

**“THE LAST PLACE THEY THOUGHT OF”:
Spatial Reconfigurations in 19th Century African American Literature**

Anna Grace Luttrell '21 English Honors Thesis

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Introduction:

Why Space?

“The opinion was often expressed that I was in the free states. Very rarely did anyone suggest that I might be in the vicinity. Had the least suspension rested on my grandmother’s house, it would have been burned to the ground. But it was the last place they thought of.”

—Harriet Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of a Slave Girl*, 1861.

A holistic understanding of the United States’ cultural and political identities—before, after, *but especially during* the 19th century—is largely a function of how the nation relates to its spatial landscape. Not only does this relationship include economic development, border formations and regionalism establishment, but also the technologies (legal systems, economic institutions, cultural and historic narratives) that maintain the nation’s control of the landscape. This thesis is a project looking at the intersection between US national identity formation, chattel slavery, Black American identity formation and African American authorship where space and geography are the premise of analyzation. Historically, the macro and micro-level management of public and private space in the U.S. as it relates to race and gender reflect centuries-long decimation of the rights that protect movement through and obtainment of public and private space so that decimation of mobility is one of the most severe attacks on an individual or group’s autonomy.

For this paper, the amorphous idea of “space” really means *geography*. If geography is understood to be the outcome of the relationship between a collective group of people and the landscape they inhabit, then I am especially interested in what is called “critical geography,”

which looks more intently at how people (and different groups of people) experience their respective spaces and how those experiences may differ from each other. I look *at* but also *beyond* a macro map-based geography of the U.S. so that what I call “micro-level landscapes” are also considered as an integral part of U.S. inhabitants geographic experience. Micro-level landscapes include the “geography” of the home or domestic space and ultimately embraces the geography of text and the literal space on a page.

The literature I study encompasses roughly a twenty-year period between 1840 and 1860. This timeline is bookended by the United States Civil War, which begins in 1861. One of the most intense and politically charged eras in U.S. history, these years were also hallmarked by rapid and sweeping changes in what the U.S. looked like on a map, which is what initially inspired this project. Within these twenty years, the frontier line had moved from the Midwest to the Pacific Coast and the formal border between the north and south (or union and confederacy) was established¹. However, while acknowledging that the Civil War is a culminating event of the political struggles I examine in my thesis, I refrain from spending much time at all examining anything past 1861 (or anything that explicitly and directly relates to the war itself). Many of the authors and texts included in this paper were overshadowed by the magnitude and historical weight of the Civil War, and I want to dedicate an independent space for their analyzations that does not use the war as the premise of study.

The original inspiration for this thesis began in a sophomore year English class when I studied the relationship between U.S. national identity formation and westward expansion and white supremacy. Historically, the U.S. has presupposed its authority to dominate and colonize any space it sees fit, resulting in the displacement and violent treatments of Black communities,

¹ Throughout my thesis I do not capitalize either “north” or “south” to emphasize the fantasy of representing them as separate and (economically, legally, culturally) disconnected spaces, as I will argue in chapter two.

Indigenous nations, and people of color. The obsession with owning and controlling space—or property—worked its way into the founding principles of the country via ultimate legal protections surrounding private property rights. In accordance with Mary C. King’s economic analysis of the historically dependent relationship between private property, violence, and race and gender privilege, U.S. property rights have served as a means to perpetuate violence against women and people of color and legalized the subjugation of these communities (King 2).

Institutionalized slavery stands as the most egregiously racist and violent legal system of privately property ownership; the plantation’s function and existence were codified within law in the form of slave codes that explicitly confined enslaved individuals to the plantation space.

Furthermore, socially constructed forms of property—which King associates with jobs, entitlements, and education, among other opportunities—are historically derived from the property of “whiteness,” evidencing the social and cultural resonance of property and privilege (King 3)².

Acknowledging that “private property” rests as a central tenant in the establishment of the United States as a means of social, political, and economic capital, private property ownership functions as a universal investment to help ensure a secure positionality in the U.S. socio-economic hierarchy. However, property rights—including the right to property in oneself—primarily concerned themselves with the exaltation and prosperity of white men. Among property owners, these rights secured a feeling of economic independence and a stable position within the greater public marketplace. Individuals locate individuality and an economic positionality in their status as property owners, a status that translates to an exterior proclamation

² Cheryl King’s “Whiteness as Property” (1993) serves as another useful theoretical framework here in that she identifies the long-standing relationship between whiteness and property ownership, explaining the social and legal privileges that an individual experiences on behalf of embodying the property of whiteness.

of the individual's internalized socio-political identity. Furthermore, property ownership creates a mechanism of self-identification where the owner has the ability to subject a property under their *control*; the property object can be understood as a stable location separate from the individual from which the property owner can derive a *stable* identity. Thus, a direct link surfaces between private property and the establishment of 19th century American individualism. Those left outside of the social and legal inclusion of 19th U.S. property rights were effectively excluded from the traditional understanding of American individualism. Throughout my thesis, I look at the ways that African-American authors derive and preserve individual and group identity that does not rely on the traditional owner-object schema of 19th century American individualism.

What follows is divided into three chapters: "Micro-Geographies: Domesticity and 'The Homespace'," "Macro-Geographies: The Nation," and "Creation and Curation of Space: Textual Geographies." Each chapter focuses exclusively on texts by Black or African-American or authors. My first chapter looks James McCune Smith's series of sketches "Heads of the Colored People" and Frank J. Webb's novel *The Garies and Their Friends* to explore Black domesticity and its relationship to communal and individual identity formation. My second chapter engages the north-south binary through Harriet Jacobs's and Frederick Douglass's slave narratives, ultimately problematizing their geographic existence and the border between them. I end by focusing on one text exclusively in my last chapter, William J. Wilson's series of sketches entitled "Afric-American Picture Gallery." The final chapter departs from studying Black geographies and identity within a greater arena of whiteness and instead focuses on the creation of autonomous and self-represented Black spaces.

Chapter 1

Micro-Geographies: Domesticity and “The Homespace”

In terms of organizing its physical space, the United States legal system recognizes a space to be in one of two broad categories: public or private property. This chapter looks closely at spaces within 19th century US literature where the assumed public-private binary blur and overlap, thus evidencing the inherent fictionality of a completely insular domestic space. For the purposes of this chapter, the notion of “private space” is restricted to the *domestic space*, which encompasses a physical residential property and the system of domesticity maintained within its walls. This system translates into a binary of the public and the domestic, where the two must always exist separately. Accordingly, the domestic space is a reaction against the public, rather than in conversation and evolution with it. Modern scholarship has traced and often times reinforced this binary over time; Jürgen Habermas’s 20th century theory of the public sphere always designates the public to be outside of the home and can be understood as a modern continuation of the 19th century theory of “separate spheres.” According to Habermas, the “public sphere” is “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (49). As an inherently political concept, Habermas references newspapers, radio shows, court houses, and the “marketplace” to be locations of the “public sphere.” Both conceptualizations—the “public sphere” and “separate spheres” — place a patriarchally derived wedge between both the theoretical function and physical boundaries of the public and domestic spaces. Acknowledging this polarity, post-structuralist scholarship has critiqued the theorization of a Habermasian public sphere as fanaticized and exclusionary (Dahlberg 23). I argue that the

post-structural understanding of the public-private binary already existed within certain 19th century African-American literature, as will be presented in this chapter.

Given the relative youth of the country, the 19th century U.S. was still working towards a sense of national identity, while simultaneously experiencing massive political division. American literature during this time period experimented with and catalyzed versions of national identity. The sentimental genre was particularly concerned with depicting everyday life, concentrating on domestic space as a vehicle through which national identity could be explored and developed. As Shirly Samuels argues, “In 19th century America, sentimentality appears as a national project: in particular, a project about imagining the nation’s bodies and the national body” (Samuels 3). The mainstream culture of the United States insisted a unilateral distinction between public and private (domestic), exemplified through 19th century sentimentalist literature. As a genre, sentimentalism necessitates emotionally performative social roles and prioritizes the separation between work and home. Rising out of sentimental literature comes the theories of “separate spheres” and the “cult of domesticity,” both of which work to maintain an insulated and separate idea of domestic space.³

Accordingly, domestic space is coded “feminine”, whereas the public or market space is coded “masculine.” In many ways, relationship to the gender binary reinforces a binary between private and public space. Linking early U.S. domestic culture to the processes of nation building, Amy Kaplan explains that an insular domesticity “plays a key role in imagining the nation as home” (582). As Kaplan points out, however, domesticity’s influence on a national identity

³ The 19th century theory of “Separate Spheres” refers to the idea that public and domestic spaces function completely independently of one another and implicates a gendered understanding of such spaces where the public is coded masculine and the domestic as feminine. Similarly, the “Cult of Domesticity” rises out of this theory as the middle and upper-class understanding that women must only belong in the home as domestic participants.

actually implicates a feminized space as a key informing agent, rather than only the market space.

Kaplan's argument highlights a larger rebuke of the apparent binary between domestic and public space by insisting that each informs the construction of the other. In a country characterized by severe inequality, the ways in which an individual experiences 19th century American space—both public and private (domestic)—cannot be separated from their particular socio-political identity. In other words, public perception and structures influence the private; consequently, the *reality* of the 19th century U.S is not consistent with the notion of domesticity held by the socially and political empowered. Robert Reid-Pharr explains this discrepancy in his book *Conjugal Union*:

The “domestic sphere” exists, then, as a fiction at least so far as it is taken to be sociologically demonstrable, the locus of a stable set of “real” economic and social relations that exist apart from the public, particularly the market. One might argue, in fact, that since the idea of the domestic is intimately tied to bourgeois articulations of an essential difference between public and private, that the marketplace, an important, if not the important, location for the production of the bourgeois, always encroaches upon domestic life (66).

Reid-Pharr pinpoints the incompatibility of a complete public-private separation. The “bourgeois” theory of public space directly ties economic vitality to market spaces outside of the house, whereas the domestic space stands completely apart from the residents' identity as economic participants. As Reid-Pharr posits, the public—compared to the private—is deemed “dirty,” along with the outside domestic servants that work within such private spaces (Reid-Pharr 66). Accordingly, the public-private binary quickly collapses because the maintenance of

this particular system of “clean” domestic space requires the continuous rejection of the “dirty” domestic labor performed by outsiders within private homes (66). Furthermore, this system of domestic space always assumes and only recognizes the labor and economic activity performed *outside* of the domestic space. Rather than trying to pinpoint and define different types of domestic spaces that exist outside of the white sentimentalist ideal, I aim to show *why* the domestic spaces discussed in this chapter are important from a historical and literary perspective in terms of locating agency and identity of the communities they represent.

Using Reid-Pharr’s explanation of the “bourgeois domestic sphere,” this chapter will look at the relationship between public and domestic spaces within James McCune Smith’s “Heads of the Colored People” and Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends*, both of which demonstrate systems of domestic space that reject the “bourgeois” structure Reid-Pharr dissolves. Beginning with “Heads of the Colored People,” I explore how McCune Smith navigates both public and private space within three of his sketches: “The Black News-vender,” “The Washerwoman” and “The Whitewasher.” Carrying forward McCune Smith’s notion of space and property as vehicles for self-identification, I turn toward Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends* to look more specifically at Black domestic space as the agent for negotiating both public and private relationships as well as the locus for a communal Black identity.

Published in *Frederick Douglass’s Paper* from 1852-1854, James McCune Smith’s “Heads of the Colored People” peeks into both public urban spaces and the private domestic spaces of Black Americans, exemplified in the sketches “The Black News-Vender,” “The Washerwoman,” and “The Whitewasher.” Both spaces—public and private— are fastened to specific anxieties, but the importance of compensated labor and the Black working-class rings clear throughout. The sketches are all set in the north and interested in the relationship between

freedom and work. While the focus on an individual worker's identity weaves through each of the ten installations, Smith goes between public and private spaces in order to "sketch" both individual and communal identity. Consequently, we see a dissent from what Reid-Pharr identifies as the "bourgeois," or white sentimentalist system of domesticity because Smith presents Black identity as a function of both public and domestic influence where the two "spheres" are not necessarily as distinct from each other as traditional white 19th century culture ascribes them to be.

As the first of the ten sketches, "The Black News-Vender" describes an encounter between the narrator, Smith using the pseudonym Communipaw, and a previously enslaved news vender with amputated legs. Compared to the vender's previous plantation residence, New York City is a highly urbanized area characterized by residential intimacy, an increased degree of freedom, and constant movement of its inhabitants within its boundaries. By presenting the northern state setting from the perspective of an ex-slave who has experienced both the plantation and the city, Smith juxtaposes the two spaces. Whereas the space of the southern plantation was strictly demarcated, the urban north presents a more fluid reality in this text.

A key distinction between these two spaces—the plantation and the American city—is the function of public space. In the south there were such spaces that technically constituted "public space," such as a town square or a street. However, these weren't entirely *public* because not all of a given area's residents were actually allowed within these spaces; enslaved people were still confined to the boundaries of a plantation and prohibited from entering such spaces. Plantations operated under a system of passes where a slave's movement out of the space, if ever allowed, was required to be backed by documentation from the owner. In contrast, northern public spaces—specifically *urban* public spaces—offer a closer but not nearly complete example

of what is understood to be public space to a 21st century reader. Even still, not all city inhabitants were equally permitted within the urban public. For example, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required slaves to be returned to their owners even in free states, and the permission of segregation law stands as another legality during the 19th century that severely limited Black movement throughout public spaces.

Diane Shaw offers a useful theoretical lens for understanding nineteenth century northern urban space through what she calls “spatial culture.” Shaw’s understanding of urban space is a function of the actual physical space of the city, which she terms the “urban container,” and also the “human interactions” taking place within that container; these two variables together make up “the fluidity of use and meaning inscribed on the built environment by the ways in which people used (or were inhibited from using) that space functionally, socially, and culturally” (Shaw 7). Shaw’s “spatial culture” explicitly acknowledges the conceptualization of physical space as simultaneously “an active agent in the shaping of notoriously ethereal relations” and the physical manifestation of the consequences of such relationships (Shaw 7). Using this understanding of “spatial culture,” the physical organization of 19th century American cities directly reflects the social, political, and economic relationships between its inhabitants. As a result, different individuals—or groups of individuals—experience urban spaces with different degrees of freedom. Smith’s “The Black News-Vender” exemplifies this difference in experience as Communi-paw narrates the news vender’s positionality—both social and physical—in the urban landscape and his interactions with other individuals existing within the same space.

To introduce the news-vender, the sketch references landmarks and location with phrases such as “between Anthony and Lemard streets,” “before the white butcher’s door,” and “Behind the papers, and almost a part of them” to position the news vender into the urban spatial fabric

(191). Readers meet the news-vender in a public setting, participating in economic markets as a member of the labor force. However, as much as Smith intends to represent the news-vender as a distinctly complex laborer and city resident, the news-vender also becomes a symbol for the larger Black community's experiences navigating urban public space as we (readers or passersby) name him as such. Smith navigates this tension throughout all ten sketches, but "The Black News-vender" is particularly attentive to its implications since the sketch revolves around the news vender's interactions with the public.

Smith's narrator repeatedly calls attention to the news vender's immobility, in terms of both physical and economic implications. However, it is the news vender's disability that guarantees him from re-enslavement. Referencing Frederick Douglass's slave narrative, literary scholar Jacob Crane argues that the news vender's disability is in opposition to the "ideology of ability that Douglass places at the center of black uplift," thus complicating the dialogue surrounding the optics of and means toward a free Black community (Crane 8). In the initial description of the vender's character, Communipaw proclaims, "He is a stationed vender, or, perhaps, like this class, the colored people, he noiselessly does his mission and leaves it to others to find out who and what he is" (191). Participating in an occupation that traditionally requires constant movement throughout the city space to sell papers, the Black news vender is effectively barred from participating in this method of transactions due to his disability. The vender's physical immobility undoubtedly parallels the severely restricted social, political, and economic mobility of Black Americans, even in the northern states. However, within this description of the vender, the narrator also asserts his individuality in relation to his "colored" identity. Smith creates an image of the vender that is intrinsically connected to the urban community, while simultaneously disengaged from the public gaze, evident in Communipaw's assertion that he

“leaves it to others” to determine “what he is”. As a previously enslaved Black man, a New Yorker, an American, a member of the working class, and a descendent of a complex genealogy, the news vender’s passersby attempt to fasten down his identity from multiple reductive angles, yet he ultimately refuses to participate in a conversation that subjects him to a stereotype.

By way of *Communi-paw*, Smith’s focus on the public gaze’s reaction towards the Black news vender’s occupation of and participation in public space remains central to the sketch’s resolution, peaking in *Communi-paw*’s discussions of the vender as an object of sympathy. In his continuous description of the vender, Smith writes, “fastened to the ground by this terrific misfortune, the true heart of the American people beats kindly and with warm sympathy towards him!” (192). The narrator invokes the word “sympathy” to call attention to the perspective of the passersby, which is one of both conscious and subconscious sympathy. Additionally, the use of the word “fastened” echoes his previous descriptions of his immobility to emphasize his current static position—physically and socio-economically. *Communi-paw* further explains that some people “[rush] away from the human sympathy that has stolen away at [their] heart,” describing the reaction of wealthier white public (192). The “rush” of the privileged public juxtaposes the immobile state of the vender, hearkening back to the severe disparity in political, social, and economic mobility between the news vender and white Americans. *Communi-paw* concludes by proclaiming, “What a living fountain of human sympathy hast thou planted on that stone stoop, linking human creature to human creature, in spite of all the bars which society has vainly placed between them” (192). Smith’s choice to reputedly align the vender with an object of sympathy is not necessarily an endorsement of such a view; rather, Smith presents the comparison to confront its existence and demonstrate how it relates to the news vender’s experience of public space. Additionally, Smith reemphasizes the vender’s immobility by describing him as “planted”.

However, “planted” insinuates growth beyond this specific moment in time and beyond a fixed understanding or stereotype of the news venter’s identity. Smith acutely situates the venter within urban space and incorporates layered perspectives to present a holistic, multi-faceted depiction of the character. Persistently focused on the language and metaphor of space, “Heads of the Colored People” emphasizes the anxieties associated with decreased mobility and the reductive gaze of white sympathy within urban public space.

Turning inwards with his sketch entitled “The Whitewasher,” which details the work of Black whitewash painters in the city, Smith opens a conversation about Black labor within white private space. Participating in a kind of crossing of boundaries or thresholds—socially, legally, and physically—the whitewashers are described as “birds of passage” who “do not visit the thawing north more certainly than overalls, long poles, and lime pails of the whitewashers thronging our cities” (221). Smith immediately characterizes the whitewashers as a group of travelers migrating between different spaces, whether this be from south to north or out of and into white domestic space. However, Smith quickly points out that:

whatever house they enter is for the time theirs. Resistance is in vain; the present an invisible but irresistible power, before which parlor doors, chamber doors, and all other fastenings and hindrances at once give way. But unlike the cruel Inquisitors, they are met with smiles by the mistress of the mansion, in *déshabillé*, who conducts them through the various apartments which require the expertise of their cleansing art (221).

The description of the whitewashers moving through the home reworks the authority and maintenance of white domestic space; the reference to a seemingly forfeited resistance appears to be a position of inferiority, yet the description of the whitewashers is infused with powerful and commanding language. Smith’s choice to place the whitewashers outside of the opportunity of

resistance is not to undermine their ability to do so, but to suggest that they are actually in the position of *power* inside this space, given their particular line of work. The upkeep of this white private space “requires” the whitewashers’ “cleansing art” for its existence so that without them, it cannot maintain its utility. However, as much as the continuation of this white domestic space relies on the Black whitewashers, its reality is simultaneously destabilized by their presence; they expose the underlying and inconsistent fantasy of 19th century white domestic spaces that attempts to separate itself from non-white individuals yet simultaneously builds its entire identity around the subordination of and projection against these same communities.

This paradoxical metaphor continues with the application of the paint itself. Mixing their own white paint, the whitewashers know “secrets about lime and lamp black” that others “would pay well for a knowledge of...but money cannot buy it” (222). As the whitewashers cover the walls of with their paint, Smith creates a visceral image of these private white spaces saturated in a “whiteness” that can only be achieved by way of the Black whitewashers. Using this explicitly spatial metaphor, the sketch reveals white obsession and anxiety over the preservation of their own spaces and spatial systems. The maintenance of “whiteness” needs a subordinated perception of “blackness” to function; Without this binary and hierarchal structure, there is no power.

Focused once again on domestic space, the setting of the sketch “The Washerwoman” is contained to a washerwoman’s home space, which is also where she completes her work. Like in “The Whitewasher,” the narrator is no longer describing public space, but now focusing on the private space commanded by a Black woman. Confronted by the second key distinction in how Black Americans experience southern and northern space, the idea of legally owned Black private space is distinct to the northern U.S. landscape. “The Washerwoman” introduces the

function and reality of Black domesticity, specifically as it relates to Black womanhood. For the washerwoman, her home space is both a site for labor and the realization of private property commandment, reflecting her socio-economic and political positionality.

This particular sketch looks at the particular identity of Black women, dissenting from the dominant informant of white men's individualism—the economy outside of the home. Drawing on Gillian Brown's arguments in *Domestic Individualism*, the 19th century notion of “economy” was defined by men and delineated all vital economic performance outside of the home, yet this is only one of many “economic realities” (9). Apart from the external market space, “domesticity constitutes an alternative to, and escape from, the masculine economic order” (Brown 6). Accordingly, just because the domestic space was understood as an apparent separation from the public sphere, which exists as one market space, this does not mean that the domestic space is not a viable economic system. While always acknowledging the detrimental effects of the blatant exclusion of disempowered groups from mainstream economies, “The Washerwoman” is interested in how the domestic space reimagines the relationships between economic participation, the domestic space, and the formation of identity.

Like the news-vender, the washerwoman was previously enslaved. Communipaw explains her escape from the south, narrating that “when she had reached woman's years, her so-called master, with much bustle, with whip in hand, had called her up to her upstairs for punishment” (202). Once upstairs, the washerwoman responds by saying, “if you dare touch me with that lash, I will tear you to pieces,” and thus, as Communipaw relays, the whipper was “whipped” (202). The stoic and empowered development of the washerwoman continues in the description of her labor, where Smith depicts, “And [her] eye and brow, chiseled out for stern resolve and high thought, the one now dull and haggard, and the other, steamed and blistered

with deep furrows and great drops of sweat wrung out by over toil” (201). Communipaw fastens the washerwoman’s labor to her intellectual identity in order to “elevate common labor to artistry,” as John Stauffer’s introduction to the sketch poses, or at least to clarify that her laboring identity as “the washerwoman” is intrinsically bound to her interiority (200); with regard to the implications of the washerwoman’s laboring identity, the sketch takes care to craft the space her home in relation to her identity as “the washerwoman” to further solidify the relationship between her domestic space and public facing identity. As Communipaw describes, the space wherein the washerwoman performs this labor is “small, hot as an oven, the air thick in it and misty with the steam rising from the ironing tables; in the corners, under the tables, and in all out-of-the-way places, are stowed tubs of varying sizes, some empty, some full of clothes soaking for next week’s labor” (201). The union of the washerwoman’s private, domestic space and laboring space is essential to the washerwoman’s socio-economic identity. Excluded from the mainstream standard of white domesticity, the washerwoman crafts her domestic space to be, in part, a function of her compensated labor. The space is oriented towards utility and economic development, which is a means of increased mobility for her. As a result, she locates her identity in her ability to command her economic activity within her own domestic space.

Unfitting to the 19th century social standards of ideal womanhood, which reserve physical labor for men, the washerwoman subverts these mainstream expectations within her home. However, to call the washerwoman’s domestic space and lifestyle as *subversive* suggests that it is in active conversation with the ideal it is subverting, but this is not necessarily true. To simply put it, the washerwoman’s domestic space is not created to be a direct reaction against white domesticity—to assert such would be reductive. Rather, her domestic space and domesticity are a manifestation of her particular abilities as a laborer, home keeper, and a Black woman.

Undoubtedly, her identity is affected by white domesticity's attempts to reduce her importance as a domestic and economic participant. Concurrently, even if the washerwoman is able to locate agency and control within the labor she performs within her domestic space, it can be assumed that she is still completing that labor on behalf of the white families that bring their laundry for her to wash. As much as she is the "whitewasher," she is also a "whites" washer and surviving within an overarching environment that systematizes her subjugation; yet this does not necessarily require that the ideals of 19th century white domesticity have control over the development and evolution of Black domesticity and Black domestic space.

In the remaining sketches of "Heads of the Colored People," space comes to negotiate social and economic relationships, both in regard to public and private space. Frank J. Webb's novel *The Garies and Their Friends* appends this same concept but focuses almost entirely on domestic space. As the second known novel to be published by an African American author, Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* narrates the lives of two distinct families, the Garies's and the Ellis's, living in Philadelphia during the mid-19th century. Rather than concentrating on the socioeconomic and political conditions of the south, Webb predominantly sets his novel in the free state of Pennsylvania, though not far from the borderline that permits legal slavery. When the Garie family moves from a plantation in Georgia to Philadelphia, Mrs. Ellis and her two daughters, Caddy and Esther, prepare the Garie's home in a wealthy part of Philadelphia. After the Garies move in, their neighbor George Stevens quickly finds out that Mrs. Garie is Black as well as a familial tie he can exploit and thus begins a series of emotionally and physically violent disturbances to the family, which peaks in an organized riot attack on Mr. Walter's house, a wealthy family friend of the Ellis's. The sustained threat of violence toward private Black spaces in the free north and the imposition of white domestic ideals, specifically related to women, on

Black households reoccur as central anxieties in *The Garies*. As Robert Reid-Pharr distinguishes, the novel seeks to define a “modern racial identity” for Black Americans by demonstrating that Black individualism is *not* a reaction to whiteness, but an identity developed within itself; thus, the private, domestic spaces of free Black Americans become the focal point of the novel, as it is within these spaces that Webb locates the production of Black individualism (Reid-Pharr 72).

While existing scholarship focuses on the significance of the domestic spaces within *The Garies*, I will focus specifically on the relationship between the domestic and public space as well as the particularity of the “drawing room,” which exists as a liminal space between the public and the domestic. Regarding its semblance to the sentimental novel form, *The Garies* harnesses the liminal drawing room space as the negotiator of relationships and identity, as opposed to the effusion of emotion. By doing so, I argue that the novel reimagines the function of the domestic space, refuting the white sentimentalist fantasy of an insular system of domesticity.

Published in 1857, the text is undoubtedly in conversation with the sentimentalist genre, which was the predominant form for the novel in the 19th century. Historically, scholarship has criticized sentimentalism for its inability to fully confront the problem slavery, the largest political issue in the 19th century U.S. Instead, the sentimental genre imagines a masculine national identity by way of domestic spaces, which, as many have pointed out, are traditionally feminized spaces (Samuels 4). This paradox is replicated within the sentimental idea of a pure and therefore white home that must ignore the national and household economy’s reliance on slavery and institutionalized racism. Attributing the sentimental genre to a nationally involved project, Shirley Samuels points out that sentimentalism codified “a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy” so that emotional response becomes the agent of negotiating social positions and relationship (Samuels 4). With

this idea of sentimentalism in mind, Frank J. Webb's *The Garies* manipulates the sentimental novel form so that the physical domestic space, rather than effusion of emotion, becomes the agent for negotiating social positions and relationships.

Black domestic space, whether it be the Garies' or the Ellis', is both a grounding point for the text and its characters as well as a space of increased vulnerability. As Reid-Pharr affirms, domesticity is not "static" but rather an "irregular process" that reflects the instability of its residential participants (65). Domesticity then, as it exists in *The Garies*, is a dynamic economy—a system of behaviors, a method of distributing resources, and a center of labor—all located within the domestic space. Whereas the public market traditionally serves as the economy informing American (white) individualism, Webb demonstrates a system of individualism informed instead by a *household* economy. However, these domestic spaces are undoubtedly in conversation with the market, in the form that residents continuously move between public and domestic spaces. While there is a definitive external threat of disempowerment and racial violence to *The Garies'* domestic spaces, these same spaces also pose a destabilizing effect towards the fantasies of white domestic practices and spaces by reimagining the relationship between the domestic and individual agency.

While *The Garies* is primarily concerned with Black domestic spaces, the novel is also interested in the formulation of white domestic spaces, as they would exist in the traditional sentimental novel. Like the whitewashers in "Heads of the Colored People," Charlie Ellis—the son of Mr. and Mrs. Ellis—participates in the labor force through a white domestic space belonging to a wealthy Philadelphian woman named Mrs. Thomas. For wealthy American households like those of Mrs. Thomas's, Black Americans were often hired to perform the domestic labor required to maintain the home. As a result, the home became divided between the

property owner's and the servants' spaces. Compared to the whitewashers in Smith's sketches, Charlie is differentiated by his age because he is a child when he goes to work for Mrs. Thomas; nonetheless, Charlie's presence in a white domestic space stands in as an "otherness," or an extension of the public that is actually required in order to maintain the system of domesticity that white domestic spaces insist upon, which fundamentally relies on subordination.

Mrs. Thomas develops her own identity and domestic space—one that she considers superior—against the identity she assigns to Charlie, which she considers inferior. For a home like Mrs. Thomas's, the presence of the *subordinate* servant is required in order for her to maintain her own superiority complex. When Charlie is sent to Mrs. Thomas's house as a servant for the holidays, he purposely wreaks havoc on Mrs. Thomas's domestic space, which climaxes at her grand planned dinner party—the epitome of a social performance. For Webb, Mrs. Thomas's dinner party is a microcosm of her obsession over controlling spatial function; at the dinner table she places herself at the head so that she can monitor all that happens in her dining room, paying special attention to make sure her servants are entering and exiting at exactly the right moments and performing exactly the right functions.

Mrs. Thomas frantically tries to separate the outside labor within her home from her system of domesticity, and while she seemingly maintains a position of control, the rigidity of the party and her own domestic space actually incur vulnerability to the outside labor it necessitates. After trapping Mrs. Thomas's cat in a kitchen jar and pulling off her wig at the dinner table, Charlie upsets the entire event. Mrs. Thomas's social plan for the night entirely collapses under his pranks accomplished within a domestic servant role, thus revealing her fantasy of a fragile domesticity formed around infeasible cleanliness and subordination. Mrs. Thomas's domesticity is a proxy for standard 19th century white domesticity that adheres to rigid

social roles and hierarchy. Her home fits exactly into the paradoxical nature of “separate spheres” where this particular formulation of domestic space grasps at insularity by trying to dislocate and disregard the external forces inevitably contributing to the household’s identity. *The Garies*, however, does not believe in the functional vitality of this kind of domesticity, and therefore presents alternative systems that reimagine a home’s relationship to the public and ability to inform identity. A large part of this reimagining takes place in the drawing room of a character named Mr. Walters, which represents a liminal but constant space between the public and the private within the home.

Traditionally in the 19th century, the “drawing room” functions as a reception space for the public, serving as a meeting point for guests that enter from outside of the house into the home. Thus, it is a liminal space between the public and private, resulting in a highly multi-purposed quality where it possesses the ability to become what its occupants need. Because the drawing room is the public facing space within a 19th century house, there was aesthetic pressure for the space to represent the moral values and identity of the home’s residents, specifically for the middle class and those with new wealth (Floyd and Bryden 64). Residents have the freedom to curate the space as it relates to their own identity so that they may assume some control over how the public will perceive them; therefore, the drawing room clearly signifies the sustained reflection of personal interiority and individualism onto interior space.

For Webb, Mr. Walters’s drawing room is of repeated use and great significance when it comes to the relationship between Black domestic space and the public. As a realtor in Philadelphia, Mr. Walter’s wealth is self-made, derived from property transactions and ownership. Literary scholar Elizabeth Stockton argues that the cultural and legal context surrounding property ownership in Webb’s time linked citizenship directly to property

ownership so that “Mr. Walters endorse[s] a classical view of self-possession that relies on property ownership rather than the racial categories upheld during the antebellum period” (475). Accordingly, property ownership provides a secure location to derive self-identification. Therefore, because the space lies at the heart of his own private property, the drawing room represent acquisition of wealth and participation in a public market as much as it signifies his interiority.

Throughout the novel, the drawing room takes many forms: a defense fort, a reoccurring meeting place, and later the space in which Charlie Ellis and Emily Garie get married. Characters frequently come and go, but ultimately always make their way back to the drawing room, culminating in the novel’s ultimate marriage scene. The unstable situations of the individuals occupying the drawing room are reflected by the constantly evolving, yet distinguishable existence of the space itself. Simultaneously, the drawing room secures a stable outlet for Mr. Walters’s identity. If Reid-Pharr defines domesticity as a matter constantly in flux, then the drawing room is the exact space in which this domesticity-as-flux takes form (65). For example, Webb emphasizes his portrait of Hattian Revolution leader General Toussaint L’ouverture that overlooks the entire space. In an interaction inside the drawing room between Mr. Walters and Mr. Garie, the latter takes interest in the portrait, not knowing exactly who it is. Acknowledging the common and notoriously offensive representations of the general, Walters emphasizes that the portrait “looks like a man of intelligence. It is entirely different from any likeness I ever saw of him” (145). As an aesthetic choice, Walters choses to include the portrait in the home’s interior as a physical manifestation of his personal interiority. Culturally, to Mr. Walters the general symbolizes Black resistance and freedom. Walters stresses the importance of the reflection between an individual’s interiority—L’ouverture, in this case—and the *externally*

projected identity of that interiority. Understanding domestic space as a form of internal projection, the arrangement of the drawing room's physical space becomes key to understanding Walters's interiority so that Walters's ability to control the curation of that space becomes a means of self-identifying and presenting a public identity. Toussaint L'ouverture's "presence" in the room throughout each chapter and use of the drawing room has a stabilizing effect on the space; no matter what guests are visiting or what events are ensuing, Mr. Walters's curation of the drawing room space is always oriented back to Mr. Walters's identity.

Although recent scholarship (Otter; Reid-Pharr; Duane) has focused on Mr. Walters's drawing room's role during the riot attack, it is not always and not necessarily operating under an antagonistic function. While the riot scene embodies an overtly antagonistic element from public figures, the Ellis family who helps to defend Mr. Walters's house are also technically "public" guests within his drawing room. Because the drawing room is a space that enables a household's interaction with the public, its purpose is to facilitate a union between people or groups, such as Mr. Walters and the Ellis family in this case. As a result, the space facilitates the (re)negotiation of relationships. With respect to the rioters, the relationship is clearly violent and antagonistic; yet for the relationships between Mr. Walters and members of the Ellis family, the drawing room breaks past socially normalized roles and contributes to a shared Black domestic identity, although this negotiation still occurs within a struggle. Furthermore, as much as the drawing room generates a communal Black individualism, the space is particularly attentive to the situation and identity of women. Generally, Webb spends significant time writing about how the women in the novel—mainly Caddy and Esther—operate within the domestic space. Minding the 19th century relationship between women and the home, the domestic space setting allows for

the maintenance of—or in Webb’s case, the subversion of—socially appropriate gender roles as the traditional (and overwhelmingly white) domestic space dictates them.

The Garies relationship to sentimentalism problematizes the genre’s foundational approach to understanding the role of domestic space and of socialization by importing some of sentimentalism’s key features—a predominately domestic setting and the marriage plot, for example—while simultaneously reproaching others—such as sentimentalism’s deflection of racial inequity and the mechanisms for negotiating relationships. For women, sentimentalism valued effusion of emotion as the means to navigate relationship building and socialization; while the sentimental novel relies on body language and social performance for negotiating relationships, *The Garies* uses the drawing room—or more broadly, material space—to grow relationships, thus standing in direct opposition to sentimentalism. Using the same spaces that are standardized within sentimental literature, like domestic space and the drawing room, Webb refutes sentimentalism’s inadequate literary devices that so often pigeonholes women into shallow, gushingly emotional roles.

Beyond the problematic gender roles associated with sentimentalism, the genre fails to even acknowledge the presence of Black women within its fictionized world. As Anna Mae Duane argues, *The Garies and Their Friends* is “an exploration of the pernicious effects the desire for whiteness wreaks within black families” (202). Acknowledging the idealized white fantasy that sentimentalism favors, *The Garies* confronts this fantasy head on by “focus[ing] almost exclusively on domestic spaces—a tactic that engages, and eventually refutes, many of the tenets of white sentimentalism” (Duane 202). To summarize the traditions of white sentimentalism’s model of domesticity, the genre overwhelmingly compartmentalizes Black women outside of its definition of ideal womanhood—as unable to properly raise good,

respectful children nor maintain a proper Christian household (Duane 202). Because *The Garies* generally follows a marriage plot where the union and prosperity of Charlie Ellis and Emily Garie restores their parents' efforts to raise successful children, *The Garies*, on a surface level, refutes the claims made by white sentimentalism about Black women. Furthermore, the novel solidifies a distinction between the imposition of white sentimental feminine ideals onto womanhood and the *reality* of womanhood.

While *The Garies'* use of the marriage plot serves as evidence of the novel's engagement with sentimentalism, it also invites criticism that the novel helps to maintain the patriarchal structures that marriage represents. Elizabeth Stockton argues that the women in *The Garies'* consistently operate in the shadow of the male characters, thus "replicat[ing] the class and gender hierarchies created by white society instead of imagining a more equal way to structure social relations" (481). However, while this is a grounded argument, I argue that *The Garies'* does not participate in an exact replication of the white domestic ideals for women in its female characters. Turning back towards the drawing room to understand how (gender) relationships are being negotiated within the novel, the riot and marriage scenes that take place within the drawing room put women in the positions of control regarding relationship negotiation.

Esther and Caddy epitomize the novel's rejection of white gender traditions within the domestic space. During the riot attack, both Esther and Caddy participate in defending the private property alongside their men friends and family members. Esther insists on learning to load pistols with Mr. Walter to help fend off the rioters; she tells Mr. Walters, "I could perhaps be of great use to you," who replies by saying that Esther won't be safe by doing so. Determined to put her skills to use she insists, "I shall not be any more exposed than you or my father" (215). As their private space comes under threat, the assistance of women is both willingly offered and

absolutely needed. The nature of a racist attack, even within text, leaves no room for undermining the capacity of women in the text.

While Esther learns to use a pistol, Caddy, whose characterization as an overly “domestic” woman borders on satire, helps to defend the house by heating and launching hot water spiced with peppers onto the attackers from the top floor, therefore implementing and adapting her “domestic” skillset. After the attack is over, Caddy says, “‘It takes us; we fight with hot water. This,’ said she, holding up a dipper, ‘is my gun, I guess we made ‘em squeal’” (221). Caddy represents a complex form of femininity where her love for housework could be mistaken for conformity to oppressive gender norms. However, given the social constraints placed on her identity, “Webb represents Caddy’s incessant activity as negotiating the demands of social performance in Philadelphia, an attempt to define a space in which, given the constraints, she and her family can be ‘free’” (Otter 376). For women like Ester and Caddy to partake in an active physically defiant role transcends beyond the boundaries of a woman’s role in the white domestic literary tradition. However, in Webb’s contemporary writing, white women characters would never be subjected to these forms of racist violence because such trauma was primarily directed towards Black individuals, as seen with Mr. Steven’s rioters. Through the women in *The Garies*, Webb “reveal[s] the inadequacy of white definitions of femininity to create an alternative model of womanhood applicable to the experiences of black women” (Duane 203). Minding Webb’s sentimentalist contemporaries, in which 19th century white domestic traditions locate Black women outside of its imagined ideal of womanhood and domesticity, the female characters in *The Garies* not only disprove that designation but unsettle the racist and gendered fantasy it rests upon.

Still, *The Garies* almost entirely develops the novel's women characters within the domestic space and through their performance of domestic labor. Webb writes *The Garies* within the overarching reality of 19th century womanhood: a general confinement to domestic space. While Duane acknowledges the gender subversion taking place in the riot scene, she argues, "after the riot, the women rapidly fade from *The Garies*. The women who survive it appear only in the context of the domestic space" (481). Indeed, the female characters are represented almost solely in the domestic space after the riot, yet this does not necessarily mean that their actions or labor are secondary to that of the men. Charlie (and Kinch too) are able to participate in the public market, in part, as a result of male privilege, whereas Esther and Caddy stay within the domestic space because the public market does not permit or reward their labor in the same way it does for Charlie or Kinch. *The Garies* is not a novel that imagines a world where Black women enjoy the same rights and privileges as Black men, let alone white men. Rather the novel reproduces the gendered reality of the 19th century, while giving its women characters—particularly Caddy—agency and individualism within the reality that she faces as a Black woman in the 19th century.

Caddy's domestic labor is the driving force behind the resolution scene of the novel—the marriage between Charlie Ellis and Emily Garie. Without Caddy, the event, which signifies the text's solidification of Black individualism, would not have occurred. The scene returns the novel back to the drawing room in the ultimate demonstration of the space's ability to unite people and groups. The entire cast of characters is present for the wedding, alongside many outside guests. Webb opens the chapter, narrating, "Caddy, who had been there since the break of day, had taken the domestic reins entirely from the hands of the mistress of the mansion, and usurped command herself"; immediately, "she entered upon the discharge of her self-imposed

duties” (349). Not only does Caddy undertake the managing authority over the entire event, but she assumes this power *herself*, with a sense of command and influence unparalleled by any other character in the novel. Furthermore, the language surrounding Caddy’s actions plays on the military language from the riot scene, carrying forward her precedent as a self-determined and powerful character. Throughout the chapter she moves through the house assigning tasks to others and inspecting that every last detail is up to her standards. Webb writes, “she went to work with energy, and seemed determined to establish the fact that her abilities were greatly underrated, and that a woman could accomplish more than one thing at a time when she set about it” (349). Her character is as important—or arguably more important—than any man in ensuring the success and symbolism of the marriage scene. As the text presents, domestic labor performed by women is liable to be “greatly underrated” or reduced to simply the process of upkeeping the home. However, if the space within a home—specifically the drawing room, in this case—can be understood as a vehicle through which public and private relationships are negotiated and identity is formed, then Caddy reworks the 19th century stereotypes of women in the domestic space by elevating her labor to be an essential function in continuing a communal Black identity.

Powered by Caddy’s work, the marriage commences; Webb writes, “Through the wide hall and up the stairway, flowers of various kinds mingled their fragrance and loaded the air with their rich perfume; and expressions of delight burst from the lips of the guests as they passed up the brilliantly-lighted stairway and thronged the spacious drawing-room” (351). In this scene, Webb emphasizes the open and inviting nature of the space, accompanied by an element of luxury. The stark juxtaposition between this marriage scene and the riot attack scene reemphasizes the drawing room as a space to negotiate relationships and a system of domesticity. The space is not inherently violent nor inherently peaceful; it takes the form of the particular

situations and interiorities of its occupants. During the marriage, this translates to the formation of a communal Black identity that adamantly rejects assimilation to whiteness.

However, even in the moments where it seems that peace is restored to Black Americans' private spaces, the pervasive threat of racist violence remains. The dinner following the marriage ceremony functions as a social performance that presents the success and accomplishment of a Black family operating within a highly oppressive society; however, as Samuel Otter deduces, Webb's descriptions of the dinner food laces this dinner scene with unnerving sexual and threatening language:

There were turkeys innocent of a bone, into which you might plunge your knife to which you might plunge your knife without coming in contact with a splinter—turkeys from which cunning cooks has extracted every bone leaving the meat alone behind, with the skin not perceptibly broken. How brown and tempting they looked, their capacious bosoms giving rich promise of high-seasoned dressing within (Webb 354).

The violent imagery Webb produces as he writes of the knife “plunging” into the turkey combined with insinuations of exploitation in the words “extracted,” “tempting” and “capacious” refuses to undermine the ever present racially charged threat on this private space. Samuel Otter argues, “In the opening and final table scenes, he [Webb] reverses the usual depictions of south and north, stressing the vulnerability and violence in Philadelphia and under freedom. The aspects of the supper—endorsement of pleasure, exposure of violence, social critique, sexual humor—do not fit together seamlessly, and Webb appears to relish the excess” (Otter 743). In addition to the violent imagery accompanying the dinner, Webb's description of Mr. Ellis at the wedding ceremony serves as a reminder of the racist violence that occurred in that very space. Webb describes Mr. Ellis sitting at the ceremony as “almost hidden in his large easy chair...

scarcely seem[ing] able to comprehend the affair, and apparently labored under the impression that it was another mob, and looked a little terrified at times when the laughter or conversation grew louder than usual” (351). Clearly, this description of Mr. Ellis preserves the lingering feelings and impact of racist violence and terror, even inside private space. The post-marriage meal and description of Mr. Ellis undeniably references the sustained violence and oppression that the Black community continues to face in moments of success, even in northern states, calling attention to the pervasive threat of legally and socially justified violation while under the theoretical protection of freedom.

Webb’s attention to the domestic space in *The Garies* evidences the significance of spatial autonomy, specifically for those where that autonomy has been historically violated. Understanding the home as its own economy where individuals express agency through their management and participation within a system of domesticity, the public market space no longer can be understood as the primary driving force of individualism and empowerment. While always acknowledging the pervasively damaging effects of 19th century spatial traditions as they relate to race and gender, the systems of domesticity like those represented in *The Garies* are reimagined by traditionally disempowered groups to be the informant of a community’s individualism and as a space to locate agency, control and empowerment.

Chapter 2

Macro-Geographies: The Nation

In the previous chapter, I examined texts that unveil an instability within the rigid systems of sentimentalism, specifically (white) domestic spaces that rely upon subordination of outside labor to function. Within sentimental literature, domesticity serves as a means to produce and regulate identity by imagining domestic space as a separate and fixed container that exists as a binary, opposite from public space. The domestic then becomes a tool for maintaining whiteness while its existence paradoxically still relies on outside (non-white) labor. Patterns of national identity develop from repetitions of this kind of white domesticity, which, as I established, stands as a fantasy of insularity and subordination. Using a similar lens, if national identity is informed by the idealized white domestic space, then the greater spatial landscape of the United States repeats and relies on these systems of borders and subordination. During the 19th century, the United States geography reflected stark cultural and political differences between the north and the south, yet the mechanisms of patrolling Black mobility influenced both. The movement of enslaved individuals from the southern plantation toward the north—from slavery to “freedom”—was traveled by thousands of Black Americans and informs the Slave Narrative genre. Expanding the conceptualizations of insular domesticity discussed in chapter one to the nation, this chapter will look the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs; both texts, as well as the greater dialogue they create, actively destabilize the systems of enclosure and regulation within the U.S. landscape.

During the 19th century, the United States, as a spatial entity, was hallmarked by its desire to “take up” more space within its borders in an attempt to strengthen and stabilize the political

and economic power of the country, which paradoxically resulted in an inherently *unstable* conception of America, the *place*. In 1803, the U.S. signed the Louisiana purchase to acquire most of the land surrounding the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers from France, who had colonized the land in the 18th century; this singular acquisition more than doubled the size of the U.S. Before the year 1900, and the government would complete three more significant North American land purchases as well as three major land Cessions through conflict and treaty with other nations. Once the U.S. declared their sovereignty over these geographic areas, political actors began a long and violent history of forced removal of indigenous peoples from these areas. In 1830, Andrew Jackson signed the “Indian Removal Act” that authorized the government to force indigenous peoples out of U.S. territory in “exchange” for land west of the Mississippi River. Of course, as the borders of U.S. territory continued to expand westward, indigenous peoples were perpetually displaced from these lands and eventually forced into U.S. authorized “reservations”; the genocide of indigenous Americans has continued for decades.

Simultaneously, within the borders of newly colonized land, the question of slavery permeated political and social conversation. Acquired “southern” territories, which would go on to become the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas and Texas entered the federation as slave states. Northern legislation attempted to prevent slavery in any new states above the 36°30’ parallel, which was effectively nullified with the passage of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 by allowing Missouri to enter the union as a slave state. Throughout the 19th century, the geography of the United States was continually shifting on a map because of forceful efforts to increase the nation’s economic vitality, domestic identity, and international standing.

National identity, therefore, was not necessarily developed through the ability to name or exist within a fixed border, but rather through the ability to occupy space and control mobility;

paradoxically, at the same time the adherence to an idea of fixed borders and a firmly compartmentalized geography was necessary for maintaining control of the space within national borders. For the purposes of this chapter, rather than the home, the *nation* is the place of examination, referring to the space within U.S. borders—an inherently artificial concept that can only exist through patrol and enforcement. Furthermore, “borders within borders” arises as a central political question in the 19th century through the belief in the north-south binary. The concept of “borders within borders” encompasses the creation of state lines, borders around “reservation” spaces created by the U.S. government, and the Mason-Dixon line (which will be the central “border within border” concern for this chapter). The authors examined in this chapter position the “border” between the northern and southern United States as a problematized geography, in that its existence only subsists through a cultural narrative assigning a certain truth to it—the difference between freedom and slavery—when in reality it did not necessarily exist as such for Black communities because the legal and social systems of the north and south were so interconnected. Recalling the illusion of an insular domesticity as discussed in the previous chapter, an insular or separated idea of the south and the north—or of the plantation and all that is not plantation—was maintained by both the north and the south to preserve white supremacy allowed by national systems of enclosure and binaries within the entire U.S. landscape.

United States space and, therefore, U.S. geography are inherently racialized concepts since regionalisms (mainly the north and the south) developed in response to differential yet definite dependencies on chattel slavery. To illustrate what I mean by the connection between space and geography, I turn to Katherine McKittrick’s book *Demonic Grounds* where she describes space as a “location through which a moving technology can create differential and contextual histories” (xii); in other words, the formation of geographies is what makes space

worth studying in terms of the national container, particularly in terms of its relation to slavery and mobility. McKittrick incorporates scholar Sylvia Wynter's writing on Black feminine geography, where Wynter's work explains the "over representation of Man" and whiteness in dominant geographic conceptions (McKittrick 123); as a result, both Wynter and McKittrick are interested in conceptions of space—such as those produced "in the margins, on auction blocks, in garrets, through literatures, and in 'the last place they thought of'"—that demand an expanded view of our "sociogeographic organization" to include the spaces not acknowledged by white, idealized models of geography (122). The slave narratives looked at in this chapter confront mainstream 19th century U.S. geography's reliance on binaries and presumption of white supremacy.

The south—as a geography—functions centrally in each of the texts presented in this chapter, and each text deconstructs the idea of a *fixed* southern geography. As literary scholar Jennifer Greeson argues, the south "both exceeds and flattens space; it is a term of the imagination, a site of national fantasy" and an "*internal other*" within the country that is simultaneously denied from and used to support national identity (1). For many (white) 19th century American authors, the south becomes a setting for experimentation and imagination, but is treated separate or parceled from the national whole. Technologies of enclosure and regulation of mobility repeat this same emphasis on geographic separation and the border between the south and the north. For example, the pass system required that enslaved individuals have a written pass of permission while off their respective plantation. The requirement of documentation and proof of freedom for Black Americans in the north combined with the violence of slave catchers served as a precursor for modern day policing⁴. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law can be understood

⁴ As sociologist Marlese Durr illustrates, "some historians assert that the transition from slave patrols to publicly funded police departments was smooth in the South and North, while others regard slave patrols as the first

as one of the broadest (spatially speaking) and most imposing technologies to regulate mobility by blanketing a law concerning run-away slaves across the entire country, therefore exposing the fantasy of the north-south binary within the doctrine of the very political system seeking to maintain it.

The collection of 19th century American slave narratives constitutes a literary genre of which one of the primary informants is the consequences of the north-south binary for enslavement and mobility. Literary scholar James Olney, who was one of the first to outline the slave narrative as a distinct genre in American literature, notes its “highly conventional, rigidly fixed form that bears much the same relationship to autobiography” because “the writer of the slave narrative finds himself in an irresolvable tight bind as a result of the very intention and premise of his narrative, which is to give a picture of ‘slavery *as it is*’” (48). The “rigidity” that Olney deduces is also defined in many narratives by the presence of white sponsors, substitute writers and editors that worked to ensure the narratives would be published and received by white (abolitionist) audiences; as a result, the originality of the author’s voice can vary from narrative to narrative (56). Both slave narratives studied in this chapter—Frederick Douglass’s *A Narrative in the Life* and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*—follow the conventions that Olney elucidates while providing robust descriptions of mobility within the regulatory systems and geographies outlined earlier. As Olney clarifies, these authors had significant pressure by white publishers to remain palatable for white abolitionists, creating a tension that will be unpacked later in the chapter for both authors

formally recognized undertaking of policing in America. Still, others identify the amalgamation of police departments in major cities in the early to mid-1800s as the beginning of modern policing in the United States” (875). Accordingly, “performances of brutality” and hyper-patrolling of certain neighborhoods by modern day police officers, especially as directed towards black Americans, is a continuation of the technologies developed by slave patrols (874).

As the most studied American slave narrative of all time, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* is regarded as the archetype of the genre; although, as literary scholar James Olney argues, "while being its fullest, most exact representative," Douglass's *Narrative* also "paradoxically transcends the slave narrative mode" in that Douglass's authorship is not restricted to the will of the white "sponsor" as in many other famous slave narratives (51). As Olney emphasizes, the reality of Douglass's authorship sets him apart from many other slave narrative authors. On the title page of original editions of the narrative, the words "written by himself" emphasize both Douglass's identity and his ability to independently write a narrative. Furthermore, the statement "written by himself" is intrinsically bound to the narrative's trajectory toward freedoms, where "literacy, identity, and a sense of freedom are all acquired simultaneously and without the first, according to Douglass, the latter two would never have been" (Olney 54). Thus, exercising the conventions of the slave narrative mode, Douglass's *Narrative of the Life* should be taken as the core of the slave narrative genre and as one of American literature's most transparent accounts of U.S. chattel slavery.

In accordance with the conventions of the slave narrative genre, Douglass concerns the storyline of *Narrative of the Life* with two goals: depicting the brutality of American slavery and tracing Douglass's movement from enslavement in the south to freedom in the north. Borders and enclosure, movement through the U.S. landscape, and regulation of that movement reoccur as central themes that drive the narrative's course, where the division between north and south—freedom and slavery—is always at the forefront of Douglass's, and therefore the reader's, consciousness. Wendell Phillips's preface to the narrative begins by situating readers within the north-south binary, addressing the "ruthless tyrants south of the Mason Dixon's line" (83). Phillips calls attention to the most politicized "border" in the 19th century U.S., framing the

narrative around its existence and the apparent truth it holds for enslaved individuals. However, Douglass—along with Harriet Jacobs and William Wells Brown—reveals through his writing the inherent fantasy of borders and enclosure on a national level.

In the first chapter of his narrative, Douglass roots his writing in explicit modes of movement and regulation *within* the plantation. As an adult writing, he consistently refers to the specific geographical locations of key settings in the narrative; for example, on the first page he describes that the Maryland plantation he was born into “is about twelve miles North of Easton, in Talbot county, and is situated on the border of Miles River” (97). On a map, this location is roughly forty miles from the informal border separating slave and free states (the Mason Dixon Line), reminding readers of the *apparent* proximity that Douglass had to freedom. Retelling his birth, Douglass writes, “Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm of a considerable distance” (93). Douglass describes what scholar Orlando Patterson calls natal alienation, or the process where enslaved mother and child are separated by enough distance at birth that they will not grow to know each other as mother and child; consequently, the goal of natal alienation is that the only relationship left for enslaved individuals is that between master and slave (Patterson 5). Following the account of his birth, the power of congregation—or the struggle against separation—will reoccur as motifs throughout the narrative to facilitate the creation of shared spaces such as Douglass’s sabbath school and underscore the emphasis that Douglass places on spatial proximity to his close relationships.

One of the most vivid examples of movement within the plantation occurs at the end of chapter one when Douglass witnesses the brutal whipping of his Aunt Hester. Before this incident, Douglass describes that he lived with his grandmother “on the outskirts of the

plantation” and “out of the way of the bloody scenes that often occurred on the plantation” (97). This event marks Douglass’s movement into the more physically violent center of the plantation, which he describes as a passage through “the blood-stained gate, the entrance into the hell of slavery” (96). A reoccurring metaphor in *A Narrative of the Life*, the image of a gate signifies passage and travel out of a previously enclosed or separated space; with this particular use of gateway imagery, Douglass describes the entrance into the reality of enslavement and names the scene the “bloody transaction,” emphasizing the insidious economic systems forcing his “entrance” (97).

Douglass develops the plantation—broadly speaking—as a distinct and highly regulated space within U.S. geography. Attentive to relaying the spatial composition of the various plantations he depicts, Douglass frequently speaks of the differences between the peripheries (borders) and center of the plantation and also the homes that sit at the core of them. In one illustration, Douglass tells of one master’s personal garden that “abounded in fruits of almost every description” where “hungry swarms of boys, as well as the older slaves” were not permitted to enjoy (102). The plantation owner, Colonel Lloyd, has to “resort to all kinds of stratagems to keep his slaves out of the garden” to a point where he puts tar around the entire peripheries of the garden to both keep slaves out and also create a way to mark those who attempted to enter (102). Boundaries—or the maintenance of boundaries—do not only matter as a line meant to separate the plantation from that which is not but also as a way of regulating the space inside the property lines. Without these systems of regulation, Colonel Lloyd cannot separate the plantation into “owner” and “slave” space; the personal areas occupied by Colonel Lloyd and his family—whether that be the home or the garden, as in this case—need borders to

maintain and separate their *whiteness*, which paradoxically cannot exist without the existence of the plantation's slave labor.

Colonel Lloyd's plantation persists as a key location in the early parts of the narrative where Douglass portrays the property as its own functioning government, dictated by a perverse legal system developed within its own boundaries. One of the largest in Talbot County, the Lloyd plantation was composed of twenty smaller farms; according to Douglass, the center of the plantation, called "The Great House Farm," stood as "the great place of business. It was the seat of government for the whole twenty farms... if a slave was convicted of any high misdemeanor, became unmanageable, or evinced a determination to run away, he was immediately brought here" (98). As Douglass describes, within the Lloyd plantation, "to be accused was to be convicted, and to be convicted was to be punished" (106). The use of legal language emphasizes the magnitude of power held by the plantation owner as well as the highly structured and compartmentalized nature of the property. Even outside of the Lloyd plantation Douglass recounts the separate legal systems that apply to different classes of people within the same spaces; he writes, "I speak advisedly when I say this,-- that killing a slave, or any colored person, in Talbot County, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community" (107) and "It was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read" (113).

Although Douglass's *A Narrative of the Life* gives a thorough encounter of the different plantations where Douglass lived, the center function of the narrative is to illustrate his movement towards the north. As part of tracing this trajectory, Douglass closely aligns physical movement with the development of literacy as a means to freedom. After leaving Colonel Lloyd's plantation, Douglass spends time in Baltimore as a domestic slave for the Auld family, eventually moving back into Talbot County where he is transferred to the farm of a man named

Mr. Covey after Captain Thomas Auld found Douglass “unsuitable to his purpose” (128). Already able to read and write, Douglass’s drive towards freedom gains significant momentum during his time on Covey’s farm. Mr. Covey was a “poor man and a farm-renter” who was known by plantation owners to “break” slaves (128), and unlike a traditional slave and plantation owner, Covey was, according to Douglass, “under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush, and at every window, on the plantation” (130). In terms of understanding how Douglass develops landscapes and setting in his narrative, Covey takes on a supernatural quality in his capacity to alter slaves’ sense of real space and impose an apparently omniscient ability to patrol—a form of violence that is recreated in later technologies of enclosure, most notably through *legislation*; while Douglass published his *Narrative* in 1845, Covey’s ability to dominate space is not unlike how the fugitive slave would experience U.S. geography under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Thus, “literacy” as a means to freedom for Douglass (and enslaved persons, more generally) goes beyond the ability to read and write to also include the ability to understand legislative implications and the patterns of patrol and regulation—such as those of Covey’s omnipresence on his farm.

It is while on Covey’s farm that Douglass begins to orchestrate his eventual escape out of south and into the north, thus invoking the spatial politics of the entire U.S. landscape in addition to the confines of the plantation. Like most of the plantations in Douglass’s narrative, Covey’s farm was located near the Mason Dixon line and “within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay,” where Douglass could frequently see ships sailing past him on the water (132). During one of the only apostrophes in the narrative, Douglass laments to the “moving multitude of ships” as he watched their movement “with a saddened heart and tearful eye” (132). To the ships he says, “You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip...I will run

away...I had as well be killed running as die standing. I will...walk straight through Delaware into Pennsylvania. When I get there, I shall not be required to have a pass; I can travel without being disturbed" (133). Douglass's apostrophe to the sailboats and the ocean confronts the restriction of movement and the pass system that afflicts him as an enslaved American. Douglas personifies the boats in order to imagine freedom of movement governed only by natural law rather than the perverse man-made system of regulation of U.S. geography and mobility. The juxtaposition of the U.S. landscape (or more specifically, Covey's farm) against the free-moving ocean calls attention to the continual effort of maintaining static and highly structured legal and political systems on the land, through which Douglass's freedom and movement is subordinated.

The imagery of boats and ships resurfaces when Douglass arrives in Baltimore—a technically "free" city—to work at the shipyard after being hired out to a man named William Gardner, who was "an extensive ship-builder" charged with building war ships (150). During this time, Douglass faced extreme physical and emotional violence from his white co-builders. Describing these workers, he says "I was to regard all these as masters. Their word was my law" (151). Douglass's position at the shipyard is as a caulker, meaning that his job is to fill in the cracks in ship wood with impermeable material. The imagery of Douglass caulking—or filling up the spaces left behind to seal and make possible the violence of warships—resonates with the greater relationship between the Black labor force and American economies; reinforced through violence, white supremacy disregards its incongruities (or cracks) by relying on the subjection of Black labor for its upholding. The symbolism of filling in the cracks and Douglass's description of the entire multitude of white coworkers as his collective master serves as a meditation of what "freedom" looks like in this white supremacist society. For Douglass to choose Baltimore as the

setting for this contemplation drives home the inability for the north to exist as a free and distinct place from the south.

Unlike the boats that Douglass encounters while on Covey's farm, the image of these ships carries a far more insidious connotation of violence and dislocation, invoking the longer history of enslavement which initially relied on slave ships on the Atlantic for sustainment. If the ocean is understood as the most fluid form of space, then a ship moving through the water *seemingly* parallels that fluidity and embodies an un-geographic quality because it isn't a fixed location—the sailboats in Douglass's apostrophe approach this quality, for example; yet we can locate the slave ship as a very real and structured place, regardless of its spatial fixed-ness. To return to McKittrick's notion of the "social production of space," the slave ship (or war ship, for that matter) illustrates exactly what geography is— not a fixed container, but a "location through which a moving technology can create differential and contextual histories" (xii). Douglass's use of ship and boat imagery exemplify this notion of the relationship between space and geography, where space and place are not made significant (in terms of how people experience them) until systems of regulation are imposed upon them. Furthermore, the fact that the ships Douglass works on are war ship is significant in their utility as violent and regulatory technologies in terms of international border systems. Ultimately, Douglass's use of the shipyard scene contributes to the narrative's greater conversation that *resist* systems of geographic regulation.

Resistance plays a crucial role as one of Douglass's central motifs in his *Narrative*. In chapter ten, Douglass's climactic act of physical resistance against Covey is one of the most studied events of the narrative, signifying a literal "turning point" in Douglass's "career as a slave" and movement north (137). However, Douglass's notion of resistance should not be understood only in terms of violent, physical resistance. Douglass emphasizes the importance of

literacy, congregation, and the ability to create in context with his trajectory towards freedom as much as he does his ability for physical movement; yet in each of these means of resistance, the function and manipulation of physical space plays an important role in their ability to resist the systems of subordination that Douglass faces.

After he was removed from Colonel Llyod's plantation, Douglass goes to live as a domestic slave in Baltimore where he is taught to read by Sofia Auld. Returning to the image and metaphor of a gateway, Douglass describes that "going to live in Baltimore laid the foundation and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity" (111). Similar to how Douglass employs the two competing meanings of the ship imagery, he also inverts the meaning of the gateway image at this point in the narrative. While in the Aunt Hester scene the image of the "gateway" functions very violently, Douglass engages it here to express movement into a better and more free space via literacy. Once Sofia Auld stops teaching Douglass how to read and write by command of her husband, Douglass continues his education on his own by "writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas's (Sofia Auld's son) copy-book, copying what he had written" (120). Douglass uses a space—the writing workbook—already occupied and employed by his master through which to progress his own freedom.

Douglass transitions his ability to teach himself how to read and write into a role as an educator for other slaves on the Auld plantation. For a short time, Douglass succeeds in running a "Sabbath school" where slaves and other Black community members would come on Sunday's to learn to read and write. After being transferred to a smaller plantation with two other slaves owned by a man named Mr. Freeland, Douglass explains that his two accompaniments "very soon mustered up some old spelling books, and nothing would do but that I must keep a Sabbath school" (142). This particular version of Douglass's Sabbath school was at a free Black man's

house and had over forty attendees at one point (142). As Douglass recounts, the Sabbath school ensured that at least one person was “free through my agency” (143). The school functions as a space of resistance through non-active, non-confrontational means; if resistance can be understood as the *ability to create*, then the sabbath school represents a communal space created by and for enslaved peoples that transcends the systems of white ownership. Similar to Douglass’s use of Captain Auld’s son’s copy-book, the Sabbath school is another space that exists within the experience of slavery and within the south that actively facilitates freedom and resists subordination; thus, the systems of regulation and borders and the freedom-enslavement (north-south) binary are destabilized within the very spaces that they are maintained. Douglass’s ability to work within “the spaces left,” or more precisely, the spaces *not considered* echo throughout slave narratives, including both Henry “Box” Brown⁵ and Harriet Jacobs.

Scholar Saidiya Hartman’s explanation of the “position of the unthought” provides a strong conception for understanding how American slave narratives and their authors relate to the larger 19th century contemporaneous literary tradition and national culture. Hartman explains in an interview with Frank B. Wilderson III, “On the one hand, the slave is the foundation of national order, and, on the other, the slave occupies the position of the unthought. So what does it mean to bring that position into view without making it a locus of positive value, or without trying to fill in the void” (185). In accordance with the paradox that Hartman identifies, American national (political, economic, social) identity needs the position of the slave in order to define itself in opposition to and also to sustain the U.S. economy via slave labor. During the American Revolution from Great Britain, the colonies rallied around the conviction that they

⁵ Henry “Box” Brown was a slave who mailed himself to the north (to freedom) via a wooden crate in 1849. Like Jacobs, Brown’s use of the postal service and a box to orchestrate his escape from slavery subverts white geographic control and conceptualizations. His narrative was published the same year in 1849.

were being treated as slaves to the English government and therefore needed independence to escape that position. Once the U.S. became a sovereign country, the foundations of its capitalist economy quite literally rest on the existence of the plantation economy and slave labor; furthermore, 19th century American citizenship was, in part, defined by the reassurance that “whiteness” can never be enslaved and hence stripped of rights. Simultaneously, the abolitionist (or more generally, the liberal) agenda also relied on the position of the slave to be the object of saving and healing a politically divided nation. As a result, while national identity developed itself in response to the position of the slave, it needed to craft a narrative of slavery that harmonized with the “national project,” as Hartman terms it. Thus, the violent histories that are the *reality* of slavery are left untold and “unthought,” unless detached from white political agendas of inclusion.

For slave narrative writers, their authorship is complicated by the fact that their dominant literary scene presupposed a story of national integration that relies on white empathy for validation (Hartman 184). Because their narratives have an anti-slavery agenda and therefore face the pressure of having to downplay the violence of slavery and the impetus towards radical thought in order to remain palatable for white readers and the narrative of national healing, both Douglass and Jacobs—or at least their narratives—occupy the position of the unthought. For Douglass specifically, the shipyard scene where Douglass’s job is to caulk the cracks in ships is a particularly salient moment for understanding how the “position of the unthought” functions in his narrative. Douglass’s job is to caulk and join cracks in the war ships; as representative of the Black labor force, he is needed by the white economy to literally fill in structural incongruities that enable the violent and territorializing abilities of warships; yet the violence that Douglass faces while fulfilling this task is left unnamed until Douglass names it himself. However, just as

Hartman stresses that this unnamed or “unthought” position cannot be romanticized as an all-healing resilience or a “void” to be filled and capitalized by white empathy, Douglass and Jacobs both actively reveal the perpetually subjugated and violent reality of their respective “unthought” positions. Applying Hartman’s conception of the “unthought” in both of these texts exposes the incongruity of national healing narratives that insist a north-south binary where the reality of the north is freedom and therefore separate from its southern counterpart.

Like Douglass, Harriet Jacobs’s slave narrative follows a general trajectory from south to north. However, Jacobs complicates traditional paths of resistance as an enslaved woman and also exposes the limits of reading resistance within her text. Largely dominated by men authors, the slave narrative genre can often be associated with themes of masculine violence. This kind of direct, physical violence is, perhaps, most famously present in Douglass’s fight with Covey—even though Douglass develops many other means of non-violent, non-physical resistance within the text. In Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (although Jacobs writes under the pen name Linda Brent) the typical qualifiers of the slave narrative readily exist, including both complicated spatial politics and masculine violence; however, because Jacobs is an enslaved woman, she experiences these themes differently than, say, Douglass does because she is threatened by masculine sexual violence. Her narrative repeatedly evidences a distinct connection between her womanhood and the spatial politics she is subject to within Dr. Flint’s plantation where she spends the majority of her enslaved life. In her encounters with and resistance to masculine violence, Jacobs’s narrative elevates a strong woman’s voice within the slave narrative genre by exposing threats of sexual violence and stalking from Flint and psychological abuse from the mistress of the house. As both a historical text and a space to

imagine and test the limits of resistance, *Incidents* expands the slave narrative's perspective on spatial themes, specifically related to womanhood and movement towards freedom.

Jacobs is attentive to both the spatial politics and systems of mobility within and outside of the plantation. Recognizing the condition of spatial containment as one of the most blatant means of controlling an individual's autonomy, enslavement on a plantation benefits from and, in fact, requires the inability of a slave to move between spaces without the permission of a "master" figure. Thus, one way to escape this control is to move outside of the plantation space. Jacobs ultimately removes herself from the Flint plantation by manipulating the spatial confines and binaries of southern space and the plantation economy, demonstrated by her spending seven years confined in her grandmother's garret. By doing so, she warps the traditional slave genre trajectory from plantation to northern states by creating a liminal space between enslavement and freedom. Here she can exist outside of the primary control of her master but still within the same space as her grandmother and children. While Jacobs's creation of liminal space becomes a necessary to her attainment of freedom, the garret should not be romanticized as though it was an exclusively liberating and positive experience for Jacobs. For seven years Jacobs stays inside this debilitating structure that never even allowed her to stand up fully, causing chronic physical and, likely, psychological trauma. Although the garret ultimately allows her greater mobility, Jacobs's time in the space is marked as the most physically immobile condition within her lifetime where she still endures the oppressive institutionalized power structures of both Mr. Flint and U.S. politics.

In line with the conventions of the genre, Jacobs spends significant time developing what life and space look like on the Flint plantation as well as her understanding of the north-south binary—a binary that she sees as illusory at best. When Jacobs is very young, her mother dies

and she is sent to live with a middle-aged slaver owner named Dr. Flint; not long afterwards, Jacobs's father dies, and she is placed under the primary care of her enslaved grandmother. Upon moving to the Flint plantation, Jacobs develops a distinct spatial map of the property. Within the first few pages of the narrative while Jacobs prepares for an evening dinner party outside the Flint house, she laments, "I spent the day gathering flowers and weaving them into festoons, while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me" (Jacobs 7). Immediately, she begins to quantify the space around her, situating the reader's first understanding of the Flint house in a measurable relationship with her dead father's grave. Both theoretically and locationally speaking, Jacobs places Dr. Flint's house in the center of her trauma and theorizes the space of the Flint property through the violent condition of enslavement. With the death of her father, a former protective figure, the Flint house becomes a symbol of Jacobs's movement away from childhood and into an isolated maturity that coincides with a distinct type of masculine violence.

Jacobs's slave duties were primarily confined within the Flint home, where threats of sexual violence from Dr. Flint persisted daily. During her time there she writes, "But I now entered my fifteenth year—a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my ear" and "He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things" (27). Reflecting on her transition out of childhood, Jacobs explains the details of her constant confinement under the same roof as Dr. Flint. It is within this space, which is owned and controlled by Dr. Flint, that Jacobs narrates her first encounters with masculine violence—both physically and psychologically. In addition to physical isolation, Dr. Flint's sexual aggression emotionally isolates Jacobs because the social and political culture of the plantation silences a slave woman's voice, especially in respect to sexual violence. The *partus sequitur*

ventrem doctrine, which required that a child follows the condition of the mother, effectively created a zero-consequence legal system on plantations that not only allowed for but promoted sexual violence against enslaved women. Accordingly, the legal systems supporting these laws bar Black women from any response within the system by not allowing them a legitimate political identity.

Dr. Flint's fervent attempts to confine Jacobs translate into an endeavor to spatially isolate her even further when he builds a solitary cabin for her. Jacobs details that this cabin was to be "in a secluded place, four miles away from the town" (57). Once again, she quantifies her setting, appending the concrete spatial layout she has been developing from the first chapter for the reader to conceptualize. Jacobs accentuates the cabin's sense of seclusion by noting that it is outside of the plantation's defined property lines—outside its borders. However, this actually puts her at a higher risk of violence because she is physically removed from familiar territory and relationships, thus furthering the psychological isolation that begins with natal alienation. Readers can infer Dr. Flint's intentions for sexual violence in his decision to build the cabin for Jacobs; in fact, Jacobs asserts, "The crisis of my fate now came so near that I was desperate. I shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by my old tyrant" (60). To avoid Dr. Flint's efforts, Jacobs becomes pregnant with a free white man's child. Jacobs's pregnancy with Sands first and foremost operates as an act of survival and complicates how resistance functions in her narrative. Although the pregnancy with Mr. Sands does not free her from the violence projected by Dr. Flint, it does prevent a specific incident of sexual violence. However, Jacobs's relation to Mr. Sands should not be romanticized because (in chapter 7) she explains that her true lover is a free Black man a few miles away from Dr. Flint's plantation. Therefore, Jacobs's pregnancy with Sands can primarily be understood as an act of survival and a mechanism to

preserve some autonomy over her own body while she is still forced to live inside a system that requires that she submit to the power structures of masculine white supremacy in order to do so.

Throughout the narrative, the regulation of Jacob's body is a central anxiety, especially because she is a woman. Retracting to an analysis of her narrative within the overarching slave narrative genre, Jacobs does not participate in the traditional reciprocated forms of physical and often violent resistance in which enslaved men might participate. In an article explaining the politics of female space in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, scholar Marilyn Wesley explains, "[Jacobs's] body not only does not provide a way to freedom, it is in fact problematized as an occupied territory. The central issue of Jacob's work is negotiating the necessary reversal when 'woman' rather than 'man' is one of the primary terms of the slave-master chiasmus" (Wesley 60). Wesley highlights a central concern of an enslaved woman's existence within the plantation space as well as an enslaved woman's means to freedom. Wesley's incorporation the "slave-master chiasmus" refers to Douglass's famous fight with Covey when the former proclaims his manhood in opposition to the dehumanizing efforts of slave holders. As a woman, Jacobs is effectively excluded from participating in a reciprocated violent masculinity (Wesley 61). Furthermore, she is subjected to an additional type of violence—sexual violence—that is experienced more often by enslaved women. In comparison to the abilities of someone like Douglass, Jacob's reduced capacity to use her body for physical, violent resistance against her master demands different forms of resistance. As its own space, Jacob's body is hyper-exposed to the heavily gendered power structures and presence of sexual violence within the plantation space.

Although Jacobs does not blatantly partake in violent physical resistance, she very actively resists and undermines the power structures imposed on her by skillfully working within

the limits of a system structured to completely suppress her. For example, when Dr. Flint wants to bring Jacobs to Louisiana with him, he approaches her with the information as a question, desperate for the gratification of hearing her say, “yes.” Jacobs understands that there is only one acceptable response, yet she replies, “I am your daughter’s property, and it is in your power to send me, or take me, wherever you go” (43). By carefully arranging her words to play into her objectification, Jacobs never actually consents to Dr. Flint—a moment where she reveals the paradox of white ownership as well as Flint’s masculine concepts of love and sexual conquest.

Returning to Saidiya Hartman’s “position of the unthought,” Jacobs escapes from slavery by working within and resisting the limits of the plantation space through a method of existing in “the last place they thought of” (Jacobs 132). She begins her journey to freedom, and remains on it for seven years, by hiding out in her grandmother’s attic—also called “the garret”—near the Flint plantation. Cleverly titling this portion of her narrative “Loophole of Retreat,” Jacobs’s begins her escape with the creation of a liminal space that sits between two opposites of a binary—freedom and slavery. To describe this space, Jacobs returns once more to a quantitative and highly detailed description of the garret’s setting, signifying its importance in her narrative. Stating it was nine feet long by seven feet wide and three feet high at its peak, Jacob makes the reader acutely aware of the suffocating dimensions in which she contained herself in for seven years (128). Compared to the portion of the narrative preceding the garret chapter, scholar Miranda Green-Barteet explains that in the attic “Jacobs is, however, more in control of her body and her life...than she has been at any other time of her life. In fact, Jacobs identifies the garret as an empowering location and uses the power of its interstitiality to her advantage” (Green-Barteet 54). Green-Barteet’s use of the word “interstitiality” directly confronts systems of borders and defined territories, where the interstitial defines what exists within the cracks or

spaces between borders—and for Jacobs, this present opportunity. For example, describing a small hole she carves in the garret wall, which she pronounces the “loophole,” Jacob is able to watch over her children and hear “many conversations not intended to meet [her] ears” while living inside the garret.

Attention to Jacobs’s body as a problematized space or geography reoccurs in scholarship, where her time in the garret simultaneously presents a transition into physical autonomy but also geographic invisibility and physical incapacitation. In her book *Demonic Grounds*, Catherine McKittrick analyzes the spatial significance of Jacobs and her garret, noting how “bodily geography can be” (44). McKittrick builds on Sylvia Wynter’s theory of the demonic, which reorients our understanding of geography so that the dominant white, masculine classificatory system that silences and relegates anything it deems as “other” is not the foundation of all geographical conceptualization and instead “subaltern lives are not marginal/other to regulatory classification systems, but instead integral to them” (xxv). Simultaneously, McKittrick aligns Wynter’s use of the demonic and geography with “the absented presence of black womanhood” (xxv). Accordingly, McKittrick associates Jacobs with a geography that is “genealogically wrapped up in the historical spatial irrepresentability of black femininity” (xxv). McKittrick’s use of the demonic exists in opposition to systems of geography and territorialization used by figures such as Dr. Flint. To illustrate this, McKittrick explains how Jacobs’s “seeable presence is crucial to Dr. Flint’s sense of place” because the visualization of her body “inscribe[s] [her] as worthy of captivity, violence, punishment, and objectification” (40). Consequently, the creation of the garret as a means for escape subverts Flint’s understanding of geography that relies on constant tangibility and regulation because it renders Jacobs as invisible and therefore unlocatable, at least in terms of Flint’s conceptualization.

Although Jacobs was technically in the south during her time in the garret, the space transcends traditional methods of geography that rely on borders, maps, and coordinates to locate place; the garret cannot be fastened onto a map because as much as it is a physical location, it metaphysically occupies a “place” in the north, in so much that Jacobs is able to convince people that she is in New York while inside of the garret. During her time there, Jacobs wrote and sent letters to Flint as if she was sending them from New York City in order to strengthen her concealment from him. She explains that she obtains a copy of the New York Herald, “and, for once, the paper that systemically abuses the colored people, was made to render them a service. Having obtained what information I wanted concerning streets and numbers, I wrote two letters, one to my grandmother, and the other to Dr. Flint” (143). Jacobs manipulates the spaces of white supremacy (a northern newspaper in this case) in order to promote her own freedom and mobility. Additionally, Jacobs also further reveals the “incongruity,” as she calls it, between the north and freedom by demonstrating how an object aligned with the free north was intended to operate as a voice for white supremacy (218).

Although she still is very much subjected to oppressive power structures during her time in the garret, it allows her to escape the first-hand abuse of enslavement and still remain present during the years of her children’s youth, as she wishes. And while Jacobs emphasizes the garret’s utility in her movement out of slavery, she refuses to romanticize the space, reminding readers that “the laws allowed *him* (Dr. Flint) to be out in the free air, while I, guiltless of crime, was pent up in here, as the only means of avoiding the cruelties the laws allowed him to inflict upon me” (135). The garret is *not* freedom because the systems of containment that legalized her enslavement still are at work while she is inside of the space; yet she is no longer under the direct control of her abuser. Jacobs demands into existence a space that theoretically cannot exist

within “the last place they (Dr. Flint and co.) thought of” (132). By doing so, she effectively resists and undermines the systems imposed upon her as an enslaved woman. Acknowledging that resistance encompasses—but my no means demands—violent intervention, Jacobs asserts that resistance includes the ability to create a space that effectively destabilizes subjugation and the structuralist binaries of U.S. geography.

Unlike with Douglass’s narrative, Jacobs’s writing and publication of *Incidents* lines up directly with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which was the most wide-reaching legal attempt to regulate Black mobility by requiring that slaves who had escaped to the north be returned to their southern owners. Upon reaching the north, Jacobs asserts, “I was, in fact, a slave in New York, as subject to slave laws as I had been in a Slave State. Strange incongruity in a state called free!” (218). Additionally, she names the Act as the “iniquitous law,” under which she “seldom ventured into the streets” (215). For Jacobs, an escaped slave, the north is *legally no different* from the south, and she fears to leave her home and move throughout the streets in risking recapture. The authority of Dr. Flint—or any master figure—becomes omnipresent in the geography, in a very similar way to how Douglass describes the presence of Covey on his farm. Although Jacobs does put considerable physical distance between herself and Dr. Flint by running away to the place that is known as “free,” the national systems to reduce Black mobility reconfigure once again to ultimately sustain the economies and geographies of white supremacy. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, along with other significant legislation (such as the Missouri Compromise), signifies a moment when the U.S. legal system itself essentially avows the illusory conceptions of separated northern and southern geographies that Jacobs names from the very beginning of her narrative.

The belief in a north-south (freedom-slavery) binary that for decades helped to ensure the political survival of chattel slavery had to be abandoned by the U.S.'s geographic self-conceptualization in order to promote the very same goal. Jacobs and Douglass's narratives distinguish the illusion of such binaries and paradoxical spatial concepts by creating spaces of both resistance and community while also subverting systems of mobility regulation by working within their "cracks" and "loopholes." Thus, both texts ultimately destabilize and dislocate the white idealized geographic understandings of the U.S. landscape. Not long after each of these narratives are written (and technically the same year that *Incidents* is published), The American Civil War begins in 1861. As one of the most famous events in U.S. history, the war historically and culturally overshadows both narratives (as well as the other texts in this thesis). Once again, a recourse to masculine violence and border conflict hallmarks the canonized narratives of 19th century U.S. history. Rather than turning to how writers conceptualized the U.S. landscape during and after the Civil War, my next chapter stays within the same pre-war period as Douglass and Jacobs to analyze and expand more upon a theme that runs through both of their narratives: the ability to create—or, in another sense, imagine—space. In both slave narratives studied within this chapter, the ability to generate spaces *separate* from the geographic conceptualizations of white supremacy serves not only as a means of resistance but also as a means of imagining space and geography outside of the *direct* subjection of a white supremacist society.

Chapter 3

Creation and Curation of Space: Textual Geographies

The past two chapters in this thesis have looked at how 19th century texts by Black or African American authors conceptualize, experience, and subvert U.S. geographies—from spaces as small as the home and as large as the nation. The analyses of these texts (sketches, novels, and slave narratives) all orient back to the existence of Black spaces—for example, the Ellis and Garie homes, the Black news venders selling stoop, or Jacobs’s garret—in the context of *or* encompassed by a greater arena of whiteness. By this I mean that the Black spaces studied in chapters one and two were either limited by or responding to an overarching white supremacist geography. Without dismissing its pervasive effects in the 19th century U.S., I want to end by focusing less on the existence of Black spaces *within* the context of or *responding to* a larger white supremacist geography and instead focus exclusively on the *act* of creating spaces that self-represent Blackness. I only look at one primary text in this chapter—William J Wilson’s *Afric-American Picture Gallery*. Published in 1859, Wilson’s *Picture Gallery* is in conversation with but also vastly different from the other texts that I have included in this thesis. Published as a ten-part series in the *Anglo-African Magazine*, it resonates most strongly with McCune Smith’s *Heads of the Colored People*. Both texts are divided into what each author calls “sketches,” respond to Douglass, and were published over multiple volumes of a Black owned and edited magazine. However, *Afric-American Picture Gallery* transcends many of its contemporary modes of writing and genre conventions (for example, the essay, sentimental genre, slave narrative, etc.) in that it develops its ideas through the textual representation of creating autonomous Black (physical) space that does not necessarily exist within any “real” geographic

or temporal context. Because this thesis is dedicated to the analysis of *literature*, this chapter represents the creation and imagining of space where *text* (authorship) is the technology used to fortify its existence.

Wilson's *Afric-American Picture Gallery* was originally published in the inaugural (1859) volume of the *Anglo-African Magazine* under chief editor Thomas Hamilton. The magazine was a part of a larger community of antebellum Black publications intended for Black audiences, which famously includes Douglass's *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Papers* (both of which began publication a few years before Hamilton's *Anglo-African Magazine*). However, as textual scholars George Hutchison and John Young explain, "while most newspapers are meant to be disposable, it is evident that Hamilton intended the *Anglo-African Magazine* to have a degree of permanence. At the end of 1859, all twelve issues of the first year were bound and made available in book form" (22). The intended physical permanence of the magazine, and therefore the intended permanence of Wilson's *Picture Gallery*, signifies two important implications regarding this newspaper: first, that its contents are dedicated to and mindful of futurity—an important theme in *Picture Gallery* itself—and secondly, that the paper was meant to be a *nice* (or upper-middle class) item that is worthy of permanently taking up space on a (perhaps curated) bookshelf. As Hutchison and Young explain, Hamilton likely wanted the *Anglo-African Magazine* to populate the increasing number of Black middle-class households "to be the black equivalent to those white-edited magazines that were proliferating in the publishing centers of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York" (23).

Divided into ten parts throughout the *Anglo-African Magazine*, Wilson's *Afric-American Picture Gallery* essentially describes a museum space, curated by the sketch's narrator Ethoip, who serves as a pseudonym for Wilson himself. Nine of the ten sketches take place exclusively

within the museum, where Ethiop tends very closely to the physicality of the gallery and the interpretations of individual paintings that line the walls. Wilson's choice to use a gallery or museum to be the space through which Ethiop represents and interprets Black history centers the text on the significance of creation and curation; for Ethiop (and therefore Wilson), curation of the gallery space represents the necessity and importance of telling and preserving Black history *from Black perspectives*, where the next generation of gallery goers (symbolically speaking) is central to the museum's purpose. The text also speaks to the histories of observation that result in objectification, especially as it relates to the white gaze that historically subjected Black individuals and communities to racist curatorial schemes within white museum and gallery institutions. Furthermore, the publication of the actual *Anglo-African Magazine* itself represents the creation of a *new and separate* space from the white publishing realm, where the pressures of white editors had no power to filter the Black voices represented within its pages. Hutchison and Young emphasize that "Wilson's sketches themselves are exactly the type of writing that might not readily find a place in periodicals edited by white Americans and are therefore an illustration of the need for expressly African American forums" (25). Not only does the creation and imagining of space within the pages of Wilson's *Picture Gallery* have significance, but also the creation of the physical magazine itself that possesses an ability to literally constitute space on a bookshelf.

The creation and imagining of something new poses a threat where the creation becomes liable to colonization and commodification from dominant socio-political contexts. One central anxiety in Wilson's *Afric-American Picture Gallery* is the threat that lies in the power of the colonialist gaze and observation, which is not necessarily limited to the white gaze but certainly encompasses it. To illustrate the tension between the dominant socio-political contexts and the

creations of individuals or communities excluded from that group, I turn to Michael Warner's notion of publics and counterpublics. In his book *Publics and Counterpublics*, Warner explains that his use of public *does not* signify a monolith of what exists in opposition to the "private," but rather can be understood as the experience of inhabiting "a certain kind of social world" (10). Unlike in my first chapter, when "public" was implicated as all that was separate from the domestic (or private), Warner warns against confusing a monolithic meaning of "public" with something like the "market." With a more nuanced understanding of the word "public," multiple publics can exist simultaneously "by virtue of their imagining" (8).

In Warner's theorization of publics there are echoes of earlier historical scholar Benedict Anderson's theory of "nation, nationality, and nationalism" (3). In his book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson examines how nations and the communities that inhabit them come to exist. He explains that a nation is an "imagined political community" that is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). The crux of Anderson's argument proposes that nations are created through their imagining—through the supposition that they exist. Thus, Anderson offers an explanation for how to understand the community built and expressed within William Wilson's *Picture Gallery*; Ethiop (the narrator) imagines, supposes—*curates*—a representation of Black Americans within its walls in order to represent the community's cohesiveness through a shared history. Similar to Anderson's theory of national formation, Warner's explanation of publics (and communities that inhabit publics) also form as the imagined collection of consciously created ideas, writings, performances, etc.; they are inherently fictional and inherently *curated*. Warner explains that what we understand as a the general "public" is actually the collection of theoretically infinite

smaller publics, some of which have more social, political and economic power among others; This collection and multiplicity of publics “give(s) form to a tension between general and particular” (11). Accordingly, the distinct type of public that Warner names as a “counterpublic” is paradoxical in nature because it exists very separately from the dominant public(s)—not to be confused with the private or domestic—but is always in dialogue with the politics of mainstream publics. We can understand Wilson’s *Afric-American Picture Gallery* as a kind of counterpublic. If, according to Warner, publics and counterpublics are “essentially intertextual, frameworks for understanding texts against an organized background and circulation of other texts,” then Wilson’s *Picture Gallery* is significant in its relationship to and conversation with the white publishing industry and also the growing 19th century African American print culture that it is a part of (16).

Before I turn to the text itself, it is important to acknowledge that Wilson’s *Afric-American Picture Gallery* has received the least scholarly attention of all the primary texts included in this thesis; this is largely because the text was not recovered and subsequently digitized until just a few years ago⁶. Among scholarship on the actual text *Afric-American Picture Gallery*, Ivy Wilson’s book *Spectators in Democracy* includes a reading of Wilson’s *Picture Gallery* that focuses on Black self-representation through art and the lack of spaces where this could exist in the 19th century. In a similar fashion to Warner’s notion of a counterpublic, Ivy Wilson approaches the development of democratic governing in 19th century American and global history by examining the “shadow of democracy,” which is where he locates Black Americans (specifically in the antebellum 19th century U.S.). For Ivy Wilson, the

⁶ In 2015 Leif Eckstrom and Britt Russell recovered the original print of Wilson’s *Picture Gallery* and archived it in digital form as a part of the “Just Teach One: Early African American Print” project. This was the first edition of the text republished since the original 1859 edition.

democratic “shadow” in the 19th century embodies a particularly negative connotation in its embodiment of “the residues and outlines of black subjectivity in political spaces where they are ostensibly fractional entities or nonentities” (5); Ivy Wilson references Harriet Jacobs’s hidden garret as a physical representation of this form of Black subjectivity and as an example of a “nonentity”. Ultimately, his focus on the “shadow” is “an understanding of the world of art as the realm where African Americans could render and translate their political messages: it is a ‘shadow’ realm, as it were, that always haunts the material world of normative political activity and its agents” (9).

Using his notion of the “shadow” to depict the position of African Americans in relation to 19th century mainstream American socio-cultural arena, Ivy Wilson asserts that “Ethiop, thus, functions as the conceit through which Wilson offers his thoughts on art and culture as well as to evince that the progress of the race will be determined by black participation in the arts” (146). Accordingly, the meaning of the text hinges on Ethiop’s (and thus, William Wilson’s) interpretation of the pictures in the gallery space. The autonomy and full visualization/realization of the space demands Ethiop’s interpretation or, as Ivy Wilson puts it, demands the “hermeneutics of black visibility” as a model of “locating and ascertaining a radical black politics” (148, 161). This becomes especially true in sketch number ten where Ethiop narrates a group of gallery goers debating the meaning of the painting “City Life.” For Ivy Wilson, William Wilson included this debate “to critique the forms of ostensibly black bourgeois sensibilities... that do damage to the psychological and emotional, if not political, registers to representing the self” (149). Ivy Wilson’s interpretation of William Wilson’s *Picture Gallery* emphasizes the necessity of self-representation and interpretation as it relates to Black art, culture and history—not only for this particular moment in 19th century history but for the longer narratives that the

Picture Gallery is crafting for future generations. I carry this critical point forward into my own analysis of Wilson's *Afric-American Picture Gallery*. However, whereas Ivy Wilson positions the gallery as a space located in the "shadow" of democracy, thus suggesting that Black spaces are grounded within the grips of white political and cultural power, I resist this premise of analysis for William Wilson's *Picture Gallery*. Instead, I focus on the "grounds" (or Black spaces) on which this democratic "shadow" is cast. By this I mean that William Wilson's gallery need not be analyzed, understood and defined from a vantage point that presumes its subjection. If, as I argue, Wilson's picture gallery can be read as geographically and temporally detached—noting once again its digital resurfacing and reception in the 21st century—then the gallery can be understood as a space always in conversation with dominant systems of power, but ultimately as an autonomous, self-defined and evolving Black space.

The central premise of *Afric-American Picture Gallery* is that the sketch's narrator (and Wilson's pseudonym) Ethiop invites the reader into his museum and explains the pictures inside. The first sketch begins with a description of Ethiop, offering some explanation of his interest in museum curation and this gallery in particular. Ethiop tells us, "Even when so small as to be almost imperceptible, I used to climb up, by the aid of a stool, to my mother's mantle piece, take down the old family almanac and study its pictures ... All this however, never made me a painter...But the habit of rambling in search of, and hunting up curious, old, or rare and beautiful pictures, is as strong as ever" (1). From the beginning, Ethiop professes a nostalgic love for pictures and their ability to serve as tools for remembering and representing the past. He also pointedly positions himself as a "rambler," "searcher," "hunter" and ultimately interpreter of pictures rather than the "painter" of them. However, Ethiop does not indicate that his interest in and choice to be a curator is any less active than the artist's job. In this text, the act of gallery

curation (finding and then organizing pictures according to a definite purpose) is synonymous with the act of fashioning histories into communal narratives that can be passed through generations.

The physicality of the gallery, then, becomes central to interpreting the narrative that Wilson (and therefore Ethiop) presents. After the reader becomes acquainted with Ethiop, he quite literally brings the reader *into* the gallery, addressing his audience directly. Ethiop says, “But without pursuing this general outline further, let the reader, with me enter into this almost unknown Gallery. Well, here we are, and looking about us” where “the walls are spacious” (2). Instead of opening the first sketch so that it is only implied that the narration takes place within a museum, Wilson literally writes the reader’s entrance into the Afric-American Picture Gallery onto the page; the effect *emphasizes* Wilson’s use of the space of the page as a technology through which to fashion physical space. Furthermore, Ethiop marks the gallery as “almost unknown,” stressing its position in relation to what kinds of galleries *would be* widely known, returning to Warner’s notion of publics and counterpublics. As soon as the reader is drawn into the gallery, Ethiop immediately begins to describe paintings on its walls, explaining, “In style and excellence these pictures vary according to the fancy or skill of the artist. Some are finely executed, while others are mere rough sketches” (1). To describe where on the gallery walls the pictures stand, Ethiop uses cardinal directions (north, south, east and west) to locate them; Although the gallery itself is relatively small, by using this system of location the text engages with geography schema that are exceptionally salient in the text’s contemporary U.S. landscape—including the north-south binary. Wilson’s choice to use the creation of a physical space as the medium through which he conveys this narrative confronts the long history of violation to Black space and mobility that have been the focal point of this entire thesis.

The works of art described by Ethiop in the gallery come in many different forms—most commonly, portraits and landscapes. The portraits in the Afric-American Picture Gallery depict both named and anonymous subjects. One of the most widely recognized portraits that Ethiop brings the reader to in the gallery is of Toussaint L'Overture, the most prominent leader of the successful Haitian Revolution against the French colonial state. L'Overture appears in the picture gallery as picture seven in the third sketch, where Ethiop pronounces his portrait as positioned “higher and in purer light than that of any man that has lived up to to-day” (4). Commenting on his decision to include L'Overture in the gallery, Ethiop tells the reader, “A picture of a great man with whose acts we are familiar, calls up the whole history of his times. Our minds thus become reimpressed with the events and we arrive at the philosophy of them” (4). Minding this description of L'Overture, the location of the picture on the gallery wall clearly is meant to emphasize the relative value of what the portrait represents for gallery goers and also Ethiop himself; not all of the pictures are positioned in “good light” (several of them in “bad” light, in fact). Additionally, Ethiop's mention of “the whole history of his [L'Overture's] times” implicates a Black history that extends and celebrates a period much longer and international than Black history in the context of the United States' existence. As Ethiop interprets, the portrait of L'Overture is meant to recall a history that ultimately facilitates the viewer to “arrive at a philosophy” of what the portrait represents—anti-colonialism, Black autonomy, overthrow of the slave state. Thus, the portrait is not only significant in its representation of an individual person, but also in its relationship to a longer Black history (to the rest of the gallery's pictures); Ethiop's curation and interpretation of the installation are the organizing factors that link each portrait—each segment of Black history—to each other.

Presented in a very similar fashion to the portrait of Toussaint L'Overture, Ethiop introduces another portrait called "THE FIRST MARTYR OF THE REVOLUTION." This picture depicts the first person who died for the American Revolution cause; in Ethiop's words, "This is a head of Attucks. It may not be generally known, and it may not be particularly desirable that the public should know, that the First Martyr of the American Revolution was a colored man" (3). Warner's notion of publics and counterpublics becomes particularly salient in this description, where Ethiop aligns the "public" with an identity of people who prefer to narrate American history from a white supremacist perspective. Yet clearly, this gallery is not only for Ethiop's own personal enjoyment, thus invoking that its audience and curator form a kind of "counterpublic" that exists separately from the dominant (white supremacist) public. The individual presented in this portrait was "the first blood that drenched the path-way which led up to American liberty," where Ethiop confronts the dependence of the United States' on violence against Black communities (3). Acknowledging the historical *unacknowledgement* of both the contributions of Black Americans to the national project as well as the violence against them in constructing it, Ethiop reorients the vantage point of the U.S. history narrative. Inside of the Afric-American Picture Gallery, visitors are presented with a view of American history that confronts the reliance of the nation on violence and subjection—a premise that American national identity attempts to dissociate from.

In accordance with Ethiop's reorientation of the American history narrative, the first picture of the entire series, a landscape painting entitled "THE SLAVE SHIP," literally frames the text in relation to chattel slavery in the United States—both physically and theoretically. The effect of this is not to collapse Black American history into the history of slavery, but rather to pointedly acknowledge the significance that it carries for the Black American experience and

also the national identity as a whole. Describing its position on the gallery wall, Ethiop narrates, “This picture hangs near the entrance, on the south side of the Gallery, and in rather an unfavorable light” (2); once again, the location and curatorial choices of the painting in the physical gallery space are intrinsically bound to the interpreted value of the picture. Landscape paintings reoccur several times throughout the picture gallery; Ethiop (Wilson) dedicates the longest elaboration to picture number nine, “MOUNT VERNON.” Alongside the slave ship landscape, the Mount Vernon painting sits in the “south side of the gallery” but “in excellent light” (6). Ultimately, both the slave ship and Mount Vernon landscapes carry significantly negative connotations, yet Wilson calls attention to an apparent difference by ironically situating them in such vastly different lighting. Generally, the pictures in “good” light are aligned with images and values that are positive in relation to Black American history; however, Ethiop complicates the symbolism of Mount Vernon—home of George Washington.

Ethiop begins his description of the “MOUNT VERNON” landscape painting by describing its significance in American culture. As the home of the first American president, Ethiop satirically pronounces, “Mount Vernon just now enters into everything. It has something to do with every spring of the machinery of American society...It is Mount Vernon in the pulpit, Mount Vernon on the rostrum, Mount Vernon from the Press, Mount Vernon from every lip” (5). Continuing this elaboration on the pervasiveness of “Mount Vernon” in “American society,” Ethiop ultimately arrives at the question: “And what is Mount Vernon?” (6). He responds to himself with “MOUNT VERNON as the readers must know is a spot of earth somewhere in Virginia, and once the Home of the Father of his Country. How careful ought we to be, then, in word or deed about Mount Vernon?” (6). Ethiop engages in a tongue-in-cheek interpretation of

the painting's quality; based on its decrepit, gothic depiction of the estate, Ethiop calls it a failure in terms of its ability to "gratify the popular American feeling" (6).

The painting is particularly notable for its depiction of Washington's dug up coffin, surrounded by the ghosts of Washington's slaves. In convention with gothic style, Ethiop's portrayal of the painting is post-apocalyptic, where "many visible crevices of the old mansion" overwhelm the image (6). Regarding the picture's positioning in "excellent" light along with the paradoxical assertion that the artist "failed," the painting of Mount Vernon stands out in the series of sketches because Ethiop reveals his interpretation of the image much less directly via irony and satire (especially compared to the Toussaint L'Overture portrait, for example). The dilapidation of Mount Vernon depicted in the painting comments on the act of preserving—of embedding a certain image of something into a dominant historical narrative. In the collective memory of dominant American narratives—or the "popular American feeling" as Ethiop calls it—Mount Vernon is preserved vastly different than it is rendered here. In a space literally dedicated to the preservation of images and artifacts, the decay shown in this picture stands in stark contrast to the work Ethiop manages in the gallery. The significance of this picture's inclusion in the gallery is understood in terms of how it *misrepresents* the "popular American feeling" that Ethiop notes; "MOUNT VERNON" reveals the disconnect between the gallery and the dominant sentiments of (white) America.

The landscape painting that stands in direct opposition to Mount Vernon is the Black Forest Painting. This painting stands out from any other in the gallery or in the text itself because Ethiop describes both the picture on the wall but also literally brings the reader into the location that is the Black Forest; he begins the "sketch" that invites readers out of the gallery and into the forest as "A Picture Outside of the Gallery" (11). By taking the readers outside of the gallery for

a moment, Wilson (via Ethiop) begins to layer physical spaces within the text, heightening the dislocated nature of both the gallery and the forest. By naming the sketch that leaves the gallery as still a “picture,” Wilson connects the two spaces through art and the act of self-expression. In picture XI, “THE BLACK FOREST,” Ethiop describes the painting as a “grand and beautiful scenery” (9). After examining the landscape in the gallery, in the next sketch he receives a letter asking him to come travel to the forest. As far as the reader is concerned, the forest is unlocatable; Ethiop asserts, “As it is no part of my purpose to disclose the precise locality of the Black Forest, nor fully the manner of people dwelling there, nor yet wholly their doings, I shall reveal no more of the contents of this letter than to say it pointed out the route so minutely that no careful observer could mistake it” (9). Like the gallery, the Black Forest has no geographical or temporal context; the only space where the forest can be located physically is through the painting of it on the wall of Ethiop’s picture gallery. Unlike the landscape of Mount Vernon, which is preserving a very particular image of a well-known location, the Black Forest painting is the only image that the public has of its real existence. Consequently, the forest is left a mystery whose full image is hidden from the public eye. The interiority and complexity of the forest (of the painting, of the man who lives there) are not made readily available and require an entire 6-page sketch to begin to unpack.

As the sketch continues, Wilson uses the text to progressively layer more spaces over top and within each other, further collapsing geography and temporality. Once Ethiop arrives in the forest, he meets the man who lives there—Bernice—and enters into his home. As the two go further into the house Ethiop describes, “At a slight touch from the old man’s hand this stone rolled away as if by magic, and revealed a deep, dark *Cavern*. With a firm step he began to descend a ladder and I followed. Down, down, down we went. Down, down, down” (13). The

cavern leads down into Bernice's artist den where he keeps his paintings, drawings, and sculptures, where Ethiop subsequently pronounces Bernice "the most studied and lifelong artist" (13). As Ethiop travels with Bernice physically down and inwards into his home, more of Bernice's art and collectables are revealed. The depth of space and moving physically inwards emphasizes the interiority that Wilson reveals for Bernice.

Among the artifacts in the cavern, Ethiop notices a familiar portrait, which he identifies as "a fine duplicate portrait of our little *Tom*; our Gallery Boy" (13). For there to be a portrait of Tom in Bernice's cavern positions the child as an integral part of the gallery's historical narrative and futurity. In fact, while Ethiop is visiting the Black Forest, Tom takes charge of the gallery's daily function. When Ethiop returns, he describes that, "The little rogue had been operating on his own hook, and pointing out the Gallery to the various magnates around for his own special amusement" (21). Tom assumes the position as the gallery keeper, crafting and presenting the gallery according to his own curatorial opinions. Among the other artifacts in Bernice's cavern, Ethiop is also particularly struck by a tablet that dates to year 4000, describing a society absent of racism—specifically white supremacy. The tablet reads of the downfall of the "*milk white race*" but from a point long into the future—the ultimate temporal and geographic dislocation within this sketch (14). This tablet signifies a specific kind of futurity absent of white supremacy that Ethiop's picture gallery (which is now intrinsically connected to the Black Forest, a gallery space of its own) is actively narrating and constructing.

In *Afric-American Picture Gallery*, Wilson uses text to develop the physical space of an art gallery as a mechanism to emphasize the need for voices and spaces that center Black futurity and the self-representation of Blackness (interiority). By writing the *Picture Gallery* and publishing it in the *Anglo-African Magazine*, Wilson himself participates in creating these kinds

of spaces that are accessible to public(s). Even in the picture gallery, Ethiop engages with outside visitors and their various opinions of the gallery. For example, during the Mount Vernon sketch, an older white woman comes in to visit the gallery to tell him she is “dissatisfied” with the gallery on behalf of its artistic merit (7). Ethiop responds, “‘Madam, or mam,’ said I at last, ‘these pictures, as a whole, make no claim to the high artistic merit you look for in them, though I think some of them rather clever as works of *art*; but they serve as simple reminders of what the people of color were, now are, and will yet be. What they have gone through, are going through, and have yet to go through’” (8). While this woman may be evaluating the gallery according to some orthodox standard of artistic ability, Ethiop stresses that the gallery is dedicated to something other than a (white) standard of good art. Ultimately, as much as the gallery is an intimate space for Ethiop himself, it becomes a meeting space for the public.

Near the end of the text in the sixth installment, a group of people (a doctor, professor, philosopher, lady in black, tall lady, short lady, fat lady, and a lady from another country, an old lady, and two Black men in long black coats) come into the gallery and debate the picture named “CONDITION” that depicts a Black child sitting by a river with “rags and their concomitants cover his body” (23). They initially examine “CONDITION” by looking at the artistic rendering of the painting, which quickly becomes entangled with the actual “condition” of the child; the prospect of “improving” the painting quality collapses with the prospect of “improving” its subject (23). The doctor and philosopher deliberate the capability for intelligence that the child in the picture possesses, where the doctor ultimately professes “you may improve the condition if you change the nature” (23). The philosopher disagrees and, as Ethiop describes they enter upon a lengthy conversation about improvement of condition and nature, referencing “*our poor little Condition in particular.*” The lady from abroad responds, “you place beneath him a power,

and put in his hands a force, that will be felt throughout the entire ramifications of human society” (24). To all the above, the “old lady” in the group responds that the other gallery goers “speak too metaphorically” and “are not understood” (24); she then goes on to interpret the incorrect picture as if it were “CONDITION”, further revealing the absurdity that lies at the center of gallery goer’s discussion. Part of this absurdity is rooted in the gallery goer’s treatment of Black art as an intellectual exercise or an opportunity to debate the current, past, or presumably future “condition” of Black Americans. This disparate group of gallery goers work through an interpretation of the picture, which is, of course, interpreted for the reader through Ethiop’s voice and thoughts (he names their visit the “imperfect sketch”) (27). To call this the “imperfect sketch” is to address the ways in which the visitors’ conversation falls short or undermines the purpose and possibilities of Ethiop’s gallery.

Ultimately, the picture gallery (the space) and the *Picture Gallery* (the text) are never meant to exist for intellectual debate or held to any of its contemporary (white) standards of artistic or literary merit. Through Ethiop’s geographic and temporal dislocation, interpretations of paintings and their relationship to different publics, Wilson denies that the picture gallery is a space controlled by a white narrative. Instead, it is a Black created space and text dedicated to representing past collective memories and the futurity that stems from them—a tool for coming generations, a space of reflection, and always unfinished. By ending this thesis on William J. Wilson’s *Afric-American Picture Gallery*, I do not want to detract any importance from the other texts I have studied in terms of their significance within an African American literary tradition. Wilson’s series of sketches, as a part of the *Anglo-African Magazine* and a greater Black 19th century print community, is in conversation with the other authors and texts studied here, which are all unpacking and engaging the ways that geography and physical space were manipulated to

reduce Black mobility, but also served as a negotiator and canvas for communal and individual Black identity during the 19th century.

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Coda

This project would be incomplete if I did not acknowledge a current and evolving issue at the university that where I have completed this thesis. As it stands, I will graduate from an institution named after a confederate general. This campus—much like a curated museum or gallery-- crafts and self-represents a historical narrative of a school that existed well before and during the period that I wrote this paper on. For centuries, buildings on the campus were named after slaver holders, portraits of confederate generals in uniform hung in the university chapel (they still remain, but not in uniform), and the university's foundational connection to slavery remained unacknowledged and unspoken. Many any of the violent and racist histories that are discussed in this thesis are fundamentally connected to the existence of this university. While my studies were confined to the 19th century, it is necessary to understand that the voices and histories in my thesis are still not fully recognized or heard at this school and how we, as an institution, are currently self-representing ourselves. Of course, this work begins, but by no means ends, by changing the name of the school and completely removing any symbols of the confederacy from our campus. Our space—this university—will never be an inclusive place that can denounce the violence of white supremacy until these voices (both from the 19th century and from my peers today) are elevated and changes are made.

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