INTRODUCTION

The “Unprecedented” Internal U.S. Migrations of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

THE TRAIL OF TEARS (1838–39) is a name used to describe the mass removal of the Cherokee from their ancestral homelands in the eastern United States to Indian Territory in the yet-to-be-established state of Oklahoma. It functions in the popular imagination and in some academic texts as the archetypal example of an internal displacement. While the Removal’s forced nature is widely understood, its description as internal is problematic. The Cherokee were removed not from the United States but from sovereign territory within the larger borders of the United States in a forced march that crossed national borders. Yet many textbooks on migration still refer to the Trail of Tears as an “internal migration,” which they define as “the movement of people within a specific nation.” I highlight this discrepancy in order to call attention to the ways in which seemingly fixed terms, particularly “internal migrant,” “refugee,” and “citizen,” develop in relation to governmental practices and manipulations. In this respect, the Trail of Tears anticipates subsequent U.S. internal migrations (without being defined by them) by showing how governmental institutions employ uncertainty regarding moving peoples to promote particular notions of landownership and “American-ness” that would later continue to create a precarious citizenship for racial minorities, women, and the lower classes.

1. Henderson and Olasiji, Migrants, Immigrants, and Slaves, 2, italics added. See also Bailey, Immigration and Migration, 6.
One reason why the Trail of Tears is misunderstood is because of the hege-emonic notion of an always already existing United States, a concept produced by the ideology that would become Manifest Destiny, in shaping a particular image of the continent marked by national borders. This hegemonic ideology had direct effects on the Cherokee, since the removal impacted those moved not just because they were taken from their homes and sovereign space but also because of the specific way the Nation was moved—under very harsh conditions that disregarded their humanity. The U.S. army rounded up Cherokee in surprise raids and held them in containment camps that were simple, fenced areas. This approach, often separating family members from each other, meant that many just had the clothes they were wearing, as well as little access to sanitation. Dysentery and other diseases flourished. They then traveled approximately 1,200 miles on foot and by boat; many traveled during the winter with limited food rations. The result was the death of approximately 4,000 of 15,000 Cherokee along the path.  

My point is to emphasize not simply that the Trail of Tears was a forced migration, but that its method and logic were intended to assert the dominance of the United States over the Cherokee nation as a people and a place. While it is of course important to recognize the agency of individuals in such instances—the Cherokee resisted and attempted renewal throughout this process—it is equally crucial to see the forces and models that propelled the Removal in the first place and continued to determine subsequent U.S. governmental actions, which promulgated the notion of American exceptionalism and deemed that the United States was worthy of whatever land it wished without regard for those already on it.

In this way, the Trail of Tears is a precursor to the examples that follow in this book. It is a part of an under-examined history of enforced movements that require further theorization because the Cherokee nation, itself a sovereign state but treated as a dependent people by the United States when it was convenient, was, during the march, ambiguously poised between two categories that would only be codified legally by the United Nations (UN) in the twentieth century: refugees and internally displaced persons. A variety of court cases during this time debated the “relationship between the right and obligations of individuals (citizens) and the rights and obligations of nations (states)” in regard to Indigenous peoples and whether they should be treated as part of the United States or separate from it. These rulings reveal that the

2. Sturgis, _The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal_, 58, 60.
3. Ibid., 65.
interweaving of land, identity, and power have a long-standing tradition in the United States.5

Contemporary discussions of migration continue to negotiate the categories of internally displaced person and refugee along with their affiliated concepts. The term “refugee” positions a migrant as an individual who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”6 This definition from Article 1 of the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951 is internationally recognized, granting codified legal protections for refugees.7 The idea of the refugee is connected intimately to the role of the nation in migration, where individuals leave one citizenship-based space to travel to another space with the goal of eventually being accepted as citizens in this new territory. As human geographer Tim Cresswell states,

[The refugee] is founded on the organization of the nation-state at the turn of the [twentieth] century in Europe. The drawing and policing of national borders, the firming up of state sovereignty and the construction of national identities were all necessary conditions for the production of the refugee as a person “out of place.” The place they were out of was the nation and that was itself a relatively recent phenomenon.8

5. The Cherokee argued that they should be seen as maintaining their own sovereignty and that the existence of treaties with the United States was proof of their status as an independent state, while the United States sought to show that the Cherokee should not be treated with the legal power of international law by denying that they had been recognized as a political entity among “the general society of nations” (Johnson v. M’Intosh [1823]). Instead they claimed that “Indians had no right of soil as sovereign, independent states” (Johnson v. M’Intosh [1823]) because Marshall’s Doctrine of Discovery states that “the appropriation of the lands for agriculture [. . .] secured the rights of the discovering nation to claim full sovereignty within the lands and against all other claims” (Barker, “For Whom Sovereignty Matters,” 7–8). This view created a tendentious definition of how ownership rights worked so that European invaders could secure land rights while also ignoring the agricultural history of the Cherokee (12). See Barker, “For Whom Sovereignty Matters” for more on the court battles over sovereignty.


7. Historically the document’s scope was limited to events preceding 1951 and could be interpreted to relate only to exiles in Europe, since it was created to solve the itinerant problem after World War II. However, in 1967, the United Nations General Assembly Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees removed restrictions based on time and geography so that the language still holds to today. See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, introductory note, 2.

Until the refugee gains protection from the new state, this “out of place-ness” exposes the refugee to suffering and violence because he or she has no legal rights of citizenship.

Still, to understand migration via the refugee’s temporary in-betweenness with an expected resolution is already to accept a false binary, since many migrants actually move within their home country and therefore never technically lose their citizenship rights. Additionally, as Patricia Truitt has argued, by categorizing the refugee as necessarily crossing national boundaries, many who are affected but remain within the nation are vastly overlooked by international protection because of this “exilic bias.” In the United States, such internal displacement shapes the modern experience to a far greater extent than typically is understood. The disempowered status of a refugee needs to be seen as having potential commonalities with the disempowerment of the majority of migrants who travel internally within a country. Such migrants fall within the category of internally displaced persons (IDPs)—individuals forced into migration but still presumably protected by their nation state. The United Nations specifically labels them as individuals and groups who have been forced or obligated to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

It is important to note that there are legal protections granted to refugees that are not internationally guaranteed for the internally displaced, since the “responsibility for the protection of IDPs rests first and foremost with national governments and local authorities.” These internal displacements are acknowledged as one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time, but since the legal protections of the internally displaced do not exist internationally in the same way as they do for refugees, the question remains, what hap-

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9. Truitt, False Images, 11. As the number of refugees continues to increase, a “source control bias” has begun that looks at the country of origin to try to solve the problems within that nation so that people do not need to flee (Aleinikoff, “State-Centered Refugee Law,” 263). This approach that could help many who are unable to cross borders has generally turned into an ideal of containment, since, as T. Alexander Aleinikoff has stated, “refugee law has become immigration law, emphasizing protection of borders rather than protection of persons” (“State-Centered Refugee Law,” 265).


11. Vieira de Mello, foreword.
pens when national and local authorities do not appropriately protect those who are displaced and are perhaps even part of the displacement problem? How do we see that rights of citizenship are often bound up in issues of law, property, and race that undermine the expected protections from the United States and the ideals of American exceptionalism it espouses?

By investigating such displacements at the national level across the twentieth century, this book works to fill in the gap left between international and national law by studying patterns of mass movements that are downplayed because a national boundary is not crossed. A fundamental question that any study of migration and citizenship must address is when and how to apply the term “refugee” as opposed to “internally displaced person.” Scholarly views on this question are divided because there are political benefits and shortcomings on either side. Some current discussions of the treatment of many people of color in the United States are attempting to address this gap by eliding the distinction between external refugee and internal migrant in order to show commonalities and thus achieve greater protections. Immigration lawyer and professor Raha Jorjani, for instance, has stated that many African Americans “would be able to demonstrate that they had more than a well-founded fear of persecution at the hands of their government” because of how they are treated by police, in prison, and generally by their own country, which would give them “a strong claim for asylum protection under U.S. law.”12 In her personal experience, writer Edwidge Danticat found that she was treated as someone “in transit,” as an unwanted refugee, not because she was an immigrant to the United States from Haiti but because she was black.13 In Danticat’s words, “Ultimately we realize the precarious nature of citizenship here: that we too are prey, and that those who have been in this country from generations—walking, living, loving in the same skin we’re in—they too can suddenly become refugees.”14 Both of these invocations approach but do not fully claim the term “refugee” for U.S. citizens; instead, they state that it is a position that might be caused via a rejection by one’s own country. Such caution is necessary because claiming the status of refugee due to a failure in state support can paradoxically perpetuate that very failure. At the same time, maintaining a strict legal distinction between refugee and internally displaced person can obscure the ways in which various citizens have felt their sense of safety and protections to be compromised without hope for acknowledgment or redress. In addition, we must consider how natural disasters or other moments marked as “excep-

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ational,” which are followed by states of emergency, affect the legal protections that are supposed to be guaranteed to citizens during migration.

Whereas the refugee is seen by definition as a problem of external migration, of movement from one nation to another that would alter that person’s citizenship, the internal migrant theoretically should not face challenges to his or her citizenship when moving, though in fact such often occurs. A primary example of this problematic relationship was the displacement caused by Hurricane Katrina, which made landfall in southeastern Louisiana on August 29, 2005. The storm caused destruction throughout the Gulf Coast region, with an official death toll of 1,833 people, but even the authority behind this number, the National Hurricane Center, acknowledges, “the true number will probably not ever be known.”15 New Orleans, a city with a majority black population and often overlooked minority populations such as Vietnamese Americans and Latino/as, bore the brunt of the devastation after portions of its levees burst, submerging 80 percent of the city and causing the evacuation and displacement of over one million people.16 Since that time, criticism has begun to reveal issues such as the systemic racism and classism toward and within the city both during and prior to the storm in thoughtful and provocative ways.17 Displaced people themselves even asked if the degree of flooding of their properties in the Lower Ninth Ward was exacerbated by this lack of concern stemming from historical racial problems.18 Gender factors are also beginning to be highlighted, such as in sociologist Jacqueline Litt’s study that details how New Orleans women, living in a city where their levels of unemployment and poverty far exceed the national average, used community networks to get away from the storm and survive in its aftermath.19 These are the stories about identity and movement that need to be better understood for the future because, although the city and the region as a whole have been affected across racial lines, the region has lost hundreds of thousands of residents within the African American population, and women with children are the slowest to

16. Ibid. and Hori, Schafer, and Bowman, “Displacement Dynamics.” Importantly, though, there was at least one significantly sized group that had been doubly displaced—the ethnically Vietnamese community in Village de L’Est who had been refugees at the end of the Vietnam War and who were now IDPs because of the storm. See Marguerite Nguyen, “Vietnamese American New Orleans” for more discussion on this community and the fact that many of them took both journeys together (117).
17. See, for example, Dyson, Come Hell or High Water or Bergal et al., City Adrift.
19. Litt, “‘We need to get together with each other.’” Also for data see Willinger, Katrina and the Women of New Orleans, 6 and 33.
return. By contrast, the Vietnamese American community has had a high rate of return and the Latino population has actually grown; the specifics of these disparities should be better understood.  

One obstacle in achieving this fuller understanding results from moments when white mainstream views apply the concept of the refugee to nonwhite and lower-class migrants that by definition separates them from their citizenship rights. During Katrina, questions of whether residents were perceived and treated with the rights and care afforded to full citizens can be heard in the diction used to represent their plight. The media repeatedly described hurricane victims as “refugees” when they fit within the historical category of internally displaced persons. Furthermore, during the Katrina catastrophe, both human and natural, reporters spoke as though the situation had no antecedents. They called it “an unprecedented instant migration” with one important difference from some of the migrations that preceded it: “This group didn’t get to make the choice about when to leave or where to go for a better life. They were simply wrenches out of their homes, and many had little, if any, say in where they ended up.” The media’s account became the dominant narrative of Katrina; these stories explained and perpetuated the idea that migration was typically voluntary—and in the distant past—except in the case of seemingly unavoidable natural calamities, for which the only response is pity. On many levels, however, the New Orleans disaster had previous models. The bias of the media and of the national response has precedents, as does the magnitude of human displacement. While it is important to note distinctions, there are many internal migrations with which to compare the Louisiana upheaval, some equally forced. Indeed, the United States was founded on the displacement of peoples: the European immigrants who sailed west, the Africans who were brought forcibly as enslaved people, and the Native Americans who were attacked, evacuated from their homelands, and then sequestered. The initial European invasion led to internal migrations, both forced and chosen, that speak to the spatialized history of the country—one that continues to be reflected in dislocations such as those caused by Hurricane Katrina. Lack of historical knowledge and appropriate terminology indicate the hidden sys-


21. See Sommers et al., “Race and Media Coverage of Hurricane Katrina” for its discussion of the “high likelihood that race played a contributing role” in the media coverage of Katrina (50).

tems of oppression and the slippage in how the protections of citizenship are not equally meted out in the “refuge” that is supposed to be the United States. This unawareness of previous events, especially those in the last century, as well as the racialized and gendered implications of the history and politics that went along with them, prompted my writing of *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements.* Additionally, the media’s narrative about the “unprecedented” nature of Katrina points to a need for awareness about the stories we tell about our past. Who narrativizes such events, and how are the stories contingent upon the teller? From the Massachusetts Bay Colony to Ellis Island, from the cowboy to the prospector, migrations and their retellings—both historical and fictional—appear to represent a journey to freedom and individual self-determination often primarily focused on the white, male experience. This view, however, overlooks the major internal migrations of the last century that were largely compelled, not voluntary, and the variety of participants that were equally a part of U.S. identity and history.

This study seeks to theorize an alternate location that incorporates the acknowledged plight and insecurity of the international refugee (with its accompanying humanitarian, ethical call for action) into the category of the internally displaced person in order to address national constructions of precarious citizenship and their relation to movement; so doing will enable IDPs to seek social justice without inadvertently disenfranchising citizens of their rights. This book shows that the United States has displayed a history of spatial colonization within its own borders that extends beyond isolated incidents into a pattern based on ideology about nation building, citizenship, and labor. Considering some of the major internal displacement of the twentieth century together—the Great Migration, the Dust Bowl, the movement to and from the U.S. concentration camps, and the prevalence of Southwestern migrant labor—reveals a past imbued with (en)forced movements and community disruption that creates, in Zora Neale Hurston’s oxymoronic words, “permanent transients” that are often race- and class-specific. Though each is seemingly a distinct regional phenomenon, these events and their fictional representations reveal similar tactics of displacement against the disempowered. This book investigates these events in relation to changing immigration policy; between the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and the immigration reform under the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, the number of international immigrants was vastly reduced, and so the nation’s attention was turned to those within its own borders. *Migrating Fictions* is the first book-length study to examine all of these movements together along with their literature and shows that one of
the trends is how enforced movement is often placed upon the laboring class and people of color. Mobility may mean freedom for the leisure class, but for the working class it often means a precarious life of endless migratory labor and the loss of a home space.

In other words, this book traces how Jeffersonian ideals of independent landownership as the basis for the nation are manipulated by various groups over time to move others—whether women, people of color, the lower class, or those who are seen as not worthy of the full benefits of citizenship for whatever reason—into disadvantageous positions and places. These exclusionary ideals of landownership reveal that the concept of the United States as a site of refuge is a myth. These government constructs, as well as how fiction responds to them by presenting alternative narratives and the possibility of “imagining otherwise,” thus become key to the theory of movement and definitions of internal migrants because who is given or loses rights is based on just such stories. Only by first understanding the ways in which internally displaced persons are shaped as such long before any “disaster” occurs can we work toward a theoretical conception of movement and space that balances between the stateless refugee and the ignored internal migrant.

THEORIZING MIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Prominent theorists have addressed the relationship among citizenship, the law, and movement in ways that are illuminating for my examination of internal displacement and the precarious life it tends to produce. My approach to the problem of citizenship and the law for internal migrants draws on work by Alexander Weheliye, Giorgio Agamben, and Judith Butler. Agamben and Butler are themselves responding to Michel Foucault’s highly influential discussions of sovereignty, state power, and management. These theorists’ formulations of key critical concepts, including the state of exception, bare life, governmentality, and precarity, allow us to see how internal displacement is part of a larger nexus of political and economic forces designed to produce and maintain inequality, particularly in terms of race, gender, and class. At the same time, I suggest that this bare life and precarity are made more fully evident through internal displacement, which exposes the dominant governmental paradigm linking landownership and citizenship. The position of

23. See Gordon, Ghostly Matters, 5 for her important contribution of this term and its idea of seeing beyond the current situation.
the internally displaced can query the dominant view because displacement demands attention to the transitory spaces of movement.

Agamben’s argument about the “state of exception” and the production of “bare life,” and Butler’s about the application of governmentality help to pinpoint the ways in which displaced peoples tend to have their citizenship rights ignored or revoked in times of movement or crisis. In Agamben’s work, the state of exception is the tool through which sovereign power is able to suspend certain laws because of a moment labeled as so unusual that the rules temporarily do not apply, but then makes these unusual moments usual, and bare life, or “life exposed to death,” is the potential violence from the state because a person lacks protection under the law. Such concepts are exemplified in Agamben’s work about the Nazi concentration camp, which exists outside the normal juridical order and enables all violence against human beings by reducing them to bare life and by making the state of exception the rule. Butler’s application of Foucault’s term characterizes governmentality as “marked by a diffuse set of strategies and tactics” that “gains its meaning and purpose from no single source” and that “dispose[s] and order[s] populations [. . .] to produce and reproduce subjects, their practices and beliefs, in relation to specific policy aims.” My use of Agamben and Butler, however, is filtered through recent work that has questioned the elimination of racial hierarchies from the concepts of bare life and governmentality. Particularly I draw upon Alexander Weheliye, who is himself extending the work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter. By expanding the state of exception to include the kind of violence already part of the ordinary functioning of the law—as in slavery or the U.S. prison system—we can see how “different populations—often racialized—are suspended in a perpetual state of emergency.” In my view, this governmental system that creates gendered and racial disparities, while operating regularly in everyday life, becomes more fully exposed in the moments labeled as exceptional, especially when those moments occur around movement and migration. In other words, built-in exceptions to the governmental system extend preexisting acts of violence, revealing how controls on movement and freedom work within both the ordinary system and its supposed emergency state.

Bare life and the state of exception are important concepts for understanding the effects of governmental practices on changing notions of citizenship.

27. Butler, A Precarious Life, 52.
29. Ibid., 88.
For instance, Agamben usefully points out how citizenship in general has been called into question by repeated invocations of the state of exception, which creates a “zone of indistinction” between the law and its suspension. In his view, the refugee has taken the place of earlier subjects who were denied full inclusion in the state. This new exclusion eventually “introduc[ed] the principle according to which citizenship was something of which one had to prove oneself worthy and which could therefore always be called into question.”

In this respect, all are equally disempowered by the undermining of citizenship via the state of exception and constructions of bare life, which have been employed in the service of political exclusion and genocide. Weheliye, by comparison, shows how the majority of these structures involve “other forms of political death” that do not annihilate subjects. In other words, rather than using the Nazi concentration camp as the paradigmatic example of bare life, Weheliye suggests that slavery and the space of the plantation epitomize how the nation-state diminishes the rights of its people while still preserving their existence for labor. Additionally, he questions Agamben’s “zone of indistinction,” which claims that all are equally disempowered by this modern sovereignty. Instead, Weheliye shows how we need to see not only the particulars of how some have their rights withdrawn while they are still forced to serve the state through exploitation, but also that this withdrawal is often made unequally against groups of people who are marked as outsiders through categorizations such as race.

Combining Agamben’s argument about the state of exception, Butler’s points about the application of governmentality, and Weheliye’s awareness of race as a key factor in these decisions lends additional theoretical weight to the distinction between the refugee and the internally displaced person. By applying their ideas to the history of internal displacements and how that intersects with racial discourse in the United States, I suggest that forced movement, rather than being a mere symptom of other repressive forces, functions as a key for defining citizenship.

For instance, Agamben’s concept of the state of exception can be applied to some comments by the then mayor of New Orleans Ray Nagin. After Hurricane Katrina, Nagin said on multiple occasions that he had called for martial law, a right not afforded to a mayor; martial law was also invoked by Press Secretary Scott McClellan and only later denied by National Guard Lieutenant

31. Ibid., 132.
33. Ibid., 36–37.
General H. Steven Blum.34 Since the city was not being run by the military but
the military was doing supporting work for the city, martial law was never offi-
cially instituted, but its invocation does show several officials in power stress-
ing that the basic rule of law had been momentarily halted, as in the “state of
emergency” that had been declared for Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and
Florida.35 Under the state of emergency, the National Guard was called in to
keep the peace, federal troops were brought in to provide humanitarian aid, and
certain rights, such as the right to congregate, were suspended. Under a state
of emergency in Louisiana, curfews may be called, traffic by vehicle or on foot
may be controlled or interrupted, the possession of weapons may be controlled,
the sale of alcohol may be prohibited, and the use of sound equipment such as
bullhorns may be prohibited.36 In particular, what this meant was that some
police officials in New Orleans told their officers that martial law did exist,
which allowed them to “take back the city” by doing things such as shooting
looters.37 In short, a state of emergency is precisely the kind of state of exception
that Agamben is discussing that allows authorities to change the law of the land.
During Katrina, this idea led to guns being taken from individuals. The think-
ing goes that this is a necessary adjustment because only police should have
guns in such a time. Therefore, the Second Amendment for gun rights was sus-
pended, as was a basic understanding of appropriate punishment—death for the
appearance of a petty crime.38 States of exception can and often are employed
by those in power to restrict or reduce the citizenship and rights of already
marginalized populations.

Such moments of crisis tend to turn U.S. citizens into rightless refugees,
but as Weheliye and Butler make clear, their rights and protections regularly
have been eroded by the existing power structure itself long before these
extreme incidents. Whereas the sovereign authority can suspend the law and,
say, invoke martial law or a state of emergency, the biopolitical manipulations
of governmentality can shape subjects unequally, rendering certain groups,
such as African Americans in New Orleans, less able to be seen as victims
who deserve the freedom of movement. Butler’s argument about the overlap
between the direct authoritarian action of sovereignty and the diffuse func-
tioning of governmentality gives us a way to understand how the instability of
particular citizens is exacerbated during movement and migration.

35. Ibid. See also “Legal Answers for New Orleans Residents.”
38. Berenson and Broder, “Police Begin Seizing Guns of Civilians.”
In other words, I am extending the idea of precarious citizenship explored by scholars such as Butler as well as by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.\textsuperscript{39} As Butler explains:

“Precarity” designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection. Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection.\textsuperscript{40}

This understanding of precarity shows how particular people are at risk for falling into the category of bare life. While who is found to be precarious may change over time, this vulnerability, as Butler further elucidates, “characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable” and thus “is [a] rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless.”\textsuperscript{41} Whereas precarity highlights the ways in which “other forms of political death,” as Weheliye put it, tend to be overlooked, it also adds to that understanding by pinpointing the intersections of gender and sexuality with citizenship.\textsuperscript{42}

All of this inequality is occurring while the United States continues to present its essence as being a place of refuge for those seeking freedom and equality. One of the key phrases espoused by both liberal and conservative politicians is the idea of American exceptionalism, that there is something special about this place that affords opportunities like nowhere else, which these internal displacements show to be a myth on many levels.\textsuperscript{43} The mix of

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\item 39. Hardt and Negri, \textit{Multitude}.
\item 40. Butler, ”Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics,” ii.
\item 41. Ibid., xii–xiii.
\item 42. Weheliye, \textit{Habeas Viscus}, 35.
\item 43. Sylvia Chong makes a connection between exceptionalism and John Winthrop in American colonial history:
\end{itemize}

En route to what would become the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop set out the idea of the New World as not merely another refuge for his persecuted religious sect but as a “city upon a hill,” a chosen land for a chosen people to enact God’s kingdom on earth. Here, the Puritan vision of being “elect” forms the basis for their exceptionalism—a dream that the new American colonies will succeed where the corrupt Old World has failed, which retroactively remakes the New World from a conquered territory into the predestined location for such redemp-

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emergency, precarity, and exceptionalism in the Trail of Tears and Hurricane Katrina are just two examples of a more far-reaching phenomenon. The history of U.S. citizenship reveals how race and a lack of access to land and landownership become circularly reinforcing concepts that perpetuate precarity.

Therefore, part of my theoretical framework draws on scholarship in critical race studies, which has exposed the long-standing connections between the law and racism in the United States. My analysis shows that internally displaced people have been produced as an operating, unofficial category of precarious citizenship by governmental forces both direct and indirect. This connection between the government and its ability to disempower as well as empower through the unequal distribution of rights is of course not a new one. In 1787, when creating the foundations of the United States at the Constitutional Convention, James Madison said, “Landholders ought to have a share in the government, to support these invaluable interests, and to balance and check the other. They ought to be so constituted as to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority.”

This view shows not an egalitarian ideal but unequal protections for the minority of the rich at the beginning of the nation, with only landowners having a full voice in the government. As the idea of legal documentation for citizenship developed in the United States, the 1790 Naturalization Act directly tied citizenship to race, requiring that citizens be a “free white person.” Over time, “those of African descent” were also included, but this only opened the conversation to a black/white binary. Therefore, as many scholars, such as Ian Haney López in *White by Law*, have shown, early citizenship cases were focused on proving one’s race as tied to whiteness. Beyond that, though, as Cathy J. Schlund-Vials has demonstrated, citizenship also became “in part a public, sentimental performance, requiring the ‘would-be American’ to declare affiliation and loyalty” and is displayed by “demonstrable patriotism and knowledge of U.S. history.”

Thus, a racialized notion of who was a citizen was also bound up in cultural capital and the need for an ongoing recitation of fealty when one’s status was in question.

Even as the state claimed to be becoming more inclusive through ending slavery, Frederick Douglass points out the results of receiving some but not all the rights afforded to other Americans:

> (*) INTRODUCTION

The United States in the nineteenth century was established on a colony system, and colonists from New England were the first to establish independent colonies in the New World. This New England strain of exceptionalism mobilizes the sacred to justify the protonational, thus marrying a universal logic to a historical particularity. (“Exceptionalism,” 306–7)

Thus, even the earliest voices were building up the idea of the New World as justified in its actions because of its special status. (I wish to thank the author for sharing her work with me while still in manuscript stage.)

If I were in a monarchial government, or an autocratic or aristocratic government, where the few bore rule and the many were subject, there would be no special stigma resting upon me, because I did not exercise the elective franchise;[ . . . ] but here where universal suffrage is the rule, where that is the fundamental idea of the Government, to rule us out is to make us an exception, to brand us with the stigma of inferiority, and to invite to our heads the missiles of those about us.46

What Douglass is demonstrating is that in the United States, where there were not fixed social classes, the lack of voting rights pointed to precisely a diminished citizenship meant to keep ideas of superiority and inferiority intact even at the very moment that the Fourteenth Amendment was being passed, which detailed that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States [. . .] are citizens [. . . who are not to be denied] equal protections of the laws.”47

Mae Ngai continues this discussion of citizenship into the twentieth century, stating that the “race science” of the nineteenth century was adapted in the twentieth century to build power structures not just on a physiognomic difference but also on how that was tied to nationality: “Modern racial ideology depended increasingly on the idea of complex cultural, national, and physical difference more than on simple biological hierarchy.”48 Thus, the historically racist idea that some races are superior to others because of physically perceived difference is then compounded with the ideas of cultural difference as the nation-state takes on its own level of power. Ngai also explains how this is enacted through the law with the goal of getting around the equal protection guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment:

On the one hand the law separated public and private spheres, prohibiting racial discrimination by the state but permitting it in private relations. On the other hand Congress and the courts sneaked racial distinction into public policy through doctrinal rationalizations like “separate but equal.” During the 1920s the legal traditions that had justified racial discrimination against African Americans were extended to other ethno-racial groups in immigration law through the use of euphemism (“aliens ineligible to citizenship”) and the invention of new categories of identity (“national origins”).49

46. Douglass, What the Black Man Wants.
47. U.S. Constitution, Amend. XIV, Sec. 1.
49. Ibid., 9.
Therefore, in the twentieth century the state itself adapted to be able to keep making legal distinctions based on race that undermined access to full citizenship rights.

Since citizenship is also very much bound up with space and since the United States particularly developed with the idea that landownership was a primary way to connect its people to the unfolding idea of the nation, it follows that lacking property demonstrated a lack of connection to that nation state. The right to own land was a foundational element of the development of the United States and the basics of self-sufficiency in this new economy. Therefore, this book will follow how the lack of landownership rights and the removal of even consistent rights to staying in one space become another tactic in the ongoing process of how governmental forces keep power and rights in the hands of a few. Migrating Fictions reveals the hidden elements of landownership and precarious citizenship within migrant discourse to show how this disempowerment is tied to movement while that very movement can itself function as a space to open up awareness and critique of such governmentalities.

THEORIES OF MOVEMENT AND THE ROLE OF GENDER

The question of space and movement has received renewed attention since criticism’s “Spatial Turn” during the last quarter of the twentieth century, a debate that was shaped by scholars such as Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre and that addressed the need for space to be considered alongside the social and historical in humanistic study.50 This interdisciplinary discussion about movement across space has developed into an area that considers not just the geographic but also the cultural, political, and economic interactions between people and spaces. The work of historic-geographic critics such as Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Linda McDowell constitutes the theoretical underpinning for my investigation into how the diachronic role of time relates to the synchronic role of space.51 Lefebvre’s work developed the idea that space could be understood through the different aspects of the perceived, conceived, and lived—une dialectique de triplicité of material space, representational space, and experienced space. Building upon this idea, Soja reframes Lefebvre’s three-
part concept into Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace—the trialectics of the real, the imagined, and the real-and-imagined spaces combined. Both Soja and Lefebvre are interested in thinking about the relationship between the physical elements of space and the way that space is imagined to be, with Soja further stressing that this intersection between the real and imagined elements of space is “radically open to additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge.” In other words, he creates a framework that builds on earlier scholarship in the field as well as focusing on cultural studies adaptations. Feminist scholars such as McDowell have done just such cultural studies adaptations by paying increased attention to class and gender, showing that combining the materiality of the space with the imaginings of an individual can create new possibilities and resistance against oppression.

My analysis continues the project explained by these geographers by attending to the specificity of identity markers such as race, gender, and perceived citizenship in relationship to the social construction of space. I draw upon the ideas of postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha and mestiza writer Gloria Anzaldúa because of their gendered as well as ethnoracially specific terminology such as “hybridity,” “the borderlands,” and “Nepantla” to distinguish how Thirdspace, the blending of real and imagined locations to create new spatial and communal possibilities, works for different populations. A sense of self is more complicated than choosing which side of a binary or boundary to claim, since often choices are imposed from outside and since the interaction of a seeming cultural opposition may create a complex “hybridity” of cultures within the individual and the community in which he or she lives that extends beyond an either/or binary. Collectively, all of these theories provide a useful means for showing that spaces and identity categories are inseparable from people’s understanding of themselves and of their communities in historical accounts as well as in their literary imaginings.

As Bhabha and Anzaldúa in particular highlight, the effects of internal migration have implications for the relationship of mobility and identity categories such as race, gender, and class. For instance, from a gendered perspective, Doreen Massey discusses the need for women to “keep moving” in order to not be trapped in a static and homebound space because “the mobility of women does indeed seem to pose a threat to a settled patriarchal order.” Additionally, Truitt has shown that it is women who are often unable to mobi-

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52. Soja, Thirdspace, 61.
53. See Anzaldúa, Borderland/La Frontera and Bhabha, “Third Space.” Soja’s spelling of the term “Thirdspace” differs from Bhabha, who spells it “third space.” In quotations I will spell it as each scholar does, but when I am employing the term, I will use “Thirdspace.”
54. Doreen Massey, Race, Space and Gender, 11.
lize during times of human suffering because of their lack of access to funding as well as the number of people who depend on them, and it is this difficulty in crossing national borders that keeps them from being seen on the international scale as refugees. Nevertheless, the history of internal displacements in the United States, which essentially renders invisible the presence of women in movement, labor, and community formation, reveals the pitfalls of mobility. Although a woman may want to escape the clichéd and literal boundaries of the kitchen by showing her ability to move, the loss of a home can equally disempower. Therefore, the choice to be stable or in motion should be the larger goal, since as geographers Tim Cresswell and Tanu Priya Uteng have stated about mobility, “On the one hand it is positively coded as progress, freedom or modernity itself; on the other hand it brings to mind issues of restricted movement, vigilance and control.” Rather than simply adopting a stereotypical white, male view of individual and unattached mobility as the best challenge to patriarchal society, one must consider the ways in which individuals and communities are empowered or debilitated by movement and the typical invisibility of women.

Women constitute a significant source via their participation in mass movements and in their fictional retellings of those events. The female authors I have selected for this study—some of whom were themselves subject to troubled, gender-biased receptions—have direct personal, familial, or professional connections to the histories they tell, which show the value of women in this quest both in active resistance and through cultural preservation and transformation. They work to save themselves, their families, their communities, and their stories, as they also imagine new ideas and opportunities for the future by constructing Thirdspaces in their literary works.

_Migrating Fictions_ addresses these issues by analyzing constructions of space and movement as inflected by race, gender, and locality in the major twentieth-century historical migrations and, notably, in novels, including Zora Neale Hurston’s _Their Eyes Were Watching God_ (1937), Sanora Babb’s _Whose Names Are Unknown_ (written 1939/published 2004), Julie Otsuka’s _When the Emperor Was Divine_ (2002), Helena Maria Viramontes’s _Under the Feet of Jesus_ (1995), and, in an afterword, Jesmyn Ward’s _Salvage the Bones_ (2011). These representative novels from different historical moments, from different regions of the country, and with different racial and economic concerns can be used to construct a larger lexicon for our understanding of movement in the twentieth century.

56. Cresswell and Uteng, _Gendered Mobility_, 1.
Each chapter concentrates on one major internal migration, its historical and legal circumstances, and one major textual example, but the capaciousness of these texts and the historical movements means that such analysis has ramifications for other fictional and historical examples as well as for theories of movement and citizenship in general. These selections recognize the intersectionality of the fields of movement, gender, and race studies that too often still disassociate their overlapping interests. They represent a variety of U.S. racialized identities, including African American, Anglo-American, Asian American, and Latino/a to indicate that some elements continuously reemerge no matter who is on the move, but also to uncover the historically and spatially distinct factors of each movement. Additionally, rather than focusing on only one migration-causing event (such as Hurricane Katrina) and its fictional presentations, this book, by looking across the century, more fully identifies the historical continuities that affect seemingly distinct internal migrations. This same choice also recognizes ongoing attempts within the literary tradition to describe the causes of these movements while imagining solutions, something that has been obscured by the periodization that separates critical scholarship on the modern from the postmodern and the early twentieth century from the post–World War II period. In this sense my work is influenced by the approaches of feminist scholars like Rita Felski, who explains in *The Gender of Modernity* how the work of female writers in the early twentieth century has been overlooked because it does not fit into the definition of modernism that privileges white, male authors, as well as by Caren Kaplan, who in *Questions of Travel* expanded scholarship on displacement over preestablished classifications of modernism and postmodernism. By engaging with novels that would be placed under different categories varying from social realist to postmodern, and with areas normally separated into the political and the artistic, this book aims to break down the categorical barriers that still associate migration with white masculinity and that minimize the contributions and struggles, both actual and imaginative, of women and people of color.

The gendered reception of these novels of displacement shows in particular the initial and continued dominance of male authors but also an increasing interest in what female authors bring to the conversation in a way that calls attention to the ongoing devaluation of some women’s writing. Male-written fiction on the subject remains the most recognized—with examples including John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), John Okada’s *No-No Boy* (1956), Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), Tomas Rivera’s *y no se lo tragó la tierra* [*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*] (1971), and even Dave Eggers’s *Zeitoun* (2009)—but female voices on internal migration are now attaining more popular and critical attention as their read-
ership grows through mainstream presses and classroom assignments. In the 1930s, Zora Neale Hurston was a well-known author and part of the Harlem Renaissance, but even so, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* received many negative reviews from male writers who objected to her focus on the movement through the rural South at a time when they were espousing creativity focused on travel to the urban North. Therefore, although *Their Eyes* received attention and a wide audience on its release, it received much more acclaim when it was recovered in the 1970s by Alice Walker and other feminist and womanist scholars and is now a largely canonical text for those who study race and gender. Also during the 1930s, Sanora Babb, a professional writer who helped during the Dust Bowl migration, never had the chance to receive contemporary responses to her novel because Steinbeck’s publication monopolized her subject matter, and her novel is only now beginning to acquire a readership with its recent publication in the twenty-first century. Conversely, the more contemporary authors have been more quickly accepted, but their treatment of historical displacement has been downplayed or decried. Víramontes’s novel is now widely taught, albeit mainly for environmental and racial issues, and Otsuka’s work gained notoriety for its painterly style and its unintended timeliness, since readers saw the incarceration of people of Japanese descent as a warning against sequestering Arab Americans after 9/11. The most recent text, Ward’s *Salvage the Bones*, received the highest accolades with its winning of the National Book Award and was directly acknowledged for discussing Hurricane Katrina; however, the award itself has been criticized by some prominent critics for, in recent years, nominating too many female authors. Critic Laura Miller also added that the nominees are “the literary equivalent of spinach. [. . . books] you ought to read, whether you like it or not.” Perhaps not coincidentally, the year following Ward’s win, the judges of the National Book Award were given new instructions that overtly stated that it was acceptable to nominate well-known authors, seemingly responding to Miller’s criticism and perhaps questioning Ward’s merit. Hence, women and

57. James, “Book Award Becomes a Feast of Canapés.”

58. Miller, “How the National Book Awards Made Themselves Irrelevant.” Julie Otsuka was also a finalist for the National Book Award that year for *The Buddha in the Attic*. She responded to Miller’s critique by stating, I guess my role as a writer is to make these people [her characters are Japanese immigrants to the United States] visible—to give them a shape and a voice and tell their story to the world. [. . .] And if this makes me sound like someone you ought to read, someone whose books “are good for you whether you like it or not,” I don’t mind. Because I’m not writing to be liked. I’m just telling the stories I need to tell before my time on this earth is over. I don’t think I could live with myself otherwise. (Johnston, “Interview with Julie Otsuka”)

59. Kaufman, “Book Awards Seek a Bigger Splash, Red Carpet and All.”
narratives about migration-causing events may be gaining more recognition, but with that notice comes a backlash that such authors and their subject matter are diminishing the value of awards and contributing to their supposed irrelevance.

In general, *Migrating Fictions* examines large-scale internal displacements in the twentieth century while acknowledging the voices of women, the laboring class, and various racial groups that narrate and people these incidents, thus contributing to current efforts in ethnic and gender studies to bring a diversity of experiences in from the edges of scholarship on space and place. Such stories provide significant material for exploring the role of space in literature; my chosen authors and their characters teach about the power of the individual, but they also point to the complex logic behind mass movements with causes that are natural, governmental, and societal.

**TWENTIETH-CENTURY MIGRATIONS AND THIRDSPACE**

This book looks at those outside forces, but it also considers acts of resistance from within the communities affected, which include the developing empowerment of women as a result of different strategies of movement and conceptions of community. All of my chapters deal with such resistance, starting from their basic migratory patterns. These often overlapping mass movements considered here add challenges to a chronological treatment. While I have organized the chapters of *Migrating Fictions* historically, moving through the Great Migration, the Dust Bowl, the U.S. concentration camps during World War II, and the ongoing migrant labor in the Southwest after the Bracero Program, I continually return to different types of migration: environmental, wartime, and economic.\(^6\) This arrangement unsettles simplistic notions of progress and increasing emancipation by showing the historical shifts in anxieties over race and movement. It also indicates how different female authors, speaking for the activities of distinct disadvantaged groups, have found storytelling and a symbolic identification with the past to offer greater or lesser potential for resistance to displacement and dispossession. Hence, my discussion proceeds through Hurston’s fictional reply to the African American migration north, Babb’s novel about Anglo-American farmers displaced during the Dust Bowl, Otsuka’s narrative about the incarceration of people of Japanese descent, and Viramontes’s presentation of Chicano/a migrant laborers. This order follows

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\(^6\) It is important to note that the UN definition of “refugee” does not consider economic displacement as a legal cause for protection or aid. See K. Long, *From Refugee to Migrant?*, 2. Economic displacement is also not part of the UN definition of an internally displaced person, yet there is a vast moving population that requires further consideration.
the interconnections among the historical events as well as the repetitions of imposed governmentality that still do not extinguish female agency.

The historical migrations of the twentieth century are, of course, part of a larger structure. An ideology of American superiority, which would contribute to the removal of the Cherokee and to the notion of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century, uncovers patterns of exclusion in later migrations such as the Dust Bowl, U.S. concentration camps, and Southwestern migrant labor—with the first beginning in the same territory to which the Cherokee had been driven, the second built upon Indian reservations, and the third relying upon similar tactics of displacement and land seizure by the U.S. government. Thus, in 1930s California, when “migration anxiety” propelled harsh laws against Dust Bowl farmers moving to the state, the situation should be understood not as an isolated incident but as a reiteration and reconfiguration of earlier immigration policy and a precedent for the Japanese American removal during World War II.61 This pattern is a pendulum swing that welcomes new inhabitants to live and work in a region and then becomes hostile to that group when they seem to gain any numbers or potential to empower themselves. For instance, after the start of World War I, immigration restrictions were lessened on Mexican workers because the United States needed bodies to replace those abroad.62 These new workers helped to develop California into the greatest industrialized agricultural market in the country, but as those workers created unions to lessen their harsh working conditions, the immigration restrictions increased, along with “repatriation” back to Mexico.63 Additionally, the Japanese American removal had ownership-restricting precedents. For example, as Cletus Daniel has commented, Japanese immigrants could not attain landownership because of the Alien Land Law that was formulated and supported by California farm owners who wanted to maintain their profits and who invoked racist ideology to constrain new immigrants from becoming competitors.64 All was said to be “in the name of selfless agrarianism,” the invocation of Jeffersonian ideals for profit, while what is exposed instead is a historical pattern that keeps profit, power, and land in the hands of a few.65 In general, if we limit our study of communities to those defined only by ownership and static space, we will overlook the multifarious ways in which they thrive or fail during and after migration.

63. Ibid., 68.
64. Ibid., 63.
65. Ibid.
I analyze how these historical migrations and their fictional representations attempt to produce a resistive Thirdspace beyond and against the ideological manipulations of the dominant governmental, legal, and economic forces. Thirdspace becomes, in the work of these novels and in U.S. history, a political site for imagining the collectivity of migratory movements; furthermore, it is a concept that unfolds and develops throughout the chapters of the book. If Hurston’s text, as I argue, shows the utopian potential of the individual home in relation to the surrounding community, then Babb’s novel locates a Thirdspace created through an environmental and economic disaster outside of the traditional domestic space that embraces—though it fails to fully realize—a form of social justice based on class that considers collective stewardship rather than individual ownership. Otsuka’s text, by comparison, extends that economic dislocation from the home to the political and constitutional displacement of people of Japanese descent in the racialized bare life of the camp; in the process, the novel creates a Thirdspace that challenges the categorical distinction between international immigrant and internal citizen. Finally, Viramontes’s portrayal of Mexican American migrant labor and the ambiguous space of the border ultimately produces a Thirdspace that demands social justice—in effect incorporating the ethical claim of the refugee into the internally displaced, perpetually migrating citizen. Thirdspace thus opens up a way of thinking through the refugee–internally displaced person problem without relieving the state of its responsibility to safeguard all citizens.

My first chapter begins with a brief case study of the history of African Americans from the time of colonization and slavery through emancipation and Jim Crow. The removal of their citizenship and landownership rights highlights flaws in views of American-ness and American exceptionalism. This history is foundational for my argument, showing a developing governmentalty of precarity existing even before the formal beginning of the nation that would serve as a model for later displacements. The chapter then focuses more specifically on how this relationship progressed in the twentieth century and is interpreted and altered in Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God. This modernist novel is structured as an allegorical road story that places a female, the main character Janie, as traveler and seeker of knowledge. She takes a literal journey through the American South and a symbolic, episodic journey across African American history through slavery, sharecropping, W. E. B. Du Bois’s idea of the “Talented Tenth,” and Jim Crow in the beginning of the twentieth century. While many critics, such as Lawrence Rodgers, say the novel ignores the Great Migration—the northern movement of over a million African Americans, which overlapped chronologically with
Hurston's writing—I demonstrate, instead, that it invokes a history of the governmental disempowerment of blacks through their inability to control their bodies and movement. Janie's connection to land and movement creates an inverted journey into the South in an economic displacement that leads to an environmental one when the 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane ravages part of Florida. The main character's movement is thus a counter–Great Migration to self and community. That is, *Their Eyes* directly links migration to a way of viewing spatial dynamics that politicizes and genders space, and shows the hope for fully realized citizenship through self-possession and landownership. Janie's precarity throughout the novel shows her searching for a location of black diasporic identity that exists outside the bounds of the northern movement and gendered expectations that can be both lived and imagined. In the end, with Janie in her own home, the novel is able to create a Thirdspace that is not yet understood by the whole community but is realized through knowledge of African American culture, individual landownership, and storytelling.

My second chapter builds upon the first by showing another group's attempt to respond to imposed governmentality in the Dust Bowl and *Whose Names Are Unknown*, in which, conversely, an environmental displacement becomes an economic one. Specifically, I begin by giving an overview of the importance of landownership as a means to develop and expand the United States. This view is exemplified in Henry Nash Smith's representation of the yeoman myth that valorizes the nineteenth-century, white, male farmer while overlooking the farmer's untenable position planting in an area previously labeled the Great American Desert. This history underlies the resulting environmental disaster known as the Dust Bowl, which forced 250,000 people to migrate from the center of the country to the West. During the Dust Bowl, the white migrants themselves try to refashion gender roles by including the voices of women in their political and economic struggle. Historically, some migrants were stopped by California's border patrol because they were considered vagrants and therefore unwanted outsiders even though they were U.S. citizens. Babb's novel reveals the misery created under these restrictions and pressures. I argue that this work exposes what I call myths of possession that equate power and success with landownership and self-possession. By tracing the movement of these “unlanded” yeomen in the 1930s as they attempt to realize this governmentally supported myth, Babb's novel searches for an alternative to these myths by positing her own idealized community united across race and gender in federal camps and on strike lines under the idea of “collective respect,” with everyone working together without interest for individual ownership or gain. While they work toward a Thirdspace
as a way to social justice, this active attempt is ultimately restricted to class, and fails to bring women and people of color fully into the decision-making process, even at the conclusion of the book. This limited approach to the reorganization of identity relationships parallels their limited approach to spatial reconfiguration of their occupational predicament because it accepts the premise of an already flawed system—they do not use the imagined part of Thirdspace to more fully question the rights of the government and farm corporations to own all of the land and manipulate citizenship laws in the first place.

In the third chapter, I discuss the incarceration of people of Japanese descent and Otsuka’s *When the Emperor Was Divine*, which tells the story of a Japanese American family that endures a wartime displacement to and from a U.S. concentration camp during World War II. I contextualize this movement by discussing the history of immigration law and the genre of incarceration narratives over time. I then show that this forced migration, with its different socially constructed spaces, stops Otsuka’s characters from being able to arrive “home” ever again. The family’s seemingly circular movement removes the safety of their home and alters their relationship with their community and with each other. Gender impacts these relationships in the structure of the historical camps that broke down the nuclear family by taking away the power and, sometimes, the presence of the male head of household. In the novel, this altered gender dynamic is specifically exposed through the mother assuming responsibility for every aspect of her family once her husband has been imprisoned, but this authority has been thrust upon her as the government forcibly assumes the traditional patriarchal role, making her empowerment illusory. This chapter argues that space is used by both the U.S. government and the dominant society at large to “disorient” this racialized group of people that is not seen as “American” enough, confusing them and turning them away from the East, even as they attempt to overcome these influences with imaginative escapist approaches of magical thinking and dreaming. Eventually the alterations imposed on them through space are so great that these controlling ideas become internalized, requiring the characters to (using Lefebvre’s spatial terms) “perceive” their lived space as the “conceived space” of the concentration camp. In other words, the government controls the characters’ understanding of space on both the “real” and “imagined” levels so that they cannot create their own redemptive Thirdspace or forge new functional gender norms, and their own home comes to represent the prison the United States had placed them in—and will not symbolically release them from—even though the camp barbed wire no longer surrounds them. These concerns
continue to resonate with subsequent generations of Japanese Americans, as Otsuka’s personal history demonstrates.

While the third chapter concentrates on the exclusionary aspects of a wartime displacement built upon an ideology of foreignness as the enemy, the fourth chapter continues that notion beyond the wartime state of exception in an ongoing economic displacement. Through the analysis of border history and gender oppression via conquest and conversion along the Mexican–U.S. border as well as of Viramontes’s Under the Feet of Jesus, I show how laborers of Mexican descent are trapped in the cyclical seasonal pattern of movement based on crops, live in a series of interchangeable small shacks with no privacy, retell stories filtered through the lens of the colonizer that disempower on the level of race and gender, and are constantly forced to occupy liminal social and political spaces that deny them a sense of having a homeland on either Mexican or U.S. soil. These governmental practices that mark them with a “disembodied criminality” developed out of the history of U.S. immigration policies. Arguing that Viramontes’s characters fight back with their own response, one best explained by Anzaldúa’s notion of the literal “borderlands” and the spiritual in-betweenness of “Nepantla,” I show how the character Estrella incorporates both real and imagined elements that transform spiritual stories of women from various times, places, and cultural/religious identities, developing an “embodied spirituality” as she searches for a new Thirdspace for her marginalized people. The book’s ending should be read as a call for social justice for its permanent transients. In this chapter, Viramontes’s novel indicates how narratives of the past—historical and literary—can be redeployed in productive ways with female leadership, particularly by exposing the fraught histories of movement concealed by governmental policies and ideology. Such exposure, because it occurs specifically at the border and in a borderland space, allows us to see how the internally displaced person must be treated with the ethical imperative of the refugee.

The fourth chapter shows Estrella’s newly found engagement with her narrative past, but her community remains limited by difficulties in productive movement. In my afterword, I return to this issue of limited movement with a discussion of the mobility poor in Hurricane Katrina and Ward’s Salvage the Bones. This event and Ward’s novel reveal that, contrary to our expectations, the contemporary moment is not the most liberatory for individuals in relationship to movement. This novel follows the Batiste family in a fictional town in Mississippi during the twelve days around the hurricane. These characters do not even consider migration, and instead their story is one of homebound survival when the costs of movement are too high, reminding us of the importance of choice for movement or stasis. Additionally, despite the narrative’s
focus on an intelligent, fifteen-year-old girl, showing the potential of female roles in the community, her position as an impoverished, pregnant child indicates how women and children continue to be dispossessed in the larger American society and during migration-causing moments. Bearing striking similarities to the 1928 hurricane and Hurston’s treatment of it, bringing us full circle, Hurricane Katrina and Ward’s novel reveal how earlier interpretations of history continue to be reflected in more recent events. These patterns of displacement will continue to repeat themselves if we do not enact better protections for internally displaced persons by realizing the critical connection between repeated narratives of migration and the dominance of land possession in our stories and lived experiences.

Altogether the history and the novels highlight how outside influences compel movement and identity transformation. They also demonstrate how those impacted individuals create spaces of opposition, imagining alternative histories and futures for themselves through acts of resistance and Thirdspace even as these spaces of resistance are often fractured by gender and racial divides. Thus, these chapters, while looking closely at different migrations and the racial groups they affected, disclose that without a fuller understanding of how governmentality can be imposed in similar ways on various groups (especially those deemed as falling short in their “American-ness”) as well as how those people can reappropriate such practices for their own purposes, we will fail to see the new possibilities that extend beyond the historically “fixed” event of movement. Taken together, my analyses of these texts contribute to the contemporary space theory project of exploring and contesting the overriding notion that space is neutral, is accessible to all, evolves organically, and simply provides a background against which various activities, such as racial injustice and gender and class oppression, take place. By investigating narratives of internally displaced people and their relationship to precarious citizenship, this interdisciplinary study reveals how literature can provide alternative histories of space and home, exposes the governmentalties and myths of American exceptionalism that help to construct them, and argues for a conception of Thirdspace that mediates between the legal categories of the refugee and the internally displaced person in an effort for social justice.