Shaping Words to Fit the Soul
Shaping Words to Fit the Soul

The Southern Ritual Grounds of Afro-Modernism

JÜRGEN E. GRANDT
For Nico
CHAPTER 3
Roll Call:
Richard Wright’s “Long Black Song” and the Betrayal of Music • 55

CHAPTER 4
Blues and the Abstract Truth:
The Southern Groove Continuum
from W. C. Handy to the Allman Brothers Band • 75

CHAPTER 5
Life and Death in the Dirty South:
The Urban Ritual Grounds of Tayari Jones • 105

CONCLUSION
“The Biggest Colored Show on Earth”:
Afro-Modernism, Hip-Hop, and Postmodern Blackness • 127

Notes • 137
Selected Discography • 163
Works Cited • 167
Index • 183
It may seem incongruous at first that the initial spark for what eventually became this book was somehow ignited in a pizza parlor in Bern (Switzerland, not North Carolina) and hastily jotted down on a paper napkin. Portions of the manuscript were fine-tuned on an airplane sitting on the tarmac in Glasgow (Scotland, not Alabama) waiting for takeoff to Amsterdam (the Netherlands, not Virginia), in a taxi inching through the clogged streets of downtown Dublin (Ireland, not Georgia), or during many an uncomfortable ride on the diesel-powered local train rumbling from Nuremberg to Bayreuth in Bavaria (Germany’s version of the Dirty South). But in a way, these places, and many more, became Shaping Words to Fit the Soul’s own ‘ritual grounds,’ however temporarily.
Much, much more important than the places, though, are the people I was traveling to see, had just met, or whose acquaintance I made along the way. Whatever is good and useful in the following pages is in no small measure due to them:

In the U.S., I am indebted to Rolanda C. Burney, Richard Freedom Byrd-Harris, Newton “Newt” Collier, Chester J. Fontenot, Maryemma Graham, La Vinia D. Jennings, Jared S. Johnson, Joseph Johnson, Tayari Jones, John W. Lowe, Hubert H. McAlexander, Barbara McCaskill, Christian Moraru, Jed Rasula, Frank “Rat” Ratliff, Calaya M. Reid a.k.a. Grace Octavia, Roger Stolle, and Kirk West. Many, many thanks to Karen and Richard Lyle-Roken and their families, especially Robi Lyle: keep on rockin’, my friend. Malcolm Litchfield, Eugene O’Connor, and particularly Sandy Crooms and Heather Lee Miller at The Ohio State University Press are simply the best in their field, but I have shared so much laughter with them that I often forget they’re my editors, too. With their sharp eyes and tough questions, the two anonymous readers who perused the manuscript were instrumental in transforming this into a real book. Erika B. Vinson and my Honors students at the University of Georgia deserve credit not only for helping me hone my own critical chops, but for succeeding where others had failed: in making me listen to hip-hop. The completion of this project owes much to the unwavering support of DoVeanna S. Fulton Minor and R. Baxter Miller—I am inspired by their example, humbled by their generosity, and proud of their friendship: thank you both for keeping the faith.

In Germany, I want to thank Klaus Benesch, Karsten Fitz, Sascha Pöhlmann, Christoph Ribbat, Heidi Rossner-Schöpf, and Kerstin Schmidt; I, too, have always depended on the kindness of strangers, and I’m glad that these six are strangers no more.

In Namibia and Nigeria respectively, I am grateful for the help and support of Mbongeni Malaba and Wumi Raji.

In Switzerland, I have always been able to count on my posse, the families of Simone and Daniel Althaus, Sandra and Martin Kindlimann, Sibylle and Thomas Menzi, and Friederike Pohlenz and Stephan Brunner.

And finally, most importantly, I am most thankful for my parents, Yvonne and Werner: wherever I am, I always know that I am still being backed by the best rhythm section anyone could ever want.

Atlanta, Georgia, August 2009
When Count Basie entered the Columbia studios on May 31, 1940, to record a composition with the title “Gone With ‘What’ Wind?” he certainly had not conceived it as the kind of biting satire that, for instance, Charles Mingus would perform some two decades later with the “Fables of Faubus.” Basie simply remarked that the tune “was really something from Benny Goodman’s book. As a matter of fact I had sat in as a guest piano player in Benny’s sextet when he recorded it for Columbia back in February while we were working at the Golden Gate.” And, he added casually, he had simply “dictated a few little changes here and there” (Basie 240; Sheridan 98–100). The “something” Basie appropriated for this recording...
session was actually a tune composed by Goodman, “Gone With What Draft?” It is safe to say that neither the Jewish New Yorker Goodman nor the midwesterner Basie intended a trenchant contestation of symbolic territory of The Wind Done Gone kind—even if, in what surely constitutes a case of inadvertent poetic justice, “Gone With ‘What’ Wind?” is a blues. Yet the title of Basie’s adaptation, phrased as a question, features at its core an adjective that points to a referential void. Its allusions and wider context stake out a symbolical terrain that at once clearly demarcates a southern setting and yet ultimately resists linguistic representation. Thus, “Gone With ‘What’ Wind?” exemplifies in some ways a paradox central to African American musics: as Nathaniel Mackey astutely points out, “Part of the genius of black music is the room it allows for a telling ‘inarticulacy,’ a feature consistent with its critique of a predatory coherence, a cannibalistic ‘plan of living,’ and the articulacy that upholds it” (252–53). The interrogatory range at the center of Basie’s song title therefore also echoes Ralph Ellison’s observation that “because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it” (Shadow 267).

The music criticism of Mackey and Ellison underlies an aspect of African American cultural production that literary theories have by and large circumvented. African American literary-critical paradigms of the past three decades have tended to privilege modes of reading that draw on the ‘authentic’ black folkways of the rural South framed, in Robert Stepto’s words, as the “genius loci” (67–70). Ann duCille has coined the term “Hurstonism” for these interpretive models, where “the valorization of the vernacular” leads to “an inherently exclusionary literary practice that filters a wide range of complex and often contradictory impulses and energies into a single modality consisting of the blues and the folk” (69). DuCille continues that “such evaluations often erase the contexts and complexities of a wide range of African American historical experiences and replace them with a single, monolithic, if valorized, construction: ‘authentic’ blacks are southern, rural, and sexually uninhibited” (71). More recently, Madhu Dubey has pointed to the still salient “romance of the residual” suffusing cultural criticism today, a romance that hinges on a reification of preindustrial, premodern (symbolic) spaces more often than not situated in the rural South (158–70). Stepto’s own investigation into “the authenticating machinery” of African American narrative, Houston A. Baker’s “blues matrix,” Henry Louis Gates’s “Signifyin(g)” and “speakerly text”—or, indeed, Toni Morrison’s “ancestral South”—all look to the vernacular culture of the Black Belt for their respective readings of African American narrative.
western author, perhaps the most ‘southern’ writer alive today—has even called her novels “village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe. Peasant literature for my people” (“Language” 26; “Seams” 59; Interview 119).

Thus, what Stepto calls the South’s rural “ritual grounds” have engendered a “pregeneric myth,” one that in turn generates the critical apparatuses for the investigation of the entire black American literary tradition (xv, 66–74). The “symbolic geography” he maps focuses on the idea that a landscape becomes symbolic in literature when it is a region in time and space offering spatial expressions of social structures and ritual grounds on the one hand, and of communitas and genius loci on the other. . . . Symbolic geography in Afro-American narratives emerges . . . as a structural topography in which seemingly permanent (to the Afro-American) social structures manifest themselves as sites for locus-specific variations upon a nearly universal race ritual. (67–68)

Defining ritual ground as “a reaction to social structure within a structural topography” that provides “the currency of exchange, as it were, within the realm of communitas,” Stepto’s critical practice delineates “a ‘tribal’ geography” that is almost exclusively male and southern (69, 70, 77).³

And so, in an ironic reversal, the historical southern ritual ground, with its brutally disruptive legacies of chattel slavery, ethnic cleansing, and civil war, becomes codified in literary-critical practice as the source of an identifiable and predominantly rural ‘southernness,’ albeit a southernness more often than not under siege or (perpetually) fading away. In the South, the guiding Morrisonian ancestor is always in danger of vanishing—but knowable and somehow stable nonetheless, for myths are by nature consolidating in that they offer tangents of identification. In the still prevailing strains of African American critical theory, Stepto’s pregeneric myth has been reincarnated in poststructuralist garb. For all their ostensible celebration of destabilizing ambiguity and heterogeneous polyvalence, Henry Louis Gates’s “Signifyin(g)” and Houston Baker’s “blues matrix” deploy their own stabilizing mechanisms, authenticating machineries that, like all concepts of authenticity, serve to declare as much who’s out as to identify who’s in (McDowell, “Changing” 165–67). Sandra Adell points out that the critical methodologies of Gates and Baker not only “fall short of their emancipatory goal of freeing Afro-American literature from the hegemony of Eurocentric discourses” but also “bring into sharp relief what can best be described as a nostalgia for tradition. For to summon a tradition, for example, by reconstructing it, is to search for
an authority, that of the tradition itself. Such an enterprise, even as it
pits two or more traditions against each other, or even as it attempts to
fuse traditions, is inherently conservative. Something is always conserved,
something always remains the Same” (137). That “something” is, more
often than not, the symbolic ritual grounds of the American South and
its vernaculars.

These critical approaches become themselves stabilizing rituals, and as
such echo in part the problem engendered by Stepto’s wholesale adoption
of Victor Turner (Stepto 67–69). For the anthropologist Turner, ritual
is geared toward “the process of regenerative renewal” (“Process” 159).
A society’s rituals are therefore also consensus models feeding into the
maintenance of “communitas”: “bedrock communitas,” writes Turner, is “a
generic human relationship undivided by status-roles or structural oppo-
sitions, which is also vouched for by myths and histories stressing the
unity and continuity of the widest group to which all belong by birth and
tradition” (“Images” 233). The evolution of communitas becomes, “for
the groups and individuals within structured systems, a means of bind-
ing diversities together and overcoming cleavages” (Dramas 206). The
normative tendencies in communitas are reinforced when enacted within
a specific geographic space (Dramas 169, 268–69). For all its attention
to liminality and rupture, Turner’s social drama is actually impelled by
processes of assimilation and integration as the ultimate goal of ritual as
a regulatory function (Rosaldo 96–97; D. Weber 530). The status of the
liminal is one that, in Turner’s concept, ultimately contributes to “ensur-
ing the continuity of proved values and norms” (“Process” 163).

However, modernism’s key themes of fragmentation, alienation, and
epistemology complicate the demarcation of the South’s rural “ritual
grounds” as a repository of the “authenticating machinery” of African
American narrative. As Adell stipulates, “in modernism the self is sepa-
rated from its world, from its true home in the world. In modernism the
self is homeless and only resides in writing. As such it participates in its
own displacement even as it seeks to reconcile itself with the ordinary,
familial, and social order of everyday life” (139). The modernist severance
of ‘word’ from ‘world’ destabilizes the southern ritual ground as genius loci
of a “bedrock communitas”—and, not coincidentally, many of his theo-
ries Turner formulated in the course of studying premodern societies. It
therefore follows that Stepto fashions the genius loci of African American
cultural production into a premodernist ritual ground, for modernism’s
inherent eclecticism and instability disturb what he, in the 1991 after-
word to the second edition of From Behind the Veil, calls “the dominant
“GONE WITH ‘WHAT’ WIND?” | 5

meta-plot of the tale”: he insists that instability is always a product of the (uninformed) reader, never a quality of the text (202, 204).

What the paradigms of Turner and Stepto minimize is that rituals, as acts that seek to regulate transferences of power and shifts of identity, in and of themselves often reinforce the disruptive impulses behind any transformation as much as they are designed to contain them (Hutcheon 97; Raboteau 86–87). Art, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, has always had an intricate connection to ritual:

The original way of embedding the artwork in the context of tradition found its expression in the cult. The earliest artworks, as we know, originated in the service of a ritual—first a magic ritual, then a religious one. It is now of decisive significance that the artwork’s auratic mode of existence is never severed entirely from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the “authentic” artwork has its foundation in ritual, in which it had its original and earliest use value. This ritualistic basis, however it is mediated, is still discernible as a secularized ritual in even the most profane forms of aesthetic service. . . . With the secularization of art, authenticity takes the place of cult value. (“Kunstwerk” 144)³

Benjamin here also stresses that the “use value” of art (reconfigured in Stepto’s paradigm as “the currency of exchange” within the communitas) has itself become highly unstable amid the social and political upheavals of modernity. Ralph Ellison grafts the implications onto southern American ritual grounds and argues that “while the myths and mysteries that form Southern mystique are irrational and even primitive, they are nevertheless real, even as works of the imagination are ‘real.’ Like all mysteries and their attendant myths, they imply . . . a rite. And rites are actions, the goal of which is the manipulation of power—in primitive religions magical power, in the South (and in the North) political power” (Going 572). The experience of repeated uprooting in the Middle Passage and under the peculiar institution informed virtually every ritual, religious or secular, of the slaves, rites in which they “asserted repeatedly . . . that their lives were special, their lives had dignity, their lives had meaning beyond the definitions set by slavery,” as Albert Raboteau writes (231). Thus, rituals as acts that seek to negotiate shifts of power and transformations of identity, and perhaps southern rites in particular, are always also manifestations of disruption, whose fissures often bespeak a “telling inarticulacy.”

In Stepto’s literary-critical paradigm, however, southern ritual grounds tend to be stable: the ritual journeys of ascent from an oppressive South
to a relatively free North and of immersion from northern alienation to southern communitas that inform black American narrative in various later amplifications are both teleological in their (symbolic) geography. Recent critical developments of Stepto’s paradigm are the narratives of dispersion and recuperation charted by Judylyn Ryan along an east-west axis, which in turn inform Edward Pavlič’s concept of Diasporic Modernism. In these later narrative modes, explains Pavlič, “figures attempt to expand the communal forms of the symbolic South in relation to newly imagined African cultural codes and patterns” (“Papa” 62). The place where the latitudinal paradigm of Stepto and the longitudinal paradigms of Ryan and Pavlič converge is the American South. But if Nathaniel Mackey is correct in arguing that the telling inarticulacy of African American texts is, at least in part, the result too of a resistance against the dominant discourse, this inarticulacy not only seeks to destabilize “predatory coherence,” but can also, inadvertently, affect the ostensible stabilities of the texts’ very own expressions of “communal forms”—then the black ritual grounds of the American South extend deep into the adjectival terra incognita of Basie’s “Gone With ‘What’ Wind?”

The rise of modernism in western art coincided, roughly, with the Great Migration, the exodus of African Americans from the predominately rural South to the industrial metropolises of the North. Adell’s suspicions about the summoning of “tradition” notwithstanding, the massive geographical and sociocultural dislocation and modernism’s centrifugal forces generated certain patterns of sensibility that distinguish Afro-modernism from much of Euro-American modernism. Hugh Kenner’s intriguing hypothesis that the U.S. educational system contributed to the emergence of high modernism—for Kenner, America was “the world’s first classroom civilization” and The Cantos simply “a Penn first-year curriculum, the one Pound happened to take”—also hints at such a crucial difference (Homemade 160; “Poets” 115). For one, the vast majority of Americans of African descent had no access to the institutions of higher learning that helped shape the aesthetic sensibilities of the Ezra Pounds and the William Carlos Williamses:

Several hours into the academic day, the blackboard is confronting students with a dense overlay of symbols left over from previous classes. When their instructor in the heat of exposition is moved to chalk up something of his own, no more than his precursors is he likely to wipe his whole expanse clean, not wanting to turn his back to the class for too long (a principle of rhetoric, not safety). Erasing just a little, he makes his additions slantwise. And as the palimpsest builds up day-long—dia-
grams, short lists, circles with three points marked on them, bits of math, supply and demand curves, bits of Aramaic—all superimposed, all bespeaking the day’s intellectual activity in that room—you feel yourself in the presence, as Beckett put it, of something you could study all your life and not understand. The blackboard with its synchronic overlay, its tough and hieroglyphic fragments of a congeries of subjects (nothing obvious goes on the blackboard; what is obvious can merely be stated)—the blackboard is our civilization's Great Smaragdine Tablet (which said “Things below are copies,” and was itself one of the things below). Absence of explicit and consecutive sense, teasing intimations of domains of order that others comprehend, that I could comprehend had I world enough and time, these are elements of its daily rhetoric, as it marshals, at random, enigmatic signs. (Kenner, “Poets” 118–19)

For the budding modernist poet enrolled at Penn, at Yale, at Harvard (Quentin Compson’s college), the blackboard is a two-dimensional, physical expanse upon which those cryptic signs congregate. For the African American writer—most likely barred from institutions of higher learning—the blackboard is also a symbol of black struggle in the New World, especially considering the significance of the trope of literacy in the (neo)slave narrative. How different, then, the blackboard behind the veil:

The school house was a log hut, where Colonel Wheeler used to shelter his corn. It sat in a lot behind a rail fence and thorn bushes, near the sweetest of springs. There was an entrance where a door once was, and within, a massive rickety fireplace; great chinks between the logs served as windows. Furniture was scarce. A pale blackboard crouched in the corner. My desk was made of three boards, reinforced at critical points, and my chair, borrowed from the landlady, had to be returned every night. Seats for the children—these puzzled me much. I was haunted by a New England vision of neat little desks, and chairs, but alas! the reality was rough plank benches without backs, and at times without legs. They had the one virtue of making naps dangerous—possibly fatal, for the floor was not to be trusted. (Du Bois, Souls 39)

The “pale blackboard crouching in the corner” a youthful Fisk University student teaching summer school found near the hamlet of Watertown, at the edge of the Tennessee hill country, is indicative of the ongoing struggle against racial inequality at the dawn of modernism. There is no question, given the pallor of the blackboard, of “Great Smaragdine Tablets” in this schoolroom, for any chalk marks on that particular board would be
comparatively difficult to descry in the first place. Interestingly, some ten years later, that same Fisk alumnus, now Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, returned to the area, but found his little schoolhouse gone:

In its place stood Progress; and Progress, I understand, is necessarily ugly. The crazy foundation stones still marked the former site of my poor little cabin, and not far away, on six weary boulders, perched a jaunty board house, perhaps twenty by thirty feet, with three windows and a door that locked. Some of the windowglass was broken, and part of an old iron stove lay mournfully under the house. I peeped through the window half reverently, and found things that were not familiar. The blackboard had grown by about two feet, and the seats were still without backs. (Souls 43)

Symbolically, then, the “meaning of progress” in education must be measured in inches per decade.9 In this, the blackboard is Du Bois’s postemancipation updating of Frederick Douglass’s pen: recalling the harsh winters he experienced on the Maryland plantation where he grew up, Douglass asserts that “[m]y feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes” (33). For Du Bois as for Douglass, the instruments of writing and literacy serve to negotiate the pain and suffering of history, and consequently to assess the progress from the past to the present (Stepto 20).

At least, that is, for Americans of African descent at the dawning of the twentieth century. Du Bois, in fact, would go on to assume a position at the University of Pennsylvania, but not even this comparatively liberal institution was exempt from the veil: given an ill-defined one-year fellowship there, Du Bois did no teaching at all because his name was soon stricken from the catalogue. As he notes dryly in his autobiography, “I did no instructing save once, to pilot a pack of idiots through the Negro slums” (197, 194–95). It was only a few years after Du Bois’s brief stint at Penn that Williams and Pound enrolled there, who after all were not even a generation younger than he. But their radically different experiences, and consequently the vastly different meanings modernity and modernism came to have for these three, are instructive. For Du Bois, who had “touched the very shadow of slavery” during his first sojourn below the Mason-Dixon line, history was not in the past but very much alive, and hence crucial to understand in the forging not just of what Alain Locke would famously call the New Negro, but of a new, modern, modernist black art (Autobiography 114). Appropriately, the metaphor of the veil has three dimensions, while the metaphor of the blackboard has
but two—not necessarily a qualitative difference, but a conceptual one to be sure.

Certainly, American high modernism was not without a concern for history. After all, Pound famously called *The Cantos* “a poem including history” (Kenner, *Pound* 362–67). But for the white American modernist, history presented options: one could select which bits and pieces of information one wanted to copy from the blackboard, “our civilization’s Great Smaragdine Tablet,” into one’s notebook. Thus, Euro-American and European high modernism offered to many what Jed Rasula terms an “idiomatic arsenal” consisting of a myriad of “elective parts” (70). But for the black artist in the New World, the point was that he or she did not have the same *choices* as Ezra Pound, or T. S. Eliot, or H. D., or Gertrude Stein, simply because, more often than not, there was no blackboard to copy from. Even Professor Du Bois had his blackboard taken from him at Penn. And so, for the American of African descent, “the adventure of Western culture” (to use George Kent’s apt phrase) and the confrontation with modernity invariably led to the American South (Kent 15). For the African American artist, confronting the rituals of the South and their legacies was not an elective; it was inescapable. Hence, the one dimension comparatively diminished in Kenner’s symbol of the blackboard in the classroom—and the one salient in Du Bois’s account—is the fourth: *time*. And it is this dimension that Afro-modernism is concerned with to a much greater degree than American high modernism.

Thus, Afro-modernism is really modernism with a historical conscience. The “telling inarticulacy” at the center of Basie’s song title furnishes the cue to my critical investigation into the southern ritual grounds of Afro-modernism as modernism with a historical conscience. In a variety of texts and contexts, the South constitutes a symbolic territory that actually resists the very narrative strategies deployed to capture it and hence is the catalyst of an epistemological crisis as much as the foundation of any “authenticating machineries.” At the same time, this stubborn resistance, the modernist alienation of word from world, prompts ever new and imaginative (re)mappings of that same territory, ontological processes of revelation within a field of tension in which narrative postures toward existence are continuously negotiated anew. In this act of (re)mapping, Afro-modernism seeks to tap not only historical consciousness—the blackboard in Ezra Pound’s classroom at Penn—but a historical conscience—the veil that accounts for the blackboard in Du Bois’s schoolhouse in Watertown, Tennessee, and its subsequent sacrifice to “Progress.” Hence, Afro-modernism suggests the reconfiguration of southern ritual grounds as situated in time and *mind* rather than time and *place*. 
“Modernism with a historical conscience” may sound like a contradiction in terms, but, as Adell reminds us, the Afro-modernist text in particular “is embedded in a paradox. It is a conjuring-weaving which reveals its dark shadow, the subtext of black existence and its un-said and un-sayable history” (140). Therefore, in the present study I shall follow Craig Werner’s lead and use the term “Afro-modernism” less as a definition of a specific school of artists or of a peculiar set of aesthetic paradigms, than as shorthand for the various ways in which artists confront the collision and collusion of alienation, fragmentation, and epistemology in the modern world (Werner 183–88). Nevertheless, as pointed out above, I believe there are indeed certain trends and patterns that distinguish much of Afro-modernism from its Euro-American counterpart, and the concept of Afro-modernism as modernism with a historical conscience therefore seeks to do justice to artistic form as well as to cultural history.

Stepto places the beginning of Afro-modernism with the 1912 publication of James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (95–97). For Houston Baker, Afro-modernism begins on September 18, 1895, the day Booker T. Washington delivered his famous address at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition (Baker, *Modernism* 15–16). Alfred Appel and Jed Rasula posit the apotheosis in 1927, the year Duke Ellington’s “Black and Tan Fantasy” was released, and the year placards announced Louis Armstrong as “The Master of Modernism” (Appel 206; Rasula 109–10). Werner reads the fiction of Charles Chesnutt as the first writings heralding the full complexities of what he calls African American “(post)modernism”; and when it is Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that constitutes the key black modernist text for Pavlič, it is Richard Wright’s *Native Son* for Yoshinobu Hakutani (Werner 17; Pavlič, “‘Papa’” 61–62; Hakutani 1–6). Notable about this roll call is the fact that the artists deemed pioneers of Afro-modernism are all southerners by birth or by upbringing—with Ellington the sole but, as a native Washingtonian, also tentative exception. Certainly, the South’s significance owes as much to demographics as to aesthetic principles; but because of this, too, the South appears a region central to the emergence of Afro-modernism, regardless of its definition.

Ultimately though, the genesis of Afro-modernism, Paul Gilroy states, lies in the experience of repeated uprooting and dislocation in the Middle Passage and its aftermath. As he writes in his seminal *The Black Atlantic*, it’s “the relationship between masters and slaves that supplies the key to comprehending the position of blacks in the modern world” (219–20). Thus, however varied, and sometimes contradictory, the approaches that black American artists took to meet the challenges of the twentieth century, they all
shared a sense that the modern world was fragmented along axes constituted by racial conflict and could accommodate non-synchronous, hetero-cultural modes of social life in close proximity. Their conceptions of modernity were periodised differently. They were founded on the catastrophic rupture of the middle passage. . . . They were punctuated by the processes of acculturation and terror that followed that catastrophe and by the countercultural aspirations towards freedom, citizenship, and autonomy that developed after it among slaves and their descendants. (197)

This dialectic of terror and acculturation was being told and retold in countless (re)incarnations of that most ‘telling’ of African American rites: call and response (Floyd 94–97; Gilroy 200; Stuckey 41–48). My study does not pretend to trace a comprehensive panorama of (southern) Afro-modernism: in literature alone, such a feat would have to tackle at the very least the fiction of Zora Neale Hurston, Ernest Gaines, and Alice Walker, as well as the poetry of Sterling Brown, again Walker, and Yusef Komunyakaa—not to mention the music of, say, Ray Charles, or the paintings of Romare Bearden. Hence, this study visits a series of southern ritual grounds and listens to selected, specific responses to the calls of modernity.

The first “call” will be that of the “Old South,” and my cartography of Afro-modernism begins with the 1893 Life and Times of Frederick Douglass. Douglass’s last autobiography has been unduly dismissed or neglected by critics because it avails itself of an expanded aesthetic of autobiography, one that the still dominating structuralist approaches fashioning the canon of African American narrative—Stepto’s latitudinal paradigm or Gates’s Signifyin(g)—cannot accommodate. The 1845 Narrative and the subsequent My Bondage and My Freedom undoubtedly emphasize the joint journeys from slavery to freedom and ignorance to literacy, and thus remain fully invested in the possibilities of literary mimesis. Douglass’s final autobiography as a protomodernist text, however, becomes more and more concerned with the fissures created by the inherent instability of all acts of textual representation. For Douglass, the modernist alienation of word from world can, and must, be counteracted if text is to tap what he calls “a life and power far beyond the letter,” an historical conscience (Autobiographies 792). Like its predecessors, Life and Times ultimately places this historical conscience at the frostbitten feet of its hero. Simultaneously, its protomodernism recognizes that there is indeed an increasing distance between ‘telling’ letters on the one hand, and as of yet unarticulated lives and powers on the other. The expanded aesthetic of Life and Times therefore not only negotiates a much more complex dynamic of immediacy
and distance, inside and outside, text and history, but also reinscribes its historical, southern conscience on the international grounds it visits.

While Douglass’s final autobiography presents us with a protomodernism in which the widening gap between word and world could still be bridged, in Jean Toomer’s Cane the axis of mimesis becomes unhinged. The novel sets out to respond to the call of “the spiritual truth” of the post-Reconstruction South as the author himself heard it in the archetypal southern small town on the threshold of modernity (qtd. in Kerman and Eldridge 95). However, the book depicts characters who are either unable to grasp fulfillment and tap a spiritual, mystic wholeness, or who are incapable of articulating comprehensibly their spiritual selves, chronicling the futile attempts of the narrative voice in its various guises to capture and reproduce Toomer’s South. The modernist crisis of representation leads to a breakdown of communication caused paradoxically by language itself, the very medium of communication. The recurring shifts between levels of narrative consciousness indicate that it is ironically language itself that prevents the book’s characters from shaping words to fit their souls, as it were. Cane thus attests to the price for which literary modernity is to be had: the fragmentation of the mimetic power of language. The novel’s historical conscience, represented by the mythical character of Father John, is still ‘writable’ and hence communicable, but at the same time Father John is relegated to a dark cellar, ignored or misunderstood by the community aboveground—the embodiment of a historical conscience that has shifted almost completely from the realm of ‘telling’ to the realm of inarticulacy.

One of the rituals Cane deems quintessential to the Black Belt’s “spiritual truth”—as did, of course, Douglass—is the ritual of song. However, the novel constantly refers to and reports on singing, but it incorporates an actual song into its narrative but once, and only fleetingly at that. In contrast, a small Mississippi farm is the setting of Richard Wright’s “Long Black Song,” where the Methodist hymn “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder” serves as the catalyst that occasions both a majestic (if utopian) vision of interracial harmony and that most brutal of southern rituals, lynching. The specific rendition of the hymn that Sarah, the protagonist, hears and that triggers the tragic events was recorded by the all-white Edison Mixed Quartet: in its performance decidedly not an antiphonal liberation text in the African American tradition, the hymn nonetheless pits two distinct realms against each other, the millennial realm of the hymn’s “yonder” on the one hand, and the historical exigencies of a southern territory marked by the ritual of lynching on the other. The resulting dialectic oscillates between the realities of southern violence and the ideal
of southern multiculture and reveals that, contrary to Toomer’s belief (and Douglass’s), song and music in fact betray the African American liberation struggle, and not just in the Deep South. Wright insists that only the writer can give voice to a viable historical conscience.

Accordingly, the long black song the title announces is one that is never sung in the story. This long black song, though, resounds at one of the ‘blackest’ of all black southern ritual grounds—the crossroads. This is the location where, or so the legend goes, the “King of the Delta Blues Singers,” Robert Johnson, traded his soul to the devil. In critical theory, too, the crossroads has become the prime metonymy for Afro-modernism—in Houston Baker’s *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* as well as Edward Pavlič’s *Crossroads Modernism*. “Music,” Paul Gilroy adjudges, “becomes vital at the point at which linguistic and semantic indeterminacy/polyphony arise amidst the protracted battle between masters, mistresses, and slaves. This decidedly modern conflict was the product of circumstances where language lost something of its referentiality and its privileged relationships to concepts” (Black 74). But because black music is also “so often the principal symbol of racial authenticity,” in the third millennium “the well-policed borders of black particularity” remain just as vigilantly guarded (34, 6). Despite Wright’s profound pessimism regarding the liberatory potential of music, one of the goals of *Shaping Words to Fit the Soul* is to reference sound as a figurative ritual ground capable of decolonizing visually inscribed, petrified mappings of raciological categorization; music can, however fleetingly, indeed swing open doors to spaces that allow for the possibility of combining seemingly divergent and opposite forms of human experience and expression.

Chapter 4 will therefore not only visit the actual crossroads where said tricky transaction between Johnson and the devil took place. It will also examine the figurative crossroads in the compositional practice of the “Father of the Blues,” W. C. Handy, as well as in the soundscapes navigated by the flagship of southern rock, the Allman Brothers Band. Handy’s blues are a product of pastiche and collage and result from the collision of what he calls “snatches of song” from a wide variety of sources; at the same time, the so-called blue notes give voice to Afro-modernism’s historical conscience (Handy, *Father* 138). At the crossroads of the blues therefore meet old and new, tradition and fragmentation, history and progress, myth and commerce, authenticity and simulacrum—and, of course, black and white. Ralph Ellison knew that “Southern whites cannot walk, talk, sing, conceive of laws or justice, think of sex, love the family or freedom without responding to the presence of Negroes” (Shadow 163). The music of the Allman Brothers Band, steeped deeply in the history of the music as it
translates Handy’s compositional technique into improvised performance, traverses an intersection closely related to the racial crossroads, namely that of cultural property and cultural propriety. A close ‘reading’ of the Allmans’ iconic song “Whipping Post” and its minstrel echoes exemplifies how blues can transcend raciological typology, but it cannot, ultimately, transcend history.

The final chapter journeys to a seemingly very different setting, namely the inner city of the post-Soul generation in Tayari Jones’s novel Leaving Atlanta and on Goodie Mob’s debut album, Soul Food. At the core of Jones’s narrative that explores the effects of the infamous Atlanta Child Murders on the lives of three fifth-graders and their community is an epistemological crisis that pits word against world, language against experience, sign against referent. The crisis, fueling a profound sense of disorientation, is so great that it revises, and even partially reverses, Douglass’s archetypal, protomodernist journey in which literacy figured as “the pathway from slavery to freedom” (38). Thus, both Leaving Atlanta and Jones’s follow-up novel, The Untelling, navigate a landscape that overlaps with the ritual grounds of the newest of the New Souths, the “Dirty South,” a landscape that, in its original mapping by Goodie Mob, also generates a deep confusion. But even in these texts, a historical conscience manifests itself by mapping symbolic ritual grounds that betray their complicity with the legacies of white supremacy and chattel slavery.

Finally, the juxtaposition of literature and hip-hop prompts a prolegomenon on the relationship between Afro-modernism’s historical conscience and postmodernism. Hip-hop is perhaps the most fiercely territorial expression of contemporary black culture, but it also avails itself of postmodernist techniques. In fact, Russell Potter hears in hip-hop “one form of radical postmodernism” (9). bell hooks’s essay “Postmodern Blackness” has emerged as a key text in the field—also because she recognizes hip-hop as perhaps the most vocal (and visible) manifestation of African American postmodernism. hooks applauds its subversive and potentially liberating elements, but professes to be disturbed by “postmodern critiques of the ‘subject’ when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time” (28). The resistance to postmodernism’s assault on notions of essence and authenticity, she writes, is rooted in the fear that it will cause folks to lose sight of the specific history and experience of African-Americans and the unique sensibilities and culture that arise from that experience. An adequate response to this concern is to critique essentialism while emphasizing the significance of
“the authority of experience.” There is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black “essence” and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle. (29)

Afro-modernism as modernism with a historical conscience anticipates in many ways hooks’s concept of “the authority of experience” informing postmodern blackness. As Little Brother’s provocative 2005 album The Minstrel Show exemplifies, thoroughly postmodernist yet socially conscious hip-hop is often born from an impulse akin to Afro-modernism’s historical conscience. The group’s hip-hop satire amplifies Christian Moraru’s rereading of postmodernism as “memorious discourse,” which does not dissolve history into poststructuralism’s wall-to-wall textuality, but seeks to recover it in an act of cultural recollection (Memorious 21–27). Thus, Little Brother’s postmodern blackness orchestrates an impulse deeply embedded in Afro-modernism’s historical conscience, namely how to wrest wholeness from the pain and terrors of American history.

The starting point for the following discussions is one that may appear geographically circumscribed, but my critical practice takes to heart George Kent’s counsel: “Any universalism worthy of recognition derives from its depths of exploration of the density, complexity, and variety of a people’s experience—or a person’s. It is achieved by going down deep—not by transcending” (11). Thus, I hope that in “going down deep,” deep below the Mason-Dixon Line, we may also find out something about the world above and beyond it.
CONCLUSION

“The Biggest Colored Show on Earth”

Afro-Modernism, Hip-Hop, and Postmodern Blackness

“I have never, in all my journeys, felt more of an interloper, a stranger, than I felt in Atlanta,” confessed James Baldwin in his treatise on the child murders, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (55). Visiting the “new” Atlanta only a few years after the ghastly string of killings, professional tourist V. S. Naipaul continued to be befuddled by the city as well (25–27, 57). His diagnosis of Atlanta’s race relations deduced that “there were two world views here almost, two ways of feeling and seeing that could not be reconciled” (58). At the end of his “turn in the South” he mused in Toomeresque tones, “But in this flat land of small fields and small ruins there were also certain emotions that were too deep for words” (296).
Both Baldwin and Naipaul discovered the same paradox W. E. B. Du Bois had accentuated almost a century earlier, when he referred to Atlanta as the “Gateway to the Land of the Sun” and as the capital of “the Land of the Color-line,” exemplifying how the South in general was a very “odd world” indeed (Souls 48, 128, 43). In a sense, they all had been on the hunt for answers to the famous questions posed in another unmistakably southern tale: “Tell about the South. What’s it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all” (Faulkner, Absalom 142). William Faulkner’s Shreve, the Canadian medical student, discovered when he posed these questions to Quentin, the quintessential white southerner, in their frigid New England dorm room, that there is a South that keeps eluding words. And, paradoxically, for this exact reason it is all the more vital to “tell about the South” again and again, to reimagine it anew.

In some ways then, Goodie Mob’s Dirty South echoes Baldwin’s sense of alienation even as it attempts to provide an answer to Shreve’s queries. Listening to the Dirty South’s topography as the soundtrack to Tayari Jones’s fiction also limns a trajectory of Afro-modernism that segues into postmodernism. As musicologist Adam Krims notes: “It seems, at times, that rap music would have to have been invented by postmodern theory, had it not been there, poised to exact its tribute” (8). Extending Craig Werner’s paradigm of the three key themes of modernism, hip-hop makes readily audible (and visible) the three key themes of postmodernism: disjunction, textuality and parody, and simulacra. Generally, where modernism’s concerns tend to revolve around the dissociation of sign from referent, postmodernism tends to explore the interplay between signifier and signified. Hip-hop’s electronic sampling of beats and melodic fragments indulges in an aesthetic of disjunction; textuality (in its widest sense) and parody are evident in rap’s relentless self-referentiality and aggressive competitiveness; and there is the proliferation of simulacra, the performative demarcation of a geographic terrain—the “‘hood” as genius loci—whose borders are often patrolled by highly stylized personae. Hip-hop scholar Russell Potter is among those who have pointed out how the cultures of the African diaspora anticipated, by centuries actually, in many ways not just modernism, but postmodernism as well: “Living, talking, making music, and writing in the subjectivity of resistance that was built—had to be built—against the economic and philosophical bulwarks of slavery and colonialism, black cultures conceived postmodernism long before its ’time’ as construed by writers who had to wait to take their cue from Derrida, Foucault, or Lyotard” (6).
In situating hip-hop squarely within a historical continuum, Potter at the same time also alludes to how contemporary African American cultural production often impugns the white noise of “il n’y a pas de hors-texte” that would demote both human experience and history to the status of, in Paul de Man’s words, “a purely linguistic complication” (Derrida 158; de Man, “Resistance” 92; Lehman 93–104). Interestingly enough, Jacques Derrida’s (in)famous proclamation that there was no outside-the-text, one of the more controversial flashpoints of the critical project of deconstruction that accompanies postmodernism, occurs in the section in Of Grammatology in which Derrida reads the autobiography of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Confessions. In the same paragraph, Derrida writes that

in what one calls the real life of these existences “of flesh and bone,” beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau’s text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the “real” supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, in the text, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like “real mother” name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (159)

Even if we should therefore have read, in Frederick Douglass’s text, that the gashes in the autobiographer’s feet “only come forth in a chain of differential references,” the point is that somebody’s frostbite scars surely did exist, but were never recorded by history-as-text. Moreover, “what opens meaning and language,” for Douglass as much as for Goodie Mob, is ‘writing’ as an act that makes ‘apparent’ the shortcomings of (mis)representation of whatever the surrounding culture deems a “natural presence” at any given time, (mis)representations that can and do have an impact on “the real life of these [black] existences of ‘flesh and bone.’”

Thus, Madhu Dubey notes that “[s]ome idea of the real that eschews both organicism and technological fetishism, innocent mimesis and textual inflation, seems urgently needed in the postmodern era,” not least because in our own time, “[t]he question of referentiality stubbornly persists as a vexed problem in African-American fiction as well as literary criticism” (11, 49). Afro-modernism’s historical conscience effects an ongoing interrogation of the act of representation; in African American postmodern-
ism, this interrogation seems far from obsolete, but is in fact intensified. Taking his cue from bell hooks, Timothy Spaulding explains that postmodernist blackness “reflects the political ideology of black nationalism, the ‘authority of experience’ and identity politics of black feminism, and the deconstructive project of postmodernism. From these discourses, African American writers develop a concept of ‘narrative authority’ that reinvests the contemporary writer with political agency by radicalizing the act of storytelling” (17). This tenacity of “some idea of the real” in African American postmodernism stems, according to Toni Morrison, also from the fact that

[i]t’s not simply that human life originated in Africa in anthropological terms, but that modern life begins with slavery. . . . From a woman’s point of view, in terms of confronting the problems of where the world is now, black women had to deal with ‘post-modern’ problems in the nineteenth century and earlier. These things had to be addressed by black people a long time ago. Certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability. (qtd. in Gilroy, “Living” 178)

These, then, are also “‘post-modern’ problems” that the Afro-modernism of The Untelling addresses, a narrative that is very much ‘about’ the telling and the untelling, the telling inarticulacies, of the black female body. Andreas Huyssen illuminates the stakes when he points out that postmodernist practice born from poststructuralist theory, “where it simply denies the subject altogether, jettisons[s] the chance of challenging the ideology of the subject (as male, white, and middle-class) by developing alternative and different notions of subjectivity” and adds that dismissing questions of authority and authorship altogether “merely duplicates on the level of aesthetics and theory what capitalism as a system of exchange relations produces tendentially in everyday life: the denial of subjectivity in the very process of its construction. Poststructuralism thus attacks the appearance of capitalist culture—individualism writ large—but misses its essence; like modernism, it is always also in sync with rather than opposed to the real processes of modernization” (213).2

Paradoxically, the perhaps most unabashedly capitalistic and most thoroughly postmodernist lot within the contemporary “tribal geography” is also the most fiercely territorial and individualistic one: hip-hop. Its performance rites, highly evocative of the Turner-Stepto conception of communitas, often demarcate symbolic ritual grounds that are not only celebrated enthusiastically but also carefully policed and vigorously defended (Benston 39; Smith 43–45, 107–9). The glorification of a mythical “‘hood"
is often accompanied by the ritual incantation to “keep it real.” That these ritualistic claims to a “tribal” terrain actually result in the continuous fabrication of often contesting authenticities does not diminish the perceived ‘realness’ of the ritual ground in question, because in hip-hop identity is inextricably linked to geography (Krim 123–51; Ogbar 6–8, 23–24). At the same time, socially conscious hip-hop often harks back to Afro-modernism’s historical conscience. In a process Derrick Alridge terms “imaging,” the more socially aware hip-hoppers seek to graft historical references onto present-day concerns: imaging addresses “temporal limitations through techniques that morph time and provide a wider lens for seeing the organic, metaphorical, symbolic, and concrete connections” between hip-hop and the Civil Rights movement and the black liberation struggle in the New World (228–29). Says Goodie Mob’s Khudjo, “We all living in the same struggle. It’s just different times” (qtd. in Alridge 233).

Little Brother is another such trio, composed of rappers Phonte and Big Pooh and producer 9th Wonder. Based in Durham, North Carolina, they too hail from hip-hop’s most lucrative territory, the Dirty South, although their aesthetic owes much more to Goodie Mob than to, say, Ludacris. Little Brother’s sophomore outing, released in the fall of 2005, is a concept album whose title is program: The Minstrel Show. Recorded and mixed in Durham’s “Chopp Shopp Studios,” the record resonates with thoroughly postmodernist techniques (booklet 12). The governing principle is parody, that of a TV sitcom called “The Minstrel Show.” Accordingly, the concept album begins with a jingle: “You are watching UBN, U Black Niggers Network, Channel 94, Raleigh-Durham, Chapel Hill,” which is followed by guest vocalist Yazarah sweetly intoning the sitcom’s theme song: “We’d like to welcome you to everything there is to know: / This is our life, this is our music, it’s our minstrel show.”

Postmodernist techniques not only are evident in the music, but extend to the packaging of the CD, announced repeatedly as “The biggest colored show on earth.” On the cover, the trio strikes the classic minstrel pose: three disembodied heads, the only color contrast consisting of the gleaming white of eyes and teeth against dark brown skin. The front-cover logo as well as the entire booklet is a parody of TV Guide magazine, reconstituted here as LB Weekly. The announcement of a cover story on page 34 about “THE MINSTREL SHOW: THE NEW HIT SITCOM. SUNDAYS ON UBN” is counteracted by the fact that there is no page 34 in the booklet. Even the parental-advisory warning sticker—not a sticker in this case, but printed in the lower left-hand corner—reinforces the postmodernist play as it calls attention to the artifice of the album’s guiding concept.
The inside of the booklet continues the parody: LB Weekly lists the songs like TV Guide lists shows, including air times and even star ratings. For example, “Hiding Place,” airing at “1 p.m.,” ranks guest rapper Elzhi with only one and a half stars out of three, whereas Big Pooh gets all three. The program announces that the broadcast of “Cheatin’” has been “cancelled” and “replaced with Percy Miracles, Live in Rome ’78” (5). Of course, the CD does include the track: and much like the shifting identities of minstrels, Phonte Coleman, a.k.a MC Phonte, morphs into Percy Miracles here, in a hilarious sendup of R. Kelly’s bedroom crooning. LB Weekly also includes an ad for “the second season finale of ‘Lovin’ It,'” another UBN sitcom, set to begin “This Monday night 8 p.m.”—but in fact “Lovin’ It” is track the tenth, slated to air on “Sunday, September 11, 2005” at “6:30 p.m.” (5, 7). Other postmodernist simulacra inside the booklet include an ad for a new line of clothing called “5th & Fashion” and even a crossword puzzle (2, 12).

But at the same time, Little Brother’s postmodernism is suffused with bell hooks’s “authority of experience” (29). In LB Weekly’s “Story of the Week”—the seriocomic liner notes—Derek Jennings insists that Little Brother “talk about real shit while everybody else talk shit about keeping it real. Our forebears hustled and struggled so that we would no longer have to scratch when we ain’t itch, or smile when we ain’t happy. But in 2005, even though you don’t have to rock blackface to be in entertainment, it ‘shole heps.” On the track “Watch Me,” for example, postmodern parody joins satire born from a social and historical conscience when Phonte raps,

I’m Phonte, international stage ripper; done
Made friends and made figures
While you stuck on the front porch mad, like you fixin’ to shave

Mister.

That’s reality, so color me purple.

My name in history, nigga, that’s all I work for.
Better keep it moving like the laws of inertia
Before these Carolina boys come to hurt ‘cha:
Better tell them about it!

On the one hand, Phonte’s parody here mockingly displaces the bygone folk culture of the black South celebrated in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple and in the pastoralism of Steven Spielberg’s movie version by boasting about his ability to navigate the global economy. On the same track, Big Pooh begins his verse by stating simply that he “can’t afford to
not record”—and how successful the trio has been in its manipulation of the postmodern conditions of consumer-capitalism is brought ‘home’ in the booklet’s acknowledgments, which list two people of Little Brother’s extended posse whose sole task is apparently “international currency conversion” (12). Booker T. Washington would be proud—and Shug Avery perhaps surprised.

On the other hand, Phonte’s postmodern parody is also an act of “imaging,” and as such it invests its very target with an authority that speaks to the continued validity of a collective historical consciousness and conscience. “Watch Me,” and the album as a whole, resounds with the “memorous discourse” of postmodernism: this is a discourse that, according to Christian Moraru, does not constitute “an irresponsible art of forgetfulness,” but rather seizes on the postmodernist mode of representation “as a case of prodigious, ‘compulsive’ cultural recollection” (Memorious 37, 21). What Little Brother’s parody recalls is not just the racist distortions of white minstrelsy but also the often more complex and differentiated performances of minstrelized blackness enacted by African Americans themselves. Little Brother’s “biggest colored show on earth” harks back to the slogan “The greatest colored show on earth” that the famed Rabbit Foot Minstrels used to advertise their performances (Abbot and Seroff 289). Like W. C. Handy’s Mahara’s Minstrels, the Rabbit Foot Minstrels were an all-black outfit that at one point included blues shouter Ma Rainey, the “Mother of the Blues,” who, according to legend, kidnapped a teenaged Bessie Smith in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and taught her to sing the blues as a member of the troupe (Lieb 4–19). The blues’ Mother and Father both, as well as Bessie Smith, the “Empress of the Blues,” and many other early blues artists such as Ida Cox or Perry Bradford, toured with minstrel troupes, indicating how crucial a part the black minstrel show played, and continues to play, in the lineage of contemporary American popular musics (Lhamon 110, 145–46; Stewart-Baxter 11–12, 36–47). In their own time, the very existence alone of outfits such as Mahara’s or the Rabbit Foot Minstrels enabled their African American cast to project themselves “across the South as a glorious, enviable spectacle . . . when white racist reaction was concerned with restricting black freedom of movement through public space,” as Adam Gussow observes (88). The introduction to “Watch Me”—“And right now, you in tuned to the biggest colored show on earth: The Minstrel Show, nigga”—is yet another reminder that the entire album is a historicized ‘text’ that explores the ‘script’ of the black body as a site of ongoing contests of representation and hence of power, an historicized text just like Walker’s novel, or Ma Rainey’s performances, or the pen in the gashes of Frederick Douglass’s feet.
For his part, the Father of the Blues defended Mahara’s Minstrels vigorously: “It goes without saying that minstrels were a disreputable lot in the eyes of a large section of upper-crust Negroes,” Handy wrote,

but it was also true that all the best talent of that generation came down the same drain. The composers, the singers, the musicians, the speakers, the stage performers—the minstrel show got them all. . . . Encyclopedists and historians of the American stage have slighted the old Negro minstrels while making much of the burnt cork artists who imitated them. But Negroes were the originators of this form of entertainment, and companies of them continued to perform as long as the vogue lasted. Mahara’s outfit, like the Georgia Minstrels, the McCabe and Young Minstrels, and the Hicks and Sawyer Colored Minstrels, was the genuine article, a real Negro minstrel show. (Father 33–34)

The modernist concern over authenticity in Handy’s slightly revisionist and oxymoronic gloss (“a real Negro minstrel show”) is revisited in Little Brother’s postmodernism: both insist that there is something “genuine” and “real” behind the minstrel’s mask: Afro-modernism’s historical conscience, hooks’s “authority of experience.” The kind of postmodern rewriting Little Brother are engaged in here amplifies their text as, in Moraru’s words, “a modality of setting up—and straight—the cultural accounts of society, its memory, and its struggles” (Postmodern 173). And if, as Houston Baker contends, it is “the mastery of the minstrel mask by blacks that constitutes a primary move in Afro-American discursive modernism,” then Little Brother indicate that black postmodernisms constitute an extension of the tradition, not a break from it (Modernism 17).⁴

This contiguity is evident, too, in the ways in which The Minstrel Show rewrites Paul Laurence Dunbar’s famous masqueraders, who also “sing, but oh the clay is vile / Beneath our feet, and long the mile” (lines 12–13). But not only are Little Brother far from resigning themselves to a loss of narrative authority and control that corrupts the songs of Dunbar’s tragic minstrels; “these Carolina boys” who have “come to hurt ’cha” also see very little “vile” in the clay of their ritual ground (Baker, Modernism 39–40; Spaulding 19). However, they still acknowledge that, like Dunbar’s singers, they too perform in an international cultural marketplace that prefers to celebrate a “mask that grins and lies” but remains largely indifferent to the humanity of those behind the mask (Dunbar 1). The parody of The Minstrel Show thus oscillates between the postmodernist recognition that all identity is constructed and the modernist quest for an authentic self. Little Brother’s brash reclamation of narrative authority at once subverts
the tragic resignation of Dunbar’s minstrels and affirms the authority of
that which engendered both “We Wear the Mask” and their album’s own
postmodernist updating of minstrelsy, namely an historical conscience
born from the variegated experience of what it means to be black in the
New World. And so, even in the thoroughly postmodern, highly digi-
talized contexts of consumer-capitalism and the global economy, Mark
Anthony Neal concludes that “[o]nce again, we’re back to ownership:
ownership of possibilities, language, and experiences; if not of blackness
itself”—even and especially in the contemporary, urban South (188).

Thus, in their insistence that representation is power, Little Brother—
who take their name in deference to the pioneers of hip-hop—position
themselves squarely within the African American tradition, a tradition
ranging from the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and the autobiographies of
Frederick Douglass to the subversive minstrelsy of Bert Williams to the
fiction of Toni Morrison. The legacies of this tradition and its histori-
cal conscience remain. As Phonte sums it up, “To me, THE MINSTREL
SHOW is ultimately about responsibility. . . . As rappers, we have to take
responsibility for what we say, and for the images we portray to our people.
If not, we’re doing essentially what minstrel shows did: perpetuating negative
images and reinforcing these negative stereotypes” (qtd. in “Little”).
It is a sentiment echoed by many, including historian Jeffrey Ogbar, who
sees in more commercially oriented rappers such as Lil Jon, the King of
Crunk, “the quintessential postmodern super coon” (31). The African
American postmodernism of Little Brother (if perhaps not that of the
King of Crunk) exemplifies that, as Ralph Ellison put it, “Negro American
consciousness is not a product (as so often seems true of so many American
groups) of a will to historical forgetfulness. It is a product of our memory,
sustained and constantly reinforced by events, by our watchful waiting,
and by our hopeful suspension of final judgment as to the meaning of our
grievances”—even into the third millennium (Shadow 171). For a people
whose history and humanity have been consistently denied or distorted
by a national ‘master’ narrative, the performance of an authentic human
voice remains absolutely crucial.

In these performances, the ritual grounds of the American South resur-
face time and time again as a site of prime importance in the ongoing
process of reinventing culture and identity. The ramifications of this col-
lective process, as we have seen, extend far above and beyond the Mason-
Dixon Line. Perhaps this is so because, as Goodie Mob could tell both
Shreve and Derrida, succinctly and with postmodernist irreverence, “Shit
just don’t sleep / In the Dirty South.”
1. Basie’s trumpeter Buck Clayton confirms: “People often wondered how we got some of these titles. . . . We were all sitting round the studio after a playback when [producer] John Hammond asked ‘What are we calling that one?’ ‘Well, let me see . . . ,’ Count said and straightaway we all said that should be the title” (qtd. in Sheridan 98). Reissues that include this and later recordings of “Gone With ‘What’ Wind?” variously list only Basie or occasionally also Goodman as co-composer.

2. See Stepto (5); Baker (Blues 3–4); Gates (Figures 236–50; Signifying 78–79, 181); and Morrison (“City” 42). Gates seems to move closer to Mackey’s “telling inarticulacy” when he adds that Signifyin(g) “depends on the success of the signifier at invoking an absent meaning ambiguously ‘present’ in a carefully wrought statement” (Signifying 86). However, Gates’s critical practice qualifies this statement substantially. Despite his claim of
being a poststructuralist, his readings are actually more akin to structuralism: if a
text performs certain empirically verifiable linguistic and rhetorical rituals, then it
is a constitutive text of the African American literary tradition (52). This is why,
in his critical paradigm, Zora Neale Hurston is “true somehow to the unwritten
text of a common blackness,” but, say, Jessie Redmon Fauset isn’t (183). In other
words, what constitutes according to Gates the blackness of a black text may ulti-
mately be ‘unwritable,’ but it can indeed be circumscribed by the critical practice
of Signifyin(g). Likewise, Stepto's critical practice does indeed, if only implicitly,
point to a reconfiguration of the southern ritual ground as situated in time and mind
rather than time and place: “what is national about Afro-America is that it is without
dominion” (77). Even so, at the base of his vertical paradigm of narratives of ascent
and immersion respectively, one always finds the South.

3. The writers whose work Stepto analyzes in his study are all southerners by
birth, except W. E. B. Du Bois—and Ralph Ellison, who nevertheless considered his
years in Alabama formative: “In time I was to leave the South, although it has never
left me, and the interests which I discovered there became my life” (Shadow
169).

4. In fact, black literature often exhibits an antipastoral strain, ranging from
Frederick Douglass’s plantation garden in Maryland, to the terrifying lynching scene
James Weldon Johnson’s ex-coloured man witnesses in the Georgia countryside, to
Toni Morrison’s not-so “Sweet Home” Kentucky plantation (R. Butler 71–72).

5. All translations of Benjamin are my own, as are subsequently those of Erich
Auerbach.

6. The fiction of William Faulkner at times approximates something of an Afro-
mordenism, as Craig Werner has argued (27–62). Still, history in Faulkner is almost
always seen as overwhelming, as for Quentin Compson, or as irretrievably reced-
ing, as for Sam Fathers—never as nourishing. It is also interesting to note that
there seems to be an inverse correlation between modernist experimentation and
salient southernisms: The Sound and the Fury, for example, is perhaps the novel that
most consequentially exploits the modernist alienation of word from world, but what
Faulkner himself called the “immitigable chasm between all life and all print” is
noticeably smaller in, say, The Reivers (qtd. in Bleikasten vii).

7. Kenner’s hypothesis in a nutshell:

Discussing a poetic, we circle toward a definition of a university system
as understood by Americans: a system in which other people are learning
things you are not, and you look daily at blackboard traces left by
professors whose subjects you are never likely to study, nor need you.
The break that defined modernist poetics was preceded by a tacit break
with the educational theories of the Renaissance, when they claimed
to understand just what combination of learnings would constitute an
educated man. (“Poets” 120)

This notion of the interface between higher education and literary modernism
recalls the division of labor inherent in capitalist economic systems. And the Ameri-
can system of capitalism—the ir-er-form of capitalism, so to speak—was of course
designed in such a way as to force as many blacks as possible into peonage.

8. This symbolism was obviously important to Du Bois. In the chapter of his
autobiography titled “I Go South,” much is taken verbatim from The Souls of Black
Folk’s “The Meaning of Progress,” including the description of the classroom where
he taught for two consecutive summers. However, the pale blackboard is conspicuously missing.

9. Werner describes call and response thus: “Grounded in West African conceptions of the interrelationship of individual and community,” the ritual of call and response begins with the call of a leader who expresses his/her voice through the vehicle of traditional song, story, or image. This call, which provides a communal context for exploration of the “individual” emotion, itself responds to a shared history that suffuses later stages of the process. If the community, as it exists in the ever-changing present, recognizes and shares the experience evoked by the call, it responds with another phrase, again usually traditional, which may either affirm or present a different perspective on the initial call. Whether it affirms or critiques the initial call, however, the response enables the leader to go on exploring the implications of the material. Rich in political implications, this cultural form enables both individual and community to define themselves, to validate their experiences in opposition to dominant social forces. (xviii)

Chapter 1

1. For more detailed accounts of the reaction to the issuance of the proclamation, see Foner (1–3, 23–27); Franklin (118–27); McFeely (215–16); McPherson (557–59); and Quarles (199–202).

2. To be sure, Life and Times is not a flawless work of art. Critics have variously pointed at a tone that is exceedingly self-congratulatory at times; at Douglass’s rather embarrassing fawning admiration for whites in position of power, especially his former masters; and at a narrative structure that is somewhat rambling and not nearly as taut as that of his other autobiographies. However, one must ask, at least as far as the first two points of criticism are concerned, if these critics do not project their disappointment in Douglass the human being onto Life and Times as a work of art. And regarding the last point of contention, the less tightly structured narrative development of the last autobiography is, at least to some extent, precisely the result of Douglass’s changed aesthetic of autobiography, which no longer grants primacy to the quest for literacy.

3. Critics who subscribe to a deconstructionist dismantling of mimesis sometimes privilege the text to the extent that it virtually eclipses context altogether: perhaps unwittingly echoing Paul de Man’s contention that death was nothing other than “a displaced name for a linguistic predicament,” Ann Kibbey and Michele Stepto, for example, read the famous scene describing Frederick’s fight with Covey as a transfer of “the signifiers of slavery” back to the slaveholder and as a stand “against the fractured referentiality of the antilanguage of the ‘white man’” (de Man, “Auto-biography” 930; Kibbey and Stepto 184). Perhaps this is the kind of critical practice that causes Deborah McDowell to complain that often “the explanation of Douglass’s strength depends overmuch on a focus on style emptied of its contents” (“In” 53). The opposite approach to reading Douglass’s autobiographies, privileging context to
the detriment of text, retains a significant investment in the powers of mimesis, so that the text becomes an archeological dig that yields traces of an ‘authentic’ black folk culture. This approach argues that “Douglass’s Narrative contains an unwritten text of folklore that the reader, and probably Douglass himself, may not be conscious of” (Rothenberg 48; Raybourn 29–38). Again, this school almost exclusively focuses on the 1845 Narrative because it is closest in time to Douglass’s upbringing as a slave and thus implicitly yields the least ‘diluted’ account of an ‘authentic blackness’ in America. (And the first problem of this approach is presented by the intimation that only the culture of the black slave is truly authentic; that there existed a quite different culture among free blacks, for instance in New Orleans, is conveniently forgotten.)

4. Though Maryland was not part of the Confederacy, it was culturally and economically still very much part of the Old South. A slaveholding state, Maryland remained in the Union thanks largely to Lincoln’s quick quelling of secessionist sympathizers, the stationing of troops, and the imposition of martial law (McPherson 284–90). After the war, the border state remained more southern than northern, with its commercial center, Baltimore, exemplifying the position of the whole state, according to historian C. Vann Woodward: “A mixture of the Old and the New Order, Baltimore was at one and the same time the last refuge of the Confederate spirit in exile and a lying-in hospital for the birth of the New Order” (Origins 162). Douglass himself always referred to Maryland as a part of the South.

5. What Douglass describes here is a rhetorical strategy common to African American speech habits that linguists have termed signification or signifying—other (mostly regional) variations of signifying include sounding, jiving, the dozens, shucking, et cetera—on which, in turn, Gates’s literary theory of Signifyin(g) is based (Baugh 25–28; Labov 306–53; Smitherman 118–34).

6. This tension is exemplary of the genre in general. Paul John Eakin notes that “autobiography is nothing if not a referential art,” but that it is also propelled by “the presence of an antimimetic impulse at the heart of what is ostensibly a mimetic aesthetic” (Touching 31). Eakin confirms Douglass’s aesthetic again when he observes that “the autobiographical act is revealed as a mode of self-invention that is always practiced first in living and only eventually—sometimes—formalized in writing” (Fictions 8–9). Eakin goes on to acknowledge that culture plays a decisive part in this mode of self-invention because “the self is already constructed in interaction with the others of its culture before it begins self-consciously in maturity (and specifically in autobiography—where it exists) to think in terms of models of identity. . . . [C]ulture has exerted a decisive part, through the instrumentality of models of identity, in the process of identity formation, whether literary or psychological” (Touching 102). James Olney has made the case for African American autobiographical writing as a paradigm of autobiography in general, for “autobiography renders in a peculiarly direct and faithful way the experience and vision of a people, which is the same experience and the same vision lying behind and informing all the literature of that people” (“Autobiography” 13, 15–16). This has made the genre particularly attractive to African Americans, whom the mainstream had (or has) sought to exclude from writing the history of America. And if “the aestheticization of culture is a product of modernity” as Gregory Jusdanis affirms, then “[I]terature in a sense is the nation’s diary, telling the story of its past, present, and future. Literary culture has been indispensable to ethnic communities wishing to cement their
integrity as nations and to demonstrate (belatedly) their modern credentials” (82, 47).

7. The hard-core deconstructionist might now object that, short of touching Douglass’s scarred feet, the Lacanian signifying chain remains unbroken (Derrida 157–64; Spivak ixii–lxvii). However, how ‘true’ the autobiographer’s textual representations of his cracked feet actually are does not really affect the pertinence of historical conscience: the scars may have healed in the half century that lies between their first and their last representation in text, or Douglass may have exaggerated, perhaps prevaricated even (although there is no evidence to that effect). But, again, the point is that even if Frederick Douglass’s feet weren’t scarred from frostbite—somebody’s feet surely were.

Chapter 2

1. I am adapting here Walter Benjamin’s closing argument in his essay on Charles Baudelaire: “He indicated the price for which the sensation of modernity is to be had: the destruction of aura in the experience of shock” (“Über” 229). Benjamin sees in Les fleurs du mal a protomodernism related to, but much more radical and uncompromising than, the protomodernism of Life and Times of Frederick Douglass.

2. William Rankin has already commented on this subject matter in his essay “Ineffability in the Fiction of Jean Toomer and Katherine Mansfield.” However, his brief analysis is mainly a comparative character study and remains largely on the surface of the texts examined. While there is indeed in Cane a “despair before the impossibility of precisely capturing emotions, feelings, and states of mind,” the question of why these fail to be transmitted Rankin does not address, except for the somewhat perfunctory conclusion that “[t]he major literary weapon for expressing the inexpressible is metaphor” (160, 167).

3. George Hutchinson maintains that the story’s title character is actually biracial: African American and Jewish (Harlem 407). However, he fails to take into account that it is really the first-person narrator—like Toomer, a genteel, educated observer from the North—who superimposes Judaeo-Christian attributes onto Fern. Confronted with the mystery that is Fern, the narrator seeks reference points that might be more familiar (more ‘writable’) to himself and his audience. Hutchinson’s overreading of Fern’s ethnicity is based on Hargis Westerfield’s analysis, which links the imagery surrounding Fern, not the title character herself, to the myth of the Jewish Mother of God (269–71). Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr point out that giving Fern Jewish characteristics is in fact Toomer’s nod to Our America, written by his close friend and mentor Waldo Frank (149–50). Scruggs and VanDemarr correctly note that “[t]he real basis for [the narrator’s] attraction to [Fern] lies in her authenticity, which derives from the context of this place,” the ritual grounds of Georgia’s Black Belt; “part of the pathos of the narrator’s various scenarios that place her elsewhere is that it reflects his own uprootedness, not hers” (150).

4. Henderson’s concept of saturation and Soul-Field clearly influenced C. Eric Lincoln’s discussion of “soul,” which is also very reminiscent of Benjaminian aura:

Whatever else it is, soul is the essence of the black experience—the distillate of that whole body of events and occurrences, primary and
derivative, which went into the shaping of reality as black people live it and understand it. . . . Soul is a kind of \textit{élan vital} developed through the experience of living and performing constantly on the margins of human society, under conditions of physical and psychological stress beyond the boundaries of ordinary human endurance. It is a quality and an art developed in the matrix of the African-American experience. (Race 243–44)

Aura differs from soul, saturation, and Soul-Field in that Benjamin was very much aware of the tautology Benston locates at the core of Henderson's critical enterprise and that, by extension, also besets Lincoln's concept of soul. Where Henderson maintains that saturation is linked to poetic structure and therefore at least in part empirically verifiable, Benjamin insists that aura defies reproducibility, linguistic or otherwise (with the tentative exception of very early photography, which nevertheless already augurs the aura's impending and irreversible destruction). It must be mentioned here that Benjamin's essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility,” more so than “A Short History of Photography” that introduces the term, is as much political polemic as it is cultural criticism. In “The Work of Art,” Benjamin actually advocates modern art’s (Marxist) emancipation from notions of the auratic and from the aura’s “parasitic existence in ritual,” instead grounding itself in a different practice, namely politics (“Kunstwerk” 144–45). While his famous term “aura” is often interchangeable with “authenticity” (as in this passage from “The Work of Art”) or “tradition,” Benjamin never spelled out a definitive concept of the auratic (Rochlitz 138). Benjamin could tout enthusiastically the dawning of a new epoch of radical art here, while elsewhere—as for example in the essay “The Narrator: Observations on the Work of Nikolai Lesskov,” written only a few months after completing the first draft of “The Work of Art”—he harked back with wistful nostalgia to an earlier time when tradition, culture, history, and indeed human experience, were not yet under relentless assault from the fragmenting forces of modernity (Lindner 202–5; Rochlitz 9, 218–19). Concludes John McCole, “Benjamin’s work celebrates and mourns, by turns, the liquidation of tradition” (8).

5. Robert Jones argues that the narrator does reach an epiphany about Avey even before their meeting in the park, concluding that the modern world “induces her spiritual sterility” (Jean 42). However, Jones fails to recognize that the narrator of “Avey” is an unreliable one as he constantly tries to impose his ‘reading’ of, as he says, “what I meant to her” on his companion (Toomer, Cane 46; emphasis added). Similarly, when he receives a short letter from her, he “decided” that her handwriting was “slovenly” (46). Thus, if he does reach an epiphany regarding Avey at all, it is an insight deeply shaped by the conception of his own self in relation to her.

6. Similarly, Paul, who “can’t talk love” to Bona, tries to explain the inexplicable to the black doorman of the club that they have just left together (76). His long explanation, precisely because it tries to explicate that which cannot be explained, is suffused with metaphors, but after he shakes hands with the doorman, he finds that Bona has disappeared. In “Theater,” the anticlimax of John’s daydream about the sensuous dance of Dorris occurs when “John reaches for a manuscript of his, and reads” (55). Thus Dorris, whose dance on stage has spurred John’s daydream, finds her dance “a dead thing in the shadow which is his dream” (56). In all of these instances, language precludes men from tapping the spiritual essence of women. Laura Doyle observes astutely that Toomer’s text
carries on a long tradition wherein movement into the educated class means distance from and containment of other bodies by way of texts. . . . Cane exposes this body-displacing tradition of texts while also retaining the assumption that women live the essential embodiment alienated by this tradition. In that sense Cane joins the body-displacing tradition by keeping its own distance, as male text, from female embodiment. . . . By attributing embodiment to women and authorship to men, Cane thus reinscribes the function of the embodied woman as material instrument of men’s culture. It affirms the racial-patriarchal aesthetic myth, which we saw operating in Romanticism, of female content and male form, with form as the governing metaphysical mechanism. Cane eschews metaphysical hierarchies without, however, withdrawing from the gendered oppositions that inflect those hierarchies. (94)

7. Significantly, the only instance in which Lewis and Kabnis connect is a moment devoid of speech:

His [Lewis's] eyes turn to Kabnis. In the instant of their shifting, a vision of the life they are to meet. Kabnis, a promise of a soil-soaked beauty; uprooted, thinning out. Suspended a few feet above the soil whose touch would resurrect him. Arm’s length removed from him whose will to help . . . There is a swift intuitive interchange of consciousness. Kabnis has a sudden need to rush into the arms of this man. His eyes call, “Brother.” (98)

As between the narrator and title character in “Fern,” a momentary spiritual connection is established here not through language, but through the eyes. However, Kabnis gives in to “a savage, cynical twist about within him” that “mocks his impulse and strengthens him to repulse Lewis.” Kabnis’s “thinning out,” parallel to the thinning out of the beauty and power Toomer himself once believed he had managed to arrest in Cane, continues unhindered (98).

8. In addition to the modernist gesture of combining different literary forms, this, then, is also the reason why “Kabnis” was written as a closet play. “The value of a performative . . . employment of ‘race,’” writes J. Martin Favor, “is precisely the ability of the performer to be at once ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ racial discourse, both ‘really’ black and not ‘black’ at all” (151). We never see the church choir perform “My Lord, What a Mourning” because in Cane’s symbolic territory they are “‘really’ black,” while the lead character in “Kabnis” is, of all of Toomer’s characters in Sempter, the one most painfully confronted with his alienation, being neither “really’ black” nor “not ‘black’ at all.”

Chapter 3

1. The graphophone was developed by Charles Sumner Tainter along with Alexander Graham Bell and his cousin Chichester Bell in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as an improvement on and alternative to Edison’s phonograph. The graphophone was initially conceived as a dictation device, its distinguishing feature a wax-covered cylinder that was more accurate and sensitive than the tin foil
favored by Edison. However, the Columbia Phonograph Company, founded in 1889, was the only company successful in marketing the graphophone, largely because it sold cylinders of music—the John Philip Sousa marches were a particular boon for the corporation. Also in part because of company mergers and various lawsuits and countersuits concerning copyright infringements, the graphophone was already outdated technology by the turn of the century. Though Tainter’s innovations laid the foundation for the success of Columbia and had a long-lasting impact on the further evolution of recording technology, the graphophone’s unwieldy six-inch wax cylinder could not compete with Edison’s and never succeeded in the marketplace. By the 1910s the terms *graphophone* and *phonograph* were used interchangeably, also because releases in Edison’s Diamond Disc Series were distributed as both increasingly popular discs and, until 1929, cylinders, if only in sharply declining numbers (Millard 64–69; Morton, *Sound* 16–42, *Off* 17, 76–79). Given the “sharp, scratching noise” Sarah hears as the salesman cranks up the device, this is a phonograph playing a disc, not an Amberal cylinder—as is, incidentally, the “graphophone” Cash Bundren aims to purchase from V. K. Suratt in William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (Wright, “Long” 132; Faulkner, *As* 258, 261; Frow 47).

2. The manuscript of “Long Black Song” contained a fifth section that was dropped in the final version published in *Uncle Tom’s Children*. In this final section, Tom arrives on the scene with Sarah’s brothers, all three of them recently discharged from the military and still wearing their uniforms. The veterans die fighting at Silas’s burning house, with Sarah, as in the published version, about to flee across the hills (Sollors 118).

3. Significantly, Silas threatens Sarah with the whip first. The black-on-black violence exerted by the master’s preferred tool of regulatory violence prefigures here Zora Neale Hurston’s contention of the black woman as “de mule uh de world” (*Their* 14). Silas’s character also recalls the whip-wielding Sykes in Hurston’s short story “Sweat” (949). Later, when Sarah sees the two white men wrestling with Silas “on the ground, rolling in dust, grappling for the whip” the latter had intended to use on his wife, the earth-mother figure, the whip again symbolizes the power to define and police the South (149). Werner Sollors has pointed out the similarities of “Long Black Song” to another of Hurston’s stories: “The Gilded Six-Bits” also dramatizes the encounter of the ‘natural’ time of black folk with the clocked time of capitalist modernity leading to the protagonist’s adultery (123–28).

4. Echoing the final scene between Fern and the narrator, an embrace in which it is not clear what happens, so is Wright’s wording of this disturbing passage ambiguous, and many critics read it as a rape scene (J. A. Joyce 380; M. Walker 117–18, 184–85). Furthermore, Sarah is linked to the same objective correlative as Fern—again with obvious sexual overtones—namely a nail: as Sarah recedes from the advances of the white salesman into the house, “[h]er numbed fingers grabbed at a rusty nail in the post at the porch” (137). In “Fern,” the narrator says of the object of his desire, “If you walked up the Dixie Pike most any time of day, you’d be most like to see her resting listless-like on the railing of her porch, back propped against a post, head tilted a little forward because there was a nail in the porch just where her head came which for some reason or other she never took the trouble to pull out” (17).

5. Sarah’s sexual arousal occasioned by the sounds of “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder” is very reminiscent of an episode in Wright’s own childhood. At the age
of twelve, young Richard became infatuated with an elder’s wife in his grandmother’s church. As he would later write in *Black Boy*,

> I felt no qualms about my first lust for the flesh being born on holy ground; the contrast between budding carnal desires and the aching loneliness of the hymns never evoked any sense of guilt in me. It was possible that the sweetly sonorous hymns stimulated me sexually, and it might have been that my fleshy fantasies, in turn, having as their foundation my already inflated sensibility, made me love the masochistic prayers. (131–32)

Around that same time, Richard promised his grandmother he would make a serious effort at praying. Locking himself in his room for prayer, an unexpected by-product of this ritual were his first literary efforts:

> My attempts at praying became a nuisance, spoiling my days; and I regretted the promise I had given Granny. But I stumbled on a way to pass the time in my room, a way that made the hours fly with the speed of the wind. I took the Bible, pencil, paper, and a rhyming dictionary and tried to write verses for hymns. I justified this by telling myself that, if I wrote a really good hymn, Granny might forgive me. But I failed even in that; the Holy Ghost was simply nowhere near me. . . . (140)

6. As far as I have been able to determine, the 1915 version of “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder” was the first to be available on disc. The hymn would later be covered by artists as diverse as Johnny Cash and Hampton Hawes, the Five Blind Boys of Alabama and Johnny Paycheck. That 1919 is the year in which the story is set is made clear by Silas’s news that Tom had returned from the war. The demobilization and repatriation through the early part of 1919 of black troops from the European theater sounded the prelude to the devastating race riots of the infamous “Red Summer” of 1919 (D. Lewis 3–24).

7. Though the Edison Mixed Quartet’s vocal arrangement has the lead baritone and tenor trade lines on the chorus section with the contralto and soprano, this does not constitute call and response. Call and response, as a musical strategy, entails the interaction between leader and collective (or congregation) (Fulton, “Singing”).

8. Interestingly enough, when HBO decided to turn the Richard Wright story into a half-hour made-for-TV short for its “America’s Dream” series, starring Danny Glover as Silas and Tina Lifford as his wife, the song that leads to catastrophe is “Body and Soul” (O’Connor). I thank Warren J. Carson for bringing this movie to my attention.

9. In “Long Black Song,” Wright also appears to apply his own version of ironic typology. The biblical names of the three black characters ironically refracture scripture: in Genesis, Sarah is the wife of Abraham, remaining childless until the age of 90. Silas accompanies Paul on his journeys and is also credited with being the bearer of the First Epistle of Peter. And the Book of Ruth tells a story of fidelity, loyalty, and, eventually, idyllic bliss—not at all how “Long Black Song” presents baby Ruth’s mother (DeCosta-Willis 546–48; McCarthy 735–37; Sollors 142).

10. This, of course, is a recurring contention in the slave narratives, that the peculiar institution is as injurious to the master as it is to the human chattel.

11. The role of religious music for Wright remained the same outside of the southern ritual grounds, too. In “The Man Who Lived Underground,” originally begun in
1941, the protagonist witnesses a church service immediately after he has fled from the police into New York City’s sewer system (Rowley 254–55, 262–63). Hearing the black congregation sing “Jesus, take me to your home above / And fold me in the bosom of thy love” in their subbasement church makes him feel “that he was gazing upon something abysmally obscene, yet he could not bring himself to leave” (Eight 24). Later, right before he is apprehended by police, he hears the same churchgoers sing, “The lamb, the Lamb, the Lamb / Tell me again your story / The Lamb, the Lamb, the Lamb / Flood my soul with your glory” (67). Written almost two decades later, the radio play “Man, God Ain’t Like That,” also published in Eight Men, is set in Africa and Paris (Rowley 490–91). Babu inspires his ‘master,’ the American painter John Franklin, by singing the hymns he has learned from Methodist missionaries, among them

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{At the cross, at the cross,} \\
&\text{Where I first saw the light,} \\
&\text{And the burden of my heart rolled away,} \\
&\text{It was there by faith I received my sight,} \\
&\text{And now I am happy all the day . . . (Eight 161)}
\end{align*}
\]

In Paris, Babu comes to believe that Franklin is God and brutally murders him when the painter insists on sending him back to Africa. Eluding trial despite a confession to French police, Babu returns to his native land, where he becomes the leader of a religious cult preaching the imminent return of Jesus in the shape of John Franklin.

12. These writings were often the result of economic necessity, not artistic interest. Wright’s attitude toward the blues seems as ambivalent as his assessment of black (southern) folk culture in general. In Black Boy, his persona is disturbed by “how lacking in genuine passion we were, how void of great hope, how timid our joy, how bare our traditions, how hollow our memories, how lacking we were in those intangible sentiments that bind man to man, and how shallow was even our despair” (43). In direct opposition to the inner life of Sarah in “Long Black Song,” the jeremiad continues:

(Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it. And when I brooded upon the cultural barrenness of black life, I wondered if clean, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty, and the capacity to remember were native with man. I asked myself if these human qualities were not fostered, won, struggled, and suffered for, preserved in ritual form from one generation to another.) (43)

Certainly, the blues is just such a “ritual form,” but Wright recognized this only in his foreword to Oliver’s book and, fleetingly, in Twelve Million Black Voices. Deploring the “cultural barrenness” of black life served the persona of the alienated, questing hero he sought to project in his autobiography (Sollors 146–47). Elsewhere, his assessment of black vernacular culture could be much more differentiated. The following passage from Twelve Million Black Voices, a book much less quoted than his persona’s invective in Black Boy, is particularly insightful also because it concerns the very medium of Richard Wright’s craft:
We [the African slaves] stole words from the grudging lips of the Lords of the Land, who did not want us to know too many of them or their meaning. And we charged this meager horde of stolen sounds with all the emotions and longings we had; we proceeded to build our language in inflections of voice, through tonal variety, by hurried speech, in honeyed drawls, by rolling our eyes, by flourishing our hands, by assigning to common, simple words new meanings, meanings which enabled us to speak of revolt in the actual presence of the Lords of the Land without their being aware! Our secret language extended our understanding of what slavery meant and gave us the freedom to speak to our brothers in captivity; we polished our new words, caressed them, gave them new shape and color, a new order and tempo, until, though they were the words of the Lords of the Land, they became our words, our language. (40)

13. See, for instance, Hurd (42–56) or McCarthy (736–37). In my view the story’s shortcomings arise out of Wright’s inability to combine in the central figure of Sarah two different functions: on the one hand, Sarah is to be read, in the first part of the tale especially, as southern earth mother embodying the territory over whose ownership black and white are fighting and dying. Accordingly, she is a creature of impulses, so much so that she later even falls asleep when her husband is about to be lynched. A certain dehumanization of Sarah is the prize Wright pays for pressing her character into an archetype: she is in a way like a doll that reacts only when squeezed, and the recurrent references to Sarah’s “black teats” position her more as mammal than as woman (126, 128). At the same time, Sarah is also the moral conscience of the tale, offering a morally superior alternative, utopian though it may be, to her husband’s Washingtonian ideology. But Sarah’s vision does seem out of character considering how Wright introduces her in the earlier sections of the text.

Chapter 4

1. For more on Johnson and the legend of the crossroads, see Marcus (21–40); Palmer (111–17, 124–28); Pearson and McCulloch (18–64, 87–102); Schroeder (27–52, 99–100); and Stolle (40+).

2. Personal conversation with Frank L. “Rat” Ratliff (30 May 2005) and Roger Stolle (31 May 2005).

3. Dockery Farms is to the blues what New Orleans is to jazz. Charley Patton, who lived and worked there in the early 1920s, is considered to be the single most important figure in shaping what is now called the Delta blues. Patton partnered often with Willie Brown, and it was Brown who mentored Robert Johnson and is credited for his role in the latter’s “Cross Road Blues” (Evans 41–49).

4. The most likely burial site, unmarked until recently, is in the cemetery at Little Zion M. B. Church just outside of nearby Greenwood. A second gravestone is in Morgan City’s Mount Zion M. B. Church, which is the ‘official’ burial site of Johnson, at least according to his death certificate. The third is in Quito, on the grounds of the Payne Chapel M. B. Church, about halfway between Morgan City and Itta Bena on Highway 7, a hamlet so tiny one does need recourse to supernatural powers to find it, because the official highway map of Mississippi does not even list it.
Johnson did indeed find his untimely end in Quito, at the Three Forks Store, which reportedly was in the yellow one-story building, long since abandoned, after the highway bridge and flanking the dirt road that leads to the Payne Chapel. A fourth possible location of Johnson’s crossroads is rumored to be outside of Robinsonville, just southwest of Memphis, but no one is able to say for certain where this one is. Last, and more mundane perhaps, given the perennial push-and-pull between commercial crossover appeal and artistic integrity that has been marking the history of black music in the New World, the most concrete crossroads may be the New York City studio whence Black Entertainment Television, BET, airs its hugely successful 106 & Park top-ten video countdown every weekday.

5. It is commonly assumed that Arna Bontemps, who “edited” the memoir, was responsible for the more poetic touches in the text (Nichols 12; K. Jones 102). However, my research indicates the opposite: the two manuscripts housed in the archives of the W. C. Handy Birthplace, Museum, and Library in Florence, Alabama, reveal that the famous opening paragraph was Handy’s own, with only slight amendments by Bontemps. In a telling letter, Handy complains that he was less than happy with his editor:

I thank you for the correction, Taylor [Texas, a stop on one of Handy’s concert tours] which I remembered, but being blind, my editor took so many liberties with my manuscript, that I wouldn’t let him see the last seven chapters, because I was dealing then, with something he knew nothing about. In fact, if you will read the opening paragraph, “Where the Tennessee River,” and so forth, he got that out and said, “I came into the world singing the blues.” He wanted the book to be more about the blues, and cut out much of my background, which I put in, and that’s maybe how Tyler crepted in. (Letter to Hank Patterson)

Though Handy’s memory is rather selective here—the published version does begin with the idyllic image of Florence overlooking the Tennessee River, although an earlier manuscript displays Bontemps’s radical corrections, some handwritten, in that very opening paragraph—it still reveals the diverging priorities of memoirist and editor (Handy, *Father of the Blues as Edited by Arna Bontemps* 1; K. Jones 96). “Maybe my editorship of Handy’s book will gain consideration for me in the field of folk music,” Bontemps had hoped initially (“Letter” 7 Feb. 1941 74). However, he confessed to his friend Langston Hughes that “[t]he Handy book is a headache. He jumps on my neck when I jazz it up; Trounstine [Handy’s lawyer] screams when I fail to. I’m afraid it’ll come to no good end” (“Letter” 14 Nov. 1939 42). “The Handy book should go to press soon,” he later wrote, “vastly diluted since I last saw it, no doubt. I take no credit or blame for its final shape” (“Letter” 26 Jan. 1940 54). And indeed, when *Father of the Blues* did come out, Handy had not acknowledged Bontemps at all, causing the latter to sniff in turn that “Handy mashed it up a lot in the interest of dignity, etc.” (“Letter” 2 July 1941 84).

The first typescript is entitled *Fight It Out* and looks to be entirely Handy’s own, bearing only Handy’s name on the inside title page (Handy, *Father* xiii). In this manuscript, the passage about the plowman’s song and Handy’s compositional modus operandi reads as follows—I have used proofreader’s marks to indicate the handwritten corrections and changes:

The primitive tone or correlated note of “YSt. Louisy Αthe Blues” was
born in my brain when a boy. In the valley of the Tennessee River was known as McFarland’s bottoms, which our school overlooked. In the Spring, when doors and windows were thrown open, the song of a Negro plowman half a mile away fell on my ears. This is what he sang:

“Aye-oh-you, Aye-oh-O
I wouldn’t live in Cairo-O!”

All thru the years this snatch of song had been ringing in my ears. Many times I wondered what was in the singer’s mind. What was wrong with Cairo? Was Cairo too far South in Illinois to be “up North”; or too far North to be considered “down South”?

In any event, such bits of music or snatches of song generated the motif for my Blues and with an imagination stimulated by such lines as, “I wouldn’t live in Cairo,” I wrote my lyrics.

At that time if I had published a composition called “The Cairo Blues,” and this simple four-bar theme had been developed into a four-page musical classic, every grown-up now, who heard that four-bar wail then, would claim that Handy didn’t write this number and you would hear them say, “I heard it when I was knee-high to a grasshopper.” Politely put this would be a mis-statement of fact; bluntly written, it would be a lie mixed with small truth. That two-line snatch couldn’t form a four page composition any more than the letters “i-n,” could spell the word information. (XII.1)

In the other manuscript, titled Father of the Blues as Edited by Arna Bontemps—an unnumbered page inside the manuscript, between pages 25 and 26, identifies this version as “Re-written and arranged by Arna Bontemps”—the same passage appears as follows:

When I was a boy, I once stood in an open doorway listening to a plowman’s voice floating across the spring-green fields. Presently I made out words and a snatch of melody.

Aye-oh-you, Aye-oh-O
I wouldn’t live in Cairo-O!

Through many years that fragment lingered in my mind. Often I tried to imagine what could have been in the singer’s mind. What was wrong with old Cairo? Was it too far South to be “up North,” or too far North to be “down South”? In any case, there was the music, brief, plaintive and inconclusive.

Now suppose I had taken this slight, four-bar theme and built upon it a composition of four pages in length and called the piece The Cairo Blues. What would my fine-feathered friends say? Exactly what some of them have said about other blues compositions of mine. “Aw, I heard that there song when I was knee-high to a grasshopper.” And while they would be telling truth, in a remote sense, they would be making a very childish observation. For that two-line snatch could no more form a full-length composition than the letters i-n could spell information. (183)
The letters and other materials in the Handy archive further confirm Handy’s compositional method and general modernist sensibility as a composer and arranger. Unfortunately, a thorough and comprehensive assessment of the holdings of Florence’s Handy Museum is beyond the scope of my present study, but this is important work that I feel ought to be undertaken most urgently.

6. It appears that Handy’s “St. Louis Blues” was mined for a most famous “snatch” itself: The bridge of Handy’s composition betrays a striking resemblance to George Gershwin’s “Summertime.”

7. In Father of the Blues as Edited by Arna Bontemps, the passage reads:

The primitive Southern Negro exaggerated the minor third and seventh tones of the scale. I had noticed this tendency. With them it was universal. Whether in the cotton fields of the delta or on the levee up St. Louis way, it was always the same. Till then, however, I had never heard it used by a more sophisticated Negro or by any white man. I introduced these two notes into my song that night and I think I can say they proved effective. Widely employed now, they are known as “blue notes.” Another first was chalked up when I struck upon the idea of using the seventh in the opening measure of the verse instead of by resolution. This was a distinct departure in composition, but it touched the spot like two fingers of rye. (116)

There is no equivalent passage in Fight It Out, only the pithy explanation, “See the blue notes? — The Blues then were a composite of the snatches, phrases, and idioms illustrated herein” (XII.5).

8. Some blues scholars, however, have also asserted that the blue note is in some ways akin to a countermoderndist affirmation of the individual self: for Rod Gruver, for instance, “organic man, man the irrepressible, wins a major victory in the blue note itself; for the blue note is a symbol of man’s refusal to give up his unpredictable orneryness, his inalienable right to be himself and nobody else’s” (223). This affirmation of the self, though, is won through the fragmentation of the western tonal scale and is therefore yet another manifestation of Afro-modernism’s intrinsic difference from high modernism. It is, once again, Ellison who distills the ramifications of the more strictly musicological aspects: “The blues is an art of ambiguity; an assertion of the irrepressibly human over all circumstance, whether created by others or by one’s own human failings” (Shadow 277).

9. Most obviously, the Faust legend comes to mind. To pick just one example of the legend’s translation from the Old World to the New, the Igor Stravinsky—Charles Ferdinand Ramuz collaboration of 1918, L’histoire du soldat, finds its irreverent southern rock counterpart in the Charlie Daniels Band’s “The Devil Went Down to Georgia.”

10. For more on Esu’s role at the crossroads, see A. Davis (472); Floyd (24–26, 72–76); Gates (Figures 48–49; Signifying 5–42); and Rudinow (134).

11. The lyrics are from the second take of “Cross Road Blues.”

12. Though the Allman Brothers Band is considered to be the “first” southern rock band, period, most if not all of the genre’s criteria actually fit Elvis Presley’s Sun recordings as well as Ike Turner’s “Rocket 88,” the song that birthed rock ‘n’ roll (Palmer, Deep 222, Rock 201). Given my aim of remapping southern (figurative)
territory as well as the Allman Brothers Band’s own rejection of the label, it is more accurate to place the band in a stylistic continuum.

13. The events surrounding the deaths of Allman, Oakley, Lydon, and Williams are recounted in detail in Scott Freeman’s band biography, *Midnight Riders*, and Randy Poe’s biography of Duane Allman, as well as in the memoirs of Joseph Campbell, Chuck Leavell, and Willie Perkins.

14. The only Robert Johnson song the band ever recorded in the studio is 1991’s “Come On in My Kitchen.” Though recorded ‘unplugged,’ the retro-arrangement does not attempt to recreate the original. What does begin as a slow, twangy, archetypal blues eventually becomes an upbeat, jaunty little piece, complete with gospel choir and New Orleans–style second-line rhythms. The only other reference in the ABB catalogue to the myth of Robert Johnson’s crossroads—other than a very early version of “Cross Road Blues” by the Allman Joys—occurs in *Eat a Peach*’s “Melissa,” among the first songs the band recorded after Duane’s fatal accident (though it had been written some years earlier). “Melissa” concerns the compulsive wanderings of a “gypsy” who “flies from coast to coast”:

Crossroads,
Will you ever let him go? Lord, Lord—
Will you hide the dead man’s ghost,
Or will he lie beneath the clay,
Or will his spirit roll away?

The ABB’s eschewing of the Johnson song catalogue prefigures the more recent revisionism of some white blues artists. For example, genre-bending slide guitar virtuoso Hank Shizzoe, a veritable encyclopedia of American blues, refuses to play “Cross Road Blues” because of his aversion to the commodification and distortion of the myth of the crossroads (personal communication, 17 Nov. 2005).

15. Not quite coincidentally, it was Duane Allman who breathed new life into the famous *Layla* sessions. British guitarist Eric Clapton and the studio musicians he had hired (recording under the pseudonym “Derek and the Dominos”) had gotten bogged down in creative aimlessness, so Clapton decided to bring in Allman to restore focus to the proceedings. Though not credited anywhere on the resulting album other than as guitarist, Allman contributed significantly, most notably the famous seven-note introductory riff on “Layla” (*Brent* 74–75; *Freeman, Midnight* 78–84).

16. They also resist the ‘jam band’ label that became so fashionably hip in the 1990s. It’s left once again to Gregg Allman to set the record straight: “We jam, but we’re not a jam band . . . [I]mprovising happens spontaneously. Jamming is not something you set out to do” (qtd. in Perlah). And Allman is correct indeed in that it was the record company MCA that created the brand label “southern rock” in 1974 specifically for that other stalwart combo of the genre, Lynyrd Skynyrd. Though nowhere near as musically adventurous as the ABB, Skynyrd, too, resisted cooptation to a certain degree, as evidenced in their tongue-in-cheek hit song “Workin’ for MCA.” And lead singer Ronnie Van Zant agreed with his colleague: “Southern Rock’s a dead label, a hype thing for the magazines to blow out of proportion” (qtd. in O’Brien and McKaie 4) At the same time, they also displayed much less awareness of the historical exigencies of their own southern ritual grounds when, albeit
at the behest of MCA, they toured in support of their 1974 Second Helping album using the Stars and Bars as stage backdrop. Their smash hit “Sweet Home Alabama,” to this day the unofficial anthem of the South, evinces this self-contradiction that stays unresolved, in turn condemning and praising the state’s segregationist governor George C. Wallace. The Confederate battle flag has remained a staple of Lynyrd Skynyrd shows ever since (O’Brien and McKaie 16–17; Odom and Dorman 98–110). The ABB’s influence on the band had already been explicit on their debut album, where the anthem “Free Bird” was a tribute to the recently departed Duane Allman.

17. McTell is a fascinating figure in his own right. He was born in Thomson, Georgia, probably in 1901, and his wanderings took him all over the South, North, and the Midwest. Containing copious ballads and spirituals as well as blues, McTell’s discography is one typical of the traveling musician who had to cater to the diverse tastes of diverse audiences and is much more varied than Robert Johnson’s. This is perhaps the reason why John Lomax, who ‘re-discovered’ McTell playing in the driveway of an Atlanta rib shack, never issued the 1940 recordings he did with the singer. Like much of his life, McTell’s death is shrouded in legend, too: succumbing to an apparent brain hemorrhage in 1959, he was reportedly seen, Elvis-like, at Curley Weaver’s 1962 funeral, or playing at an Atlanta storefront church in 1972 (Bastin 213–14; D. Kent, liner notes).

18. The band recorded the Willie Dixon-penned classic, Oakley’s only lead vocal, for their Idlewild South album. Characteristically, as they would later do with “Statesboro Blues,” they were not satisfied with simply covering the song: the original riff they grafted onto “Statesboro Blues,” but reversed it for “Hoochie Coochie Man.” In the original hit version for Muddy Waters—as well as in “Statesboro”—the riff is ascending; in the Allmans’ version of the Dixon song, it is descending. Likewise, the Taj Mahal version of “Statesboro Blues” that initially captured Duane is significantly different from the rearrangement that found its way to the top of the ABB bandbook: for one, Mahal’s rendition lacks the riff from “Hoochie-Coochie Man” and deploys a much more pronounced shuffle beat, mostly a result of Mahal’s use of only one drummer.

19. In Fight It Out, the passage appears as follows:

One day, at Tutwiler, while waiting for a train that had been delayed nine hours, I enjoyed a sleep to be awakened by a guitar played by a colored man, and in a manner new to me. He was using a knife pressed on the strings in a way since made popular by Hawaiian musicians, who make use of a steel bar. The chords he struck would waken any one. Question: how many years—or centuries—had a knife antedated the steel bar? Knife or steel bar, in any event, produced unforgetable [sic] tones. The man was singing:

“Goin’ Where the Southern Cross the Dog.”

He would repeat the line three times, accompanying it on his guitar with the wierdest [sic] melody I have ever heard. The tone stayed in my mind.

(VI.3)

Father of the Blues as Edited by Arna Bontemps describes the event thus:
Then one night at Tutwiler as I nodded in the railroad station while wait-
ing for a train that had been delayed nine hours, life suddenly took me by
the shoulder and awakened me with a start.

A lean, loose-jointed Negro had commenced plunking a guitar beside
me while I slept. His clothes were rags; his feet peeped out of his shoes.
His face had on it some of the sadness of the ages. As he played, he
pressed a knife on the strings of the guitar in a manner later popularized
by Hawaiian musicians who used steel bars. The effect was unforgetable
[sic]. His song, too, struck me instantly.

Goin’ where the Southern cross the Dog.

The singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the
guitar with the weirdest melody I had ever heard. The tune stayed in my
mind. (73–74)

20. Personal communication with Kirk West, 5 April 2006.

21. The whipping post was not a regional feature by any means. This particular
kind of corporal punishment had been brought to the New World early on, and virtu-
ally every town in New England had a whipping post. However, in the South the
whip was the master’s preferred tool for enforcing his absolute power over his human
chattel, and so the whipping post became a symbol of the most inhuman cruelty
and injustice of the peculiar institution, as countless slave narratives attest. That
poor whites sometimes ended up tied to the whipping post was considered especially
effective punishment and deterrence in a region where flogging was associated with
the submission of unruly subhumans, the lowest of the low. The whipping post would
remain in use long past emancipation; in fact, southern states did not abolish it until
a few years after the end of Reconstruction (Franklin and Schweninger 42; Stampp
174; Woodward, Origins 94–96).

22. As a genre, southern rock at once resuscitated and revamped traditional
modes of southern masculinity (J. Butler 73–74; M. Butler 43–44; Ownby 371–74). What Paul Wells calls the chivalric pattern of the plantation model “naturalises
hierarchies and the idea of an ‘extended family’ as a benevolent, self-evidently moral
construct. This enables southern rock bands to represent the South without reference
to the key issue of ‘race’” (121). While the ABB was, and is, certainly complicit in
maintaining these southern gender hierarchies, the Allmans’ racially integrated,
extended ‘brotherhood’ renders visible (and audible) the African American pres-
ence, something that sets the band apart from almost all the other acts in the genre.
See also Abernathy (14); Ostendorf (78–79).

23. On the original studio recording on the ABB’s self-titled debut album, Gregg
Allman can be heard shouting off mic during the guitar-screams. And on the Fill-
more tapes, Duane’s announcement, “We got a little number from the first album
we’re going to do for you; Berry [Oakley] starts her off,” is followed a yell of recog-
nition from the back of the hall, “Whipping Post!” which is picked up with joyful
anticipation by someone else closer to the stage, “Whipping Post, yeah!”

24. This kind of rhetorical minstrelsy has also seeped into the lyrics of Gov’t
Mule, an offshoot of the ABB and mainstay on the jam band circuit since the mid-
1990s. Next to innovative covers—ABB-like reinventions really—of Son House or
Memphis Slim and leader Warren Haynes’s tip of the hat to fellow North Carolinian
John Coltrane, the group’s self-titled debut album also contains their theme song, “Mule.” Ostensibly about social class, the chorus of “Mule” slips into discursive minstrelsy and asks

Where’s my mule,  
Where’s my forty acres?  
Where’s my dream,  
Mister Emancipator?

A more recent example of a full-length album of sonic minstrelsy is the 2002 *Me and Mr. Johnson* by Eric Clapton, that most prolific purveyor of the crossroads myth (Lipsitz 121).

25. And herein lies also a crucial difference: black minstrel shows such as Mahara’s committed even more “significant crimes” simply by taking their show on the road. In an era when rituals of racial segregation pervaded every parcel of public space, the mere mobility alone of black minstrel troupes, not just crisscrossing the South, but sometimes venturing north of the Mason-Dixon line, even overseas, enacted recurrent transgressions of boundaries designed to keep Americans of African descent in their place (Guessow 88).

26. Brother Wynton explains in the liner notes to *Black Codes*:

Black codes mean a lot of things. Anything that reduces potential, that pushes your taste down to an obvious, animal level, anything that makes you think less significance is more enjoyable. Anything that keeps you on the surface. The way they depict women in rock videos—black codes. People gobbling up junk food when they can afford something better—black codes. The argument that illiteracy is valid in a technological society—black codes. People who equate ignorance with soulfulness—definitely black codes. The overall quality of every true artist’s work is a rebellion against black codes. (qtd. in Crouch 12–13)

That the ever-combative Stanley Crouch, Wynton’s ideological amanuensis, (mis)quotes Rahsaan Roland Kirk’s “Volunteered Slavery” in his liner notes speaks to yet another irony of the southern ritual ground, considering that it’s this very tune that opens Derek Trucks’s 2006 *Songlines* album (Crouch 7).

27. Coltrane’s most famous recording in waltz time is his classic 1960 rendition of “My Favorite Things,” and the tenorist returned again and again to this time signature. It was originally Jaimoe who spurred the ABB’s interest in modern jazz: “Duane and Berry was very much into rhythm and blues, and I kind of turned them on to a lot of jazz things . . . John Coltrane and Miles Davis were Duane’s favorite jazz people. ‘My Favorite Things,’ by Coltrane, he loved. And that Miles Davis thing, *Kind of Blue.* Duane’s favorite song was ‘All Blues’” (qtd. in Freeman, *Midnight 63*). Both “My Favorite Things” and “All Blues” are in waltz time, and both feature Coltrane. “Dreams,” another early ABB classic, is in fact nothing else than a slightly spiced up “All Blues” with lyrics attached, as Oteil Burbridge likes to point out when he quotes the famous Paul Chambers bass line. Confirmed Duane Allman, “You know, that kind of playing [on *At Fillmore East*] comes from Miles and Coltrane, and particularly *Kind of Blue.* I’ve listened to that album so many times that for the past couple of years, I haven’t hardly listened to anything else” (qtd. in Poe 182).
28. Pioneered by trumpeter Miles Davis, modal jazz requires the improviser to play over a mode or scale rather than over a chord progression. The borderline between chordal and modal improvisation is often somewhat blurry, but generally a modal jazz tune employs only one or two scales, whereas a chordal tune is harmonically much more complex; Davis's *Kind of Blue* and John Coltrane's 1960 “My Favorite Things” are the most influential examples of modal jazz. The shift from bebop’s lightning-quick chord changes to merely one or two scales doesn’t necessarily make the improviser’s task any simpler, for modal jazz requires comparatively much greater melodic inventiveness. At the same time, neither Duane Allman’s nor Dickey Betts’s technical dexterity or their harmonic awareness match that of, say, a Barney Kessel, and so modal jazz offers a more accessible path than bebop (or standards for that matter) for blues-based instrumentalists seeking to exert their improvisational prowess. Almost all of the ABB’s extended improvisations occur on tunes whose solo sections are either two-chord vamps (“High Falls”) or entirely modal (Betts’s homage to Charlie Parker, “Kind of Bird”—even though Bird, of course, never played modal jazz), but the heads are often harmonically and rhythmically advanced, certainly for rock.

29. The godfather of gypsy jazz recorded the tune six times under slightly different titles (Dregni 251; Vernon 166, 208, 214–15, 223, 229, 230–31). That Betts has Reinhardt in mind is evidenced by the fact that he quotes the eighth-note figure from the lullaby’s bridge, which is also the part that Reinhardt borrowed note for note. That is also the same section that occurs in Grieg’s op. 17, “Twenty-five Norwegian Dances and Folk Songs”—and in the third movement of Gustav Mahler’s Symphony no. 1 (Benistad 76–82; Fischer 1–4, 181–90).

30. In this respect, “Mountain Jam” is fairly unusual in that most vehicles for extended improvisation in the ABB handbook utilize a minor scale.

31. The oft-repeated comparisons between Gregg Allman and Jimmy Smith are desperately overhyped; in fact, Allman cites Booker T. Jones of Booker T. and the MGs as his biggest influence (Lynskey 17). Though he knows the music of Smith, King of the B3, very well, Allman is smart enough a musician to realize that he has neither Smith’s fleet fingers nor Smith’s harmonic sophistication; consequently, his solos are rare and always very short. His main task is to furnish the harmonic carpet for the guitarist and the bass player to float over. Also, it may sound as though Led Zeppelin initially forged a similar aesthetic approach as the ABB—their self-titled debut contains several blues covers—but rather than the mining of the southern groove continuum’s (Afro)modernism, Zeppelin emphasized a parodic approach to the blues.

32. Tapings of several live performances allow tracing the evolution of the medley and corroborate that, other than a few signposts along the way, the structure of the extended performance could change virtually from day to day. At an April 11, 1970, performance in Cincinnati, the band was still relatively unknown and touring in support of their first studio album. At that performance, “Mountain Jam” had not yet joined “Whipping Post,” but it lasted for over forty-four minutes and is particularly noteworthy for a funk section halfway through that eventually leads to fleet-fingered country and western, all of it merging into a Chuck Berry homage; also, the Zeppelin quote seems to have originated with Betts, who leads the ensemble here into the descending four-note riff from “Dazed and Confused.” By July, a mere three months later, the medley had already gelled. Two performances of the conjoined “Whipping Post” and “Mountain Jam,” only 48 hours apart, at the
second Atlanta International Pop Festival display the band’s spontaneity: Friday’s “Whipping Post” doesn’t contain a rubato section until the very end, and, instead of the theme, “Mountain Jam” begins with Duane and Betts tossing back and forth a three-note motif the latter played around with in the first song. Gregg discards the Zeppelin quote from “Mountain Jam.” The band’s quick thinking and internal chemistry are on full display when the second half of the medley was interrupted for half an hour due to a severe thunderstorm; when the ABB resumed the set, Duane didn’t even count off, simply started playing a funk lick, and the rest of the band fell in to continue “Whipping Post” where they had left off. On the Sunday version of “Mountain Jam,” “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” makes its first appearance and is taken in tempo, to a shuffle beat to boot, before slowing to a statelier tempo. For a show in Washington, D.C., half a year later, the band played “Whipping Post” on its own again. From the very beginning of Duane’s solo, the overall approach has decidedly shifted to modal (especially in Gregg’s comping), even more so than later at the Fillmore, and there are now two lengthy free rubato sections. (And when Gregg Allman decided to record a stripped-down version of “Whipping Post” for a solo project, his arrangement remains chordal throughout, but he garners it with a “Spanish tinge” courtesy of maracas, timbales, and congas—missing is the sonic minstrelsy of the whip and cry.) By the final concert of the ABB’s 2007 summer tour, “Whipping Post” closed out their performance and stood once again by itself, as it had in the very beginning. “Mountain Jam” did precede it in a truncated version, but it was now the closing bookend of a medley beginning with “In Memory of Elizabeth Reed” with a prolonged percussion-bass jam in between. The way the ABB navigates these frequently changing time signatures within an improvisational whole that bends, stretches, and contracts the underlying rhythmic pulse but never ruptures it abruptly also indicates why its music is modernist and not postmodernist like, say, the dizzying array of musical bric-a-brac of John Zorn’s Naked City (Dombrowski 214–15).

33. Still, quite often—more often than not—American popular music has elevated ‘blackness’ as the emotional, expressive standard for white musicianship, a romanticization that lingers on in the new millennium, as David Grazian’s study Blue Chicago shows. That negrophilia and negrophobia are not mutually exclusive, as Berndt Ostendorf has pointed out, is exemplified by the following exchange between Elvis Presley and his guitarist Scotty Moore in Sam Phillips’s Sun Studios (Ostendorf 81):

PHILLIPS: Fine, fine, man, hell, that’s different! That’s a pop song now, little guy! That’s good!
SCOTTY MOORE: Too much vaseline!
(Elvis laughs, nervously, proudly.)
MOORE: I had it too!
ELVIS: Y’ain’t just-a-woofin’!
MOORE (imitating an eye-rolling black falsetto): Please, please,
please—
ELVIS: What?
MOORE: Damn, nigger! (qtd. in Marcus 192)

34. The ABB was not nearly the first to stipulate racially integrated seating. A similar clause appeared in all of Roland Hayes’s contracts following his 1923 return from a tour of Europe (P. Anderson 90–93).
35. All of Collier’s quotes come from my interview with him, conducted on 14 April 2006, at the Georgia Music Hall of Fame’s Zell Miller Center for Georgia Music Studies. In another bizarre niche of this particular southern ritual ground, Otis Redding’s first recording was for producer Bobby Smith’s Confederate Records Studio, whose offices were housed in Macon’s Robert E. Lee building. Smith’s first two signees were Redding and Redding’s friend Wayne Cochran, “The White James Brown.” Smith quickly realized the former’s star potential and changed his label’s name to Orbit Records in order to get more airplay (G. Brown 16–17; Freeman, Otis! 68–71).

36. Riffing along more contemporary revolutions of the southern groove continuum, historian William Jelani Cobb comes to the exact same conclusion when he adjudges that “[t]he legions of mic-grabbing rhyme-spitters in Germany, Japan, France, and Amsterdam are no more contrary to the black roots of hip hop than Leontyne Price was a threat to the Italian roots of opera” (7). Blues scholar Joel Rudinow locates the standard of authenticity in a performative stance marked not by ethnicity, but by the integrity and understanding with which an idiom is used that, historically, did originate with Americans of African descent (135–36). Extending the African American ritual of call and response, musicologist Samuel Floyd insists that “[t]rue dialogism requires that the composer, the performer, and the listener modulate effectively between black vernacular and European-derived voices in a way that keeps the cultural integrity of both intact and viable in a fused product” (266). It is my argument that, at its very best, the ABB’s music exemplifies such “true dialogism” as it strains to give voice to (Afro-)modernism’s historical conscience. Seconds sociologist Paul Gilroy, “I realise that the most important lesson music still has to teach us is that its inner secrets and ethnic rules can be taught and learned” (Black 109). Thus, as jazz scholar Jeffrey Magee summarizes it, “the phenomenon of Afro-modernism is at once both racially grounded and transcendent of race” (14).

Chapter 5

1. In hip-hop, a similar phenomenon occurs. There, the claim to authenticity is often accompanied by a militant territoriality, a fierce loyalty to the proverbial ‘hood—East Coast, West Coast, the Dirty South, Nellyville, et cetera—framed as the incantatory ritual of ‘keeping it real,’ both a promise and an admonition. In hip-hop as performance, the ritual ground of the ‘hood is usually under siege from a variety of threats: from the police, for example, or rival gangs, or simply just tragically unhip outsiders trying to crash the block party, and so on. At the same time, for hip-hop as business, the music, and all the defensive demarcations of its various ritual grounds that characterize much of it, has long since become a lucrative commodity in the global economy. And so, what Kembrew McLeod observes of black inner-city hip-hop applies equally to the white southern rock of the Drive-By Truckers: “Authenticity claims and their contestations are a part of a highly charged dialogic conversation that struggles to renegotiate what it means to be a participant in a culture threatened with assimilation” (147). And the Dirty South is no enclave in this regard, as Matt Miller points out: “The politically oppositional orientation of the Dirty South—expressive of the reclaiming of former sites and symbols of enslavement and segregation, and the legitimation and celebration of ‘lowdown and
dirty’ working-class African American culture—diminishes as the concept spreads outwards into global markets, and is often eclipsed by superficial notions of edginess afforded by the appropriation of contemporary southern urban blackness” (“Dirty”).

2. Williams, convicted of three of the murders in 1982, has always proclaimed his innocence. Both the work of the Fulton County Task Force and that of the prosecution in Williams’s trial has remained hotly debated over the decades, so much so that a quarter century later, DeKalb County Police Chief Louis Graham, a member of the Task Force at the time of the murders, felt compelled to reopen five of the cases falling under his current jurisdiction. Although that investigation was dropped a year later, alternate theories based on new or withheld evidence and witness statements keep resurfacing, most recently of involvement of the Ku Klux Klan or of a convicted child molester (Scott E3; Scott and Torpy A1; Suggs and Gentry A1; H. Weber). For in-depth accounts of the crimes, investigation, and trial, see Chet Dettlinger and Jeff Prugh’s The List or Bernard Headley’s The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race. The entire case file is accessible on the Web site of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“Atlanta”).

3. The parental admonition here echoes the folk belief that thunder and lightning are signs of God being at work, which demand the respectful response of silence and rest (Lincoln, Race 54–55). The southern-gothic touches of the novel’s opening scene also recall an earlier, very different Atlanta: W. E. B. Du Bois’s poem “Litany of Atlanta,” written in the wake of the bloody 1903 race riot, describes a city in the grips of an apocalyptic cataclysm: “A city lay in travail, God our Lord, and from her loins sprang twin Murder and Black Hate. Red was the midnight, clang, crack and cry of death and fury filled the air and trembled underneath the stars when church spires pointed silently to Thee” (line 11). And seven decades later, Dudley Randall asked,

What desperate nightmare raps me to this land
Lit by a bloody moon, red on the hills,
Red in the valleys? Why am I compelled
To tread again where buried feet have trod,
To shed my tears where blood and tears have flowed?
Compulsion of the blood and of the moon
Transports me. I was molded from this clay,
My blood must ransom all the blood shed here,
My tears redeem the tears. Cripples and monsters
Are here. My flesh must make them whole and hale.
I am the sacrifice. (lines 1–11)

Although “Legacy: My South” does not describe Atlanta directly, it acts nevertheless as a companion poem to “Litany of Atlanta” in terms of its postapocalyptic landscape. Setting these three ritual grounds side by side, this intertextuality thus points to one hallmark of the African American literary canon, namely its cyclical approach to time and history, because the opening scenes of “Magic Words” circumscribe a preapocalyptic landscape.

4. Significantly, the novel recurrently depicts Tasha and her classmates as studying for a vocabulary test, doing spelling homework, or preparing a book report (33, 36, 54, 56, 70, 101, 164, 175, 188, 194). Not quite coincidentally, Rodney fails another spelling test in “The Direction Opposite of Home,” and Octavia’s spelling
book is stolen in “Sweet Pea” (109, 148). The unreliability of any kind of referential reporting also extends to physical acts and images: Tasha, for one, fails to grasp the import of her slightly older cousin Ayana’s body language (61, 64). And all three of the major characters comment on the surreal disconnect between the images they see on the local evening news—usually introduced by WSB Channel 2’s Monica Kaufman, the first black news anchor in Atlanta. To Tasha, the nine photographs of missing children broadcast by Channel 2 “looked like school pictures . . . arranged in three rows like a tic-tac-toe game waiting to be played” (24). And later, when Kaufman reports the discovery of Rodney’s body, Octavia muses, “Kodak commercials say that a picture is worth a thousand words, but the one they showed of Rodney ain’t worth more than three or four. Boy. Black. Dead” (155).

5. Befitting a city that displays a remarkable readiness to discard its past(s), the characters in Jones’s follow-up novel, The Untelling, twentysomethings (and therefore of the same generation as Tasha, Rodney, and Octavia) negotiating the vagaries of love and marriage in the mid-1990s, have no memory of the Atlanta Child Murders—at least they don’t display any awareness of them. Accordingly, the motif of the air freshener recurs, but it is divorced from its association with recent Atlanta history (143). The novel’s narrator only remembers the janitor of her elementary school remarking darkly, “Wasn’t even last year that someone was snatching kids right around here” (95). And while Leaving Atlanta, like Cane, isn’t really a roman à clef, some of its characters resemble the actual victims. Jashante, for example, is a composite character of sorts: fourteen-year-old Edward Hope Smith, the first victim on the Task Force list of twenty-nine, was last seen in the evening of July 20, 1979, at Greenbriar Skating Rink; Lubie Geter, also age fourteen and the eighteenth name on the list, was hawking Zep Gel car deodorizers outside a shopping center in the afternoon of January 3, 1981, when he disappeared. Wayne Williams, though never even vaguely identified in Jones’s novel, was known to have an uncanny ability to impersonate a police officer—he also liked to pose as a music producer and talent scout—and it is just such an impersonator who lures Rodney into his car (“Atlanta”; Headley 35, 81–83, 138–41).

6. For instance, the narrative voice knows that Leon, Rodney’s classmate and an accomplished shoplifter, is lying to the candy store owner (105). The separation of the narrative voice from Rodney’s mind, barely hinted at for most of “The Direction Opposite of Home,” is perhaps most obvious at the very end, where the narrative voice identifies the serial killer only as “the driver” and foregoes any closer description, when Rodney himself remains, as usual, acutely aware and observant of everything else surrounding him at that moment (140).

7. At one point, the narrative voice coldly observes that “Monica Kaufman said that the missing children had been asphyxiated. Your children’s dictionary (which you hate) does not include this important word, so you consulted the real one in the family room. Asphyxiate is to smother, which is almost the same as drowning” (113–14).

8. Jones herself has a different take on the nature of the second-person-singular point of view: drawing on Jim Grimsley’s Winter Birds, she says that “[m]y idea for the second person in Leaving Atlanta is the idea of a guardian angel almost speaking to Rodney” (“(Un-)Telling” 74). Jones’s insistence on the narrative voice as protector rather than stalker fails to explain, however, not only why it cannot protect him from a life already filled with terror and from a grisly, premature death, but why nothing is
ever really explained to Rodney. Either way, Jones's own interpretation of the voice as guardian angel still supports my reading of the disorienting nature of language because the voice, if it is an angelic one, after all still exists only as words.

9. Interestingly, the tangible “Terminus” surviving today—the Zero Mile Marker of the old Western & Atlantic Railroad from which in 1847 the city’s original boundaries were drawn—is located approximately a quarter mile from the W&A’s very first zero mile post. Where exactly that first marker’s location was, no one knows today (Rutheiser 15–17). Once again, the southern ritual ground defies exact geographic circumscription.

10. Emphasizing again the chasm between the sign and its referent, both Tasha and Rodney discover that the school gossip on Octavia—her body odor, her intellectual deficiencies, and so on—is not accurate either (48–49, 89–90).

11. Accordingly, Octavia, prompted by her mentor Ms. Grier, expresses an interest in calligraphy: “I made sure that my penmanship was perfect, so somebody could know me for that” (165).

12. Octavia here remembers what Ms. Grier had told her earlier about her own childhood in an attempt to alleviate the fifth-grader’s fear and anger. Orphaned at an early age, Ms. Grier tells Octavia that she was sent to live with an aunt and uncle. The first night in her new home, she wanted to share the bed with her cousin Twyla, who rebuked her: “Not in here with me,” Twyla said, as though bed sharing was disgusting. I tucked my little head and went to the other twin bed. The pretty spread was butter colored and I was afraid that I might spoil it. I was as lonely that night as I have ever been in my life. But I didn’t cry because I didn’t want to wet the eyelet pillow slip” (235). Ms. Grier’s anecdote here echoes the beginning of Toni Morrison’s “Recitatif,” in which the two main characters, Twyla and Roberta, meet as young girls at an orphanage and “changed beds every night . . . for the whole four months we were there” (1776). Other Morrisonian resonances in Leaving Atlanta include the recurring motif of marigolds—The Bluest Eye, also a story of a harrowing loss of innocence, begins with the observation that, “[q]uiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941”—and the dedication of Jones’s novel, “Twenty-nine and more,” points to the narrative’s radically changed symbolic southern ritual grounds from those of Beloved, dedicated to “Sixty Million and more” (Morrison, Bluest 9).

13. The character of little Tayari in Leaving Atlanta therefore resembles Vladimir Nabokov’s Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov in Pnin much more than the Man in the Macintosh in James Joyce’s Ulysses—if, that is, one subscribes to Nabokov’s own interpretation of the Bloomsday book (Nabokov, Pnin 185–91; Nabokov, Lectures 316–20; Joyce 90–91, 209, 273, 307–8, 348, 395–96, 529, 600). In Ulysses, the appearance of the author in disguise is but one of a myriad of puzzles Joyce proudly proclaimed to have hidden in the novel for generations of English professors to ponder over (Kenner, Ulysses 9). In both Pnin and Leaving Atlanta, neither author’s alter ego is a Joycean “self-involved enigma,” but serves to remind us that the images we form about each other are often less than truthful, and thus these images also have the dangerous potential of portraying the people behind them as less than human (J. Joyce 600; B. Boyd 278–79). Perhaps because both Jones and Nabokov are, ultimately, champions of the human imagination—if in very different ways, to be sure—Pnin’s hero, just like Octavia at the close of “Sweet Pea,” is released at the end into a freedom that can only be imagined, not narrated: “Then [Pnin’s] little sedan boldly swung past the front truck and, free at last, spurted up the shining road, which
one could make out narrowing to a thread of gold in the soft mist where hill after hill made beauty of distance, and where there was simply no saying what miracle might happen” (191). Tayari Jones’s brother, Lumumba, also has a few cameo appearances of his own in Leaving Atlanta.

14. Rodney’s father is also in many ways Jones’s revision of the tragic hero in August Wilson’s play Fences, Troy Maxson, who chastises his younger son, “A man got to take care of his family. You live in my house... sleep you behind on my bedclothes... fill you belly up with my food... cause you my son. You my flesh and blood. Not ’cause I like you! Cause it’s my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you!” (2431). Claude Green imparts to his son that his brother Joe never amounted to anything because his father was already too old to give his youngest son “a good whipping when he needed it”; like Troy Maxson, Joe works as a garbage man for his city’s sanitation department (132).

15. “Red Dog,” the brief skit that precedes “Dirty South,” mimics a drug raid gone bad. It begins with a character named Straight Shooter knocking on the door of a drug house. Immediately following the completion of the transaction, armed police storm the premises and subdue everyone with force. In an obvious distancing of referent from sign, the skit implies that Straight Shooter acts as an informant and is hence shooting anything but straight. The skit’s title refers to a paramilitary antidrug police squad that was notorious, especially in Atlanta’s black community, for its brutality and corruption (M. Miller, “Rap” 183–84). Although the squad has since dissolved, the Red Dogs’ mystique continues to live on among the city’s law enforcement and malefactors (Richard B. Lyle III, personal communication, Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles, Atlanta, Georgia, 20 May 2005).

16. Although the characters are, for the most part, not aware of it, the West End is also the location of The Wren’s Nest, Joel Chandler Harris’s home, a national historic landmark and perennial intimation of Harris’s appropriation of the Uncle Remus stories. Furthermore, the name of the protagonist’s sister, Hermione, Jones says she got not from Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale, but from a novel by H. D. entitled HERmione; there, the child bearing that name is constantly reminded by the mother that her name derives from the great playwright’s work and therefore carries with it certain responsibilities of decorum (T. Jones, “(Un-)Telling” 73, 75). In The Untelling, the mother’s favorite admonition is, “That is not what Dr. King died for” (1).

17. The time frame of the novel coincides with the very public debate surrounding the body of yet another Atlantan, the puzzling yet appropriately named mascot of the 1996 Olympics, the androgynous Whatizit? (Hiskey 14; Rutheiser 1–7).

18. Jones signifies here on Faulkner’s famous pronouncement to his students at the University of Virginia that there was “no such thing really as was because the past is” (Faulkner 84).

Conclusion

1. To be sure, postmodernism is perhaps an even more hotly contested concept than modernism. Fittingly, the term itself eludes definition, or even consistent application. bell hooks, for example, appears to use it as a catchall term that includes the theoretical enterprises of deconstruction and poststructuralism. I use the terms
postmodernist to denote certain aspects of and trends in contemporary literary and mass culture, and poststructuralist or deconstructionist to denote the critical theories that accompany them.

2. The nexus between consumer capitalism and the commodification of culture Huyssen illuminates here brings to mind Robert Stepto’s “tribal’ geography” that supplies “the currency of exchange, as it were, within the realm of communitas” (70, 77). Except that in Stepto’s paradigm, this currency of the vernacular must resist capitalist cooptation. This, then, also brings to mind Benedict Anderson’s contention that “[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6).

3. Madhu Dubey’s critique exposes an apparent self-contradiction in hooks’s take on (black) postmodernism: elsewhere in Yearning, hooks’s “cure for the fragmentation of black communal life in the post-Civil Rights era calls for a retrieval of the very conditions that she earlier admits to be irrevocably lost—the ‘organic unity’ and ‘traditional black folk experience’ of the days of racial segregation” (34). Nevertheless, hooks’s “authority of experience” can remain a valuable concept for a critique of postmodern blackness if we remind ourselves that said experience is far from homogenous (as hooks herself insists repeatedly); nor is said authority always absolute (as the unresolved paradox in Yearning manifests).

4. See, for example, also K. Davis (242–44); Dubey (19–22); Hakutani (viii); Spaulding (1–4); and Werner (20). It is also worth pointing out here that elements of Christian Moraru’s rereading of postmodernism as “memorious discourse” are based on bell hooks and on his readings of African American writers such as Ishmael Reed or Charles Johnson as well as on hip-hop (Memorious 118–24; Postmodern 83–125).

5. Postmodern neominstrelsy has also been satirized in feature-length films such as Robert Townsend’s Hollywood Shuffle or Spike Lee’s Bamboozled and is widespread enough that it has engendered a countermovement: the Internet-based “Stop Coonin Movement” consists of “an underground collective of educators and activists” whose slogan is “Hustlin Consciousness to the Hip Hop Community” (Stop).
**SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

———. *Eat a Peach*. Capricorn/Polygram, n.d.
———. “High Falls.” *Win, Lose or Draw*. Capricorn, n.d.
———. *Idlewild South*. Polygram, n.d.


Dunbar, Paul Laurence. “We Wear the Mask.” Hill et al. 615.


———. Letter to Hank Patterson. 6 Sept. 1950. Unmarked box. File labeled “Correspondence with Mrs. Hubert Patterson, Taylor, TX.” W. C. Handy Birthplace, Museum, and Library, Florence, AL.


Hewitt, Roger. “Black through White: Hoagy Carmichael and the Cultural Repro-


———. “Recitatif.” Hill et al. 1776–86.


Tracy, Steven C. Introduction. Write Me 1–7.


Works Cited

INDEX

Abernathy, Jeff, 122
“Abide With Me” (Spencer/Chalmers), 60
Absalom, Absalom! (Faulkner), 7, 128, 135, 138n6. See also Faulkner, William
Adell, Sandra, 3–4, 6, 10, 52
Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, 32
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Twain), 118
161n1, 150n8, 155n31, 157n36. See also modernism
“All Blues” (M. Davis), 154n27
Allman, Duane, 84–87, 89–91, 96–98, 100, 102–3, 151n13, 151–52nn15–16, 152n18, 153n23, 154–55nn27–28, 156n32. See also Allman Brothers Band
Allman, Gregg, 84–88, 91–93, 95–97, 151–52n16, 153n23, 155–56nn31–32. See also Allman Brothers Band
Allman Brothers Band, 13–14, 84–105, 118, 150–51nn12–13, 151–52n16, 152n18,
153nn22–24, 154–56nn27–32, 156n34, 157n36; Allman Brothers Band at Fillmore East, 88–99, 101, 153n23, 154n27, 156n32; Eat a Peach, 88, 92, 151n14; “Mountain Jam” (Leitch/Allman/Allman/Betts/Oakley/Ojohanson/Trucks), 92, 97–99, 155n30, 155–56n32; “Whipping Post” (G. Allman), 14, 91–98, 102–4, 153n23, 155–56n32

Allman Brothers Band at Fillmore East, 88–99, 101, 153n23, 154n27, 156n32

Allman Joys, 151n14

Alridge, Derrick P., 131

Anderson, Benedict, 162n2

Anderson, Eric Gary, 115

Anderson, Marian, 104

Anderson, Paul Allen, 37

André 3000, 119. See also OutKast

Andrews, William L., 20

Appel, Alfred Jr., 10

Armstrong, Louis, 10

Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians AACM, 104

Auerbach, Erich, 21, 37, 138n5

aura, 5, 32, 44, 46, 49–52, 78, 85, 141–42n4. See also Benjamin, Walter

authenticity, 2–5, 9, 13, 14, 20, 30, 32, 52, 80–83, 88, 103–4, 131, 134, 135, 140n3, 141–41nn3–4, 157n36, 157n1

Beckett, Samuel, 7

Beelzebub, 85

Bell, Alexander Graham, 143n1

Bell, Chichester, 143n1

Bell, William, 122

Benjamin, Walter, 5, 28, 32, 44, 138n5, 141n1, 141–42n4. See also aura

Benston, Kimberly W., 25, 32, 44

Berry, Chuck, 155n32

Betts, Dickey, 85, 87, 91, 93, 96, 97, 98, 101, 155n28–29, 155–56n32. See Also Allman Brothers Band

Big Pooh, 131, 132. See also Little Brother

Bizet, Georges, 79

Black, James M., 60, 61

Black, Les, 101

“Black and Tan Fantasy” (Ellington), 10

Black Boy (Wright), 71, 145n5, 146n12

Black Codes (From the Underground) (Marsalis/Marsalis), 95, 154n26

Blackling, John, 95

blue note, 13, 80–81, 89, 91, 150n7–8. See also blues

“Blueprint for Negro Writing” (Wright), 69


The Blues and the Abstract Truth (Nelson), 75–76

“Body and Soul” (Heyman/Sour/Eyton/Green), 145n8

Bontemps, Arna, 148–50n5, 152–53n19

Boozer and the MGs, 155n31

“Boom Boom” (Hooker), 95

bop. See bebop

Boyd, Eddie, 82, 99–100

Bradford, Perry, 133

Brown, James, 77, 97–98, 102, 157n35

Brown, John, 22

Brown, Luther, 77
Brown, Sterling, 11
Brown, Willie, 147n3
Burbridge, Oteil, 94, 96, 154n27. See also Allman Brothers Band

Caesar, Irving, 69
Cain, John, 50
call and response, 11–12, 33, 35–37, 61, 64, 68, 89, 96, 97, 98, 139n9, 145n7, 157n36
Campbell, Joseph “Red Dog,” 85, 86, 98
Cane (Toomer), 12, 36–56, 57, 62, 79, 107, 110, 121, 141n2–3, 142–43nn5–8, 144n4, 159n5
Carmen (Bizet), 79
Carson, Warren J., 145n8
Carter, Jimmy, 101
Cash, Johnny, 145n6
Chalmers, Thomas, 60
Chambers, Paul, 154n27
Chapman, John Peter. See Memphis Slim
Charles, Ray, 11
Charlie Daniels Band, 106, 150n9
Cheeseborough, Steve, 77
Cher, 85
Chesnutt, Charles, 10
Clapton, Eric, 82, 88, 151n15, 154n24. See also Cream; Derek and the Dominos
Clayton, Buck, 137n1
Cobb, William Jelani, 157n36
Cobbs, Willie, 91
Cochran, Wayne, 102, 157n35
Coleman, Ornette, 87, 96
Coleman, Phonte. See Phonte
Collier, Newton “Newt,” 102–3, 157n35
The Color Purple (Spielberg), 132
Coltrane, John, 87, 95, 96, 99, 154n24, 154–55n28–29
“Come On in My Kitchen” (Johnson), 151n14
country and western, 87, 106, 155n32
Cox, Ida, 133
Cream, 86. See also Clapton, Eric
“Cross Road Blues” (Johnson), 83–84, 86, 147n3, 150n11, 151n14
Crouch, Stanley, 154n26
crunk, 106, 135. See also hip-hop
Curtis, King, 84
Daniels, Charlie, 106, 150n9
“Danse Norvégienne” (Grieg/Reinhardt), 97
Davis, Angela Y., 92
Davis, Ed, 89
Davis, Miles, 87, 154–55nn27–28
“Dazed and Confused” (Page), 97, 155n32
de Man, Paul, 129, 139n3
deconstruction, 129–30, 139n1, 141n7, 161–62n1
Derek and the Dominos, 151n15. See also Clapton, Eric
Derrida, Jacques, 128–29, 135
“The Devil Went Down to Georgia” (Clements/Daniels), 150n9
The Dirty South (Drive-By Truckers), 106–7, 122, 124. See also Drive-By Truckers
dirty South” (Goodie Mob), 119–21, 135, 161n15. See also Goodie Mob
Disturbing Da Peace, 121
Dixon, Willie, 152n18
Dolphy, Eric, 75
“Done Somebody Wrong” (Lewis/James/Levy), 91
Donovan, 92
Doolittle, Hilda. See H.D.
Dowd, Tom, 99
“Down By the Riverside” (trad.), 68
Doyle, Laura, 43, 142–43n6
“Dreams” (G. Allman), 154n27
Drive-By Truckers, 106–7, 122, 124, 157n1; The Dirty South, 106–7, 122, 124
Du Bois, W. E. B., 7–9, 17, 55–56, 60, 125–26, 128, 138n3, 138–39n8, 158n3
Dubey, Madhu, 129, 162n3
duCille, Ann, 2
Dunbar, Paul Laurence, 134–35
Duncan, Bowie, 51
Duvall, John N., 116

Eakin, Paul John, 140n6
Eat a Peach (Allman Brothers Band), 88, 92, 151n14
Edison, Thomas, 60, 61, 66, 143–44n1
Edison Mixed Quartet, 12, 60, 67, 145n7
Eight Men (Wright), 146n11
Eliot, T. S., 9
Ellington, Duke, 10
Ellison, Ralph, 1, 2, 5, 13, 37, 56, 71–72, 92, 100, 103, 116, 118, 124, 135, 138n3, 150n8
Elzhi, 132
“Every Day I Have the Blues” (Chapman), 55

“Fables of Faubus” (Mingus), 1
Faubus, Orville, 1
Faulkner, William, 111, 124, 128, 136n6, 144n2, 161n18
Fauset, Jessie Redmon, 138n2
Favor, J. Martin, 52, 143n8
Feather, Leonard, 75
Five Blind Boys of Alabama, 145n6
Flaubert, Gustave, 35
Floyd, Samuel A. Jr., 157n36
Foley, Barbara, 50–51
folk music, 40, 42, 44, 46, 52–54, 72, 79, 81, 87, 92, 98, 148n5, 155n29
Foucault, Michel, 128
Frank, Waldo, 141n3
Franklin, Aretha, 84, 101, 106
“Free Bird” (Collins/Van Zant), 152n16
free jazz, 87, 96, 104. See also jazz
“Frère Jacques” (trad.), 97, 155n29
Fulton, DoVeanna S., 36, 61
funk, 91, 98, 155–56n32. See also rhythm and blues; soul fusion, 96, 99

Gaines, Ernest, 11
Garrison, William Lloyd, 20–21
Gates, Henry Louis Jr., 2, 3, 20, 38, 137–38n2, 140n5
George, Nelson, 119
Georgia Minstrels, 134
Gershwin, George, 76
Gershwin, Ira, 76
Geter, Lubie, 159n5
Gilroy, Paul, 10, 13, 70, 79, 157n36
Glover, Danny, 145n8
Gone With the Wind (Mitchell), 114
“Gone With What Draft?” (Goodman), 2
“Gone With ‘What’ Wind?” (Basie), 1–2, 6, 137n1
Good Times (Columbia Broadcasting System), 124
Goodie Mob, 14, 119–21, 124, 126, 128, 129, 131, 135; “Dirty South” 119–21, 135, 161n15
Goodman, Benny, 1–2, 137n1
Gordon, Dexter, 97
gospel, 61, 62, 151n14. See also spirituals
Gov’t Mule, 153–54n24
Graham, Louis, 158n2
Grateful Dead, 97
Grazian, David, 81, 156n33
Grieg, Edvard, 97, 155n29
Grimsley, Jim, 159n8
“Growing Pains” (Ludacris), 121–22
Gruver, Rod, 150n8
Gurdjeff, Georges, 39
Gussow, Adam, 92, 93, 133
gypsy jazz. See jazz manouche

Hakutani, Yoshinobu, 10
Hammond, John, 137n1
Harris, Joel Chandler, 161n16
Hawes, Hampton, 145n6
Hayes, Roland, 156n34
See also Allman Brothers Band; Gov't Mule
“Hellhound On My Trail” (Johnson), 76, 85
Henderson, Stephen, 44, 59, 119, 141–42n4
Hendrix, Jimi, 98
Henry, John, 106
H.D., 161n16
Hicks and Sawyer Colored Minstrels, 134
“High Falls” (Betts), 155n28
Hinkel, Florence, 60
L’histoire du soldat (Stravinsky/Ramuz), 150n9
Hollywood Shuffle (Townsend), 162n5
“Hoochie Coochie Man” (Dixon), 89, 152n18
Hood, David, 101, 105. See also Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section
Hood, Patterson, 106. See also Drive-By Truckers
Hooker, John Lee, 95
hooks, bell, 14–15, 33, 130, 132, 134, 161n1, 162nn3–4
“Heart ‘Lanta” (Allman/Allman/Betts/Oakley/Johansen/Trucks), 91
Hour Glass, 84
House, Son, 82, 90, 153n24
“How Bigger Was Born” (Wright), 57
“How Blue Can You Get?” (Feather), 75
Hughes, Langston, 73–74, 148n5
Hurd, Myles Raymond, 73, 76
Hurston, Zora Neale, 2, 10, 11, 127, 138n2, 144n3
Hutchinson, George, 141n3
HuysSEN, Andreas, 130, 162n2
“I Forgot to Be Your Lover” (Bell/Jones), 122
“I Got the Blues” (Maggio), 79
“I’ve Got Rhythm” (Gershwin/Gershwin), 76
“In Memory of Elizabeth Reed” (Betts), 85, 91, 156n32
Internationale (Pottier/De Geyter), 71
Introduction to Blues Fell This Morning (Wright), 72
“Is It True What They Say About Dixie?” (Caesar/Lerner/Marks), 69
Jaimoe, 87, 91, 95, 97–98, 154n27. See also Allman Brothers Band
James, Elmore, 91
James, Skip, 82
jazz, 2, 70, 87, 88, 95, 96, 98, 99, 147n3, 154–55nn28–30, 157n36. See also bebop; free jazz; jazz manouche; modal jazz; swing jazz manouche, 87, 155n29
Jennings, Derek, 132
“Jessica” (Betts), 97
John Mayall's Blues Breakers, 86
Johnson, Charles, 162n4
Johnson, James Weldon, 10, 138n4
Johnson, Johnny Lee. See Jaimoe
Johnson, Robert, 13, 76–78, 80, 83–86, 88, 100, 104, 147n1, 147–48nn3–4, 151n14, 152n17, 154n24
Jones, Booker T., 155n31. See also Booker T. and the MGs
Jones, Leroi. See Baraka, Amiri
Jones, Lumumba, 161n13
Jones, Robert B., 50, 142n5
Jones, Tayari, 14, 107–26, 128, 159–60n8, 160–61nn12–14, 161n16, 161n18; Leaving Atlanta, 14, 107–21, 124, 125–26, 158–60nn3–8, 160–61nn10–14; The Untelling, 14, 122–26, 130, 159n5, 161n16
Joyce, James, 160n13
Joyce, Joyce Ann, 60
Jusdanis, Gregory, 140–41n6

Kaufman, Monica, 159n4, 159n7
Keith, Toby, 77
Kelly, R., 132
Kenner, Hugh, 6, 9, 37, 49, 125, 138n7
Kent, George E., 9, 15, 74
Kentucky Headhunters, 101
Kessel, Barney, 155n28
Keyes, Margaret, 60
Khudjo, 131. See also Goodie Mob
Kibbey, Ann, 139n3
“Kind of Bird” (Betts/Haynes), 155n28
Kind of Blue (M. Davis), 154–55nn27–28
King, B.B., 75
King, Martin Luther Jr., 76, 101, 103, 113
Kirk, Rahsaan Roland, 88, 154n26
Komunyakaa, Yusef, 11
Krims, Adam, 128
Krupa, Gene, 98
Ku Klux Klan, 158n2

Lacan, Jacques, 141n7
Lady Sings the Blues (Furie), 124
“Layla” (Clapton/Gordon), 151n15
Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs (Derek and the Dominos), 151n15
“Leave It There” (Tindley), 60
Leavell, Chuck, 85, 151n13. See also Allman Brothers Band
Leaving Atlanta (Jones), 14, 107–21, 124, 125–26, 158–60nn3–8, 160–61nn10–14
Led Zeppelin, 97, 155–56nn31–32
Lee, Robert E., 157n35
Lee, Spike, 162n5
Lerner, Sammy, 69
Lesskov, Nikolai, 142n4
Lewis, George E., 98, 104
Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (Douglass), 11, 17–34, 139n2
Lifford, Tina, 145n8
Lil Jon, 76, 135
Lincoln, Abraham, 18, 23, 26–27, 140n4
Lincoln, C. Eric, 141–42n4
Little Brother, 15, 131–35; The Minstrel Show, 15, 131–35
Liveright, Horace, 38
Locke, Alain, 8, 38
Lomax, John, 152n17
“Lonely Woman” (Coleman), 96
“Long Black Song” (Wright), 12, 55–58, 73–74, 92, 100, 145nn8–9, 146–47nn12–13
The Long Dream (Wright), 70;
Lott, Eric, 81, 94, 95
A Love Supreme (Coltrane), 99
Ludacris, 76, 121, 131
Lydon, Twiggs, 86, 151n13
Lyle, Richard B. III, 161n15
Lynyrd Skynyrd, 106, 151–52n16
Lyotard, Jean-François, 128

Mackey, Nathaniel, 2, 6, 57, 126, 137n2
Magee, Jeffrey, 157n36
Maggio, Antonio, 79
Mahal, Taj, 89, 152n18
Mahara’s Minstrels, 79, 95, 133, 134, 154n25
Mahler, Gustav, 155n29
“Man, God Ain’t Like That” (Wright), 146n11
“The Man Who Lived Underground” (Wright), 145–46n11
Mansfield, Katherine, 141n2
Marks, Gerald, 69
Marsalis, Branford, 95
Marsalis, Wynton, 95, 154n26
Martin, Bruce K., 95
Mayall, John, 86
McCabe and Young Minstrels, 134
McCole, John, 142n4
McDowell, Deborah E., 139n3
McKay, Nellie Y., 43
McLeod, Kembrew, 157n1
McTell, Blind Willie, 89, 91, 152n17
Me and Mr. Johnson (Clapton), 88, 154n24
“Melissa” (G. Allman), 151n14
Memphis Bleek, 76
“Memphis Blues” (Handy), 80
Memphis Slim, 55, 81, 153n24
Miller, Matt, 157–58n1
Miller, R. Baxter, 32, 48
Mingus, Charles, 1
The Minstrel Show (Little Brother), 15, 131–35

minstrelsy, 14, 15, 70, 79, 81, 93–95, 102, 103, 131–35, 153–54nn24–25, 156n32

Mitchell, Margaret. See Gone With the Wind
Mitchell, W. J. T., 21
modal jazz, 96, 98, 155n28, 156n32 See also jazz
Moore, Scotty, 156n33
Moraru, Christian, 15, 19, 33, 116, 133, 134, 162n4
Morrison, Toni, 2–3, 34, 93, 111, 121, 130, 135, 138n4, 160n12
Morton, Jelly Roll, 91
“Mountain Jam” (Leitch/Allman/Allman/Betts/Oakley/Johanson/Trucks), 92, 97–99, 155n30, 155–56n32
“Mule” (Haynes/Woody/Abts), 154n24
Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, 101, 106
My Bondage and My Freedom (Douglass), 11, 19–25, 28–29, 31
“My Favorite Things” (Rodgers/Hammerstein), 154–55nn28–29
“My Lord, What a Mourning” (trad.), 53, 143n8

Nabokov, Vladimir, 160–61n13
Naipaul, V. S., 127–28
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (Douglas), 11, 19–25, 28–29, 31–32, 140n3
Native Son (Wright), 10, 56–57, 70–71
Neal, Mark Anthony, 120, 135
Nelson, Oliver, 75–76, 103
9th Wonder, 131. See also Little Brother

Oakley, Berry, 85–86, 87, 91, 96, 98, 151n13, 152n18, 153n24, 154n27. See also Allman Brothers Band
Oakley, Linda, 92
O’Connor, Flannery, 85
Ogbar, Jeffrey O. G., 135
Oliver, Paul, 72, 140n6, 146n12
Olney, James, 33
106 & Park (Black Entertainment Television), 148n4
Organized Noize, 119
Ostendorf, Berndt, 90, 94, 156n33
OutKast, 119

Paganini, Niccolò, 26–28, 32, 71, 117
Parker, Charlie, 97, 155n28
Patton, Charley, 147n3
Pavlič, Edward, 6, 10, 13
Paycheck, Johnny, 145n6
Penn, Dan, 101
Perkins, Carl, 106
Petry, Ann, 111
Phillips, Sam, 106, 156n33
Phonte, 131, 132–33, 135. See also Little Brother
Pickett, Wilson, 84, 106
postmodernism, 10, 14–15, 33, 116, 121, 128–35, 141n1, 161–62n1, 162nn3–4
poststructuralism, 3, 15, 130, 138n2, 161–62n1
Potter, Russell A., 13, 128–29
Pound, Ezra, 6, 8, 9, 37
Presley, Elvis, 106, 150n12, 152n17, 156n33
Price, Leontyne, 157n36
Pusser, Buford, 106
Quinones, Marc, 96. See also Allman Brothers Band

Rabbit Foot Minstrels, 133
Raboteau, Albert J., 5
Rainey, Ma, 133
Ramuz, Ferdinand, 150n9
Randall, Alice. See The Wind Done Gone
Randall, Dudley, 158n3
Rankin, William, 141n2
rap. See hip-hop
Ratliff, Frank L. “Rat,” 147n2
Rasula, Jed, 9, 10
Redding, Otis, 84, 87, 101, 102, 154n35
Redman, Joshua, 99
Reed, Ishmael, 97, 162n4
Reinhardt, Django, 87, 97, 155n29
rhythm and blues, 86, 89, 154n27. See also blues; funk; soul
Richards, Keith, 82
ring shout, 35–37, 50, 61, 79
ritual, 3–5, 9, 11–12, 30–31, 35–37, 49, 56–58, 61, 70, 73, 79, 92, 93, 103, 104, 105, 110, 112, 120, 121, 133, 138n2, 139n9, 142n4, 145n5, 146n12, 154n25, 157n1. See also call and response; ring shout
Roach, Max, 98
rock, 82, 84, 85, 87, 88, 91, 98, 103, 105, 106, 150n12, 155n28. See also southern rock
“Rocket 88” (Turner), 150n12
Rollins, Sonny, 95
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 129
Rudinow, Joel, 157n36
Russell, Thomas, 18
Ryan, Judylyn, 6

Sam and Dave, 102
Santana, Carlos, 91
Schubert, Franz, 104
Schuller, Gunther, 80
Scruggs, Charles, 141n3

Second Coming, 85
Shakespeare, William, 161n16
Shizzoe, Hank, 151n14
slave songs, 12, 30–31, 35–37. See also spirituals
Smith, Bessie, 133
Smith, Bobby, 154n35
Smith, Edward Hope, 159n5
Smith, Jimmy, 155n31
Sollors, Werner, 144n3
sorrow songs, 55–56, 68–77, 126. See gospel; slave songs; spirituals
soul, 14, 97, 101, 106, 119, 120, 124. See also funk; rhythm and blues
Sousa, John Philip, 144n2
“The South’s Gonna Do It Again” (Daniels), 106
southern rock, 13, 84, 88, 101, 105–7, 150n9, 150–51n12, 151–52n16, 153n22, 157n1. See also rock
Spaulding, A. Timothy, 33, 130
Spencer, Elizabeth, 60
Spielberg, Steven, 132
spirituals, 12, 35–37, 40, 42, 43–44, 46, 52–57, 59–64, 67–73, 75, 126, 145–46n11, 152n17. See also gospel; slave songs; sorrow songs
Spiro, Phil, 82, 93
“St. Louis Blues” (Handy), 78–79, 148n5, 150n6
Starks, John “Jabo,” 98
“Statesboro Blues” (McTell), 89, 91, 104, 152n18
“Steal Away” (Willis), 70
Stein, Gertrude, 9
Stepto, Michele, 139n3
Stepto, Robert B., 2–6, 10, 20, 29, 130, 138n2–3, 162n2
Stolle, Roger, 147n2
Stone, Albert E., 22
“Stormy Monday” (T. Walker), 91
Strachwitz, Chris, 82
Stravinsky, Igor, 150n9
structuralism, 11, 138n2
Stubblefield, Clyde, 98
Stuckey, Sterling, 36
“Summertime” (Heyward/Gershwin), 150n6
INDEX  |  191

Sundquist, Eric J., 20–21
“Sweet Home Alabama” (King/Ross-ington/Van Zant), 152n16
swing, 70. See also jazz
“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” (Willis), 70

Tainter, Charles Sumner, 143–44n1
tango, 79
“There Is a Mountain” (Donovan), 92
“Third Stone from the Sun” (Hendrix), 98
38 Special, 97
Thomas, Rufus, 101
Tindley, Charles A. Jr., 60
Toomer, Jean, 12, 13, 36–56, 61, 66, 71, 79, 107, 110, 121, 124, 127, 141nn2–3, 142–43nn5–8; Cane, 12, 36–56, 57, 62, 79, 107, 110, 121, 141nn2–3, 142–43nn5–8, 144n4, 159n5
Townsend, Robert, 162n5
Tracy, Steven C., 104
Trucks, Butch, 87, 88, 95, 96, 97–98.
See also Allman Brothers Band
Trucks, Derek, 88, 94, 96, 154n26. See also Allman Brothers Band
Turner, Darwin T., 50, 51
Turner, Ike, 150n12
Turner, Jim, 100
Turner, Mary, 50
Turner, Victor, 4–5, 56, 130
Twain, Mark. See The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Twelve Million Black Voices (Wright), 70, 72, 146–47n12

Uncle Tom’s Children (Wright), 57, 63, 67–70, 144n2
The Untelling (Jones), 14, 122–26, 130, 159n5, 161n16

Van Leer, David, 29, 31
Van Zant, Ronnie, 151n16. See also Lynyrd Skynyrd
VanDemarr, Lee, 141n3
“Volunteered Slavery” (Kirk), 154n26

Wald, Elijah, 83
Walden, Phil, 84, 89, 93, 103
Walker, Alice, 11, 132, 133
Walker, David F., 30
Walker, Margaret, 74
Walker, T-Bone, 83, 91
Wallace, George C., 152n16
Washington, Booker T., 10, 50–51, 65, 117, 132
Washington, George, 26–27
Waterman, Dick, 82
Waters, Muddy, 89, 152n18
“Way Down South Where the Blues Began” (Handy), 79
Wayne, John, 106
“We Shall Overcome” (Tindley), 70
“We’ll Understand It Better By and By” (Tindley), 60
Weaver, Curly, 152n17
Wells, Paul, 153n22
Welty, Eudora, 116
Werner, Craig Hansen, 10, 56, 61, 62, 73, 128, 138n6, 139n9
West, Kirk, 153n20
Westerfield, Hargis, 141n3
Wheatley, Phillis, 124, 135
Wheeler, Frederick, 60
“When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder” (Black); 12, 57, 59–61, 63–64, 66–67, 73, 144nn5–7
“Whipping Post” (G. Allman), 14, 91–98, 102–4, 153n23, 155–56n32
White, Booker “Bukka,” 82
“Will the Circle Be Unbroken” (Habershon/Gabriel), 98, 156n32
Williams, Bert, 135
Williams, Joe, 55
Williams, John S., 50
Williams, Lamar, 86, 151n13
Williams, Wayne, 107, 111, 113, 115, 117, 119, 122, 158n2, 159n5
Williams, William Carlos, 6, 8
Wilson, August, 161n14
The Wind Done Gone (Randall), 2
Woodward, C. Vann, 84, 140n4
Wright, Richard, 10, 12–13, 55–76, 92, 144–45nn4–5, 145nn8–9, 145–47nn11–13;Black Boy, 71, 145n5, 146n12; “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” 69; Eight Men, 146n11; “How Bigger Was Born,” 57; Introduction to Blues Fell This Morning, 72; “Long Black Song,” 12, 55–68, 73–74, 92, 100, 145nn8–9, 146–47nn12–13; The Long Dream, 70; “Man, God Ain’t Like That,” 146n11; “The Man Who Lived Underground,” 145–46n11; Native Son, 10, 56–57, 70–71; Twelve Million Black Voices, 70, 72, 146–47n12; Uncle Tom’s Children, 57, 63, 67–70, 144n2

Yardbirds, 86
Yazarah, 131
“You Don’t Love Me” (Cobbs), 91
Young, Fred, 101
Young, John, 60
Young, Richard, 101

Zorn, John, 156n32