of the means of producing their life, turning them into landless proletarians forced to sell their labor to the newly arrived settlers for subsistence wages. The narrator details this process:

the American had begun to ‘develop’ the land. He had it cleared and made it into cotton fields, into citrus orchards and towns. And it was the Mexicotexan’s brown muscular arms that felled the trees. He wielded the machete against the smaller brush and strained his back pulling tree stumps out of the ground. For this he got enough to eat for the day and the promise of more of the same tomorrow. As day laborer clearing more chaparral, as cotton and fruit picker for as few cents a day as he could subsist on. Every stroke of the ax, every swing of the mattock clinched his own misfortune. (42)

The novel begins by focusing on how the armed struggle against this invasion and occupation is not only defeated but has prompted a violent counterinsurgency of Texas Rangers and white vigilantes. The novel’s protagonist Guálinto, whose uncle Feliciano is a fighter in this armed struggle, and whose father, Gumersindo, is murdered by Texas Rangers in their campaigns against this armed struggle, comes of age in the years following this violence. With revolutionary activity defeated, the novel is concerned with
representing what forms of resistance are possible, how can Mexican Americans free themselves from the ways they have been turned into a colonial proletariat, a class of worker treated as less than human. While the novel is often studied as a novelization of the corrido and this form’s limits, I suggest it be considered a work cut from the same cloth of 1930s proletarian fiction.

Barbara Foley’s study on proletarian literature of this era explains that workers, intellectuals and organizers “envisioned revolution as the necessary path for achieving workers’ power and saw literature as a means of arousing and preparing the proletariat and its allies for their historical tasks. . . According to the leading Marxist critics, proletarian texts should convey ideas and attitudes that would impel their readers to take action against existing social conditions—that is, move them leftward” (118). In this vein, Paredes’ novel represents the possibilities for the proletarian subject, like Guálinto, to develop a revolutionary class consciousness through the experiences he and his comrades face in these years when all revolutionary activity appears to be squashed. In other words, it is from these conditions of defeat that the novel tells the story of how Guálonto, the son of this revolutionary but defeated generation, can form a new revolutionary identity that will help guide his people’s struggles to win their land back and no longer serve as the colonial labor pool for white settlers.

However, I contend that Paredes uses the proletarian novel form to demonstrate how this form cannot represent a revolutionary consciousness for Mexican Americans like it does for working-class whites and proletarianized small farmers. Paredes uses the proletarian novel in ways that show how the class identity this genre represents in the 1930s does not include Mexican proletarians because this class identity is entangled with
US colonialism even as it might unify wage workers against capitalist exploitation. Proletarian literature cohered a particular class identity through and from which workers could make demands on capital and the state. In their criticism of the limits of workerist politics, the Endnotes collective suggests that the workers’ movement during this time sought to fashion a collective worker identity in order to secure demands from the state: “Indeed, the capacity for demand-making in a given struggle may be grasped as structurally linked with its capacity to draw upon an existing — or forge a new — collective identity; demand-making and composition are two sides of the same coin” (Web). Paredes takes this narrative strategy of cohering the workerist identity of the 1930s and shows how it fails to satisfy the demands of decolonization of Mexican Americans as a colonial proletariat, and in showing how it fails them, Paredes uses this strategy to highlight the ways settler colonialism maintains a colonial proletariat on which the Fordist worker, fashioned out of New Deal reforms, forges unity with capital as a labor aristocracy of the welfare state sharing in spoils of empire.²³

To see how Paredes does this, we have first see how his narrative initially follows the formula of the proletarian novel. The proletarian novel of the 1930s had many variations. A popular version was what Foley characterizes as the proletarian bildungsroman. Opposed to the proletarian social novel that focused on multiple perspectives and class subjects, the proletarian bildungsroman focuses on a singular protagonist and treats his or her development of revolutionary class consciousness as a type or figure for the entire working class. “In the proletarian bildungsroman,” Foley explains, “the trajectory of the plot must render inevitable the protagonist’s development of class consciousness” (328). The goal behind this narrative trajectory in which the
protagonist begins as an oppressed worker but becomes a revolutionary actor is to
develop the same consciousness in working-class readers. The proletarian bildungsroman
is propaganda encouraging such readers and their allies to commit to a revolutionary
politics. As Foley argues, “in these texts the protagonist’s espousal of—or at least growth
toward—revolutionary class consciousness embodies in microcosm the change that is
occurring, and must continue to occur on a larger scale, in the working class. The
mimetic encloses the didactic: positioned to identify with the protagonist’s ‘conversion,’
readers presumably carry the text’s implied lessons over into their own lives” (327).
Following the expectations of the proletarian bildungsroman, then, the plot of George
Washington Gómez narrates how Guálinto and his friends face oppression and how their
struggles to overcome this oppression are formative of a revolutionary class identity.
Paredes thus sets up his novel to be a proletarian conversion narrative. The novel poses
and explores the problem of how Guálinto will be converted to the revolutionary cause of
liberating his community from US colonialism.

The forms of oppression most formative of Guálinto’s developing proletarian
consciousness are found at the school. If Guálinto’s father and uncle faced colonial
violence at the hands of Rangers, this violence has been transferred to the institutions of
colonial education that function to fulfill the same goal of maintaining Mexican people as
a colonial proletariat. The school continues to be a battle ground. On the one hand, the
school is where Guálinto is to gain the skills that he can use to help his people:

A great man who would help and lead his people to a better kind of life. How this
would be accomplished they did not know. Sometimes they thought he would be a
great lawyer who would get back the lands they had lost. At other times they were
certain he would become a great orator who would convince even the greatest of their enemies of the rightness of his cause. Or perhaps he would be a great doctor who would go around healing the poor and thus create an immense following. . .

But they agreed that he was not just another boy. He was greatly intelligent, gifted, and destined for wonderful things. His family’s mission in life was to give him every opportunity possible to their limited means. (125)

While the school appears as a space of democracy, behind this veneer, it reproduces the racial hierarchies of settler colonialism. The school is a colonial institution where Mexican students are to learn how to accept and not resist their status as a racialized colonial proletariat. 24

The plot, however, reveals that Guálinto overcomes such violence to develop a class consciousness affirming the very Brownness that the education system has attempted to convince him is a sign of his inferiority and subordinated status. When Guálinto and his friends are excluded from their own prom because the venue doesn’t allow Mexican Americans, he refuses to pass as “Spanish” and instead affirms his Mexican identity. (173). Later at his graduation, Guálinto expresses perhaps the strongest form yet of his revolutionary consciousness. During the ceremonies, he identifies his oppressors and what he must struggle against to be free. White settlers, were the cause of all evil, he thought. All the tales of hate and violence from his childhood came back to him from the half-consciousness in which they had been submerged. They came, they took away everything we had, they made us foreigners in our own land. He thought how there had always been an Anglo blocking his path to happiness, to success, even to plain dignity. An Anglo had
taken away his girl, the same Anglo had ruined his sister. Because of the Anglos he would never find decent work. And even when his uncle had made a few dollars, and American banker had stolen most of them. Because of the Gringos he had killed his other uncle. (273)

Here is where the plot of the proletarian bildungsroman would close with the image of Guálinto embracing working class unity or a politics of communism as the answer to problem he has laid out in the above passage. For instance, Mike Gold Jews Without Money closes its bildungsroman plot in such a way. After detailing the hardships and toil of working class life in New York City, and contemplating suicide because the forces the protagonist faces seem insurmountable, he, in last scene of the novel, hears a communist organizer speaking from a soap-box that “out of the despair, melancholy, and helpless rage of millions, a world movement had been born to abolish poverty” (309). The protagonist embraces the message completing his conversion to radical politics: “O workers’ Revolution, you brought hope to me, a lonely, suicidal boy. You are the true Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit. O Revolution, that forced me to think, to struggle and to live. O great Beginning!” (309).

The plot of conversion does not close like this in GWG because Paredes sabotages his own proletarian novel for reasons of showing how the worker identity, like the one found in Gold’s Jews Without Money and other proletarian novels, this narrative form tries to cohere doesn’t include, or cannot satisfy the demands for freedom of Mexican Americans as a colonial proletariat. This image of the collective worker to which Gold appeals, the worker of a world movement, containing the rage of millions, is one that the
worker’s movement itself constructed through representation. “The heart of the workerist vision,” writes the Endnotes collective, “lay a mythic figure: the collective worker — the class in-and-for-itself, the class as unified and knowing its unity, born within the space of the factory. The collective worker was presupposed in workers’ organising and posited through that organising effort. But, to a large extent, the collective worker did not exist outside of the movement’s attempts to construct it (emphasis in original)” (Web). The collective worker was understood to be a universal subject in the way Marx’s critique of capital suggested that capitalism encloses and break ups precapitalist formations, absorbing the world’s people into the production process as laborers pitted against capitalism’s owners. Whatever disparate identities people had before, they could find unity in their new status as wage workers. In this way, as the Endnotes collective says, “The class,” as the workerist movement saw it, “came to exist as an abstract identity that could be affirmed, dignified and proud of” (Web).

To galvanize worker solidarity under the banner of this collective worker identity in hopes of strengthening the workers’ movement and pity from the middle-class reader that could lead to state reforms as building blocks for a more radical socialist future, the proletarian novel featured documentary scenes of worker suffering. Paredes’ GWG shows, however, how this documentary language of workerist suffering functions to erase the suffering of unpitiable nonwhite workers like the novel’s colonial proletariat of Mexican Americans. The pity that builds unity for white workers comes from denying such pity for colonial workers.

In a series of scenes documenting how the Great Depression affects South Texas, the novel focuses on the ways white workers receive preferential treatment — how they
retain an immunity from disposability and precarity—compared to Mexican workers.

“Help wanted. Young white man to help with farm. That red-faced Gringo will get it. No matter. That’s old man Lilly’s farm and he’s an anti-Mexican sanabaviche. Wanted. Nursemaid for children two and five years old. Must be English-speaking. No chance for the old woman there, not a chance. Wanted. White woman to keep old lady company. Wanted, dependable, hard-working white man” (195). There is also the scene in which two Mexican workers confront a cotton farmer who gives white workers better rows of cotton to pick:

--Mr. Kelly, we’re working for you but we get paid for what we pick. Anybody can see you’re giving those Americans the best rows.
--It’s my field, ain’t it? If I put white folks on them rows they’ll starve to death.
--But we’re just as human as they are. We can starve too.
--Those folks don’t know how to pick cotton. Never puck any.
--How about Manuel’s kids here?
--Don’t give me none of your lip. Get to work or get out. (199)

Here Paredes uses documentary language to show how the wages of whiteness not only crowd out the recognition of suffering of colonial workers but also prevent class solidarity between white workers and colonial workers. Suggesting that the Tom Joads of the Great Depression are receiving better rows to pick cotton or higher wages compared to colonial workers because their white settler status shields them from the kinds of disposability reserved for the less than human colonial worker, undermines a strategy of eliciting pity that builds unity and power only for white workers.25
It is not that these scenes discount or deny white worker exploitation. Rather, by undermining the power of these typical documentary scenes of white worker suffering, the novel exposes the ideological work of such language in the first place: the pity it elicits is not for capitalism’s exploitation of the worker but for capitalism’s exploitation of the settler. The collective worker identity is rooted in affirming a settler status as a means of creating unity to oppose capitalism. There is lament and worry over the proletarianization of small farmers, of members of the petty bourgeois, and for white workers whose chronic unemployment and precarity during these times appears to exceed the bonds of whiteness and settlerism.

Paredes reveals how seeing and grieving the exploitation of wage worker as the universal white worker is central to capitalism as racial capitalism: “You know you can’t expect to make as much as Johnny Mize. His standard of living is higher than yours. He needs more money to live on. You can do with less. . . Everybody knows that a Mexican family can live on two dollars a week with things as cheap as they are nowadays. Now, do you want that job or don’t you?” (200). Racialization values some workers over others to create wage differentials and to justify who is made surplus and who receives protections. For Paredes to use this documentary mode to emphasize how the wages of whiteness are entangled with a workerist identity of the 1930s-proletarian novel suggests that class unity will be achieved only through recognizing the ways racialization and colonization create national oppressions and not through demanding such things be ignored or come second to the goal of a universal workerist unity. While Paredes use of the documentary mode to showcase worker suffering highlights how there is no class unity between white workers and colonial workers, it is in pointing up this very
asymmetry that the novel suggests from where possible worker unity will arise, namely from attacking the ways the colonial relation creates two proletariats, one that benefits from the super-exploitation and disposability of the other.

Paredes further sabotes what we can now see is the white proletarian novel in the way the conversion plot of Guálinto ends with him renouncing any form of revolutionary anticolonial consciousness he might have developed in favor of taking up a counterrevolutionary consciousness, a class consciousness of settlerism.\(^{27}\) That is, the closure of the proletarian bildungsroman plot becomes a betrayal of revolutionary consciousness. Readers learn that after Guálinto goes to college, he marries a fellow student, a white woman who has a Master’s degree in sociology and at one point studied, “Mexican migrant labor in central Texas” and whose father was a Texas Ranger working at the same when Guálinto’s father had been murdered by Rangers (283). Guálinto has used his education to become an officer in the military assigned to do surveillance and counterinsurgency work in his own border community. As he tells his uncle Feliciano, “My job is border security. . . If any spying or sabotage takes place it will be by some of our own people” (299). The novel dramatizes what should be the fitting closure to the proletarian bildungsroman plot when Guálinto visits his school friends who in the years since his departure have started political organizing. They invite him to a meeting expecting Guálinto to return and use his skills to help their struggle. “Today he returns to us, a famous lawyer from Washington, D.C. I propose a toast for the man who will give us the benefit of his leadership and experience” (292). Guálinto, however, is there not to help but to discourage and if necessary spy on their activities.
What was before a budding revolutionary consciousness has turned into a counterrevolutionary identity. Guálinto internalizes white supremacist attitudes toward Mexican workers. “Getting the Mexican out of himself was not an easy job, he thought” (283), or as he says to Feliciano, “Mexicans will always be Mexicans. A few of them, like some of those would-be-politicos, could make something of themselves if they would just do like I did. Get out of this filthy Delta, as far away as they can, and get rid of their Mexican Greaser attitudes” (300). What the novel suggests here is if the proletarian novel coheres a collective worker identity entangled with the wages of whiteness and settler sovereignty, this also means, like we saw in Chapter 2, that such a worker is required to police colonial populations. By finishing the proletarian plot with Guálinto working as a border spy, the novel shows how the collective worker of the white proletarian novel carries a counterrevolutionary identity defined against insurrection/rebellion of colonial populations. As such, the novel’s proletarian conversion plot of the white worker has been fulfilled insofar as converting to a politics advocating for the universal white worker means developing a reactionary consciousness opposed to the anticolonial politics of capitalism’s colonial proletariats.

In this way, we can see how writing the story of Chicanx liberation from within the narrative strategies cohering the collective worker as white worker becomes an analogy of Guálinto seeking freedom in and through the very institutions premised on colonial dispossession. Paredes brings to light how writing a revolutionary identity of Mexican Americans through the narrative strategies representing white worker consciousness at this time, which is another way of saying, seeking freedom only through workerist approach that ignores national oppression, results in reaffirming the colonial
relation. Forms born out of and dependent on colonial violence will reproduce this violence. Sabotaging his own novel’s proletarian conversion plot, then, becomes the way Paredes’ *GWG* formally embodies how seeking freedom through the categories premised on colonial dispossession is a lost cause for colonial subjects. In this light, the welfare state that promises redemption for white workers by turning them into the Fordist worker, an offer white workers easily accepted, appears as it has always functioned: as a counterrevolutionary state. It secures a harmony between white workers and capital by excluding and containing the rebellion of the colonial proletariat.

When read this way, Paredes’ novel teaches us about the role of border violence in shaping the relationship between the New Deal, Fordist worker and the colonial proletariat. Revealing how while the white worker might be proletarian, he or she is also a settler and how this status requires a commitment to police the rebellion/resistance of colonized people, suggests that a key feature underpinning welfare state reforms and Fordist production is the white worker’s support of US settler sovereignty at home and settler imperialism abroad. It is in this way we can see how with the rise of the welfare state border security becomes an important tool for not only controlling colonized populations but also securing settler unity across classes through a form of white nationalism (support for settler sovereignty) defined against the Chicanx and Latinx colonial proletariats. After Feliciano tells Guálinto, “you can turn me in if you want to” referring to his former revolutionary and insurrectionist actions against the United States government, “if it helps keep you in the good graces of your masters,” Guálinto says, “I have no ‘masters.’ I am doing what I do in the service of my country” (302). Yet as Feliciano points out this country is a settler nation premised on the exclusion of the
people it colonizes from its white democracy and civil society. “Does ‘your country’ include the Mexicans living in it?” (302). The border Guálinto has been sent to secure and police serves as a key instrument of counterrevolutionary violence necessary to reproduce colonial hierarchies on which the welfare state depends.\textsuperscript{29} In short, the novel demonstrates how border violence is integral to the ways the welfare state secures harmony between white labor and capital.

By demonstrating how the 1930s proletarian novel represents a worker consciousness supportive of colonization, Paredes offers a narrative that not only sees the welfare state as a continuation of the settler state, but also locates anticolonial resistance in the recognition of how the institutions and categories of settler colonial society are not designed to incorporate/recognize colonial subjects.\textsuperscript{30} It is in showing how the very narrative form that promised to represent, and in doing so, bring about the redemption of the worker fails to do the same for Chicanxs that the novel maps a path of decolonization for such workers of a colonial proletariat class.\textsuperscript{31} Paredes suggests that Marxisms centered on the white worker, like the view we see in the white proletarian novel at the time, be accountable to critiques of racialization and national oppressions and thus the struggle of decolonization, and that this struggle should not be placed second to a universal workerist identity less workers struggles become reactionary and supportive of a counterrevolutionary state. Of course, in a few short years it will be anticolonial struggles—national liberation movements—that put Marxism into revolutionary practice in ways that white workers at this time throw in with the New Deal reforms and seek stability precisely through their relationship to capital in this dream of achieving a settler social democracy.\textsuperscript{32} In this way, the novel highlights how the stage of Fordist production,
the arrival of real subsumption, depends on the highest form of consent from white workers as a labor aristocracy supportive of welfare state reforms and that this is possible through colonialism at home and imperialism abroad.
Conclusion

The novels of McNickle, Petry, and Paredes register a moment when colonized and racialized writers approach the novel form with an awareness of its limits to demand recognition of the sovereignty and humanity of their communities. If earlier writers of these same communities, such as those discussed in Chapters 1-3, had turned to the novel to produce such visions of sovereignty and humanity only to find how the genres of the nineteenth century fail them in this regard, McNickle, Petry and Paredes approach the novel much more conscious of the fact that when used within and from the locations of elimination and social death, it cannot envision the colonized and enslaved being included or redeemed through categories of modernity that it otherwise coheres at the locations of white settler possession and freedom. Because of this, we see how McNickle, Petry and Paredes use the naturalist novel to highlight how a settler reading public and the settler state, in their goal of maintaining forms of unity and harmony among settlers required for capitalist expansion, will not recognize the sovereignty and humanity of Native, Black, Brown communities. In other words, these writers use a form of committed art—one that at the time had powerfully demanded recognition of the how capitalism had threatened to violate white workers’ expected immunities from disposability and unfreedom—to show how the same demand for immunity would not be honored for colonized peoples. Instead, it would only be met with non-recognition precisely because the legitimacy of the liberal social contract, or these forms of settler unity holding together liberal democracy and the marketplace are produced through structures of Native elimination and anti-Black subjection.
If earlier writers of this study sought out the novel with the assumption that its genres could help them prove that their communities be made free in and through the categories of modernity, McNickle, Petry, and Paredes see such a task as an impossible one for they know that these categories are premised on their peoples’ ongoing exclusion and subjugation. It is taking the genre at the time that proved to win recognition for white workers and small farmers and using it to reveal how its narrative strategies cannot win the same recognition for the colonized and enslaved that McNickle, Petry, and Paredes emphasize the role of the novel in legitimizing a modernity that rests on the violence of coloniality. For such writers, the only use the novel appears to have in this moment is to serve as a vehicle for exposing the very impossibility of modernity and its narrative forms like the novel itself. While they approach the novel form much more aware of its limitations, in doing so, they continue what previous marginalized writers had done when using the novel, which is to make explicit the ways the colonial and slave relation must be maintained in order to uphold the expansion of capitalism and the integrity of US democracy. Thus, if the novel fails Ridge, Ruiz de Burton, Delany, Callahan, Pokagon, and Love in their task of imagining how the colonized and enslaved can be freed through the categories of modernity, McNickle, Petry, and Paredes stage and highlight this failure in ways that point up the importance of refusing and rejecting these categories once and for all.

It is in this way that the novels of this study serve as an archive in the long nineteenth century of narrative forms that make visible the irreconcilable contradictions of modernity in a way that the late modernist aesthetic is valued for doing so in the same moment this archive comes to an end. Adorno had best theorized this late modernist
aesthetic. He argued that through the autonomy of its formal structure the work of art brings to light the social contradictions of capitalist society. If ideology conceals such contradictions, it is the role of art to spotlight them. In his essay “Commitment,” Adorno argues that politicized art or works with political messaging reproduce the very politics their authors’ oppose because the politics of a work of art lies in its form not in its political message or content. If the formal experience of the work of art is not autonomous from or opposed to the forms of experiencing the world its political messaging decries, the work of art, no matter how radical its political message, will nevertheless uphold or legitimate this world. As Adorno explains, “the notion of a ‘message’ in art, even when politically radical, already contains an accommodation to the world: the stance of the lecturer conceals a clandestine entente with the listeners, who could only be rescued from deception by refusing it” (193). Adorno identifies only a few artists who produce autonomous works of art that do this political work of defamiliarizing rather than accommodating audiences to modernity. It is Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka, who, as Adorno puts it,

arouse the fear which existentialism merely talks about. By dismantling appearance, they explode from within the art which committed proclamation subjugates from without, and hence only in appearance. The inescapability of their work compels the change of attitude which committed works merely demand. He over whom Kafka's wheels have passed, has lost forever both any peace with the world and any chance of consoling himself with the judgement that the way of the world is bad; the element of ratification which lurks in resigned admission of the dominance of evil is burnt. (191)
If Beckett and Kafka create works of art that confront the reader with the impossibilities of his or her world through modernist experimentation, we can see that the narrative dissonances of the early ethnic American novel, as I have shown in this study, already serve as an archive of forms doing this work that Adorno calls for in his theory of the modernist aesthetic. To suggest this is to argue for a literary value of this archive of dissonant forms not as autonomous works of art in the way Adorno sees literary value in the works of Beckett or Kafka, but in the way these early novels through their dissonance produce maps of the antagonisms of the colonial and slave relation as the structures of violence underpinning modernity. Where this dissonance prevents images of freedom or sovereignty of colonized and enslaved people, it inscribes perceptive views of the ways the colonial and slave relation enable the expanded reproduction of the capitalist relation.

In this way, we should see how not only the novels of McNickle, Petry, and Paredes, but also the earlier novels of this study, relate to the literary and cultural nationalisms in the decades to come. The way that their formal dissonances express the colonial and slave relation as irreconcilable antagonism, that is, as structures of dispossession producing the cohesion of settler society, corresponds to what the global anticolonial rebellions of the mid-twentieth century (that produce such cultural nationalisms) are seeking to overcome in their revolutionary goal of liberation not incorporation. To see these relations as antagonisms and not conflicts, is to see the need for their destruction rather than synthesis. This was the political goal of mid-twentieth century Native, Black, Chicanx, and other Third World liberation struggles: a destruction of those projects that sought to destroy them rather than the further democratization or reform of a social order premised on these antagonisms. It is these early novels and the
way their dissonances make explicit colonialism and slavery as antagonisms that already produce ways of seeing these structures that call for and support a politics of liberation through destruction.

Of course, the literary and cultural nationalisms that emerge from these global anticolonial rebellions and national liberation movements show how the novel takes on a new role at this later time in its aim of cohering the identities of resistance of these movements and rebellions. The novel of literary nationalism does not demand recognition like the early ethnic American novel, but instead constructs identities of liberation movements themselves, ones that are affirmable and thus help consolidate the (anti-colonial) national or class identity of the colonized and enslaved. The novels of this earlier period before the mid-twentieth global anticolonial rebellions, should be seen, then, in line with the trajectory of what these international rebellions sought to achieve rather than be seen as prior works of a period of assimilation that do not offer images of resistance and agency. These earlier works encode the structural violence of settler colonialism and anti-Blackness that later literary and cultural nationalisms write identities of resistance to destroy as a condition of possibility for self-determination of Native, African, and Chicanx peoples. In other words, these early novels reveal what shortly thereafter global anticolonial rebellions prove true: not only is the goal liberation not incorporation, but any kind of incorporation, recognition, or representation within liberal democracy will only come as a concession won through the building of power/autonomy among colonized and enslaved people.

We should also see that in our contemporary period of late capitalism and neoliberal state policies in which neocolonialism and counterrevolutionary state strategies
of liberal multiculturalism that offer cultural or ethnic recognition to marginalized people as a way to disavow demands for liberation, the novels of McNickle, Petry, and Paredes, as well as the other works of this study, serve as prescient critiques of these strategies. These early novels demonstrate how capitalism and democracy in the United States expand and progress precisely through the projects of elimination and social death. Incorporation or achieving freedom in these projects will always come at the price of furthering the genocide and death of others. In seeing this antagonism, there is a logic of refusal and fugitivity found in the dissonant forms of these early novels that warns of the dangers of neocolonialism and other ruses of recognition that only serve to reinforce colonial and racial power disparities not remedy or overcome them.

It is in this way, then, I also want to suggest that by showing how state recognition is offered only to those within the sites of settler sovereignty and whiteness in order to restore settler unity required for capitalist expansion, the novels of McNickle, Petry, and Paredes reveal how the very aspiration for social democracy in the United States is always already the desire to achieve settler democracy. New Deal reforms redeem white workers by upholding their status of settler, someone benefitting from capitalism in ways that while exploited by capital, he or she nonetheless retains protections, security, and benefits, a share of the spoils of colonial and racial dispossession.

J. Sakai argues that the welfare state was created to ensure that white workers could gain what had always been promised to them in settler democracy, namely the benefits and power of being included as settlers:
The victory they gained was the firm positioning of the Euro-Amerikan working class in the settler ranks, reestablishing the right of all Europeans here to share the privileges of the oppressor nation. This was the essence of the equality that they won. This bold move was in the settler tradition, sharing the Amerikan pie with more European reinforcements so that the Empire could be strengthened. This formula had partially broken down during the transition from the Amerika of the Frontier to the Industrial Amerika. It was the brilliant accomplishment of the New Deal to mend this break. (195)

When seen as the attempt to restore the dream of settler democracy, the welfare state and the aspiration for social democracy can be understood not as the attempts to bribe potentially revolutionary workers as much as they are attempts to maintain cross-class unity among all settlers required for the expanded reproduction of capitalism. That is, while white workers as settlers fighting for greater rights or even collective ownership of the means of production—a settler socialism—was a threat to capitalists, it was not necessarily a threat to white supremacy or settler colonialism. This is why, however, the novels of McNickle, Petry, and Paredes offer important narrative refusals of the New Deal and the welfare state. Because their novels reveal how the creation of the welfare state came as a result of the non-recognition and exclusion of Native, African, and Mexican Americans, they register the ways this formation is designed to create equality and thus greater unity among settlers precisely through the ongoing dispossession of the colonized and enslaved.

In this way, then, these novels help us see the end of the welfare state from its beginning. In the years following the 60s, neoliberal policies emerge premised on the
dismantling of the ways the welfare state attempts to redistribute wealth from the top to the bottom. David Harvey argues that this dismantling should be read as the result of a capitalist class restoring its power by recapturing the state in response to the success of workers’ movement of the decades before.¹ However, the novels of McNickle, Petry, and Paredes suggest that the welfare state model falls apart because already by the 1970s the welfare state no longer does its job of maintaining a racial solidarity between white workers and owners when after the racial and colonial rebellions of the 60s the result was the state also extending welfare state benefits to the colonized and racialized, or the people never meant to receive them in the first place, as was the case in New Deal reforms of the 1930s.² If the welfare state no longer promised only to provide security and protections for white workers as a way to maintain the wages of whiteness, or the defense of their status as settlers (that ensured their consent and cooperation with capital allowing for its reproduction and expansion), but instead, because of the rebellions of Native, Black, and Chicanxs of the 60s, also, extended some of these same benefits and security to the colonized and racialized, then the welfare state no longer was worth its cost to capital. Instead, as a way to continue to maintain settler unity and thus the consent and obedience of white workers, capital would come to invest in mass incarceration and the expansion of policing institutions as tools for maintaining colonial and racial hierarchies. McNickle, Petry, and Paredes, of course, already predict this in the way they show how the welfare state and social democracy were from their inception projects attempting to restore and maintain unity among settlers through the exclusion of colonized and enslaved classes to ensure favorable conditions for the reproduction of capitalism.
Today, then, when capitalism runs aground on the crisis of its own reproduction, and its violence begins to carve into populations of white workers who expect their status of settlers to be protected and backed by the state, it is not a coincidence that the two most powerful visions to emerge promising to resolve capitalism’s betrayal of settler unity are nostalgic visions of a return to when settler unity was upheld and defended. One such vision is for a return to the (white) welfare state where the Fordist worker enjoyed a greater share of the value he or she produced, and the other is a nostalgia for a settler republic of the nineteenth century, a recuperation of the dream for something much closer to what those like Franklin, Jefferson and Jackson had in mind of a white settler ethno-estate. The former could be called a form of settler social democracy or settler socialism, and the latter a form of white fascism that has always been settlerism in the United States. McNickle, Petry, and Paredes, however, along with the marginalized writers of this study preceding them, teach us that from the structural standpoint of the colonized and enslaved, these two nostalgic views have much in common, and that, as a result, both the founding vision of the United States and its later iteration in the form of the welfare state are not going to deliver freedom to all people, and thus should be rejected for a politics that will—namely decolonization and Black abolition as the movements promising to lay waste to the antagonisms of anti-Indianism and anti-Blackness upholding a capitalism that has it out for all of us.
Notes

Introduction

1 See Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*.

2 Works that explore similar questions that my study builds on include: David Roediger’s *Class, Race, and Marxism* which explores how capitalism produces and depends on racial difference; Frank Wilderson’s “Gramsci’s Black Marx” that examines the more radical proposition that the base of capitalism is less the exploitation of wage labor than it is white supremacy, a relation of domination on which labor/capital relation is built; Chris Chen’s “The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality” that discusses the ways race and racism, or the racialization process functions not only to create wage differentials among proletarians in order to increase rates of exploitation, but also to manage through direct violence capitalism’s unwaged and/or surplus or redundant populations; Iyko Day’s *Alien Capital* that explores how the difference between exchange value and use value, abstraction of labor power compared to its use value, produces the ways the mystifying abstractions of capital are racialized onto the bodies of Asian laboring bodies as “alien” and thus menacing in relationship to the ways white labor is racialized as concrete labor grounded in use-value. The racialization of labor according to the binary of white nativist/Alien foreigner obscures the way labor-power as a commodity in capitalism contains both an exchange value and use-value and cannot be separated.

3 Here I refer to the work of theorists such as Iyko Day, Glen Coulthard, Jodi Byrd, David Roediger, Chris Chen, Frank Wilderson, Lisa Lowe, Tiffany King, Robert Nichols, and Jodi Melamed.


5 See Michael Denning’s “Wageless Life.” See also Robert Nichols’ “Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation.”

6 Harry Harootunian’s *Marx after Marx* suggests that because Marx seeks to see the capitalist relation all at once, his map must totalize or complete capitalism’s movement toward the real subsumption of labor, which, in doing so, occludes the view of ongoing and co-present forms of formal subsumption and modes of primitive accumulation.

7 See Patrick Wolfe’s “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.”

8 For instance, the Oceti Sakowin Nation at Standing Rock in 2016 were not trying to blockade an oil pipeline as exploited workers. Rather, their struggle was one over land and Native sovereignty. As Indigenous subjects, their struggle was against a form of ongoing primitive accumulation, an extractive capitalism attempting to turning their land into a means of producing wealth by running a pipeline carrying a commodity to be sold
for profit through it. For more on Standing Rock and the long history of Indigenous resistance against colonialism and capitalism, see Nick Estes' *Our History is the Future*.

9 Here I draw on definitions of how Indigenous peoples are structurally positioned within colonialism and capitalism from the work of Byrd, Coulthard, and Jean O’Brien.

10 See Walter Johnson’s *River of Dark Dreams*.

11 See also Tiffany King’s work on why the slave is not a laborer, but a subject of social death in her “Labor’s Aphasia: Toward Antiblackness as Constitutive to Settler Colonialism.”

12 For instance, there can exist an anti-Black worker-run, democratically controlled mode of production, just as this same mode of production can exist on stolen land or, in other words, not be accountable to the demands of decolonization which call for repatriation of lands to Indigenous people.

13 For Marx, capitalism is accumulation of value through the relationship between labor and capital. In this relationship, labor produces surplus value for capital and capital pays a portion of this value to labor to allow for the reproduction of labor. In this way labor and capital reproduce each other. This is what Marx means when he says above that “capital has become capital as such” when it “creates its own presuppositions.” Marx elaborates on this further in Section 7 of Capital, the Law of Accumulation, where he discusses the simple reproduction and expanded reproduction of the capitalist relation. The crisis of the reproduction of this relationship arises from the tendency of capital to accumulate surplus value that it cannot reinvest and to shed labor through its drive to lower costs of production through labor-saving innovations that increase productivity while decreasing the use of capital’s source of surplus value, namely labor. Workers become redundant or superfluous and cannot reproduce themselves through the market without wages. Capital cannot expand if it cannot reinvest its surplus in new ventures that can exploit labor. For an extended account of this crisis of reproduction, also known as capital’s secular crisis see, Joshua Clover’s “Subsumption and Crisis” and Endnotes collective’s “Misery and Debt.”

14 This is debated if this is in Marx’s work or not, or if it is read into Marx’s work.

15 Settler sovereignty not only distributes the spoils of empire to labor allowing many to escape or avoid proletarian life. It also recognizes labor to have productive capacity which is immunity from disposability or surplus. This immunity from disposability, however, is the right of a settler to demand the state not allow the settler laborer to be treated like the Indian, the subject who is positioned as disposable and surplus to capital. Labor consents, then, to capital despite the crisis of exploitation precisely because settler sovereignty has first promised immunity from this crisis. Labor has only come to agree to this relation, not rebelled in ways that stood in the way of its reproduction, because settler sovereignty promised labor immunity from the forms of violence and disposability only reserved for the colonized and enslaved. Exploitation was always to be a temporary status resolved through colonial dispossession. The other side of this process of reproducing wage labor despite crisis is whiteness as the position produced through anti-Black violence. Whiteness promises wage labor will be free labor, which is to say, unenslaveability. Wage labor emerges and is reproduced as white labor, which is immunity from being positioned as the Slave. Wage labor emerges then through this promise of unslaveability. Workers come to agree/consent to the wage labor relation
because it promises freedom as unslaveability. This consent is reproduced by reproducing blackness as slaveness.

16 Notable examples of this work include Glen Coulthard’s critique of Marx’s stagist account of primitive accumulation in *Red Skin White Masks* where Coulthard argues that Indigenous peoples struggle against colonial dispossession rather than exploitation, a fight over land rather than labor power. Jodi Byrd’s *Transit of Empire* shows how Indianness puts in motion and facilitates the expanded imperialist violence around the world as well as conceals the ways liberal democracy and its attempts to include “formerly” colonized and enslaved peoples remain premised on ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands. See also Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism” and Jodi A. Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed, and Chandan Reddy’s “Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities.”

17 Jameson writes further that, “the deviation of the individual text from some deeper narrative structure directs our attention to those determinate changes in the historical situation which block a full manifestation or replication of the structure on the discursive level. On the other hand, the failure of a particular generic structure . . . alerts us to the historical ground, now no longer existent, in which the original structure was meaningful” (146).

18 Adorno describes works of art that demonstrate this form of representation: “in expression they reveal themselves as the wounds of society . . . The socially critical zones of artworks are those where it hurts; where in their expression, historically determined, the untruth of the social situation comes to light. It is actually this against which the rage at art reacts” (237). The untruth of capitalism’s emergence and expansion during the period of these early narratives is the history of colonialism and slavery as its necessary conditions of possibility. The irreconcilable tensions, breakdowns, and binds in the forms or ideologies of these early narratives bring this untruth to light.

19 We can see how the early literature of the colonized and enslaved make explicit what later cultural nationalisms take as a given and that neoliberal multiculturalism wants us to forget, namely that the reproduction of liberal capitalism is premised on the colonial and slave relation. For this reason, we should read these early narratives not as assimilationist texts even if their overt themes did support such politics but as precursory representations of the antagonisms/impossibilities of liberal capitalism that the anticolonial struggles of the mid-twentieth century had named and declared to dismantle in their cultural representations. These early narratives also, then, should be seen as speculative visions whose importance returns today in an era when neocolonialisms and promises of liberal recognition try to stand in the way of liberation struggles, or when class-first models stand in the way by not putting decolonization and abolition first, or suggesting that communism can exist on stolen land or white supremacy is the effect that will melt away rather than the base of a capitalist modernity.

20 Here I draw from Ciccariello-Maher’s study of what he calls a history of decolonial dialectics that challenges Euro-centric forms of stagist dialectics. Coulthard’s work also calls this “normative developmentalism” in which it is assumed that capitalism homogenizes all peoples in ways that oppresses them but also creates the conditions for a worker-centered communism, ignoring Indigenous peoples’ ontological relationship to land-bases. The refusal of the colonial and slave relation is also then the refusal of
capitalism’s teleology whether it be promises of liberal inclusion where universal human emancipation is promised through capitalism or the stagism of a Eurocentric linear dialectics where workers are redeemed through a democratically, worker-run mode of production that is only possible by passing through capitalism in the first place where never is it the goal to return lands to Indigenous people and be accountable to their laws and ways of life on such lands.

Chapter 1

1 For more on how the working class formed out of what was first the creation of a wageless or unemployed class, see Michael Denning’s “Wageless Life.”

2 Writing on the origins of modern policing, Kristian Williams points out how the formation of the New York City police department in 1845 was in response to worker riots. The police had the task of controlling crowds and disciplining worker behavior in public: “the greatest portion of the actual business of law enforcement did not concern the protection of life and property, but the controlling of poor people, their habits and their manners” (70), and that, “with the birth of the modern policing, the state acquired a new means of controlling the citizenry—one based on its experiences, not only with crime and domestic disorder, but with colonialism and slavery as well” (76).

3 See the circular “Vote Yourself a Farm,” distributed by the True Workingman, Jan. 24, 1846 in John Commons’, A Documentary History of American Industrial Society: Labor conspiracy cases, 1806-1842. Landless settlers of the North and South had “voted for a farm,” which is to say, voted for genocide and slavery, when they voted for Jackson in 1832 and his successors Van Buren, and Polk, to follow. Lincoln would also use the same slogan to win support of land reform free soil voters hoping to escape proletarian status through increased enclosures of Native land in the West, a promise he kept with the passage of the Homestead Act in 1863.

4 See Judith Butler’s Precariousness Life and Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?.

5 See Marx and Engel’s, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848).

6 There is a rich history of scholarship on the politics of Bartleby’s refusal. See Louise K. Barnett’s, “Bartleby as Alienated Worker,” Slavoj Žižek’s “Notes Towards a Politics of Bartleby,” Giorgio Agamben’s Bartleby, or on contingency,” Gilles Deleuze ‘ Bartleby; or, the Formula,” Jacques Rancière’s “Deleuze, Bartleby, and the Literary formula,” Sianne Ngai’s introduction to Ugly Feelings, Branka Arsic, “Passive Constitutions or 7 1/2 Times Bartleby,” Dan McCall’s The Silence of Bartleby, and Russ Castronovo’s “Occupy Bartleby.”

7 Jamie Bronstein explains how an “equal-rights ideology among American artisans” during the antebellum period led once artisan but now increasingly exploited workers to call for land reform: “the ideology was precipitated by the perception that the road from journeyman to laborer was becoming increasingly difficult to travel.” The solution was to appeal to settler democracy or what was called republicanism. “Land-reform propagandists expanded this critique by presenting artisans with the specter of an unfinished American Revolution, unfinished because there was as yet no social equality. . . National Reformers appealed to their constituency as a group of citizens, and a call for a landed democracy as the goal of the unfinished American revolution” (69, 70).

8 The prison has always been a racializing institution. To be imprisoned for vagrancy,
marks Bartleby’s fall from whiteness. As Brenna and Davina Bhandar explain: “dating back to the medieval era, and traveling from the transatlantic history of slavery to the present, the categories of evildoer, criminal, vagrant, and terrorist operate as raced categories, which work to produce the prison as a key institution of a racial and gendered capitalism. As many prison abolitionists have shown, the presumed link between criminality and colour means that racial categories function ideologically to naturalise incarceration” (7). Nikhil Pal Singh in “The Whiteness of Police,” writes that, “If white supremacy is understood as a form of group-differentiated power and pleasure that accues value, the racial distribution and directionality of the legitimate violence it exerts over those regarded as ‘dangerous and inconvenient’ publicly confirms it and performs its most essential work” (1098). For Bartleby to be policed instead of doing the policing of non-white bodies, threatens the social contract, so to speak, of whiteness itself.

9 For an example of this aspiration, see Horace Greeley’s “socialism” in the Tribune where he sought to harmonize employers and workers.

10 Graham Thompson in “‘Through Consumptive Pallors of this Blank, Raggy Life’: Melville’s Not Quite White Working Bodies,” writes that “by having laboring bodies perform ‘a not very white’ whiteness that never fulfills the whiteness attributed to them by nativist labor activism, Melville’s short fiction, rather than producing the mea culpa for his role in the Astor Place riot that Barbara Foley identifies, reinforces a distrust of political movements whose rhetoric relies upon ideas of class superiority, national purity, and genealogical fixity. Bartleby and the maids may appear to be white but the iterative resonances of Melville’s narratives—the preferences for pallid and blank—suggest the elusive nature and unreliability of this whiteness as any basis either for social change or, ultimately, affiliation across class boundaries” (40,41). I argue that the story is calling for a recuperation of whiteness and not offering a critique of it, independent of Melville’s personal views on race.

11 See Barbara Foley’s reading which contextualizes the role of the Astor place riot in shaping the story’s politics.

12 Marx had noted this conflict of the settler colony. In Capital, he writes “How, then, to heal the anti-capitalistic cancer of the colonies? If men were willing, at a blow, to turn all the soil from public into private property, they would destroy certainly the root of the evil, but also — the colonies. The trick is how to kill two birds with one stone. Let the Government put upon the virgin soil an artificial price, independent of the law of supply and demand, a price that compels the immigrant to work a long time for wages before he can earn enough money to buy land, and turn himself into an independent peasant.” (Chapter 33: The Modern Theory of Colonisation).

13 For a critique of the mainstream settler liberal politics of the Occupy Wall Street movement which drew so much from the figure and politics of Bartleby, see Sandy Grande’s “Accumulation of the Primitive: The Limits of Liberalism and the Politics of Occupy Wall Street.”

14 See Russell Thornton’s, “Cherokee Population Losses During the Trail of Tears: a New Perspective and a New Estimate.”

15 See Castillo and Camirillo who argue, “Forced into a life that was outside of the newly imposed Anglo-American law,” Murieta’s Mexican rebellion, “was a banditry in the form of retribution and for the purpose of survival” (2). See also Eric Hobsawm’s reading of
Murieta in *Bandits*. For an historical account of Joaquín Murieta, see Bruce S. Thornton’s *Searching for Joaquín: Myth, Murieta, and History in California*.

For a summary of the question of whether *Murieta* is a novel of resistance or assimilation, see Sean Teuton’s remarks in, “The Indigenous Novel.” Readings that fall on the side that *Murieta* is a novel of assimilation see Christenson, Lowe, Rowe, and Goeke. See also John Havard’s more recent study that argues “in speaking for the concerns of Mexicans and the Cherokee, Ridge advocates for a world in which exceptional, cosmopolitan peoples of color have the opportunity to rise to the social and economic rank warranted by their elite capacities,” and that, “against the identity-based ideologies he saw at work in Cherokee Removal, the laws of 1850s California, and sensation fiction, Ridge reproclaims the Enlightenment message that access to a liberal way of life should be open to all” (323, 343). For studies that read *Murieta* as a novel of resistance, see Owens, Walker, Alemán, Rifkin, and Madragon, Crumpton, and Cox.

My reading of the novel’s formal structure builds on Owen’s early reading in which he argues, “Ridge’s *Joaquín Murieta* can be seen as intensely dialogic, a hybridized narrative within which the author is in dialogue with himself, within which two distinct linguistic consciousnesses, two kinds of discourse, coexist in a ‘dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment’” (35). Lori Merish similarly reads the novel’s form in terms of hybridization: “written about the shifting (inter)national borderland of California, Ridge’s novel enacts cultural hybridization in its very medium of expression, defying literary classification and foregrounding the instability of formal, generic, and linguistic cultural boundaries” (52).

For more on the historical novel, see Lukács’ important study *The Historical Novel*.

At the same, by the 1850s, writers like Hawthorne and Melville attempted to carve out new literary meanings for the romance which rejected historical truth in favor of aesthetic autonomy. As Hawthorne explains in his preface to *The House of Seven Gables*: “When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one. The Author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral, as with an iron rod—or rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly—thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude” (2).

Indigenous rebellion in fact did serve as a backdrop to Ridge’s novel. The Garra uprising of 1851, that both Alemán and Rifkin take note of in their readings of the novel, was a multi-tribe coordinated effort led by Cupeno Chief Antonio Garra to kick out and remove white settlers from southern California. While it was suppressed, it panicked the settler communities, revealing the instability of settler sovereignty. For more on the Garra uprising, see Douglas Monroy (197-198).


For a history of Indigenous genocide in California, see Clifford Trafzer and Joel R Hyer’s *Exterminate Them*: *Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape and Enslavement of*
Native Americans During the California Gold Rush, 1848-1868, and Benjamin Madley’s *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe.*

Cheryl Walker argues that Chinese laborers in the novel serve as a type for Indigenous people “who were also slaughtered in large numbers even when they did not resist” (129, 130).

Here I build on a point that Alemán makes when he argues that, “Joaquín Murieta espouses the very ideals Anglo-Americans lack in the narrative, creating what is perhaps the most criminal aspect of Joaquín Murieta—he is more ideally American than Anglo-Americans are. That is, he earnestly attempts to live up to the country’s social ideals, even after he realizes most Anglos fall short of them” (87).

We see such an example of this pure sensation in the follow scene, which is one among many in the novel: “Dead men lay upon every side, both Americans and Mexicans, and in front of Three-Fingered Jack were stretched five men with their skulls broken by the butt-end of his revolver, which he had used as a club after emptying its contents, and, at that moment that Joaquín’s eye met him, he was stooping with glaring eyes and a hideous smile over a prostrate American, in whose long hair he had wound his left hand across whose throat he was drawing the coarse grained steel of his huge home-made bowie-knife. With a shout of delight he severed the neck joint and threw the gaping head over the rocks. He was crazy with the sight of blood and searched eagerly for another victim. He scarcely knew his leader, and the latter had called to him three times before he recovered his senses” (59).

Rifkin reads the novel’s ending as a warning to white readers of the potential for future unrest among the populations US settler colonialism dominates: “instead of generating anything resembling a program for change, the effect of the novel’s deferral of (political) resolution and multiplication of implicit referents is to leave the reader with a sense of the (geopolitical) porousness of the nation and the potential for violence that inheres in the existence of numerous conquered, alienated, and racialized collectivities within U.S. borders” (40). Similarly, Rowe argues that, “the failure of democratic idealism in postwar California is a social problem that Ridge’s narrative proposes both to analyze and solve. But it does so not by staging a well-justified rebellion engineered by the heroic Joaquín and his loyal followers, but by demonstrating the anarchic consequences of this failure” (159). I argue that instead of offering a positive or manifest vision of a revolutionary movement, Ridge’s *Murieta* succeeds in revealing the structural conflicts of settler democracy. This view, like a negative dialectical critique, allows us to understand what conditions must be overcome to bring about revolutionary change. To see the impossibility of the present, is to find a path out of the present towards a different future. In this regard, I contribute to a point Alemán makes: “*Murieta* undermines its author’s ostensible assimilationist position and reveals instead the cultural and physical violence American ideologies perform on individual and collective racial bodies that emulate American ideals” (73-74), and “The larger point of Rollin Ridge’s narrative is thus not to espouse America’s cultural myths but to expose their shortcomings by having the Mexican racialized body politic perform them” (91).

Indeed, already in 1859, *Murieta* had been pirated and published as a sensationalized crime-story by San Francisco’s *California Police Gazzette*. Ridge was upset and denounced this version not only because he didn’t receive royalties, but because it extricated the sublime and therefore literary meanings of Murieta as the honorable subject.
deserving recognition and thus respect of his individual autonomy. As Streeby points out, “the California Police Gazette makes Murrieta into an example of an innate, alien criminality” (266). In this way, the sensation industry conceals what Ridge’s novel laid bare: the antagonism on which settler democracy is built and maintained. Although Ridge prepared a second edition of *Murrieta* that was republished a few years after his death in 1871, nothing came of it in terms of reclaiming the literary meanings of Murrieta. Ridge’s writerly reputation was quickly severed from the novel, after which he came to be remembered mostly for his poetry until the republication of the novel in 1955.

28 John Gonzalez agrees, “In relying upon the racialized national claims of citizenship through white descent, *The Squatter and the Don* demonstrates the dead end of national allegory in contesting corporate restructurings of everyday life” (166).

Chapter 2

1 For more on John Brown and his raid on Harper’s Ferry, see the biographies of John Brown from David Reynolds, Tony Horwitz, and W. E. B. Du Bois.

2 *Blake* is most widely recognized for its hemispheric vision of slavery, or how Delany stretches the novel’s narrative vision beyond the borders of the nation-form. Paul Gilroy has argued that “the suggestive way that it locates the Black Atlantic world in a webbed network, between the local and the global, challenges the coherence of all narrow nationalist perspectives and points to the spurious invocation of ethnic particularity to enforce them and to ensure the tidy flow of cultural output into neat, symmetrical units” (29). Gilroy’s reading of *Blake* has led to several readings over the years that build on his initial hemispheric approach to the novel. Jeffory Clymer studies how *Blake* responds to 1850s legal discourses and cultural meanings of property and commerce. Clymer demonstrates how *Blake* attacks essentialist notions in race, reveals the shared economic interests between the North and South, and reflects anxieties concerning the South’s imperialist desire to annex Cuba in order to prevent potential slave insurrections in the Caribbean reaching US borders. Ifeoma C K. Nwakwo’s reads *Blake*, along with Gayl Jones’s late twentieth-century novel *Mosquito*, as examples of US African American fiction that “view the hemisphere in terms of a potential for collectivity while also highlighting the differences among oppressed peoples, thus demonstrating that US African Americans are not provincial—that they too can recognize, comprehend, and embrace that which is different or unfamiliar” (584). Sharad B. Orihuela’s studies the role of Black piracy in the novel. Against those who read Delany’s endorsement of market values and self-help ideologies, Orihuela maintains that Delany’s representation of the illegal economies of Black piracy serves as a transgressive and potentially liberating transnational space for Black rebellion and revolution. Andy Doolen reads *Blake* as offering a transnational vision of rebellion precisely because it reflects the actual global borders of US racial capitalism. Through this transnational vision of racial capitalism, *Blake* avoids casting the rebellion in terms of a struggle for liberal freedom and redemption, and thus avoids reproducing the very views used to support US slavery.

3 Scholars of the novel have also attested to its unique premise. Eric Sundquist argues that, “Delany projected a far more elaborate version of . . . the threat not of secession and disunion but of African American resistance on a grand scale. . . In this alone *Blake* is set apart from every other Black text of the period, many of which advocated . . . individual
acts of resistance but none of which suggested that large-scale nationalist political action was possible apart from emancipation and emigration” (199), while Adenike M. Davidson has argued that Delany’s choice to include a “full Black protagonist, a blatant disregard for a white audience, a willingness to abandon ‘Christianity’ and Christian ethics, a move away from presenting either the North or Europe as a haven by centering freedom in the Caribbean, and by presenting the possibility and necessity of Pan-African unification against white supremacy” (28), made Blake unique compared to other fictions representing slavery at the time. In studying why Delany’s novel of global slave insurrection omits the Haitian Revolution, Gregory Pierrot argues that “Delany defined his novel as a cultural intervention, a renewed literary model for a new Black American nation” (177).

4 If Melville’s “Benito Cereno” shows how the nation depends on slave labor for which the risk of rebellion threatens to destabilize it, Delany’s representation of insurrection begins from a different set of coordinates in that it already assumes the US nation is not worth defending. Melville’s layers of irony and ambiguity, which make it a literary fiction in that it invites readers to read and interpret what Delany cannot perceive at his own peril, lay bare the humanity and capacity for self-determination of the enslaved, which becomes all the more frightening for a US nation premised on containing Black rebellion. Nonetheless, Melville’s story resolves this contradiction between fearing the enslaved because they are inhuman and human in its turn away from literary to legal discourse at the end of the story. Douglass’ Heroic Slave ends offering an image of a successful slave insurrection but that is confined to a ship rather than spilling out over the land like we see in Delany’s novel. Madison Washington also becomes its captain, suggesting that Douglass imagines the fulfillment of the Declaration of Independence. Stowe’s Dread treats Black rebellion of dismal swamp as a form of protest that must be transformed into a desire for inclusion and incorporation for there to be reconciliation between the enslaved and white America. Delaney’s Blake, however, forecloses a view of insurrection, which emphasizes the antagonism of Blackness instead of offering a (false) resolution.

5 All references to Marx’s letters or newspaper correspondence I take from Andrew Zimmerman’s edited collection of Marx’s writing on the Civil War found in The Civil War in the United States.

6 For more on how Marx’s Capital is a conceptual representation of the totality of capitalism that its forms of appearance conceal, see Jameson’s Representing Capital.

7 My reading attempts to builds on Adenike M. Davidson’s study on the genre of the Black nation novel. In her chapter on Blake, she argues that the novel not only rejects “dominant African American aspirations to inclusion” but also showcases “actions of violence, spirituality, and racial uplift [that] are less in response to political exclusion and more connected to the forming of a national community, the determining of the best means for survival and success, and the self-defining of Blackness as a positive manifestation of the community” (31). In Delany’s attempt to do this, the narrative problem he creates, I contend, is how to represent the structure of slavery that has violently made African slaves into a nation or class of people in the first place.

8 If Delany’s goal is to represent mass slave insurrection, to do so, he must offer a global vision—a totalized view—of the structure of slavery. That is, to borrow from the
language of Lukács, Blake should be considered a realist novel insofar as it aspires to map the totality of its world, a world of slavery.

On the question of the novel’s formal failures, I contribute to Adéléke Adékú’s reading in which he argues that “Blake’s narrative structure commands an almost unanimous negative critical judgment because it combines virtually all the major narrative genres that have been devised for writing about the Black experience in the antebellum New World—the fugitive slave narrative, ‘spiritual’ conversion, maroon resistance, Middle Passage horrors, and so on—without seeming to be able to integrate them” (36, 37).

For studies on primitive accumulation see Marx’s later chapters on primitive accumulation in Capital, Cedric Robinson’s Black Marxism, and Silvia Federici’s Caliban and the Witch. For work that has more recently revisited the term see Glen Coulthard’s Red Skin White Masks, Jordana Rosenberg and Chi-ming Yang’s “Introduction: The Dispossessed Eighteenth Century” Rosenberg’s “Monstrously Unpositional: Primitive Accumulation and the Aesthetic Arc of Capital,” and Robert Nichols’ “Thief Is Property! The Recursive Logic of Dispossession.”

Here I build on the way Fanon is taken up in Coulthard’s Red Skin White Masks, George Ciccariello-Maher Decolonizing Dialectics, and Frank Wilderson’s Red, White, and Black. These theorists, despite their divergent interpretations, read Fanon’s dialectic as one that rejects Hegelian synthesis in favor of a destructive, decolonial movement forward out of the colonial relation. The key articulation of Fanon’s dialectic, as all three of these theorist highlight, is found in a footnote in Black Skin White Masks where Fanon revises Hegel’s formulation of the Master/Slave dialectic. If “for Hegel there is reciprocity,” Fanon argues that in the colonial world, “the master scorns the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work. Likewise, the slave here can in no way be equated with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds the source of his liberation in his work. The Black slave wants to be like his master. Therefore, he is less independent than that Hegelian slave. For Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object” (195).

Historically, for a minority group of Natives who owned slaves, slavery, they believed, provided a means for achieving economic stability and preserving political sovereignty in the face of further colonization. Yet the much more common position was opposition to slavery. Many viewed it as a practice that further entrenched tribal economies in the same plantation economy that had displaced their communities in the first place. Most of those in opposition to slavery in the years before the Civil War were also those who refused to acknowledge the authority of Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the treaties signed in its aftermath. These communities refused to abandon their nation’s ancestral lands, and, as a result, were forcibly removed by the US military and made to march West, with many dying along the way. Patrick Wolfe has pointed out how slavery among the Choctaw became the sign of permanence and economic stability that accelerated the South’s genocidal campaign to forcibly relocate tribes (396). Slavery had created a strong division among members of the Southeastern tribes, one that would not only intensify in the years leading up to and during the Civil War, but also in the years that followed. For notable studies on the role of slavery in the history of the Southeastern Tribes, see Barbara Krauthamer, Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South, Tiya Miles, The House on Diamond Hill: A
Cherokee Plantation Story, and Jodi Byrd’s Chapter 4 “Cherokee Freedman, Internal Colonialism, and the Racialization of Citizenship” in Transit of Empire.

For more on how settler colonialism and slavery emerged as interlocking structures of domination see Iyko Day, “Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, AntiBlackness, and Settler Colonial Critique.” and Justin Leroy, “Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism.”

As Johnson argues, the economic crisis of 1837 drove plantation imperialism in ways that led to wars of conquest with Mexico—first in the invasion and seizure of the lands that became Texas and then the greater Southwest. See Johnson’s Chapter 11 on William Walker’s invasion and occupation of Nicaragua in River of Dark Dreams, and for a history of US filibustering in Cuba see Rodrigo Lazo’s Writing to Cuba: Filibustering and Cuban Exiles in the United States and Tom Chaffin’s Fatal Glory: Narciso López and the First Clandestine U.S. War against Cuba, or Robert May’s Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America.

See Johnson’s analysis of filibustering as the South’s way to acquire cheap lands for aggrieved poor whites (381-389).

For more on racial dispossession and speculation see Brenna Bhandar’s “Property, Law, and Race: Modes of Abstraction.”

Johnson also notes that by the 1850s, the South was calling for Atlantic slave trade to be re-opened as a way to lower the prices of slaves, making it easier for propertyless whites to become slaveholders (407- 418).

Here I agree and build on Doolen’s point that “Delany’s critique defines the [American] Revolution as a failure that cannot serve as the ideological origin for a Black independence struggle that exceeds national time and space” (157). Katy Chiles offers a similar understanding of Delany’s critique of the limits of the US nation, arguing that the uneven and discontinuous intratextuality of Blake’s serial print form allegorizes the uneven, contradictory, and fraught experience of the US nation as a project compromised by the alternative temporalities of its minority/subaltern populations.

Marx shared a similar fear that Northern white workers might become formally enslaved if the South’s economy expanded. He writes in an article, “The Civil War in the United States,” published in Die Presse, November 7, 1861: “The slave system would infect the whole Union. In the northern states, where Negro slavery is unworkable in practice, the white working class would be gradually depressed to the level of helotry. This would be in accord with the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom, and that as in the South the real labor is the lot of the Negro, so in the North it is the lot of the German and the Irishman, or their direct descendants” (61).

See also Roediger’s Wages of Whiteness and Eric Foner’s Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War which offer a history of slavery’s role in the labor politics of white workers of the nineteenth century.

Labor reformers often compared white workers to the enslaved in order to emphasize how the inequality of wage labor threatened to break the promises of a white democracy rather than to raise concerns over the mistreatment and oppression of the enslaved. An illustrative example of this can be found in labor reform leader George Evans address to abolitionist Gerrit Smith in the Working Man’s Journal, 1844: “I know that families cannot be separated by force among the whites, as they are among the Blacks, and I say this is an abuse that ought to be speedily abated at the South; but does not the white poor
man suffer even in this respect almost as much as the Black? See how families are separated even under the present system; not, indeed, by brute force, but, with equal effect, by the lash of want” (361).

22 For more on the consolidation and expansion of whiteness and the nation-form after the Revolutionary war, see Maggie M. Sale’s The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity. Sale argues that “the rise of racialist discourse on white supremacy in the nineteenth century constituted a new—different from distinctions between those already free and those enslaved—in which the inclusionary potential of the discourse of national identity was simultaneously expanded [for whites] and limited [for non-whites]” (9).

23 For instance, Roediger writes that “in the brutal, Columbia, Pennsylvania race riot of 1834, defenders of the white rioters modelled their appeal directly on the Declaration of Independence, charging a plot by employers and abolitionists to open new trades to Blacks, and ‘to break down the distinctive barrier between the colors that the poor whites may gradually sink into the degraded condition of the Negroes—that, like them, they may be slaves and tools” (58). White labor fought for improved conditions and greater power not by weakening capital but by upholding racial difference.

24 In their studies of slavery, both Eugene Genovese and Orlando Patterson emphasize that direct force was the principle mechanism upholding the master-slave relation in the South. As Patterson puts it, “There is absolutely no evidence from the long and dismal annals of slavery to suggest that any group of slaves ever internalized the conception of degradation held by their masters” (97). Wilderson also emphasizes that unlike the wage laborer, “consent is never a constituent element of the slave relation” (Introduction to Afro-pessimism 24).

25 For an alternative reading of Delany’s critique of liberal humanism see Britt Rusert’s new materialist study of Blake in which Rusert argues that the novel represents a “fugitive science,” or object-centered, nonhuman understanding of personhood which subverted and defied the race essentialist views housed in nineteenth-century liberal humanism.

26 Rebecca S. Biggio argues that “Delany’s approach to the novel was informed by his belief that the threat of Black community was more frightening to whites than the threat of Black violence, because community among Blacks, both locally and on a national scale, fundamentally undermined the system of slavery by creating a place, albeit unsteady, where slaves could see themselves as something more than ‘socially dead,’ and with capital and resources for the struggle ahead” (440).

27 For important studies on the relationship between white supremacy and class, see Ted Allen’s Invention of the White Race, Du Bois’ “White Worker” in Black Reconstruction, Angela Davis, Women, Race and Class, David Roediger’s Wage of Whiteness, Noel Ignatiev’s How the Irish Became White, and Joel Olson’s The Abolition of White Democracy.

28 My point is that one possible reason why Delany has an interest in focusing on Cuba, apart from its importance in the South’s expansionist desires of the 1850s, is that unlike in the South, Cuba didn’t have a large free white population working to police the enslaved. This allows Delany to imagine what cannot be imagined in the South, namely the enslaved receiving help from those who were not only non-enslaved but also non-slaveholders.
Here my reading of Cuba adds to but also diverges from scholars Robert Levine and Gregg Crane who also focus on its significance in their readings of the novel. Levine argues that Blake’s leadership role in Cuba offered white audiences who feared violent slave rebellion, “an image not of Black homicidal fury but of responsible Black leadership. The hopeful suggestion of such a possible ending, then, would have been that the elevation of Delany’s heroic surrogate would contribute to the emancipation and elevation of Blacks in the United States” (216). Crane has maintained that the Black community envisioned in Cuba fulfills the very ideals of US liberal democracy that white Americans have violated: “In contrast to the ‘white’ definition of the American ‘political community’ through reference to the past ‘custom and policy of the country’ and a national interest in racial dominion, parallel ‘Black conversations’ in Blake develop an African American alternative—creating a pluralistic community and determining individual rights through a present dialogue that discovers and establishes a civic consensus” (540).

One of the foundational studies of Afro-pessimism, Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* points out how “emancipation appears less the grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection. As well, it leads us to question whether the rights of man and citizen are realizable or whether the appellation ‘human’ can be borne equally by all” (6).

For more on how Black rebellion shaped capital’s form and the political structures of the United States as a counterrevolutionary formation see, Gerald Horne’s *The Counterrevolution of 1776.*

As Wilderson succinctly puts it in *Red, White, and Black,* “If workers can buy a loaf of bread, they can also buy a slave” (13). See also Wilderson’s “Gramsci’s Black Marx.”

Roediger tracks how white labor reformers began to turn away from using the discourse of white slavery in their critiques of wage labor. Instead, white free labor became the designation taken up to describe white labor of the North. The reason for this shift had to with the expansion of wage labor and the consolidation of whiteness. As Roediger explains, “To ask workers to sustain comparisons of themselves and Blacks slaves violated at once their republican pride and their sense of whiteness,” (86) and that “the defense of the free white labor, around which the Republican party gained ground in the 1850s and to which opposing parties also sought to appeal, succeeded among white workers because it better appealed to the values of herrenvolk republicanism than did either the languages of white slavery or of abolitionism” (87).

A debate existed between abolitionists and labor reformers on the question of white labor’s relationship to slavery. George Evans and Horace Greeley had argued that white slavery was a more serious form of slavery and thus should be addressed first and foremost, accusing abolitionists ignoring the plight of white workers closer to home than the far off the enslaved of the South. Abolitionists, like Wendell Phillips, countered that slavery could not even be compared to “white slavery” of the North and that efforts should be made to free the enslaved of the South alongside reforming wage labor of the North.

Similar stagist views of wage labor had circulated in debates on labor reform, abolition, and slavery at mid-century. For instance, Brownson, like many, had argued that the injustices of wage labor should be addressed before sympathy and action be taken on behalf of the enslaved because slavery was already on course or fated to give way to
wage labor. As he writes, “could the abolitionists effect all they propose, they would do
the slave no service. Should emancipation work as well as they say, still it would do the
slave no good. He would be a slave still, although with the title and cares of a freeman. If
then we had no constitutional objections to abolitionism, we could not, for the reason
here implied, be abolitionists. The slave system, however, in name and form, is gradually
disappearing from Christendom. It will not subsist much longer. But its place is taken by
the system of labor at wages, and this system, we hold, is no improvement upon the one it
supplants. Nevertheless, the system of wages will triumph. It is the system which in name
sounds honester than slavery, and in substance is more profitable to the master. It yields
the wages of iniquity, without its opprobium. It will therefore supplant slavery, and be
sustained— for a time” [sic] (12). Marx inverts the position taken up by Brownson by
suggesting that the emancipation of the enslaved gives rise to the dialectical movement
wage labor’s battle with capital.

Here I hope to contribute to the work of C. L. R. James, Lisa Lowe, Cedric Robinson,
Ciccariello-Maher, Coulthard, and Wilderson who, in divergent ways, offer critiques that
attempt to decolonize Marx and Marxism’s dialectical stagism.

For an extended analysis on Douglass’ confrontation with Covey as a decolonial
praxis, see Ciccariello-Maher’s conclusion in Decolonizing Dialectics.

Chapter 3

1 See Philip S. Foner’s The Great Labor Uprising of 1877 and David O. Stowell’s Streets,
Railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877.

2 Arrighi argues that because corporate capitalism or vertical integration emerged first in
the United States it was able to supplant the British Empire as the next world hegemon, a
process that began with the 1873 crisis. See also Alan Trachtenberg’s The Incorporation
of America.

3 This absorption of labor resulted from the drive of capital to restructure the labor
process to increase productivity. It was at this time, in other words, that the labor process
begins to be reorganized from a process producing what Marx calls relative surplus value
to the process of producing absolute surplus value. Instead of merely extending the work
day to extract further value from workers’ labor, capital reorganizes labor and machinery
within the production process to increase rates of exploitation. This difference between
absolute and relative surplus value is also understood as the difference between formal
and real subsumption of labor in capital. For more on this, see Marx’s Section 7 on the
Law of Accumulation in Capital.

4 Many understood this crisis in terms of the closing of the frontier in North America.
Fredrick Jackson Turner best captured this sentiment in his “Frontier Thesis” (1893). If
expansion had provided the life-blood to settler democracy, opportunities to acquire land
through conquest have reached an end: “since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed
into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and
the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which
has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. . . But never again will such
gifts of free land offer themselves” (37). Without this access to land as property, the
power of settler democracy as settler sovereignty to overcome labor’s conflict with
capital appears in crisis since “the most important effect of the frontier has been in the
promotion of democracy here and in Europe” (30). Turner defines democracy as a settler popular sovereignty in which access to land through Indian removal gives settlers leverage to curb the power of capital and a centralized state. Frontier anxiety, then, was the fear that capital had strained, to the point of breaking, a cross-class alliance, formed in the antebellum years and reconsolidated during Reconstruction, between white labor and capital on which depended liberal democracy’s coherence and expansion. The closing of the frontier, or the sign of less chances to escape proletarian life through stolen land, signaled the potential breakdown of settler sovereignty as site of shared power/benefits among settlers. It was this position of counterrevolution that Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” had suggested created unity among a settler class: “the effect of the Indian frontier was a consolidating agent in our history is important. From the close of the seventeenth century various intercolonial congresses have been called to treat with Indians and establish common measures of defense. Particularism was strongest in colonies with no Indian frontier. This frontier stretched along the western border like a cord of union” (15). “The Indian was a common danger,” writes Turner, “demanding united action. . . It is evident that the unifying tendencies of the Revolutionary period were facilitated by the previous cooperation in the regulation of the frontier. In this connection may be mentioned the importance of the frontier, from that day to this, as a military training school, keeping alive the power of resistance to aggression, and developing the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman” (15).

5 The expectation of property can be understood as the assumed right of all settlers to possess and benefit from settler sovereignty. Nick Estes argues that this expectation of property functions as a “fiction of ‘freedom’ . . . equaling political and capital enfranchisement, [that] engages in the kind of speculative freedom through speculation of eventual property ownership—a promise hardly fulfilled to any but a select few given the short history of the U.S.” (195). Alyosha Goldstein explains how this expectation of property is a form of property itself that settlers demand the state defend and protect by making land accessible for ownership. Where this expectation of property has always been understood to be realized is at the site of the frontier, a space viewed as terra nullius that could be seized through conquest (i.e. the Doctrine of Discovery) and transformed not only into value (accumulation by dispossession) but, perhaps, more importantly, the means of production for settler workers to become independent producers not dependent on wage labor.

6 Du Bois argues that “it was said that even if free Negro labor miraculously proved profitable, Negroes themselves were impossible as freemen, neighbors and citizens. They could not be educated and really civilized. And beyond that if a free, educated black citizen and voter could be brought upon the stage this would in itself be the worst conceivable thing on earth; worse than shiftless, unprofitable labor; worse than ignorance, worse than crime. It would lead inevitably to a mulatto South and the eventual ruin of all civilization” (130). He also notes that, “the poor whites, on the other hand, were absolutely as sea. The Negro was to become apparently their fellow laborer. But were the whites to be bound to the black laborer by economic condition and destiny, or rather to the white planter by community of blood? Almost unanimously, following the reaction of such leaders as Andrew Johnson and Hinton Helper, the poor white clung frantically to the planter and his ideals; and although ignorant and impoverished, maimed and discouraged, victims of a war fought largely by the poor white for the benefit of the
rich planter, they sought redress by demanding unity of white against black, and not unity of poor against rich, or of worker against exploiter” (130).

7 See Peter Brooks’ *Melodramatic Imagination*.

8 Howells also argued that the purpose of realism was to represent “human nature and the social fabric, which it behooves us to know and to understand, that we may deal justly with ourselves and with one another” (497).


10 In different ways, Kaplan, Howard, and Michaels argue that realism/naturalism conceal class antagonisms and should be read as legitimizing the rise of industrial capitalism and consumer culture. Jameson’s recent *Antinomies of Realism* is more complicated in its assessment of realism. He finds an aporetic quality of realism between its affective dimensions and its narrative dimensions that makes history appear. I suggest that the melodramatic narratives of marginalized writers of this time also contain aporetic qualities that make the history of colonialism and slavery appear rather than only class conflict.

11 For more on sentimentalism and melodrama in the nineteenth century see Lauren Berlant’s foundational study, *The Female Complaint*.

12 Kara Mollis argues that “Significantly, the novel stresses how Genevieve’s progressive adoption of an identifiably Native American perspective enhances her relationship with Wynema by ensuring *mutual* comprehension and respect and, on a larger level, promoting intercultural bonds” (121). See Kara Mollis’ “Teaching” Dear Mihia”: Sentimentalism and Cross-Cultural Education in S. Alice Callahan’s” *Wynema: A Child of the Forest*.”

13 In one scene, after espousing a chauvinist view of the Muscogee performing a bathing practice to prevent disease, a practice Genevieve calls “strange ceremonies” and “barbaric customs,” she is corrected by Keithly who plays the role of anthropologist. He instructs Genevieve to take part in the bathing in order to demonstrate her acceptance and appreciation of the practice, which, in doing so, as Genevieve says, “I see I should have strengthened my influence over my Indian friends, by pleasing them in performing their water-ceremony” (28). Keithly excuses Genevieve, claiming his years embedded in Indian country have given him a more culturally sensitive perspective: “you took the same view of the case that many others of our race have taken, and you have not done any harm. I may be wrong in the view I take of the matter . . . but I have thought often and long over it, and my course seems best to me” (28). Through this cross-cultural training, Genevieve produces feelings of reverence and admiration for Keithly, feelings that bring them closer together in their work among the Muscogee: “there was a mist in her eyes as she said this in a low tone. ‘Amen,’ he said soberly and reverently. This gave the conversation a more serious turn and the speakers a kindlier regard for each other” (29).

14 This can be read as veiled reference to an understanding of the Ghost Dance as a political movement and uprising that at the time had prompted forms of counter-insurgency and white reactionary response that culminated in the genocidal violence at Wounded Knee.
My reading of *Wynema* differs from Melissa Ryan’s analysis of the relationship between white middle-class feminism and Indigenous resistance to colonialism. Ryan argues that in the novel, “the struggle for Indian autonomy can be seen as analogous to white women’s own struggle with political disenfranchisement—and her readers may come to see the real Indian ‘problem’ as the threat to Native sovereignty rather than the resistance of Native people to so-called “progress.”” (36). Furthermore, Ryan suggests that “meaningful ‘solidarities’ with white women readers emerge not from the affectional language of the ‘happy families nestling in the village’ but from Callahan’s more subversive insistence on the shared experience of dispossession and misrepresentation. Here, then, the conventions of the sentimental novel function not to collapse cultural difference in shared emotion, but to re-establish the basis for cross-cultural sympathy on a discourse of rights. Working within the rhetorical conventions established by white women, in other words, Callahan attempted to transmute the silencing effect of sentiment into a vehicle for an Indian voice” (42). I suggest that there is structural difference between these struggles and that the novel reveals how the success of white middle-class feminism is premised on falsely collapsing this difference by assuming the Indigenous peoples and white middle-class women share an equivalent structural position.

This is dramatized in Genevieve’s confrontation with her fiancé Maurice Mauran upon her return from teaching among the Muscogee. The figure of patriarchy in the novel, Maurice not only advocates for policies of Indigenous genocide, but also holds repressive views of women. He upholds the domestic/public binary and typifies the view that liberal democracy is reserved only for white settler men. Genevieve’s time among the Muscogee, however, catalyzes her demand for recognition and inclusion.

Other scholars have similar readings of the tension between sentimentalism and realism in the novel. Lisa Tatonetti contends that “In light of those tensions, I would argue that her turn to Wounded Knee evinces a personal struggle to balance the injustice of the massacre with the romance of her original story and the privileged narrative of her life, which, like Wynema’s, was a picture of ‘successful’ assimilation” (26). Susan Bernadin argues that “in its entanglement of popular generic and ‘historically real’ narratives, *Wynema* manifests an unresolved tension between sentimental appeal and social indictment, between cross-cultural affiliation and estrangement, that will repeat itself in other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels by Native and African American women writers” (221). Senier writes, “*Wynema* shows whites and Indians attempting to mediate their cultures, but with more problems than successes. In the novel’s final chapters, mediation itself comes up for question, and the novel appears to pull back from much of its apparent early confidence in cross-cultural translation” (433).

Here my reading adds to Susan Bernadin’s point that, “in its pointed refusal to produce a seamless narrative closure as dictated by conventional romance plots, and especially by ‘ending’ with a recent event whose consequences for Indian policy and peoples were still part of public debate, *Wynema* contests the moral and legal grounds of US nation-building” (220).

The question, then, of whether the novel of assimilation or resistance is not something I am focused on this essay. Instead, I am interested in showing how the tension between an assimilationist plot and the novel’s realism serves as a map of dispossession’s role in enabling the expansion of capitalism.
In another moment of realism disrupting the sentimental plot, Keithly reads an editorial on the Wounded Knee massacre. The author argues it was always the intention of the United States to seek to eliminate Indigenous peoples: “‘The great Indian war is over—nothing was done except what was intended to be done to start out with. A lot of defenseless Indians were murdered; the Indian agents and contractors reaped a rich harvest; that’s all. ‘Tis said but true’” (100-101). Genevieve remarks, “I think that editor is rather bitter,” and asks, “is what this editor says literally so? Do you suppose the United States Government intended things to turn out as they have?” (101). Robin says the answer lies in the “results of their actions,” which is to say that Wounded Knee and examples like it are not the exception but the normal results of a nation that removes Indigenous peoples in order to replace them with settlers (101). To claim and contemplate the intention of the United States is one way the novel thinks about dispossession and elimination as a structure rather than bad choices of settlers in an otherwise progressive democracy. If the structural design of the United States, as it is contemplated here, is to remove Indigenous people, there is little to no hope for a future in which Indigenous peoples and settlers will be able to find peace while remaining tied together through a relation of violence. The suggestion that it was by design that Wounded Knee occurred calls into the question the novel’s sentimental vision of future harmony between settlers and Natives. It also at the same time demonstrates the uncertainty of assimilation’s success as a form of indirect elimination and the progress this success promises to uphold.

A second example of this in the novel can be found in the narrator’s condemnation of US newspapers that lionize US soldiers who are celebrated for their Indian-killing at the Wounded Knee massacre rather than decry Indigenous genocide: “‘But,’ you ask, my reader, ‘did not the white people undergo any privations? Did not the United States army lose two brave commanders and a number of privates?’ Oh, yes. So the papers tell us; but I am not relating the brave deeds of the white soldier. They are already flashed over the world by electricity; great writers have burned the midnight oil telling their story to the world. It is not my province to show how brave it was for a great, strong nation to quell a riot caused by the dancing of a few ‘bucks’ – for civilized soldiers to slaughter indiscriminately, Indian women and children. Doubtless it was brave, for so public opinion tells us, and it cannot err. But what will the annals of history handed down to future generations disclose to them? Will history term the treatment of the Indians by the United States Government, right and honorable? Ah, but that does not affect my story! It is the Indian’s story—his chapter of wrongs and oppression” (93). Here the narrator breaks out of the sentimental plot to suggest that settler newspapers legitimize empire when they attempt to give both sides of the story in the history of colonization. Not to tell the story from the perspective of the victim, is to already take the side of the oppressor.

While Craig Womack argues that Wynema is not a novel about Creek or Muscogee sovereignty (and thematically, I agree it’s not), the presence of Indigenous sovereignty nonetheless lies in these moments when realism disrupt the novel’s sentimentalism.

Here I add to Susan Bernardin’s point that that Wildfire’s speech, “exposes the inadequacy of the reformers’ Christian sentiment to fit either Lakota experience or the United States’ historical conduct toward Indian nations” (220).

For more on settler indigenization and “settler moves to innocence” see Tuck and Wang’s “Decolonization is not a Metaphor.”
Deloria summarizes this binary between the noble and hostile/savage Indian and its role in shaping settler identity as follows: “Americans built the nation on contradictory foundations: a highly positive interior brand of Indian Otherness coexisted with exterior savages lurking outside societal boundaries. By the early twentieth century, however, many Americans had become fascinated with a positive exterior Indian other, one who represented authentic reality in the face of urban disorder and alienating mass society” (74).

This continues to be a strong ideology prevalent today: just look at how the Outdoor industry commodifies wilderness spaces as refuge from alienated life of a (late) capitalist modernity.

See, for example, the reform or muckraking journalism of Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, or articles published in McClures Magazine around this time.

A present-day example of is this can be found in forms of white environmentalism like the social entrepreneurship of a company like Patagonia which recently ran an ad protesting the shrinking of the Bear Ears National Monument with the title, “The President Stole Your Land.” This slogan was quickly challenged for how it erased Indigenous claims to the same lands. Patagonia’s brand of activism which tries to preserve public lands as (white) sites of romantic anticapitalism loses its integrity when Indigenous people demand that same land be repatriated.

From the point of view of white labor, George finds the resolution to capitalism’s attack on settler sovereignty in the settler state socializing land, that is, abolishing private ownership of land, or the creation of a settler commons that, George imagines, would maintain capitalism, while ensuring equality of opportunity and the end to exploitation. Commoning the land puts the United States back on track toward achieving higher forms of civilization and progress. It avoids the fall into barbarism that inequality spells for settler democracy. For George, equality is the mark of civilization, arguing that what makes US settlers modern and civilized is precisely the cultivating of equality through conquest and elimination: “The truth is that progress goes on just as society tends towards closer association and greater equality. Civilization is co-operation. Union and liberty are its factors. The great extension of association—not alone in the growth of larger and denser communities, but in the increase of commerce and the manifold exchanges which knit each community together and link them with other though widely separated the recognition of the equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—it is these that make our modern civilization so much greater, so much higher, than any that has gone before” (457-8). Achieving this equality and the progress it entails requires that capital’s power over white labor must be curbed, but not that capital itself be abolished.

See Susan Scheckel’s study in which she compares Love and Booker T. Washington’s understandings of upward mobility. Scheckel argues that “when Nat Love suggests that he is Deadwood Dick, he implies that whiteness is not essential to the role, which an African American can assume as well as a white man. Whereas Washington relied upon the melodramatic plots originating in slavery to contain the potentially frightening changes ushered in by the Civil War, Love enlists the stereotypical characters and formulaic plot structures of the dime western to highlight the social and economic fluidity that his autobiography exemplifies.” (233). For other studies on Love, see Blake Allmendinger’s early reading, Georgina Dodge’s more recent study of Love’s

Carnegie had argued that white labor should support the concentration of capital precisely because concentrated wealth advances white racial superiority, a benefit, he implies, that improves the lives all white settlers, regardless of class position. “While the law may be sometimes hard for the individual,” Carnegie contends, “it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department. We accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment; the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few; and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential to the future progress of the race” (16-17). Capitalism as social Darwinism, Carnegie believes, facilitates the formation and maintenance of “natural” racial hierarchies, with white people at the top and nonwhites at the bottom. Even if some white settlers are made to live in poverty, their inclusion in this brotherhood of whiteness is an absolute gain outweighing the relative poverty between white owners and white labor. This is Carnegie’s strategy for gaining the consent of his workers despite intensifying conflicts of exploitation and worker repression at the time.

Chapter 4

1 In his essay “Commitment,” Adorno criticizes the political aesthetic of artists Sartre and Brecht. Adorno argues that politics lies in the form of the work of art and not its political content: “The content of works of art is never the amount of intellect pumped into them; if anything, it is the opposite” (194).

2 For more on how literary naturalism is an art form of the polemic, see Ira Wells’ Fighting words: Polemics and Social Change in Literary Naturalism. For a reading of naturalism that sees it reproducing the logic of the very industrial capitalism it claims to critique, see Walter Benn Michael’s The Gold Standard.

3 Pizer continues, saying, “the chaos and turmoil of the social collapse of the 1930s did not cause despair among writers and intellectuals but rather the vitalizing expectation that out of the rubble of the old system and its values would emerge a society more capable of fulfilling the American dream” (Twentieth-Century 16).

4 It is in this way that I am also suggesting that naturalism protests against the ways industrial capitalism disrupts settler unity holding together the capitalist relation. It demands that settler democracy ensure that those with the right to have rights through the liberal social contract retain such rights that it appears industrial capitalism has violated. It emerges in response to this class antagonism between settlers at the turn-of-the century and is revived after 1929 because this is an historical moment when the potential for catastrophic rebellion seems possible and eminent and the liberal contract as racial contract, settler democracy, needs mending immediately. Like Progressive era reforms, the welfare state at a much larger scale answers this call to repair the liberal social contract. The state saves capital from the rebellion of labor by providing workers security from unemployment and the threat of surplus life. Naturalist protest fiction thus becomes the mode of representation at this time most closely embodying the logic of welfare state reform in which it appears that garnering recognition of worker suffering leads to state action and the reinforcement of civil society.
These novels dramatize Fanon’s critique of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, a critique demonstrating how there is no recognition for the nonhuman, those in the zones of “nonbeing.” These positions of the elimination and social death are constitutive of the very zones of recognition in the first place. See *Black Skin White Masks*.

As theorist George Caffentzis notes, the creation of the welfare state in the 1930s would lead to what some call the golden-era of capitalism in years that followed: “between 1947 and 1967 we see that in this period wages and profits intimiated the fulfillment of an American Capitalist Dream: the class struggle can be bypassed, wages and profits can grow together, perhaps not at the same rate, but in a long-term growth equilibrium path. The Keynesian strategy of matching real wage increases with productivity increments seemed to succeed” (20). It rescues capitalism from revolution by holding intact settler unity, its pillars of sovereignty and whiteness, an investment in producing a more reliable and stable working class, the result of which prevents revolution and saves capitalism from further disruptions. As Caffentzis explains: “not only had unemployment to be ‘conquered,’ but the real wage, which the working class ‘defended’ in the starkest years of the Depression and later forced up, could be capitalized upon. If wage increases could be used to capitalize the home, this would eventually increase the productivity of labor, and thus increase profit. Here we have the basis of a class deal: happy workers, happy capital, and a compromise! The Keynesian system is delicately balanced upon the symbiosis of home and factory and the use of the wage not only for working-class subsistence but as a form of investment for capital” (25).

For a foundational study of the welfare state and literary production see, Szalay, Michael Szalay’s New *Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*.

For more on McNickle as a modernist, see Alicia Kent’s study in which she argues, “unlike the modernist expatriates, Archilde is never able to go abroad and live the life of an artist, suggesting that the modernist notion of flight to Europe to pursue an artistic calling is not applicable to most Native Americans. And unlike the modernists, Native Americans in modernity did not have to go abroad to be homeless; as Native Americans they already are homeless in their own home” (37). Kent also contends that, “because dissolution of tribal lands and the attempted eradication of Indian cultures were central historical conditions of modernity for Native Americans, modernity looks different from the vantage point of many Native Americans, for whom the modern effort to break with the past was not chosen but imposed. In drawing upon modernist themes but also in revising the narrative of the modernist expatriate life in his novel, McNickle simultaneously engages in and challenges the modernist project in order to suggest that it does not apply neatly to the situation of most Native Americans in the modern era” (38).

Louis Owens shows how McNickle had initially written *The Surrounded* as a romance. Owen writes, “*The Surrounded* didn’t always end in fatalistic despair, however: In the earlier draft of the novel entitled “The Hungry Generations” a version almost twice as long as the published manuscript, and very different in its implications, McNickle allowed Archilde to live happily ever after. In this draft, Archilde is allowed to travel to Paris and to experience the heady atmosphere of the Lost Generation’s milieu” (244). Comparing the two versions, Owens comes to the conclusion that “the distinction between the two versions might well be compared to that between a conventional romance and a naturalistic novel. In the former much confusion of identity and potential
disaster lead to marriage and the promise of a fruitful future; chaos is ordered a controlled. In the latter, the protagonist simply cannot understand much less order and control the world he inhabits. The question who he is remains unanswered. The romantic and the naturalistic might also define American attitudes toward the Indian from the first encounters: the choice for the Indian in the American imagination has always been a choice between marriage with the white cult or inexorable death. It is at that point that the road divides” (247).

10 See Hemingway’s “Big Two Hearted River.”

11 Owens reads the novel’s pessimistic ending as follows: “Archilde stands where not just the road but the maps divide. One fork would seem to lead toward a past that is irretrievable, the other toward a world in which Indian values have no meaning. Across this divided terrain communication would seem impossible. That the Indian road is no longer viable seems indisputable in The Surrounded” (242)

12 An example of this sentimentalism legitimizing the “Vanishing Indian” is Helen Hunt Jackson’s Ramona.

13 Patrick Wolfe further elucidates IRA policy as ongoing assimilation as elimination: “in seeking to dismantle that opposition, the Indian Reorganization Act sought to raise the scope of assimilation from the level of the individual to that of the tribe itself. Where Dawes-style assimilation had reconstituted individual Indians as property-owners, and thus sought to eliminate them as Indians, the Indian Reorganization Act reconstituted tribes into structural conformity with White institutions – which is to say, it sought to eliminate them as Indian institutions” (36).

14 While Coulthard’s critique of liberal recognition applies to contemporary contexts, particularly the Canadian settler state, the logic of liberal recognition in which it is assumed both the colonizer and colonized meet reciprocally is the logic in the IRA.

15 Here I differ from Robert Dale Parker who argues, “The Surrounded can finally stand, therefore, as a critique of narrow reaction and a call for more imaginative, more organized responses, a call that McNickle and others increasingly heeded in political activism and in the ongoing history of Native American writing that carries a wider vision of political and imaginative possibility than such early and founding works and titles as Cogewea, Sundown, and The Surrounded” (927).

16 Coulthard goes on to say, “today this process will and must continue to involve some form of critical individual and collective self-recognition on the part of Indigenous societies, not only in an instrumental sense like Fanon seemed to have envisioned it, but with the understanding that our cultural practices have much to offer regarding the establishment of relationships within and between peoples and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity and respectful co-existence” (48).

17 For foundational studies of Petry’s novel see, Lindon Barrett’s “(Further) Figures of Violence: The Street in the American Landscape; Keith Clark’s The Radical Fiction of Ann Petry; Don. Dingledine’s “‘It could have been any street’: Ann Petry, Stephen Crane, and the Fate of Naturalism”; Kimberly Drake’s “Women on the Go: Blues, Conjure, and Other Alternatives to Domesticity in Ann Petry’s The Street and The Narrows; and Heather Hicks’ ‘This Strange Communion’: Surveillance and Spectatorship in Ann Petry’s The Street.”

18 For more on this, see: Marx’s Capital, Chapter 25: The General Law of Accumulation.
Justin Akers Chacon and Mike Davis in *No One Is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border* summarize nicely the history of proletarianization of Mexican Americans in the land the US encloses after 1849: “Mexicans residing in the newly acquired portions of the United States were reduced to second-class citizenship. While the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo contained a set of guarantees protecting the land and voting rights of Mexicans, “American local, state, and national courts later ruled that the provisions of the treaty could be superseded by local laws.” Anglo economic interests used the federal government, in the form of the Federal Land Act of 1851, to deprive Mexicans of their land, and state and local governments to implement a Jim Crow-like social structure across the Southwest.’ Most Mexican land- Holdings were nullified in the decades following the war, reducing the majority to the ranks of the working class” (Locations 1004-1009).

For more on this history of counterinsurgency see Kelly Lytle Hernández’ *Migra!: A History of the US Border Patrol*.

This category of the less than human colonial laborer is best captured in the scene where Guálinto’s friend Orestes does the math to figure out how many Mexican Americans the life of a horse is worth. Orestes is reading in the paper the sentences handed down to local criminals and sees that “A Mexican steals a horse and gets ten years” (178). He then suggests that, “you would think that before the law in this town a horse is worth five Mexicans” and furthermore “that in murder cases Mexicans and Negroes get double the sentence a white man would get. So what if the Mexican had been killed by a Gringo? The Gringo would have got off with a year. One divided into twenty: a Mexican then is worth one-twentieth the value of the horse. But that isn’t all of it… Chances are the Gringo’s sentence would be suspended. Then how much would a Mexican be worth? What’s one-twentieth of zero?” (179). Here Orestes’ comments highlight how Mexican American lives are treated as objects before US law, that they are valued as equivalent to livestock, interchangeable and disposable, mere objects commodified for profit and ownership of others. Theorist María Saldaña-Portillo says of this passage, “Mexicans are less than zero within the racial imaginary of the United States, unable to find a place in the United States binary logic, because of the racial difference of their mestizaje, which they are unable to shed… Orestes provides an ironic undoing of the law as the site of emancipation. Anglo-American jurisprudence can recognize Mexicans only obliquely, through that which they are not: Mexicans are neither white nor black but can be read through only these two categories of being. If Mexicans are visible legally only by passing through a U.S. racial ideology of white and black, this passage is nonetheless subtended by the language of Mexican racial governmentality, inherited as it is from Spanish colonialism.” (827)

Leif Sorenson argues that *George Washington Gómez* is a hybrid form combining the bildungsroman and the corrido form. As such Sorenson contends, “The corrido of border conflict ends tragically, with the hero either imprisoned or killed. These two narrative trajectories seem incompatible, but Paredes’s novel satisfies the conventions of both. The novel achieves this conjunction by forcing the reader to process the same set of events through two different narrative codes. George finds his place in the national body of the United States but the casualty of this success story is the corrido ethos itself, which dies out of the world of direct action and social significance to become a psychological symptom, a recurring dream” (134).
23 My argument compares to Tim Libretti’s reading of the novel who writes, “I will argue that the novel reconceives the relation between race, class, culture, and nation, effectively rewriting the master narrative of class struggle to include the specific conditions of Chicanos and to highlight the agency of Chicanos in those struggles. Paredes accomplishes this political and cultural transformation through a synthesis or hybridization of the traditional corrido form with the then emergent form of literary class struggle, the proletarian novel” (119).

24 For example, Guálinto learns from his experience in school to internalize the status of inferiority he is ascribed. In one scene, when Guálinto’s wealthy girlfriend passes by his house, he runs inside to hide, fearing she will see his poverty as a sign of this ascribed inferiority (157). His uncle Feliciano, who has not attended school, confronts this internalization he sees in his nephew as a defamiliarizing experience “On the porch Feliciano sat for a long time in his rocker, thinking. He inspected his large, bony hands as if he had never seen them before. Then he looked around him, studying his surroundings. After that he sat in the rocker for a long while, unmoving, his eyes fixed in the distance.” (157).

25 This unity presented as class unity was really a unity among white workers coded as the identity of the universal workers. As the Endnotes collective writes, “within the labour movement, workers claimed that the class identity they promoted and affirmed really was universal in character. It supposedly subsumed all workers, regardless of their specific qualities: as mothers, as recent immigrants, as oppressed nationalities... That is to say, it included workers not as they were in themselves, but only to the extent that they conformed to a certain image of respectability, dignity, hard work, family, organisation, sobriety, atheism, and so on” (Web). I maintain that this very image is an identity of whiteness.

26 Of this section, Libretti argues that “representing typical literary depression scenes effected by the stock market crash of 1929—really the beginning of the 1930s proletarian literary tradition—and contrasting them with very different experience of the Mexican laborer in the Southwest, Paredes at once invokes his text’s relation to the proletarian novel form but also marks its difference from that form. Working within the proletarian form, Paredes identifies the work as a narrative of class struggle; but by bringing to bear the specificity of the Mexican working class and national experience on the proletarian literary form, Paredes complicates and expands the parameters of the form and rewrites traditional narratives of class struggle to incorporate the national struggle of the internally colonized Texas Mexicans. This strategy allows Paredes to identify the Mexican laborer as part of and in solidarity with the working class” (123). I differ from this reading by suggesting that Paredes makes explicit how the wages of whiteness, the way white workers share a settler status with owners, places them in a different position of power than a Mexican colonial proletariat, and as such, unity is only possible by attacking these very institutions creating this asymmetry in the first place.

27 Libretti shows how the proletarian bildungsroman, if following its conventions, should end in Paredes’ novel: “Just as early in the novel Feliciano’s partners in the campaign for a Spanish-speaking Southwest Republic eventually betray the revolution in one way or another, so George Washington Gómez also betrays the revolution by rising individually within an American free market economy that racially and economically oppresses most Mexicans. The typical narrative of 1930s proletarian liberation would have called instead
for his assent with his class and nation” (126).

28 In this way, we can see how Paredes offers a critique of the proletarian bildungsroman in a similar way that Foley contends it is a form opposed to proletarian politics. Using bourgeois forms to represent the identity and struggle seeking to abolish bourgeois relations becomes a paradox in which the form legitimates what the content suggests should be destroyed. Referring to the proletarian bildungsroman Foley says: “These texts are not, in my view, “leftist”—either in the sense of espousing ultrarevolutionary doctrine or in the sense of being excessively didactic. Rather, the difficulty encountered by writers of “conversion” tales stems in part from the authors’ choice of a medium for telling these tales. The form of the bildungsroman with its tendency to focus on the individual and to foreclose contradiction in the movement toward closure, significantly inhibits the expression of a politics advocating collective consciousness and revolutionary change. Indeed, the genre loses some of the very qualities that make it an effective (if politically loaded) medium for exploring bourgeois consciousness and destiny. Transposed to the task of articulating an antibourgeois politics, the genre’s cognitivist premise conflicts with its hortatory function” (353-4).

29 The bond and harmony between white owners and white workers the novel mentions also requires, as we saw in Chapter 2, that white workers support or participate in the policing of colonial populations and their potential rebellion or acts of resistance. To receive redress, or to achieve a unity that could lead to a settler socialism, white workers must defend US sovereignty and thus border violence, the policing of colonial rebellion/resistance, acts of survival.

30 While Libretti argues that “Paredes’ national struggle takes place within the cultural arena but not with the goal of reclaiming lost territory. Instead he advocates the formulation of a political program in cultural terms, one that comprehends the distinct history and unique conditions of oppression and exploitation endured by Chicanos in the U.S. yet also allows for an alliance with the working class struggle” (128), I contend that Paredes and his novel are interested in land and revolutionary struggles to reclaim stolen land and that such politics lies in first acknowledging what categories and movements are opposed to such a politics, such as, the workerist movement that the proletarian novel coheres in its aim of winning welfare state reforms and building a settler socialism without a view of decolonization.

31 This is where I add to Ramon Saldivar’s point who argues, “the rest of Guálito’s story is concerned with what it would take, materially and psychologically, to imagine a new identity, how one could conceptualize what one can by definition not yet imagine since it has no equivalent in current experience. The novel attempts meticulously to imagine, in other words, the affirmation that is contained in every negation, in short, the future in the present” (283).

32 Libretti here suggests that “Paredes intervenes in and rethinks the Marxist sociocultural approach being developed in the Thirties and by synthesizing the corrido and the proletarian novel forms, he offers a version of a Chicano Marxism, so to speak (in the spirit of Cedric Robinson’s Black Marxism) and provides models for the rethinking of class struggle today in the context of the multiracial, indeed, multinational U.S. working class” (129).

Conclusion
See David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

For more on how New Deal reforms were designed to elevate white workers above colonial laborers, and how such reforms were weaponized to reinforce colonial and racial hierarchies see, Mary Poole’s *Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* and Deborah E. Ward’s *The White Welfare State: The Racialization of U.S. Welfare Policy*. 
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