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# Emerging Scholars Roundtable

Curated by the 2014-2016 Executive Council of the  
Emerging Scholars Organization, An Affiliate of the  
Society for the Study of Southern Literature —  
Stephanie Rountree, Zackary Vernon,  
Monica Carol Miller, Matthew Dischinger, and Kelly Vines

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## **Blast South: Manifestos of Southern Vorticism**

Long live the great art vortex that sprung and springs up in this region,  
blowing away all things passe, obliterating all things worn-out, tired,  
dead.

We stand for realities present, not futures sentimental or pasts sacripant.  
The southern vortex is maximum energy, a reminder of change and  
harbinger of changes to come.

We blast first (from impoliteness) the white South. Curse its culture for  
its sins and infections passed on and on and on, dismal albatross set  
round our necks and hearts and minds, forever rotting there.

Blast all parochialism, North and South, East and West.

Blast 1619 to 1865 and the white wake of apartheid to follow.

Blast 1865 to the present. Blast “slavery by another name,” the Jim Crow  
car, and displacements on grand and small scales.

Blast 45.

We bless reconstructions yet to come.

Bless the marchers, boycotters, protesters, and whistleblowers of the  
resistance. Bless Black, Brown, and LGBTQ+ bodies whose histories have  
taught us how to resist.

Bless old and new and renewed centers of urban southern culture: New  
Orleans, Savannah, Austin, Birmingham, Jackson, Memphis, St.

Augustine, Carrboro, Athens, Charleston, Baltimore, Baton Rouge, Tuscaloosa, Lexington, Columbia, Richmond, Mobile, Oxford, Nashville, Asheville, Tallahassee. Bless the avant-garde and celebrate the bohemians.

Bless (and blast) New Southern Studies, that long-overdue revolution, that ambiguous banner under which these newest scholars emerge.

Bless studies of new Souths and new studies of old Souths.

Blast Trans-Atlantic slavery, debt peonage, the chain gang, labor exploitation, racial oppression, and land dispossession.

Bless the origins of American popular music: Negro spirituals, ragtime, Delta Blues, New Orleans Jazz, rock and roll.

Bless soul food and soul music.

Bless country and city and all places holy between.

Bless *Queen Sugar* and *Atlanta*.

Blast the specialist, the professional, debonaire, good country southerner.

Bless southern humor, wild giver of crow's feet.

Bless and blast the southern grotesque, deliciously evil thing that it be.

Bless the tacky, the ugly, the cash-only roadside attractions.

Blast the Southern Agrarians, those phony, pedantic armchair farmers, for romanticizing agriculture while peddling racism, classism, and sexism. Bless the southern agrarians out there working so doggedly to develop new and indeed very old farming techniques to feed the hungry masses without destroying the planet.

Blast food deserts, and bless butter beans.

Bless gardens, and blast guns.

Blast meth, and bless bourbon.

Bless the Renaissance and staying power like a bear.

Blast racial stereotypes, minstrelsy, the plantation school, white southern nostalgia, and willful ignorance.

Blast angelheaded hipsters and all other culture vampires, and bless them for craft cocktails, untold varieties of tacos, and keeping Knoxville scruffy and Austin weird.

Blast domestic terrorism in all its shades of white. Bless Denmark Vesey, revolutionary leader of men both bound and free, and bless Bree Newsome, who, after the Emanuel massacre, fearlessly snatched the Confederate flag from its honorific position on the South Carolina Statehouse grounds.

Blast mosquitoes, both bug and novel.

Bless iconoclasts, battering rams for good: Armand Lanusse; H. L. Mencken; Richard Wright; Zora Neale Hurston; Martin Luther King, Jr.; W. E. B. Du Bois; Medgar Evers; bell hooks; Lillian Smith; Paul Green; Ida B. Wells; Alice Walker; Nell Irvin Painter; Lillian Hellman; Tom Dent; Jerry Ward; Truman Capote; Craig Womack; Marilou Awiakta; Allan Gurganus; Randall Kenan; William Barber, II; Kara Walker.

Bless Booker T. Washington, and blast the “Atlanta Exposition Address.”

Bless Beyoncé for her shirt-sleeve southernness—both playful and defiant.

Bless the past and future of southern Hip Hop: OutKast, Master P., David Banner, Big K.R.I.T., Big Freedia, Lil Wayne & Young Money, Lil Jon, and Ludacris.

Bless all musics that represent hometown souths.

Bless the arts, and blast budget cuts for the humanities.

Blast all fire-breathing reactionaries who stymie progress and impede equality.

Blast the Southern Foodways Alliance for glamorizing southern poverty, and bless it for documenting endangered cultural enclaves.

Bless front porches and hammocks and day drinking.

Blast Walmart for destroying small-town America and only removing the Confederate flag from stores when it was politically and economically opportune.

Blast homophobia. Curse Chick-Fil-A, Kim Davis, Ted Cruz, and Pat Robertson. Bless Southerners on New Ground (SONG), Campus Pride, and the Campaign for Southern Equality.

Bless mountains, and blast mountain-top removal, for loss of life and limb and habitat.

Blast Stone Mountain, Georgia.

Bless USET (United South & Eastern Tribes), Coushatta Powwow, and Red Earth Festival.

Bless mothers, and blast passive aggression.

Blast Lilly Pulitzer for making girls look like the curtains of cheap Miami hotel rooms.

Blast redistricting to rig elections, and blast voter ID laws and all other modern day poll taxes.

Blast gauche Dollywood, and bless beautiful Dolly.

Blast *The Birth of a Nation* for its virulent, KKK-inspiring racism, and bless George Perry Johnson and Noble Johnson for *The Realization* of cinema.

Bless DJ Spooky, Alice Randall, and all those whose work reveals what southern myths obscure.

Blast the genocide and removal that “birthed” this nation, and bless the Nations whose histories and agencies still demand our critical attention.

Blast Andrew Jackson, myths of the vanishing Indian, and Cherokee Princess grandmas.

Blast the cultural, commercial, and academic exploitation of southern folk.

Bless Alana “Honey Boo Boo” Thompson.

Blast *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* for hawking caricatures of the poor South, but bless it for its unapologetic representation of the ugly South with its reversal of schadenfreude.

Blast Grit Lit for fetishizing and commodifying the Rough South, and bless Grit Lit for giving voice to the voiceless.

Bless grits, and blast G.R.I.T.S.

Bless the border between Georgia and Florida. Blast Florida Georgia Line.

Blast homogenization and Dixification, McDonald's and Cracker Barrel.

Bless George Washington Carver and whoever invented the boiled peanut.

Blast targeted mass incarceration, which transforms marginalized people into constant fugitives. Bless VISTA and writers like Joseph Bathanti for bringing poetry to prisons.

Bless country ham, and blast Smithfield, killer of people and pigs.

Blast low minimum wages, and bless low latitudes.

Blast oil drilling in the Gulf, and bless workers as well as the wetlands and birds and fishes.

Blast Big Tobacco, cigarette industries leeching life from soil and South.

Blast fracking and all its short-sighted proponents.

Blast farm subsidies for lining the pockets of Big Ag while fattening the bellies of Americans.

Blast the Heritage Foundation, and bless the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Bless Leah Chase, and blast Paula Deen.

Blast the Tilden-Hayes Compromise, black codes, southern redemption, and Plessy v. Ferguson.

Bless abolition, the Civil Rights Movement, and the long black freedom struggle.

Bless #BlackLivesMatter, and blast #AllLivesMatter.

#SayHerName and bless it.

Blast DAPL, Bayou Bridge, Atlantic Coast, and all pipelines. Bless #MniWiconi, the Indigenous Environmental Network, and Water Protectors everywhere.

Bless beaches, bayous, deltas, and swamps, and blast landscape as destiny.

We whisper in your ear a powerful secret: the South is (and, of course, is not) a provincial region.

*We dont. We dont! We dont hate it! We dont hate it!*

Bless New Southern Sincerity. Bless our hearts.

**Zackary Vernon, Stephanie Rountree, Monica Carol Miller,  
Matthew Dischinger, Kelly Vines, Rain Prud'homme-Cranford,  
Jennie Lightweis-Goff, Jarvis C. McInnis, and Alison Arant**

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### What's Old about the New Southern Studies?

**Jennie Lightweis-Goff**

POSTCOLONIAL THEORISTS ACKNOWLEDGE—RELUCTANTLY AND RUEFULLY—that their object of study died an early death. Its tombstone reads 1978-2000, dates indexing the publications of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* and, later, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (Cooppan 82). Sometimes I worry that we in southern studies might fall into dreaming and wake, like Scrooge, standing over our own tombstones, inscribed 2001-2010 to indicate Dana D. Nelson and Houston A. Baker's call for a new southern studies at the earlier juncture, and Jennifer Rae Greeson's *Our South* at the later. In the temporal between, we have Jon Smith, whose scholarship rests like a supporting beam in the edifice of new southern studies, pointing southernists

toward combination, juxtaposition, hybridity: that is, the South's postmodernity (21). From Nelson and Baker we take our urgency, and from Greeson we take a resistance to boundedness and boundaries that delimit our South. I hesitate to bury us (alive, especially), but wish that the field had learned different lessons from Greeson. After *Our South*, we cast our critical searchlights at the region as a quarantine for pathology, but we have seemingly ignored Greeson's innovative, ancient, and nearly pre-regional archive in favor of syncopating our work to the new: to Southern Renaissance texts of the last century and the culture industry products of the post- and neo-southern present. Must our archive be as new as us?

Herein lies the central paradox of the field. At conferences and in journals, in conversation and in print, we seem split between those who believe the *New* modifies *Southern*, and those who believe that *New* modifies *Studies*. What is the endgame of finding new Souths in Panama and Canada, when so much of the region, defined in the most procedural of terms—cardinal directions—remains alienated and ostracized from the whole? New southern studies has promised, in James L. Peacock's work and elsewhere, to restore the South to the world, but I still await the South in the South. Whither Key West, Laredo, and my beloved New Orleans (recently annexed by the Antilles, if its academic mentions are any indication)?

I am a partisan of the oldest of Souths, the urban core that resides at its physical periphery: Charleston, Savannah, St. Augustine, Baltimore, Mobile, New Orleans, and other twinkling lights along the shore that form the Southern Littoral. Though urbanity is often seen as signifier of the new and the post-, these cities evince a longstanding dissensus within regional boundaries. They are our capitals and destinations. As a distinctly urban southernist, I find the region to be an exquisite repository of cities, places where we other Southrons learned to be Jewish, women, feminists, black, immigrants, queers, punks, radicals, flaneurs, flaneuses: all the identity categories that traditional southernisms elide. Other Southrons did not wait for the neo- and post-Souths of Atlanta and Houston to be born in the twentieth century; they made it around them with the law at their heels. They (and we and I) live in a state of resistance, revision, and, yes, sometimes unwitting capitulation to dominant senses of the South.

If you are thinking to yourself "But those aren't cities; they're too small!" you are likely not alone, but you are also operating under a

narrow sense of what constitutes the metropolis. Look not to size but to scale: calibrated to the human body, these cities provide us a place to walk across in a fit of pleasure or panic (if, for example, Atlanta's "Walking Dead" find themselves thirsty for salt water). When I teach about the people and texts that arose within these boundaries, I find myself turning from southern studies, with its intense contemporaneity, to French theorists and mid-century Greenwich Village denizens like Jane Jacobs to make sense of places "to stroll, to chinwag, to be alive in" (Lefebvre 117).

Perhaps I'm admitting that, like the straw man of Lauren Berlant's *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, I hate (y)our archive (10). I admire so much recent thinking in the field, but like an anxious hostess, I peer out the window and await the New's arrival in the oldest of Souths, for extant southern urbanisms to shake off the smell of Charlotte's barfing exhaust pipes and tarry with me in cities with "doors older than most American trees . . . manhole covers that can be read just like a natural formation" (Codrescu 131). Since this cluster of essays offers the occasion to consider myself emerging—superannuated as I am—I hope readers might permit themselves, too, to consider the old South and make it new.

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### **Southern Confection: Toward a Rubric of *Anteliberalism***

**Stephanie Rountree**

IN THE WAKE OF THE CHARLESTON MASSACRE, SOCIAL MEDIA ERUPTED IN debates over the Confederate battle flag, or as your resident Facebook historian would correct, the Battle Flag of Virginia. The vitriol deliberated the historical "truth" of the flag's "original meaning" (cue a scoffing Barthes), and amidst the battle, one could trace contending ideologies between the diplomatic cause of the War (i.e. slavery) and Confederate soldiers' individual justifications for fighting (e.g. protecting homeland, defense against an imperial North, etcetera ad nauseam). As a feminist scholar who fiercely advocates that second-wave adage "the personal is political," I could not help but understand flag apologists' perspective, despite my vehement contention with their ideology. Notwithstanding the southern states' articles of secession, Jefferson Davis's well-documented rhetoric, the deep archive of Confederate print media,

and all other historical evidence of slavery's fundamental role in prompting secession, those who search through public History to privilege individuals' private history intuitively understand how "the ambitious sweep of politics and history" is often, as Patricia Yaeger teaches us, isolated by "a traditional separation of 'history' from everyday truths" (154).

And the everyday truth for flag apologists, back in June 2015, was that the ideological foundation of their identity was crumbling around them. Even Walmart stopped selling Confederate paraphernalia. *Walmart*. As legislators made history removing Confederate images from honorific sites, a concurrent battle raged in your neighborhood superstore. In fact, when Walmart denied one Louisiana man's request for a Confederate flag cake, he successfully ordered another adorned with the ISIS battle flag (Kim); striking out on social media, Chuck Netzhammer condemned Walmart's efforts to "alienat[e] southern Americans." At first glance, it seems positively absurd for such an intense ideological battle to rage in a Slidell, Louisiana, bakery. But, on second thought, given the profoundly insidious cultural manifestation of US neoliberalism, perhaps Netzhammer took his battle straight to enemy gates, to a site where state control has always surreptitiously exercised sovereignty over its citizens. In a comical portraiture of what Michel Foucault famously termed *biopolitics*, the battle raged over a calorie-laden delight designed for both physiological and capitalist consumption.

In his 1978-79 lecture series, Foucault explores US neoliberalism<sup>1</sup> and its efforts to control the bodily composition of national citizenry; his work offers an instructive rubric for understanding the 2015 Confederate flag debate within the long arc of US (neo)liberal governance. Situating our national shift from liberalism to neoliberalism in the mid-twentieth century, Foucault characterizes this transition as lessened preoccupation with product *consumption* (liberal) to greater emphasis on *production* (neoliberal), centralizing even more severely the producer/body—the citizen. Neoliberalism's evolution contextualizes his theory of biopower whereby the state influences the economic market indirectly by controlling the physical life of its citizens (e.g. FDA regulations, marriage prohibitions, CDC policy). Despite their ostensive claim of promoting

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<sup>1</sup>Foucault's discussion of US neo/liberalism in *The Birth of Biopolitics* spans just a few lectures of the overall series, which spends considerable time tracing the rise of neo/liberalism in England, France, and Germany.

“public good,” these bio-controls insidiously facilitate citizens’ productivity in the labor force. Something about this technique—policing laborers’ bodies toward an imperative of production, coordinating dietary, sexual, and medical practices in bio-manipulation of the labor pool—sounds familiar.

Remember that Confederate economic system? The one that the-stars-and-bars so fiercely defended during the Civil War? The one that rendered humans both literal capital and productive labor? Slavery once again returns us to a foundational logic upon which the United States’ capitalist democracy was built.<sup>2</sup> Racialized slavery collapsed governmental fixation upon (liberal) consumption and (neoliberal) production, as slaves functioned as both capital *and* labor. What, then, is so *neo* about neoliberalism? These biological policies are just contemporary incarnations of centuries-old practices honed by enslavers. Therefore, if enslaver practices offer contemporary scholars with an archetypical prefiguration of biopower, a (neo)liberal technology par excellence, then reconceptualizing American neoliberalism as a current manifestation of *anteliberism* could open new inroads for interrogating the infuriatingly resilient southern myth.

In this light, Netzhammer’s beef with the Walmart bakery proves both astute, as he identifies cultural manifestations of anteliberism, and profoundly ironic, as African Americans have battled the same war against Confederate sympathizers like Chuck for centuries. Here we see how our responsibility as scholars of southern studies is more pertinent than ever. Interrogating the long arc of American anteliberism back through racialized slavery offers constructive modes of resistance against contemporary manifestations of US biopower, those that would render brown, black, poor, gendered, queer, Indigenous, and disabled bodies unprotected within structures that privilege productive citizenship, whiteness, wealth, and heteronormativity. Such an interrogation must, as Jay Watson urges us, “read for the body” to identify physiological control of populations. Likewise, it must, as Michael Bibler teaches us, turn to the nineteenth century and investigate how the slave system

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<sup>2</sup>Scholarship on US racialized slavery continually reminds us—whether as canonical as W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) or as contemporary as Edward E. Baptist’s *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (2014)—the logic of slavery underwrites American economy and polity. We should start with this deep reservoir of scholarship that dismantles the economic structure of slavery in order to dismantle modern-day neoliberal biopower.

rendered “not only the thingification of the object, but the thingification of the subject as well,” consolidating controls over commodity and laborer. Such work can productively collapse distinctions between historical modes of US violence against civilians by using the tools developed in African American, slavery, and southern studies to dismantle neoliberal, indeed anteliberational technologies of power.

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**That “the Land Would One Day Be Free”:  
Reconciling Race and Region in African American and Southern Studies**  
Jarvis C. McInnis

Everyone in my family knows not to question Grandmama when she makes a proclamation, so I ask a related question. Why did she stay in Mississippi in the 1950s if there are so many parts of our state she’s still afraid of traveling to, while hundreds of our relatives left Mississippi for hopes of economic freedom in the Midwest.

“The land, Kie” Grandmama says. “We worked too hard on this land to run. Some of us, we believed the land would one day be free. That’s all I can tell you.”

—Kiese Laymon, “How They Do in Oxford”

IN HER MOST RECENT STUDY, *SOUTHSCAPES: GEOGRAPHIES OF RACE, Region, & Literature*, Thadious Davis rightly critiques African Americans’ exclusion from southern identity. Insisting that race does not eclipse region, she examines “writers of color [who] claim the very space that would negate their humanity and devalue their worth” (19). If, as Davis contends, African Americans have traditionally been marginalized within southern studies as well as constructions of southern identity, then the south has also been pushed to the fringes of African American studies or is mainly engaged in reductionist ways. As a site of the most brutal forms of racial violence and domination, the south often symbolizes deep pain and ambivalence for black people, creating a fissure between race and region in the field. And yet, in *Turning South Again*, Houston A. Baker, Jr., asserts quite provocatively that the south is the locus of black American identity and the genesis of black modernity.<sup>3</sup> Though Baker has been hailed as a chief architect of the new southern studies—a movement that, within the last fifteen years, has done important work to acknowledge and critically engage the south’s rich

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<sup>3</sup>See also Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*.

ethnic diversity—few scholars in African American studies have answered his call to interrogate the paradox of blackness, modernity, and southern identity. To paraphrase Pat Ward Williams, then, I’m wondering, can you be black and claim the south, too?<sup>4</sup>

For many African American studies scholars who do engage the south, it is often figured as a scapegoat for America’s long and dark history of racial capitalist violence, dispossession of property, labor exploitation, or a foil for the (circumscribed) freedoms afforded in the urban north. To be clear, the south is indeed all of these things. But, if the recent outrage against police brutality and the #BlackLivesMatter outcry reverberating across the nation have taught us anything, it is that racism is an American problem, not simply a southern one. After all, Jim Crow—both the pop culture figure responsible for the rise of minstrelsy and the segregation policy that was retooled into a racial caste system after Reconstruction—originated among white northerners.<sup>5</sup> As Malcolm X observed, “Mississippi is anywhere south of the Canadian border” (479).<sup>6</sup> And though his use of Mississippi as metonym for American racism seems to contribute to the problem of scapegoating the south, it actually suggests that the problem of the south—i.e. the inability to integrate and accept formerly enslaved people as liberated, rights-bearing, agential subjects—is indeed the problem of the nation as a whole. As such, he effectively redistributes the anti-black violence

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<sup>4</sup>In “Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock” (1986), photographer Pat Ward Williams reframes a 1937 lynching photograph originally published in *Life* magazine with the question, “Can you be black and look at this?”, among others. For an analysis of this work, see Elizabeth Alexander.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas D. Rice, a native New Yorker often touted as the father of blackface minstrelsy, instigated the popularity of this performance style by caricaturing an enslaved black southerner on stages in the Midwest and the Northeast, making the North the birthplace of American minstrelsy. For more on how racial segregation originated in the urban North, see C. Vann Woodward’s classic study, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*.

<sup>6</sup>Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Dana D. Nelson invoke this observation from Malcolm X to make a similar claim in their introduction to a special issue of *American Literature*, announcing and framing the new southern studies. See Nelson and Baker 231-44.

traditionally associated with “our South” as constitutive of the broader United States.<sup>7</sup>

And yet, the black south provides a rich “problem-space”<sup>8</sup> for interrogating some of the most pertinent trends and questions animating African American and southern studies alike. As Paul Gilroy’s classic study, *The Black Atlantic*, demonstrates (perhaps unwittingly), the black south is integral to the field of black transnationalism and diaspora studies and anticipates the global turn in new southern studies. In my research, for instance, I elucidate how Caribbean intellectuals in the early twentieth century embraced and repurposed Booker T. Washington’s vision of an industrial and agrarian future for African Americans as a strategy for socioeconomic autonomy and self-determination in places such as Jamaica, Cuba, and Haiti. By tracing and examining how Washington and the Tuskegee Institute shaped the literary, political, and aesthetic economies of the US South and the Caribbean, I show how the black south was a part of a larger global and hemispheric south—what I have termed the “global black south”—well before the Southern Agrarians insisted on depicting the region as a closed, bounded space. Moreover, recent attention to the south in black intellectual history seeks to remap the origins of American sociology. While it is well known that the Tuskegee Institute was Robert E. Park’s laboratory for working out many of the theories that gave rise to the Chicago School of Sociology, Aldon Morris’s *The Scholar Denied* contends that, through W. E. B. Du Bois, Atlanta University is the birthplace of modern American sociology, thereby establishing the black south as an active contributor to the genesis of this major academic discipline.

As African American studies seeks to move beyond the accommodation versus resistance binary, the emergent discourse on fugitivity and vitality within conditions of domination and social death also provides a ripe opportunity to re-center the south within the field. From plantation slavery to sharecropping, debt peonage to racial segregation, forms of incarceration have organized black life in the south from its very

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<sup>7</sup>In *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature*, Jennifer Rae Greeson holds that “our South” is “an internal other for the nation, an intrinsic part of the national body that nonetheless is differentiated and held apart from the whole” (1).

<sup>8</sup>In *Conscripts of Modernity*, David Scott defines a “problem-space” as “a context of argument and, therefore, one of *intervention*. . . . an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes . . . hangs. . . . a context of dispute, a context of rival views, a context, if you like, of knowledge and power” (4).

inception (and came to be a feature of black life in the north as well). Thus, as scholars investigate the prison industrial complex and the myriad structural inequalities that persist as the residue of plantation slavery and Jim Crow, the experiences of black southerners are an important object lesson. What are the strategies or practices that black southerners used not only to resist or merely survive structures of domination, but also to give expression and lay claim to their full humanity? Indeed, as Hasan Kwame Jeffries demonstrates, it was black southerners in Lowndes County, Alabama, who inspired the Black Power Movement and the genesis of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California.

Ironically, out of these horrifying conditions also emerged the roots of (black) American popular culture: from ragtime and blues to jazz and rock and roll. What would it mean, then, to envision the south as a space of vitality and futurity for black people? In the early twentieth century, about 90% of African Americans lived in the south (“2010 Regional”). And though the Great Migration significantly shifted black populations to the urban North, what were the futures imagined by those who stayed and/or left and returned? As Julius B. Fleming, Jr. explores in his work, how did the ontologies and epistemologies that emerged from the unique experiences of black southerners give birth to the modern Civil Rights Movement, for instance, the most significant social movement in American History after abolition?

Importantly, the south is not only the site of ancestry or traumatic racial memory, but also a place where new futures are being articulated every day. According to the 2010 census, the twenty-first century is witnessing a reverse migration, where approximately 55% of African Americans now live in the south (“2010 Regional”; “2010 Census”). As such, a handful of scholars are beginning to reexamine the contemporary south as a livable space for black people, irreducible to (though not divorced from) the history and memory of black subjection. In the tradition of Zora Neale Hurston, these scholars insist that the contemporary black south is urban, global, and a dynamic breeding ground for black social life. Riché Richardson, Zandria F. Robinson, and Regina Bradley, for example, are grappling with the dynamism of the urban south in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. Relatedly, the characteristic sounds of southern hip-hop, especially from Atlanta and New Orleans, have left an indelible mark on the music industry, whereby traditionally southern beats can be heard from Chicago to New

York to Los Angeles. Black southern writers such as Natasha Trethewey, Jesmyn Ward, and Kiese Laymon—whose poignant portraits of black life in post-Katrina Mississippi restore the state to the national memory of the storm—are some of the most prominent voices in contemporary (African) American letters. And most recently, the critically-acclaimed television series *Queen Sugar* (a drama grappling with the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow in rural Louisiana) and *Atlanta* (a comedy about Atlanta’s hip hop scene, which won a Golden Globe, among numerous other awards) evince the range of possibilities for representing black southern life in popular culture. These efforts to chronicle the contemporary south are crucial for deconstructing popular (mis)representations of the region as mired in a state of arrested temporality, by embracing its *overlapping* temporalities, where the past and present often commingle and collapse onto each other.

Recent activism contesting sites and symbols of black subjection and dispossession is creating a critical aperture for interrogating the aftermath of slavery, another prominent trend animating the field. Given that the United States has never adequately dealt with its history of enslavement or how its legacy still impacts the lives of black people today, the lessons to be gleaned from “our South” are necessary for moving the country forward. The resurgence of the rebel flag debate after the Charleston massacre; the opening of the Whitney Plantation, “the first and only U.S. museum and memorial to slavery,” in Louisiana in 2014 (Rosenfeld); and college students’ efforts to confront the complicated legacy of slavery and colonialism in American higher education—from Woodrow Wilson at Princeton University (the southern Ivy) to the rebel flag at the University of Mississippi to the question of reparations at Georgetown University—are all fertile ground for reassessing the standoff between race and region, blackness and southernness.

Ultimately, I am calling for a more nuanced, less reductionist engagement with the south in African American studies that maps the geopolitics of race and region anew. Such a reorientation is crucial for understanding the ways in which Ferguson, Baltimore, and New York City are not mere geographical aberrations, but rather inextricably linked to Charleston, Jackson, Sanford, and the white supremacist, anti-black racism that pervades the nation as a whole, from north to south, east to west. Furthermore, the black south has always been modern, urban, and global, and as African American studies continues to engage the broader diaspora, the south should be an important part of

its purview. Regional bias, that is, abandoning the south because it is ostensibly not “radical” enough, only serves to further obscure the terrain of the unfinished project of freedom and equality and to delimit the kinds of futures that are imaginable.

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**From Bayou to Academe: A Story of Alliance Making**  
**Rain Prud’homme-Cranford**

*ÇA FÉ INAVÉ. ANUMPA NAN ANOLI SV’BVNNA.*<sup>9</sup> THIS IS A STORY OF alliance-making.<sup>10</sup> One that travels from warm salt-tinged humid air wetlands, bayous, and Gulf-backwater boonies to the drafty, always too cold, too white halls of academe. No matter someone’s size (I am no young small southern belle),<sup>11</sup> universities seem to loom giant. However, this *ohoyo nia, kréyol femn gra, gordita* takes up space. Yet, even walking through the halls of my alma mater, I somehow managed to feel absent, missing, and silenced. There is a larger underlying reason for this, one that reaches into issues of landbase, Indigeneity,<sup>12</sup> and the practice

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<sup>9</sup>Louisiana Creole and Choctaw phrases signaling kinetic/shared/storytelling narratives. For more on Louisiana Creole language, see Ancelet; Hakner.

<sup>10</sup>Using the term *story* I signify a shared rhetorical relationship between speaker/teller/crafter and listener/audience/learner. In Native rhetorical studies and American Indian studies authors/scholars/storytellers have sought to show there is no dividing line between Indigenous meaning-making systems (i.e. rhetorical structures of conveying knowledge) in modern or traditional art and narrative forms. In other words, stories, poetry, quill and bead work, basketry, and contemporary writing are all as theoretical and didactic as any western form of writing. Part of the uniqueness, however, in Indigenous rhetoric practices (meaning-making/knowledges) is that it is heavily kinetic, relying on active engagement of both the speaker/writer/storyteller and the audience/listener/learner. Hence, I open this manifesto with phrases signaling storytelling, a kinetic rhetorical practice that by its very nature it is reciprocal. See: Roppolo; Henry, Pascual Soler, and Martínez-Falquina; and Powell.

<sup>11</sup>I am truly grateful, at forty, to be included with these brilliant emerging southern scholars—“Bless my heart” may I bloom late yet long!

<sup>12</sup>I use Indigeneity, Indigenous/Indigenous-descended meaning persons connected culturally/socially/ancestrally to people of Native/First-Nations descent—including Federal, State, Status Indians, as well as Métis/Country-Born/Métiz@s/Louisiana Creole/Cajuns/Chican@s/Hawaiian/Pacific-Islanders.

of erasure of Native/Mestiz@<sup>13</sup> bodies within structures of higher education.

I have written the “South is not isolated; it is a global, transracial, transnational” place where “in the words of Carolyn Dunn . . . ‘the landscape does not forget’”(Cranford Gómez 92, 90). While a landscape’s community remembers blood, segregation, genocide, exploitation of Red/Black bodies, and disenfranchisement of women, the poor, and people of color, there is still a desire to distance these experiences from the current narrative of the south. For those of us still living within ongoing narratives of erasure, exploitation, racism, sexism, and revisionist history, it is a relationship that de Certeau would categorize as “the conqueror” writing “the body of the other and trac[ing] there his own history” (xxv). Working at intersections of Indigenous-African-Latinidad diasporas means more than interrogating how history and identity are tied to regionality. It also means learning to negotiate alliances. However, doing the work needed as Indigenous-descended community members within academia on Native land requires questioning—how do we navigate institutions that seek to keep us from being present as intellectual bodies?

Western higher education has a history of compartmentalizing the epistemologies scholars use when working within disciplines, especially Indigeneity.<sup>14</sup> Separating and segregating methods of knowledge, with a particular emphasis on lack of Indigenous community access, input, and traditional knowledges, often means inter-conflict in approaches to narratives of how the world operates (through Indigenous epistemologies and hermeneutics). University and academic disciplines in general have not had a history of reciprocity to Indigenous communities. Removing Indigenous/Mestiz@s from reciprocal relationships to our communities, many universities have histories that have sought to eradicate us from landbase and family, while appropriating our histories, images, and cultural continuities with their academic paracolonial practices. Cultural

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<sup>13</sup>My use of mestiz@/Mestiz@ is part of a growing movement in Latinidad to move towards gender inclusivity and to embrace language markers rooted in Indigeneity via codices (typographic logograms) or Nahuatl (Xican@). My work with logograms is drawn from Damián Baca, who uses and enlists the “typographic logogram ‘@’ . . . primarily for purposes of gender inclusivity” and as a “marker of communal subjectivity among Mestiz@ cultures” (2).

<sup>14</sup>Many universities still lack a Native/Indigenous Studies program and Ethnic Studies programs, rather than being on the rise, are declining.

appropriation is evidenced in the case of Chief Illiniwek (University Illinois Urbana-Champaign mascot) while historicism and western mythmaking reared its head in the recent controversy at Cal-State Sacramento regarding Native American revisionist history. Sadly, appropriation of all things Native continues to be fair game for the sake of non-Indigenous entertainment. Native American “apparel” also known as “Pocahottie and Brave” dress-up parties sparked backlash from Native students at Yale and Dartmouth, while Noah Kelly’s student review at California State Long Beach of their annual 2011 Powwow titled, “POW WOW WOW YIPPEE YO YIPPY YAY” caused outrage across Indian Country. While Indigenous people on and off campuses raised their voices in protest against all these aggressions towards Indigenous peoples and culture, universities, for the most part, continued to have selective hearing. So the question remains—how do Indigenous-descended bodies survive, thrive, and take back something useful to homespaces?

Indigenous scholars must readdress how we prepare not only ourselves but our communities and our non-Indigenous allies entering universities to work competently within Indigenous meaning-making systems (i.e. rhetorics, epistemologies, and hermeneutics) and, importantly, to give back to home communities. Indigenous intellectual traditions are trans-Indigenous and tribally specific. However, like other forms of intellectual discursive acts, they engage in dialogue with ideas outside of their geographic and cultural sphere. These conversations take place in written, oral, artistic, and/or narrative/historic/scientific forms. Traditions from poetry/oratory to basketry/beadwork and cosmology/architecture are exercises in literacies of our cultural competencies and narrative meaning-making systems both inter-tribally and cross-culturally. Likewise, our work within academe should not just benefit the few, but serve a purpose beyond the self—beyond the Indigenous scholar. The reciprocity of Indigenous scholar to Indigenous community logically calls to a similar relationship between academic institutions built on Indigenous land to the peoples who call those lands home.

Luckily, trends in new southern studies focus on border removals, intellectually and geographically. Through dismantling rhetorics of disappearance and borders between disciplines, dominant structures of antiquated notions of “the South” unravel, allowing Indigenous reinscriptive practices for sustainability. The result allows space for Indigenous scholars and our allies to create kinshipped meaning-making

systems based in stories of place/land addressing the “Rhetoric of Disappearance,” wherein it is assumed Indigenous peoples of the south are “more ‘vanished’ than anywhere else” (Hobson 7), thereby blending multi-discipline narratives weaving choruses of Indigenous presence/persistence onto practices of erasure.

Relationships between Indigenous-descended peoples and allies in the academy means we must call upon our history as transitional and transnational culture-brokers—a position marked in our DNA sequence—literally in Native genealogy. This alliance-making reminds me of Choctaw *hakchuma shuka*—the act of smoking the calumet, a tobacco pipe as a spiritual or cultural narrative. As with most Indigenous-meaning-making systems, *hakchuma shuka* works within a set system of rhetorical and hermeneutical structures. This formed a kinetic (active) cultural-rhetorical (interpretation and practice) agreement between the peace delegates/towns/clans and dealings with French or colonials signaling an alliance. *Hakchuma shuka* is a sacred act to seal alliance-making, connecting both sides as the pipe is passed and smoked.

Treaties/alliances/dialogues being “read” in site and recognition of each other’s presence on this land—the act/text acknowledged from both sides to make meaning rhetorically and culturally. In this sense, *hakchuma shuka* reminds us that how we go about making alliances/kinships is as important as histories, and the objects/peoples we create our alliances with are as powerful as the land we create them on.

To those of us working in new southern studies, let us create dialogues/dialectics dismantling borders, old Jim Crow binary separatism, moving towards decolonizing structures of dominance, and working with critical mixed race studies. Let us remember the south is murky as the muddy waters of the Mississippi and to do good works we need good alliances. Therefore, as we seek to navigate academe as both Indigenous and Native allies, our triumphs come in what we do to “disassemble” buildings built on Indigenous land and what we, as Indigenous peoples, take home to usurp notions of our silence. For me, this starts and ends from a Creole-Mvskogean center. It is more than working within Red/Black/Gulf Latinidad diasporas. It is seeking to do work that hopefully impacts my home landbase, issues for Louisiana Creole Indigenous recognition, Louisiana Choctaw-Biloxi and Gulf sustainability, and further un-silences myths of Louisiana and Gulf Coast Indigenous absence in the face of settler-colonial dominance. Therein, lay reciprocity to communities, landbase, acknowledging histories vying for

voice, and in this process I emerge kinshipped to the New (Native) Southern Studies.<sup>15</sup>

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## Popular Culture and Public Scholarship in the South

Kelly Vines

I WAS INITIALLY ATTRACTED TO SOUTHERN STUDIES BECAUSE OF THE FIELD'S emphasis on interdisciplinarity and activism. Not only do southernists come from a wide variety of academic and cultural backgrounds, but we also frequently combine the methodologies of various academic fields in order to understand and offer solutions to social issues both within and outside of the academy. Like many of my emerging peers, I am not satisfied with simply being a rigorous academic but will measure my own success by the impact that my work has on improving the lives of people, both within and outside of the US south. In order to do good work, I believe that we must forge stronger bonds between the world of academia and the communities that we study. We must also expand our analysis to include more popular forms of culture—television shows, films, and comic books—as these are important sites for both reproducing and challenging prevalent conceptions of the south and southern people.

Many southernists have already turned their attention to representations of the south in popular culture.<sup>16</sup> Erich Nunn's manifesto in *PMLA* joins a chorus of southern scholars emphasizing the importance

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<sup>15</sup>I am indebted to the work of Keith Cartwright, Andrew Jolivéte (Louisiana Creole/Atakapa/Choctaw/Opelousas), Geary Hobson (Quapaw/Arkansas Cherokee), Melanie Benson Taylor (Herring-Pond Wampanoag), LeAnne Howe (Oklahoma Choctaw), Phillip Carrol Morgan (Chickasaw/Choctaw), Thadious M. Davis, Michael P. Bibler, and many more, mési, yakoke.

<sup>16</sup>Recent examples include *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* by Tara McPherson (2003); *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* by Riché Richardson (2007); *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* by Karen L. Cox (2011); *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary* edited by Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee (2011); *Comics and the U.S. South* edited by Brannon Costello and Qjana Whitted (2012); and the forthcoming *Small Screen Souths: Region, Identity, and the Cultural Politics of Television* edited by Lisa Hinrichsen, Gina Caison, and Stephanie Rountree.

of devoting critical attention to the south in popular culture. With filmmaker-friendly tax breaks in both Louisiana and Georgia, we have seen a significant uptick in the number of television shows filmed in the south and set in southern states.<sup>17</sup> Television shows are not just filmed in the south; they also frequently feature both southern landscapes and southern cultures as an integral part of their appeal. Personally, Stephen Moyer's southern accent as Bill Compton in *True Blood* will stick with me for far longer than any specific details about the show's plot.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, reality television in particular highlights folk traditions in the south as both anthropologically significant niche cultures and schadenfreude-inspiring spectacles. As we watch television shows engaging with southern topographies and cultures, we must keep in mind that these representations of the south are at least as voraciously consumed by American audiences as many of our most beloved southern literary icons. Additionally, as television shows swell in popularity and increasingly focus on southern identities, we must continue to consider what's at stake in these representational practices. It is impossible to study the ever-evolving concept of southernness, especially contemporary southernness, without devoting serious critical attention to the plethora of souths depicted in film and on television.

As we turn our attention toward popular culture, we must make a conscious effort to extend our scholarship beyond southern texts and engage with southern culture in person by meeting and talking with people outside of academia, including their interpretations in our work, and writing for audiences outside of academia as well. While we might analyze the way reality television presents the south, we might also, as Leigh Anne Duck and Erich Nunn suggest, investigate the impact of current film-making practices on southern communities themselves. In Louisiana, for instance, the film industry enjoys one of the most generous tax incentives in the country, as the state's Motion Picture Investor Tax Credit awards \$180 million to filmmakers annually even as my home

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<sup>17</sup>Television shows include *Treme*, *True Blood*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Walking Dead*, *True Detective*, *House of Payne*, *Nashville*, and *Hart of Dixie*. Reality television series focusing on the south include *Duck Dynasty*, *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, *Party Down South*, *Moonshiners*, *Swamp People*, *Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta*, *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, *Queen Sugar*, and *Atlanta*, to name a few.

<sup>18</sup>Fans have created minutes-long videos compiling all of the instances the character says "Sookie" in his unique (if not completely accurate) southern accent, and Moyer is frequently asked to repeat the name at fan conventions.

institution, Louisiana State University, has faced crippling budget cuts and Louisiana has “ranked near the bottom of quality-of-life metrics measuring poverty, public health, support for education, and so on” (Nunn 188). Critics of the tax credits believe that the program does not create enough economic opportunities for Louisiana citizens to offset its impact on the state’s budget. While we can measure the economic impact of the program using data collected by the state, we might also talk with people in Louisianan communities about how they perceive the presence of the television and film industry in Louisiana.

In addition, we might learn from and collaborate with folklorists and ethnographers to develop projects that explore the interaction between southern texts and the southern folks represented in them. I am currently examining the cultural practices governing alligator hunting in southern Louisiana. The project was inspired by the strong reactions that many of the students in my composition courses (who are mostly native Louisianans) expressed when I asked them about *Swamp People*. In developing this project, I am reaching out to alligator hunters themselves to understand how hunting factors into their own identities, to investigate their perceptions of the show, and to uncover aspects of alligator hunting that are not necessarily depicted on reality television. My goal in this project and future ones like it is to privilege the voices of those outside of academia who embody the southern cultures that are at the heart of our studies.

The 2016 presidential election highlights the necessity for a more thorough engagement with southern communities. In Dana D. Nelson’s recent keynote address at the 2017 conference of the Southern American Studies Association, “We Have Never Been Anti-Exceptionalists,” she asserts that we must engage in conversations first to understand, then—perhaps—to persuade. Through the generous dialogue Nelson advocates, we might develop a better understanding of the social and economic issues important to members of southern communities and develop more robust and egalitarian solutions for communities in crisis. I am also advocating for more academics to pursue public scholarship. By beginning or continuing to engage in public scholarship, I believe we can combat growing anti-intellectual sentiment in the United States.

Working in collaboration with people in southern communities can help us, as cultural critics, understand not only how art represents southern culture, but also how representations of southern culture are understood both at home and in larger global contexts. This kind of

collaborative work also allows us to directly impact the communities about which we are so passionate. As southernists, our training provides us with the tools to deconstruct problematic representations of the south and challenge seemingly monolithic cultural stereotypes. Including voices outside of academia, writing in registers and venues for public consumption, and turning our attention to representations of the south in popular culture allows us to apply our skills to the many pressing social issues facing the south and the nation today.

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### **Plantation, Pulp, Trash: Approaching the Circum-South(s)**

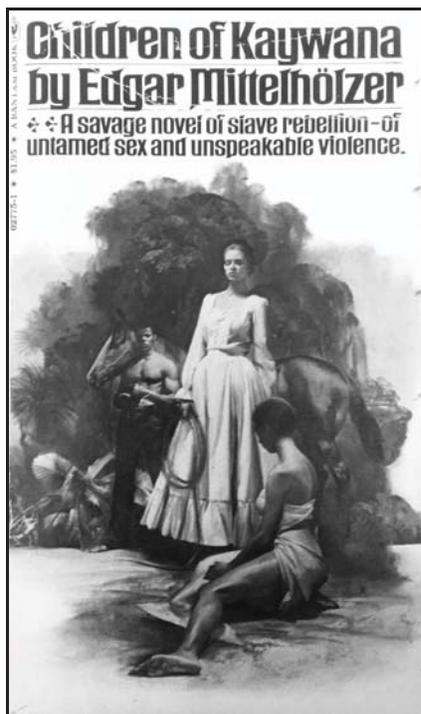
**Amy K. King**

IF PULP NOVEL COVERS ARE MEANT TO LURE READERS BY HINTING AT gender-bending spectacle and suggesting abnormal sexualities within the novels, then the 1976 Bantam Books pulp cover of Edgar Mittelhölzer's *Children of Kaywana* (1952) fits the bill. The cover circulates an image of a white woman that has remained taboo, for western cultural norms dictate that white women should not act with such lusty violence, especially against other women. Although the novel's narrative characterizes this Guyanese plantation mistress in a manner that suggests a break from gender norms in terms of her violence and sexuality, the scene on the pulp cover does not actually occur in the novel. However, this "fact" does not matter in the currency of images that this cover art draws from and contributes to, as the image obviously plays on customers' expectations of "the plantation mistress" as a raced and gendered performance.

That "performances" and "images" circulate (around the Caribbean basin, throughout the Americas, and beyond) is not a new concept worthy of a manifesto. And, neither is the "trashiness" of popularized images new. Many of these pulp series feature narratives that exploit the power relationships on American and Caribbean plantations to create in readers the joint feelings of disgust and desire. The pulp books themselves also literalize trash.<sup>19</sup> Yet, these cheap "throwaway" editions,

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<sup>19</sup>Currently, you can find hundreds of plantation pulp novels (used, worn, water-or-otherwise-stained) for sale for a penny each online.



Cover illustration of the 1976 Bantam paperback edition of Edgar Mittelhölzer's *Children of Kaywana*. Image supplied by author.

mostly published in the 1960s through the 1970s, sold well and continue to sell to collectors or curiosity seekers—if not for the formulaic plots, then for the imagery they circulate on their covers. Plantation pulps thereby embody many of the tropes that scholarship about southern US cultures analyzes, as the various connotations of “trash” resonate throughout contemporary projects.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, these images circulate throughout a space (both cultural and geographical) that is much larger than a region of the US.

Like many of my cultural studies colleagues, I take every text seriously, for the “trashiest” of texts (such as plantation pulp novels) can show us how relationships of power on the plantation convey the intersecting categories of race, class, color, gender, sexuality, and nationality. I consider the violent plantation mistress wherever—and whenever<sup>21</sup>—I find her,

in texts canonical, non-canonical, written, visual, audial, and in translation. As I locate and enter the fruitful—if also difficult—intermedial conversations that have been happening between written

<sup>20</sup>Patricia Yaeger's essay “*Beasts of the Southern Wild* and Dirty Ecology” (2013), for example, has sparked conversations about the implications of considering “trash”—throwaway peoples, plastics, places—“luminous.”

<sup>21</sup>Although I focus on contemporary circum-Caribbean depictions of violent women on plantations, I also consider how these tropes—while transformed in contemporary contexts—draw from antebellum accounts of women who enslaved people or were enslaved.

and visual texts in Caribbean and American settings (broadly defined), my projects inherently avoid conventional cultural, regional, geographical, and national divides.

My work in contemporary hemispheric American studies thus participates in broader conversations about post-colonial, post-imperial global souths, and I use a “circum-Caribbean” framework to connote a focus on hemispheric movements and exchanges of images and performances.<sup>22</sup> My method is to create a constellation of representations held together by their complications of a theme: most recently, intimacy in violence, power, and self-formation. Through focusing on how scenes of violent touch between women use intimacy to complicate power relationships on the plantation, I show how the grotesque violence of New World plantation slavery comes to bear on contemporary images and performances. When women perform “unthinkable” violence, they are coded as monstrous, but when their violence originates on the plantation, the violence connects contemporary power struggles to the legacies of slavery.

This is not the only strand of hemispheric conversations we can participate in, and as we constantly expand our archives and conversations, we should realize that there are no pedestals for hemispheric work. We should find, examine, and fill the gaps in the cross-cultural, cross-temporal, cross-medial conversations created by contemporary hemispheric projects. Instead of arguing for a new-new terminology, or saying that hemispheric projects are a thing that have been done, we should recognize that projects from the 1990s onward have opened spaces for unapologetic discussions that carefully consider the intermediality of images and performances across circum-“southern” spaces. My archive traces images and performances of violent women from their popular forms to narratives that transform the tropes into radical messages about power and agency. I thereby examine how popular imagery (such as “the violent plantation mistress” on pulp novel covers) and subversive performances (where skin-to-skin touch complicates social categories in films, paintings, and novels) exist on a continuum that decenters this hemispheric conversation. At the same time, I always consider how nationality remains an intersectional

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<sup>22</sup>In addition to building on Joseph Roach’s and Paul Gilroy’s frameworks, I also find Jessica Adams’s introduction to her collection, coedited with Michael Bibler and Cécile Accilien, *Just Below South* (2007), to be helpful when I am considering terminology.

category of power and oppression. Hemispheric projects must carefully contemplate local and international historical and social contexts; such considerations create rigorous methodologies and can ultimately energize hemispheric conversations.

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### Looking Ugliness Square in the Face

Monica Carol Miller

SINCE THE 2000 PUBLICATION OF THE LATE PATRICIA YAEGER'S *DIRT AND Desire*, I have been among many scholars who have been ready to take up Yaeger's challenge that we should "dynamite the rails" of the traditional southern literary canon (34). In response to Flannery O'Connor's characterization of writing in the shadow of William Faulkner as being borne down upon by the Dixie Limited, Yaeger, in her germinal study of southern women writers, exhorted us to focus on the wreckage: the damaged, fractured, and excessive bodies which she saw as "omnipresent" in the work of southern women writers (xiii).

To be fair, I enjoyed the rallying cry to explode and smash and tear things up. I've written elsewhere of my identification with characters such as Flannery O'Connor's Mary Grace, whose anger at anti-intellectual busybodies like Ruby Turpin leads her to bean the "old wart hog" with a heavy book. Nevertheless, fifteen years out from Yaeger's big book, I'm beginning to weary of the extremes and excesses, the blown-up tracks, so many shot-out jukeboxes and fractured bodies. Even our arguments are deployed like soldiers.

Yaeger describes her experience writing *Dirt and Desire* as being "mesmerized by a spectacle of regional trauma" (1)—and I am troubled by the potential paralysis of such mesmerism. What are we missing in the shadows of the gargantuan, amidst the wreckage of the tracks? For every grotesque McCullers character like Miss Amelia there's a Mick Kelly, not so much grotesque as she is awkward and unattractive; for every Louvinie in Alice Walker's *Meridian*, with her severed tongue, there's Celie in *The Color Purple*, who's ugly but can work like a man. From Katherine Anne Porter's Cousin Eva, whose weak chin doomed her to a life of spinsterhood and suffragism, to the scrawny and square Esch in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*, twentieth- and twenty-first-century southern women writers have created what I see as a genealogy

of physically ugly female characters in southern literature: differing from the norm just enough to catch and hold the attention of the viewer while simultaneously repulsing her.

At the risk of adding to Yaeger's already robust schema of categories, I propose that we look at the less extreme but equally important category of ugly women in southern literature. Ugliness as a category is important because, unlike more extreme categories such as the grotesque, ugliness is quite everyday. Where the grotesque shocks its audience, the ugly is near enough to normal that it can go almost unnoticed, seeping through boundaries that the grotesque explodes. To date, scholarship addressing the figure of the ugly woman has generally conflated ugliness with other categories, such as the grotesque and the freakish. By differentiating the more quotidian characterization of "ugly" from more extreme descriptors, I argue that ugliness, particularly given its regionally-specific meaning, has a specific function in the work of southern women writers: ugliness marks those who for various reasons are not suitable for the expected roles of marriage and motherhood.

"Don't be ugly!" is a specifically southern expression, a warning that someone is misbehaving or acting inappropriately. The ubiquity of ugly female characters in this fiction calls into question what southern scholar W. J. Cash termed "gyneolatry," the worship of the beautiful white woman upon which so much of southern ideology has been based (86). The purity and protection of middle- and upper-class white women have been evoked when defending not only retrogressive gender roles in the region, but also its history of Jim Crow laws, lynching, and other race-based violence and practices of exclusion. I propose that southern women writers have consistently used the figure of the ugly woman as an act of rebellion against this ideology which insisted upon limited roles for women. Indeed, it's too easy to forget that the first line of *Gone with the Wind* is "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful." What should we make of the fact that even the quintessential southern belle fails to meet ideals of southern beauty? If the south, as many scholars observe, functions as an internal other for the nation, then examining the multiplicity of ugly women in this fiction illuminates the ways in which women defy not only the expectations of southern gyneolatry but also those of the larger American culture, in which the southern woman often acts as a representation of the south in general.

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## The Anthropocene and the Future of Southern Studies

Zackary Vernon

WHETHER WE WANT TO ADMIT IT OR NOT, THE SOUTH, LIKE THE REST OF THE world, has entered the Anthropocene—a new geological epoch in the Earth’s history marked by human-induced changes to the environment. After nearly 12,000 years of the Holocene—a relatively warm and stable period that fostered the explosive growth of human populations—a majority of scientists now agree that the Anthropocene has arrived and with it unprecedented disruptions to global ecosystems, including climate change, carbon and chemical emissions, depletions of the ozone layer, atmospheric aerosol loading, the loss of biodiversity, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, air toxification, and worsening floods and droughts.<sup>23</sup> In such a world, it has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between what is natural and artificial, and thus the perception of nature, as a wild and pristine space, is a thing of the past. The idea of the Anthropocene has and likely will continue having far-ranging cultural, political, and artistic ramifications, as we consider our place in and our responsibilities to this post-natural world.

A survey of recent scholarship in southern studies reveals that relatively few publications in the field have addressed environmental issues. By my estimation, since 2010, the top five journals—*Mississippi Quarterly*, *Southern Cultures*, *Southern Literary Journal*, *Southern Spaces*, and *Southern Quarterly*—have published a total of 556 scholarly articles, roundtable discussions, or substantive non-academic essays. Of these, eighty-three, or 14.9%, address either past or present environmental issues, and most are not firmly grounded in ecocriticism or environmental studies, but rather explore issues like landscape, geography, foodways, or agriculture.<sup>24</sup> The field’s response in the form

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<sup>23</sup>There remains some debate about who first coined the word “Anthropocene.” However, in its current meaning, the word was both theorized and popularized in the early 2000s by scientists such as Eugene F. Stoermer and Paul J. Crutzen. In more recent years, scholars in the environmental humanities have adopted the term, utilizing it in a range of academic contexts.

<sup>24</sup>Without sharing my results, I asked my research assistant, Vito Petruzzelli, to conduct a similar survey. His estimate of environmental criticism in southern studies was even lower than my own. He found that only 11.6% of scholarly output in the field dealt with environmental issues.

of environmentally oriented monographs and collections has been even less robust, with only a handful of books published to date.

In her introduction to the groundbreaking 1996 collection *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Cheryll Glotfelty asserts, “In view of the discrepancy between current events and the preoccupations of the literary profession, the claim that literary scholarship has responded to contemporary pressures becomes difficult to defend” (xvi). Since 1996, many factions of literary studies have engaged more rigorously with environmental issues through the publication of books and articles as well as through conferences and environmental societies. Southern studies, however, remains largely behind the curve.

But what, if anything, makes it imperative that southern studies participate more thoroughly with environmental studies? On one hand, the south would be an ideal fit for environmental study because of its long-held agricultural traditions (although now the region is almost wholly dominated by industrial factory farms); in addition, the south still hosts vast swathes of green spaces, both protected and in need of protection. On the other hand, though, there is nothing unique about the south or southern studies in that every academic field needs to address the interconnections between local and global environmental issues. After all, our lives are inextricably bound to the environment—to the physical world that provides for us the sustenance and shelter and pleasure needed for our species to survive and flourish. The future health of the planet will largely be determined by human choices that are made within the coming years and decades.

Although people have been aware of environmental degradation and the need for widespread conservation efforts since at least the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, our generation is unique in that we know just how dire the consequences of the Anthropocene can and likely will be. Therefore, we bear the brunt of responsibility more than any other humans in the history of our species. Scientists and policy makers should not have to contend with this responsibility alone. All people and certainly all academics should be contributing to possible solutions.

Jedediah Purdy, in his recent Pulitzer-nominated book *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (2015), notes that from the period of colonization onward “there has been a link between how Americans have acted toward the natural world and how they have imagined it” (22). Undoubtedly, the arts have played a major role in shaping the

American environmental imagination, and thus scholarship in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities is more important than ever. As southernists, we might consider what Ellen Glasgow has to say about (pre)industrial agriculture, or William Faulkner about the ecological sublime, or Randall Kenan about local foodways, or Ron Rash about sustainable eco-tourism. Academics studying the intersections between the environment and literature, film, visual arts, philosophy, and politics have a vital role to play in determining how present and future societies the world over will respond to the impending pressures of the Anthropocene.

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### **Parsing the Pleasures of Southern Music Studies**

**Alison Arant**

CRITICS IN SOUTHERN STUDIES HAVE SPILLED MUCH INK ON THE SUBJECT OF authenticity, and the discourse on southern music is no exception. On the one hand, I love what I have learned from scholars who expose the persistent, hearty, and often problematic desire for something that sounds genuine. This kind of research reveals how fantasies of authenticity underlie many key moments in the history of music associated with the US south, from W. C. Handy's account of first hearing the blues in 1903 in Tutwiler, Mississippi, to Johnny Cash's 2002 cover of "Hurt" by Nine Inch Nails.<sup>25</sup> With undeniable merit, these analyses show how musical modes can become signifiers of race or region or real experience, which reveal some of our deepest fears and desires regarding the self and the other. Since the notion of a pure musical form, free from influence or artifice, is as suspect as claims to racial purity, rigorous critics should expose myths like these.

On the other hand, it is time to diversify our key terms. Though authenticity remains relevant to discussions of music with a southern label—see, for example, the cover art of Scarface's 2015 southern hip-hop release *Deeply Rooted*—I'm not satisfied with criticism that supposes the fantasy work of southern music entirely accounts for its appeal. In our scholarship, it has become a commonplace to argue that

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<sup>25</sup> Regarding W. C. Handy, see Marybeth Hamilton's *In Search of the Blues*. Regarding Johnny Cash, see Jon Smith's *Finding Purple America*.

music trading on authenticity attracts its audience by offering an imaginary reprieve from the problems associated with modernity and everything after. Within this framework, musical phenomena—take the resurgence of the old-timey, for instance—become a compensatory fantasy in response to perceived loss. But just as soon as someone shoots the jukebox in the name of disrupting misguided pleasure, somebody else hauls out Alan Lomax's 1930s-era Presto disk recorder and sets it up in the parks of Brooklyn, capturing the sounds of old-time ballads and faint city buses in the grooves of acetate records (*The 78 Project*).

I grant the necessity of criticism that exposes the fantasies at play in plenty of music called southern. At the same time, however, the pleasures of music are manifold, and as scholars of it, our points of critical consideration should be too. Does dispelling the myth necessitate disposing of the song? Could we do more to distinguish between the problems of southern music and its pleasures, blasting the one while blessing the other?

I think we could, and I suggest that paying attention to other forms of pleasure might help critics like us hear more in the songs on the jukebox. Toward that end, I propose critical treatments of the kinds of fun that come with participation and subversion, and I'll offer two brief examples.

To consider the possibilities of communal pleasure, let's start with the contemporary taste for vintage music and the new old-timey groups who make it. Though the sound is often dismissed as a nostalgic response to our increasingly wired existence, that critique doesn't fully explain its appeal. In the twenty-first century, why make music on a banjo and not on a multiple sequencer, DJ mixer, and electronic effects unit? It could be pretense, or it could be that the latter are harder to take to a park or pass around the porch on a summer night. Escape fantasies aside, making music in the old vein is relatively cheap, self-contained, and user-friendly, considerations which go a long way toward explaining its historic flourishing both in the US south and beyond. Without idealizing or fetishizing the folk, there is much to be said for the democracy of the tools and the singability of the melodies.

Another source of pleasure might come from finding subversion in surprising places. Take the minstrel archive, locus of some of the country's catchiest music and most destructive race fantasies. While musicians have often responded to the genre's history of problematic pleasure by taking its music out of rotation, critics have examined its ideology by primarily considering it in relation to whiteness. Both responses make sense, and yet

the recent work of musician and writer Dom Flemons suggests we should examine the subversive strains of minstrel music from black performers like Gus Cannon (1883-1979). We might also explore the ways in which contemporary black string bands like the Carolina Chocolate Drops or the Ebony Hillbillies recuperate some components of the minstrel tradition while decrying its historic fantasies.

Moving beyond debates about authenticity does not mean we should unproblematically enjoy problematic music. Rather it is precisely because music works on multiple levels that our scholarship must as well. Considering its communal and subversive aspects might help us hear more besides the same old song.

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### **After Southern Critique**

**Matthew Dischinger**

AT THE START, I WILL JOIN THE CHORUS OF MANIFESTO-ERS IN SAYING THAT I'm not here to burn down any barns. One thing I love about our collective nod to the Vorticists is that the once avant-garde venom of their form, repostured here, feels anachronistic. The modernist manifesto reveled in its anger, performing zealous rage that left its victims trembling. This manifesto may lack the radical conviction of an attack or the converted belief of a defense. It is an attempt to redescribe the aims of southern critique, yet once more, in the hopes of offering another path for some of our critical energies.

I am here to talk about texts. Not just novels, of course: poems, stories, essays, plays, films, television shows, and emerging media forms. I am struck by the chasm that exists between the ways we talk about southern texts in the classroom, where we encourage students to explore their affinities with texts, and the way we talk about the very same texts in academic discourse, where we have been trained to mistrust all readerly attachments. As the market for faculty jobs continues to constrict and the expectations for those occupying faculty jobs continue to grow, I want to take a step back and ask what we talk about when we talk about critique. What might we talk about more?

Like many before me, I decided to pursue a doctorate in English because I was attracted to the political energy of what I only later heard described as a "hermeneutics of suspicion." The phrase I first heard when

reading Paul Ricoeur quickly revealed itself to be *de rigueur*. I became enamored with the revolutionary feeling of suspicion—of turning a text on its head through the clever, complex, top-down application of a theory. Much of my own work, if I’m being fair, has (dare I say unconsciously) operated on the assumption that novels embed hidden meanings beneath their superficial forms and functions, and that an expert critic can uncover these simultaneously totalizing and destabilizing structures. In her germinal rethinking of these critical methodologies, *The Limits of Critique* (2015), Rita Felski wonders about alternatives to the “militant reading” that typifies the hermeneutics of suspicion (1). Felski’s argument is at least structurally consonant with Jon Smith’s in *Finding Purple America* (2013), where Smith aligns critical attachments to subversion to a thing “we take pleasure in continually circling without ever achieving” (3). For Smith and Felski alike, the affect of true subversion produced and reciprocated through critique is often inseparable from the way it uncovers, destabilizes, or denaturalizes.

What are we missing in our efforts to suspiciously demystify and destroy? How do we account for readerly attachments to texts—particularly southern texts in an era in which southern lacks a clear referent? When Lauren Berlant claimed that “All attachment is optimistic,” she was not suggesting that what critique ultimately lacks is positivity (1). If optimism rings a bit naive in our ears, I want to instead feel the full force of Berlant’s claim, which seems to me to be that we are attracted to texts because of what they help us reimagine and reinvision rather than merely what they interrogate. What I am arguing for is a more flexible version of our critical work that might wonder without quite as much cynicism, why we readers—both scholarly and not—continually turn to southern texts.

If the only way we can think about readerly attachments is through suspicion, then we cannot make room for texts to deliver new ideas to us. That is, suspicious critique demands not that we turn to texts for ideas, but that we bring our already instantiated ideas to the text for confirmation. Suspicious critique consigns the text to be continually illuminated rather than allowing it to illuminate. The arena of suspicious critique is one of reactions to reactions, which seems a far cry from the way we experience texts either on our own or with students. Repairing to the private spaces of reading might help us theorize reparative reading practices, what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick longs for when pointing toward

“the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture” (150-51).

Let me be clear that my intent here is not to advocate moving away from political readings of texts or, alternatively, to advocate a new totalizing methodology. Rather, I am suggesting a return to texts that might provide something of a counterbalance to the hermeneutics of suspicion. Attending to the reasons reading publics variously affiliate with texts does not sacrifice the political urgency of fiction, for example, but instead it allows the road between readers and text to move in both directions. As debates rage about the newness of southern studies, perhaps we might wonder about alternatives to the common practices across the field. We know all too well where suspicious critique leads, but I am wondering if it alone can take us where we hope the field, and the south, will go. What comes after southern critique?

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