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The differences between Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston are both well known and highly exaggerated. Though they mutually rejected each other's literary aesthetic approaches to representations of racial blackness, they shared a political aesthetic approach—an approach I will define below as "voice work"—to the emergent political power of black female voice in the United States. The now infamous mutual literary reviews of Hurston by Wright and Wright by Hurston have led many critics to read their work as oppositional, and continue to shape the ways in which we read these authors as representative of a set of dichotomies in African American literary history: sociological versus anthropological, communal versus individualistic, masculine versus feminine, political versus aesthetic, rhetorical versus authentic, northern versus southern, and communist versus folk.[1] Wright and Hurston, however, did not frame their mutual critiques through all of these binaries, but rather focused specifically on the gendered nature of the other's text and his or her narrative representation of voice. Wright attempted to distance his writing from Hurston's more "feminine" narrative techniques that "cloak" her prose in "facile sensuality" ("Their Eyes" 17), while Hurston dismissed Wright's "masculine" aesthetics with her comments on the lack of "act[s] of understanding and sympathy" in *Uncle Tom's Children* ("Uncle Tom" 3). In addition to critiquing each other's positions through reading the other as hyper-feminized or hyper-masculinized, each critiqued the other for improper use of dialect, an important form of political voice work in their respective texts. Hurston says of Wright, "Since the author is himself a Negro, his dialect is a puzzling thing. One wonders how he arrived at it. Certainly he does not write by ear unless he is tone-deaf" (4). And Wright calls Hurston's use of dialect a continuation of "minstrel technique" ("Their Eyes" 17). It is worth putting some pressure on the particularities of these reciprocal

critiques. It may be that the things Wright and Hurston found most troubling about each other's work were the very aspects of their own projects they held most dear—i.e. an explicit interrogation of the gendered nature of racial politics and the political possibilities of voice work in character representation and audience address.

Historically, the power of voice has been a theme central to African American literature and literary criticism. Writing out of a history of enforced silence, African American authors have represented voice as an important source of personal and political agency; and the search for language in African American fiction is often simultaneously a search for identity and an affirmation of individual selfhood.[2] Much the same can be said for women's fiction and feminist literary concerns. Women have historically been constructed as women by silencing their access to public speech. Ursula K. Le Guin has theorized this as a "split" in voice: a "father tongue" that speaks in the language of public discourse and social power versus a "mother tongue" that is interlocutionary, conversational, and that "expects an answer" (149). Gaining voice is not, however, a simple process. Political freedom, including the freedom of speech, has historically in no way insured a personal or social ability to voice one's sense of identity. Frederick Douglass says of his own story that the mere ability to speak it was not enough. "My simple narrative," he says, "was an old story and to go through it night after night was a task altogether too mechanical for my nature. . . .I must speak the word that seemed to me the word to be spoken by me" (qtd. in Callahan 18). One way of continuing to pay attention to voice in women's and African American literature while avoiding what Douglass here points to as an overly simplistic understanding of the voice of the oppressed as transparent self-expression is to think about narrative constructions of voice not as external articulations of a preexisting but silenced interiority (or internal minority), but instead as voice work, which attempts a rearticulation of the field that defines what can be politically and socially said or understood and how it can be said or understood.

Voice work is a way of conceiving of and potentially altering the ways in which speaking and hearing can function. It is a term for theorizing a set of political tools that often function beyond our individual control. I choose the term voice work for several reasons. First, in structurally echoing "speech act," it captures the active, creative, and social nature of language as presented in speech-act theory.[3] I use voice rather than speech

to acknowledge the political importance of the connections among individual subjectivity, social identity, and voice, as well as to acknowledge voice work theory's debt to previous work on voice in African Americanist and feminist literary criticism. Finally, I choose "work" following Hannah Arendt's use of it as a term with which to talk about speech and action together. According to Arendt, action is the basis of all politics. One must insert oneself into the world with action, which is the beginning of change. However, speech is also required for "the disclosure of the agent in the act" (180). The truly political act for Arendt arises from this "revelatory character of action and speech" (192) which does not perform work in the sense of producing a product but is work in the Aristotelian sense of "to live well" as a performance, an activity, and an experience (207). "The public realm," says Arendt, "the space within the world which men need in order to appear at all, is . . . more specifically 'the work of man' than is the work of his hands or the labor of his body" (208). Voice work is a theoretical tool for articulating what literary texts do in the active processes of being read and circulated to create a public space of appearance through what Arendt terms the "living deed and spoken word" (206).

Jacques Rancière's theory of political disagreement can help us clarify the specific ways in which voice work is political. Politics, Rancière argues, is not about the systems through which a state or society functions, but rather about what can and cannot be said or heard.[4] Politics consists in disagreement, by which he means,

> a determined kind of speech situation: one in which one of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying. Disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness. (x)

In African Americanist, feminist, and black feminist literature and literary theory, voice work takes on just this kind of political valence. Political voice is heard not when a person speaks, but when "contention over what speaking means constitutes the very rationality of the speech situation" (xi). Voice work is the constitution of the rationality of the speech situation and the creation of both the voices heard there and the hearing audience to which they speak.

Though much critical work has been done with voice as individual and communal expression, voice work as the investigation of the politics of aesthetics and of politically charged speech situations needs further exploration, particularly in relation to representations of racial blackness and womanhood in the United States. The current historical definitions we have for African American political movements in the US at the dawn of what is now thought of as the long civil rights era[5] (interracial communism, cultural nationalism, desegregation, to name a few) are in many ways about opening new symbolic spaces of articulation and making, in Rancière's words, a "part of those who have no part" (14). Nevertheless, the particularly gendered ways in which these movements are treated (following the historical sexism inherent in their practices) do not provide many models for reading women writers as producing radical or directly politically engaged texts, nor do they provide frameworks for reading the work of male writers (particularly those participating in the social protest tradition) as purposefully provoking and promoting feminist responses. Feminist critiques of African American and women's literature continue to value authentic representations of self and voice as self-expression; racial and class-based critiques and histories continue to focus on the men who had the most access to being heard in the existent public sphere.[6] I suggest that both Hurston's and Wright's use of voice work led to complex articulations of the possibilities for racial and gender politics at the beginning of the long civil rights era, articulations that may be for us, in an era of multicultural "post-feminist" liberalism, difficult to hear.[7]

Uniting Hurston and Wright

In 1974 June Jordan called for a rethinking of the Wright/Hurston divide, proclaiming that she did "not accept that Wright and Hurston should be perceived, properly, as antipathetic in the wellsprings of their work" (288). Jordan's vision has yet to be fully realized in literary criticism. This is not to say that no work has been done to represent the two authors' works in relation to one another. Werner Sollors argues that reading Wright and Hurston through their respective disciplinary ties (sociology and anthropology) reveals what we think of as inherent oppositions to be complementary perspectives seen through different professional lenses. Both writers, Sollors argues, present representative characters that speak for the condition of the Negro and see modernism as a disruption of

folk ways of understanding the world. Additionally, William J. Maxwell devotes a chapter of his *New Negro, Old Left* to rethinking our received understandings about the Wright/Hurston debate, arguing that communism and anthropology functioned respectively for Hurston and Wright as modernizing movements that "ethnicized" populations and valued folk culture (165). Ultimately, Maxwell uses this comparison to recoup a reading of Wright as recognizing folk culture's "revolutionary significance" (178), a reading that Maxwell feels has been obscured by anti-communist sentiment in the criticism addressing Wright since the mid-twentieth century. Most current criticism, however, continues to use the Wright/Hurston debate to highlight either Wright's or Hurston's distinct literary or political position, a distinction that most often runs along lines of gender and gendered definitions of politics.

In the remainder of this essay I will look at the ways in which Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Wright in *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son* engage in the kind of radical black feminism that Hortense Spillers designates the "*claiming* of the monstrosity" that is the "female with the potential to 'name'" (480). Hurston and Wright, in attempting to claim this "monstrosity" of female naming, reveal it to be both an overpowering voice and a voice that cannot yet be heard in the existing discourses of American and African American politics. I will look at voice work in represented speech and action as well as audience address to explore the ways in which the works of Hurston and Wright share political investments in the power of women's voice work. Ultimately, both writers present a complicated and never fully realized (on a national hegemonic level) way of thinking racial politics that challenges the liberal model of individualism, representation, and transparent expression that has taken hold in contemporary US identity-based politics. In the words of Nikhil Pal Singh, "the dominant flavor of contemporary discussions of race and nation reproduce . . . liberal nationalist conventions" which "monopolize the discussion of civic identity and political expression at the expense of a full rendering of black political subjectivity" (43). Though the (short) civil rights movement is considered to be about making social and legal claims to inclusion in preexisting American political, social, legal and economic systems, Singh argues that, "black freedom struggles have not only been about obtaining market access, equal citizenship, or integrating black people into common national subjectivity. Rather, they represent the counter-statements of political subjects who have struggled to widen

the circle of common humanity" (44). In other words, the long civil rights struggle has always incorporated a politics of voice work in which counter-statements work to construct new possibilities for political subjectivity, to make a part of those who have no part so that they can enter into political disagreement.

Hurston and voice in feminist and African Americanist criticism

Though some recent Hurston scholarship has begun reading her work in relation to a range of national and international political, economic, and materialist structures and practices,[8] this move toward placing Hurston in broader public and materialist contexts tends to move away from feminist-oriented arguments and concerns over voice.[9] Arguments that employ a predominantly gender-based framework, on the other hand, continue to stress Janie's self-actualization and achievement of voice.[10] I would like to return here to feminist informed discussions of voice in Hurston's work to challenge the frequent figuration of Hurston as presenting an authentic, self-expressive black or female voice and to reorient our understandings of *Their Eyes* in relation to the theory of political voice work. In so doing we can begin integrating readings of Hurston invested in voice and feminist politics with more contemporary materialist and more narrowly politically contextualized readings of her work, as well as integrating them with the work of Wright.

A brief overview of canonical readings of voice in Hurston provides a foundation for thinking about her employment of voice work. Perhaps the most well-known and influential argument concerning voice in *Their Eyes* is Gates's claim that Hurston has written a "speakerly text" (158) that registers an "authentic black voice" (156) and a "linguistic presence of the [black American] literary tradition" (165). Gates connects this search for voice in the text to "a search for the self" (158), i.e. a unique black self that is discovered through a textual version of black oral tradition. Using free indirect discourse, Hurston is able to capture the double self of the African American subject and the double voice of mimesis and diegesis in the literary text. Cheryl Wall similarly argues that voice in *Their Eyes* is about self-discovery. She suggests that Hurston's is the "first authentic black female voice in American literature" (76) represented in the character of Janie, whose "self-discovery depends on her learning to manipulate language" (89). Janie learns to use a voice that is part of the community to insist on her own female autonomy.

Barbara Johnson, John F. Callahan, and Michael Awkward have also focused on narrative voice in *Their Eyes,* but they suggest that not only is the individual self accessed through learning to manipulate and express the complexities of a desire for subjecthood and autonomy in language, but that this voice is more importantly about communication. Johnson suggests that Janie's "authentic voice" comes from her ability to recognize and speak her own self-difference, "to assume and articulate the incompatible forces involved in her own division" ("Metaphor" 212). Callahan sees *Their Eyes* as having an adapted "call and response" (116) structure which not only "fus[es] individual and collaborative narrative authority," but also calls to readers, asking them (in a version of Le Guin's mother tongue) "to respond as listeners and participants in the work of storytelling" (118). This structure also teaches readers how to listen and respond in constructive ways. Through characters like Nanny and Jody, female and male readers alike are warned that an authoritative or hubristic voice will not function to create community but only more hierarchy, and asks readers to listen and respond to perspectives and truths that may threaten their own sense of self and authority. Michael Awkward also sees the narrative structure of *Their Eyes* as structuring "(comm)unity" (14) and as providing a "powerful black cultural voice" (17). He insists on the connection between voice and action. Janie, he says, "seems to issue a general condemnation of verbal performances that are not (and *cannot be*) supported by appropriate action" (16). Nanny, Jody, and even Tea Cake represent aspects of voice without action. Only Janie's use of speech and silence are active and can affect her own and others' lives.

Such canonical critiques can already be seen as implicitly suggesting a politics of voice work. Janie's articulation of a combination of discourses incompatible as yet in the larger social and political field is a political gesture in that it looks to make a place for non-representative narratives for black women in the United States—narratives that do not assume that because a character is a black woman that she speaks for black womanhood, that do not voice identity directly via its bodily representation. I want to add to these understandings of the novel by pointing out that its political critique is not merely implicit. It explicitly announces itself as a critique of and therefore a part of national, public political discourse and partakes in it by opening up space for other potential subject positions. It acts through voice work in the Arendtian sense. Janie's childhood nickname, "Alphabet" (9), announces her explicitly as a metaphor for speech and naming. As her nickname suggests, Janie represents a theory of language that is not about expressing a pre-existing self—the name

"Alphabet" having been given to her because she had many names, none of which was able to name a self or identity already there. Interestingly, neither "colored" nor "Negro" appear to be among the names given Janie (she doesn't recognize herself as black until she sees herself in a photo), also suggesting that Janie's voice work involves attempts to rename, to name beyond the limiting but inescapable categories of race and gender. Janie also figures her story as political discourse, telling Pheoby that she's been "a delegate to the big 'ssociation of life . . . de big convention of livin'" (6).

The all-black community to which Janie returns at the beginning of the novel is also connected to political voice work in that it is a community in search of new possibilities of expression. This opening of new speech situations is figured as dangerous and violent: "She left the porch pelting her back with unasked questions. They hoped the answers were cruel and strange" (4). Nevertheless, it is also a situation of potential freedom, a hope for "strange" (that is, new) answers in a space where "words walk[ed] without masters" (2). Janie is unwilling to share her new knowledge and ways of naming with the town only because the speech situation is not one in which she can be heard. It is not yet one in which the townspeople's desire for "new answers" could be satisfied. Janie's comment, "If they wants to see and know, why they don't come kiss and be kissed?" (6) is Hurston's commentary on the voice work left to be done, the need to constitute new rationalities for the political speech situation for black female subjecthood in the US.

Hurston's presentation of Nanny reinforces the fact that Janie is representative of broader public and political voice work. Nanny's dream to "preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high" and her corresponding desire for Janie to take "de text" and "a stand on high ground" (Hurston 16) may be less a critique of Nanny's authoritativeness or hubris, as Callahan suggests, but rather Hurston's way of making clear to the reader that this public pulpit does not yet exist. Nanny's "text" can't be heard because there is no public political sphere in which either she or her daughter could be heard—a situation that Janie begins to address by finding a place to be "heard" within the public space of Joe's store. The scene in which Janie publicly announces to Jody: "When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (79), is arguably her most active and successful public and political articulation in the novel. Gates names this as the moment that "Janie gains her voice and becomes

a speaking subject" (187). And Wall sees this linguistic act as "an essential step toward self-reclamation" (92). Critics have also noted that this claiming of a powerful black female voice is so effective that it, in fact, kills Jody.[11] What I want to suggest is that while Hurston *is* forwarding a call-and-response model based on an important connection between voice and action, the connection between voice and action is not, as Awkward suggests, "natural" but rather political. The call-and-response not only establishes black or black female autonomy and community, but is also a political call that asks for a political response, particularly from black women. It is simultaneously a call to respond and a recognition of the destructive power that women can wield in responding.

Hurston was well aware of the possible readings and repercussions of her texts. She knew her writing would be judged in the context of black aesthetic and literary cultural movements. There is no reason not to assume that Janie's story is Hurston's attempt to negotiate demands for a representative black aesthetic in the same way that Bigger's story is for Wright.[12] Additionally, there is no reason not to take the violence of Hurston's novel as seriously as that of Wright's. Janie kills Joe with her entrance into the public sphere. In 1943 Hurston wrote to Countee Cullen on the subject of desegregation. After claiming (falsely) that she had "no viewpoint on the subject particularly," she goes on to argue that "the white man is not going to surrender for mere words what he has fought and died for, and . . . if we want anything substantial we must *speak with the same weapons* [of violence]." Hurston insists: "either we must do something about it that the white man will understand . . . or shut up. . . .If some of us must die for human justice, then let us die" (Borders 92, italics mine). Here Hurston explicitly articulates a politics of voice work. It is not enough to publicize injustices. One must change the rationality of the speaking situation such that those in power will "understand." She suggests that this is a potentially violent move and the cost may be death. One of *Their Eyes Were Watching God's* structures of address is a black feminist activist voice addressing black women and indicating to them the power of their own voices. It also addresses black men, suggesting that their lack of voice work (i.e. attempting like Jody to be a "big voice" via extant masculinist power) might cost them their own lives at the hands/mouths of black women. The text registers the paradox of black female voice work resulting from a political wisdom that knows that without a discursive situation in which these voices can be heard they may become

violent; yet that violence becomes necessary if those voices cannot be heard. Hurston's text is a call for black female voice and a positing of the need to create (perhaps violently) a space for interracial, intraracial, and cross-gender understanding. In the following section I will trace these same imperatives through Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son* to demonstrate the similarities between Hurston's and Wright's politics and their literary use of character representation and audience address.

Wright and the mother tongue

Hurston and Wright are often contrasted in their relations to their female characters, female audiences, and feminism in general. While Hurston is considered a foremother of modern feminisms, Wright is most often portrayed as at best unconcerned with the rights/lives of women and at worst a misogynistic writer who has no qualms about using female characters in the most abusive of ways.[13] Alice Walker, Awkward, and Gates (among others) connect Hurston to a literary lineage of black women writers. Walker lists Hurston among names like Phillis Wheatley and Frances Harper as one of the few who represent and carry on the "signature" of strong artistic black women (238, 243). Awkward places Hurston in a tradition of "Afro-American women novel[ists]" (6) whose works "form a harmonious system" of "cooperative textual interactions" (7) based on a mother/daughter model. And Gates explicitly compares Hurston's and Wright's representations of their own mothers to argue that Hurston celebrates female voice while Wright silences it. Gates quotes Hurston describing her mother just before her death, unable to talk and looking at Zora in a way that made her understand that she was looking to Zora "to speak for her" (167). In the quote from Wright concerning his mother's death, Wright says she "told me that she could not endure the pain, that she wanted to die. I held her hand and begged her to be quiet. That night I ceased to react to my mother; my feelings were frozen" (Gates 167). Gates tells us that these passages clearly indicate "how far apart Hurston and Wright stand in the tradition."

While it is true that Hurston and Wright narrate the loss of their mothers differently, the fact that both writers insist on the moment of their mothers' deaths as affecting their sense of themselves and their ability and desire to write places Wright's and Hurston's literary projects closer together than we might at first assume. Hurston's anecdote quite

clearly announces her feeling that she can, and is asked to, speak for other women, thus connecting her to a tradition of female voice. Wright's anecdote, though it appears to be about silencing women's voices, in fact constructs the female voice as more powerful than does Hurston's. He does not silence his mother, for she continues to speak. A careful reading suggests that he is not asking for her not to speak at all, but rather for her not to announce her defeat. The cessation of feeling described here indicates that her insistence on announcing a desire to die or give up led to his response of shutting down his own feeling. This anecdote can be read in relation to many of Wright's female characters as well as his implicit address to a female audience, particularly in *Uncle Tom's Children*. A literary representation in which women's voices are silenced is *not* the same as the text itself silencing women or asking them to remain silent. As in the anecdote quoted by Gates, Wright's fiction is actually calling on women to speak and live, not to shut down or remain quiet or ask others to speak for them. Like Hurston, Wright is aware of the power of women's voices to do violence (particularly to black men). Yet he is also, like Hurston, calling on women to use their voices in a way that allows for political action. Wright's texts suggest that unless women are able to do this, there will be neither communal nor individual voice for African Americans.

Before I turn to the texts themselves, I would like to point out one other aspect of Wright's relation to literary traditions that often gets overlooked or oversimplified. *Uncle Tom's Children* explicitly, through its title, places itself in a female literary tradition, specifically in relation to the "female" genre of sentimental protest.[14] In Richard Yarborough's introduction to the Perennial Edition of *Uncle Tom's Children* he mentions naturalist novels, communist theory, Chicago school sociology, pulp novels, and the work of the New Negro Renaissance among Wright's literary and intellectual influences, but he does not mention nineteenth-century sentimental novels, though Wright's use of characters and situations to engage the reader and provoke an emotional response is in fact quite similar to the sentimental novel. Though it is well known that Wright wrote of *Uncle Tom's Children* that he regretted the fact that he had "written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about" ("How Bigger" 454) this does not, as Yarborough seems to suggest, indicate that the text was never meant to employ sentimental literary tropes. *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* perhaps the most famous American

sentimental novel, certainly did not discourage tears. At the same time, it was not supposed to make readers "feel good" or morally justified simply for having read it. If this were the case, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would not have had the powerful social and political impact that it did. Wright, in *Uncle Tom's Children,* engages some of the same literary tropes and politicized aesthetics as Stowe. *Uncle Tom's Children* does, to some extent, use a "language of tears" to provoke readers' emotional responses in the service of asking them to act in a political capacity even if they do not have access to an official political realm. Jane Tompkins writes of sentimental fiction that it "represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view" and "is remarkable for its intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness; and that, in certain cases, it offers a critique of American society far more devastating than any delivered by better-known critics such as Hawthorne and Melville" (83). *Uncle Tom's Children* is also an effort to reorganize culture from an African American point of view and, like the sentimental novels to which Tompkins refers, its intellectual complexity and ambition provide a devastating critique of US society in the first half of the twentieth century. Yarborough concludes that "*Uncle Tom's Children* constitutes a self-conscious rejection of the past" that breaks with earlier literary traditions opening up space for "countless black authors who followed in his wake" proclaiming, "Uncle Tom is dead!" (xxix). Yet if the novel were simply a rejection of the past and of earlier literary styles, representations, and traditions it would not be titled "Uncle Tom's *Children*." Wright might have called it "Uncle Tom Is Dead," but he did not. His title explicitly indicates that the book is part of a lineage, his characters the "children" of Stowe's characters and the "children" of a world in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was so profoundly influential (in both positive and negative ways). Moreover, the stories that make up *Uncle Tom's Children* are themselves "descendants" of Stowe's novel. However much Wright might be repulsed by the idea of sentimentality without action, he clearly recognizes Stowe, for better or for worse, as a literary foremother—one who, incidentally, also recognized the need for Uncle Toms to die and be replaced by former slaves who will, like George Harris and the list of free black men provided at the end of Stowe's novel, fight for full citizenship whether in the US or a country of their own, and accumulate property and power.[15]

A great deal of the voice work of *Uncle Tom's Children* is achieved structurally. The text is framed by two stories about women. This fact itself

indicates the importance of female characters to the text and suggests an implied female as well as male audience.[16] The first story, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," appears as an autobiographical sketch, situated at the beginning of the book to give more authenticity to the fictional stories in the collection. Yet it is also a way to introduce the reader to the power of women's voices to either reinforce or undermine Jim Crow ideology. While the main character of the story is the young black autobiographical male narrator who goes through multiple stages of "Jim Crow education" (7), the person who starts the narrator on this educational path and who ultimately has the power to take him off it is his mother. After a fight with the "white boys who lived beyond the tracks" (1) that leaves the narrator with a gash requiring three stitches, his mother beats him and tells him: "I was never to fight any more wars. I was never, never, under any conditions, to fight *white* folks again" (2). In the first two pages of the book we are shown that it is black women and particularly black mothers who hold the key to dislodging Jim Crow ideology and that it is in their role as "good mothers," i.e. as protectors of their children and reproducers of social and cultural knowledge, that they fail in this political potential. While many of the women in *Uncle Tom's Children* appear to be mouthpieces for white dominance (Grannie's "Don yuh go thinkn sin, Bob!" [67] when Bob wants to steal a boat from white people during a flood to save his family) or weak figures unable to act (Big Boy's mother's refrain, "Nobody but the good Lawd kin hep us now" [40]), this introduction implies that it is by conformity to heavily reinforced gender roles, not by inherent gender-based weaknesses, that this is the case.

The last story, "Bright and Morning Star," presents a woman as its hero. This is striking not only because of the rather subordinate roles women have played in earlier stories but moreover because it is the only story in which the hero acts in a way that actually changes his or her environment. The other stories have heroes but the best these heroes can do is choose in what manner they run or, more often, die. Not that this is an insubstantial accomplishment. As Yarborough puts it, "choosing the terms of one's own death in a world that refuses to let you live as a human being constitutes an existential triumph of no small order" (xxiv). Still, it is not ultimately existential triumphs that this text celebrates, but rather political and social triumphs. And the only tale in which one is clearly to be found is "Bright and Morning Star."[17] In this story, Sue, an elderly black woman, is politicized by the labor organizing of her sons in an interracial

communist group. Born and raised with a strong religious faith learned from her own mother that allowed her to "obey the laws of white folks with a soft smile of secret knowing," she is given "a new [vision], different, but great and strong enough to fling her into the light of another grace" (225). This new political faith is challenged when Sue's son Johnny-Boy is captured by the sheriff and tortured for the names of his comrades. Sue knows that if he talks he could be spared and that another member of the party is already headed to the sheriff to inform him of those involved. Sue maintains a strong political voice throughout the story and even though Johnny-Boy is the only person left of importance in her life, she decides not only to give up her own life, and not only to give up her son's life, but also to let him be tortured in front of her while she waits with a hidden gun to shoot the traitor and keep the names of the organizers from the law. She succeeds in this and thus in this story the death of our main character is not simply a story of fighting to die on one's own terms but a story in which a woman's voice work (her ability to speak and to decide when and where to speak so as to be heard) and corresponding actions lead to a victory for the interracial labor organization. Throughout the story Wright implicitly calls to a female audience, suggesting that they respond by entering a space of political voice work, even if that means giving up traditional ideas of womanhood and motherhood by being willing to let children die or be hurt and to kill if necessary. Wright does not ask his female audience to relinquish their faith or love of their children and families, but calls for them (in a way that echoes Hurston) to redefine their "vision" of right and wrong, and to put freedom before safety.

Like *Their Eyes* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Uncle Tom's Children* is written to a broad audience, asking for readers to rethink their understandings of racial hierarchy and gender norms. But it is also, like the aforementioned novels, addressed specifically to a female audience and it calls on women to take whatever actions are within their power to effect political change. "Bright and Morning Star" makes it clear that there are certain acts, both speech acts and physical acts, that are available only to women. For example, Sue has to ask Reva, a small, thin, white girl, to walk a mile through cold and mud to tell the comrades that the sheriff knows about the meeting. This is presented as a responsibility of Reva's precisely because of her femaleness and her whiteness: "Being a woman, Reva was not suspect; she would *have* to go. It was just as natural for Reva to go back through the cold rain as it was for her [Sue] to iron night and day

or fur Sug to be in jail" (228). It is not natural in an essentialized way, but natural considering the world they live in and what it means to be white or black, male or female. Likewise, as an older, black woman Sue is perhaps one of the only comrades who can approach the scene of her son's torture by the sheriff and his cronies. She does this by acting exactly as they would expect her to.[18] She shows up with a sheet (under which she carries Johnny-Boy's gun) and in submissive language tells them she has brought the sheet to take away the body. Thinking she has come to save her son, they encourage her to try to get him to talk. They break his legs in front of her. She wants to kill him to end his pain but waits, knowing that she most likely will only have one shot with which to kill and silence the traitor. She succeeds and though she and Johnny-Boy are killed, she is able to die telling her enemy: "Yuh didn't git what yuh wanted! N yuh ain gonna nevah git it!" (236)—a success far greater than that of most characters in the book. By representing Sue as the most politically effective character, and the most respectable female character in the book, Wright not only, as Higashida argues, "insists that issues of gender . . . are integral to conceptualizing a revolutionary praxis and subjectivity" (400), but also implicitly calls on the black female reader to let go of her fears for her lovers, sons, and daughters, enough to use her voice and silence politically.[19]

Politics of address in *Their Eyes* and *Native Son*

Lacking in the readings that oppose Hurston and Wright—such as Gates's argument that Wright "counted himself among those few Negroes who could tell not only their own story but also the woeful tale of their pathetic, voiceless black countrymen" (166), while Hurston, "search[ed] for a telling form of language [and] define[d] the search for the self" (168)—is an acknowledgment that both *Native Son* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are to a great extent novels about what *can't* be said. *Their Eyes* does the voice work of producing a "speakerly text" in which a black communal voice can take its place within an American literary tradition. Yet Hurston includes the critically contentious scene in the white courtroom in which Janie is not able to speak her own story or represent herself in a public, political space. We might think of the entirety of *Native Son* as a version of this courtroom scene. Without the access to a successful all-black community (Eatonville) that Hurston had, Wright's question

becomes not how to represent an authentic African American voice, but how to speak as an African American in a white-dominated and defined world. Bigger is never, as Janie is, able to make himself understood through his own voice. Nevertheless, voice work is foregrounded in both plots as a central personal and political struggle. Both authors run up against the Rancièrian political in which contention over what speaking means constitutes the rationality of the speech situation. The voice work of both texts helps the reader to understand the nature of the current political speech situation, as well as challenging that speech situation through construction of and address to particular audiences. There are parallels between the ways in which others' voices must be negotiated or at times silenced to make room for one's own ability to speak. Both texts make demands on their readers to hear differently and both construct and speak directly to a female audience.

As discussed above, Hurston gives us specific textual cues, asking us to read voice in *Their Eyes* as an explicitly political expression. Hurston also positions her audience such that they are forced to respond to the paucity of possibilities for political expression and the need to construct radically new political speech situations. Hurston's decision not to have Janie's speech represented in either direct or free indirect discourse in the courtroom provides a model for the politics of speaking publicly in the narrative aesthetics of the work more generally, as well as representing the limitations faced by black women writers and speakers in Hurston's historical moment. Janie's silence in the courtroom has yet to be satisfactorily explained by critics. This, I argue, is because it is purposefully unsatisfying. It is not a moment of empowerment but one revealing the necessity for more political change, more contestation over what speaking means and who and what can be heard as a legitimate speaker and as legitimate content. In a courtroom in racist America, Janie's voice literally could not be heard. But this is not because she can't get the legal right to a trial, which she has and which "works" to establish her innocence. Rancière suggests that "politics exists because the logos is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt" (22-23). In Hurston's fictional world Janie is able to enunciate what she feels is just and therefore be found not guilty by the court. Hurston's actual text, however, is

unable to represent this speech, suggesting that this is a politics that still needs to be constructed, a space in which black female voices still risk being perceived merely as "noise." Thus the aesthetics of the scene—the way the reader experiences it subjectively—has profound political valence in that it "speaks to" what cannot be spoken directly by Hurston or Janie.

Wright places a similar emphasis on both interpersonal and public speech. *Native Son* can be read as an extended courtroom scene not because of the trial itself (though certainly in this space black voices cannot be heard), but because Bigger is never in a space in which the racial politics of his environment do not impact his ability to speak and be heard. Max's character functions as an extended metaphor for speaking in the political realm. He is the man who attempts to speak for Bigger in the realm of state discourse. And, as a man representing a potential connection to the state and the political, he is the person to whom Bigger feels the greatest need to make himself heard. "How could he get into that man a sense of what he wanted?" Bigger asks himself after the trial, "If he could only tell him!" (422). And a page later: "But he had to *make* him know!" (423). The novel does not end with the court's verdict; it ends with Bigger's attempt to speak in the political space defined by Max's presence. This attempt, however, fails. Max is unable to speak for Bigger in the courtroom. He repeats arguments that already register as speech but he is unable to make, as Rancière would have it, a part of those who have no part. He relies on figuring Bigger as a passive body. He does not ask the court to recognize Bigger's own speech, and is able neither to comprehend Bigger nor to provide a space in which Bigger can speak and be heard:

> [Bigger] could not talk. Max reached over and placed a hand on this shoulder, and Bigger could tell by its touch that Max did not know, had no suspicion of what he wanted, of what he was trying to say. . . .Distractedly, he gazed about the cell, trying to remember where he had heard words that could help him. He could recall none. (422)

In the end Max turns away from Bigger's request to acknowledge "the reality of his living" (423), i.e. his actual desires and motives: "I didn't know I was alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for them" (429). However, Bigger is able to affect Max by making his eyes "full of terror." Forcing Max to turn away in terror is Bigger's most pow-

erful and, like Janie speaking to Jody, potentially most violent political act; and it happens in the form of voice work. He has spoken to Max in a way that forces him to hear differently. Though Max as representation of the political realm of speech does not change enough for Bigger to be fully heard, his normative ways of hearing are challenged such that he must understand enough to *feel* what Bigger is saying. Like the examples from *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Their Eyes,* this scene indicates both the rarity and the potential violence of truly political speech.

Similarly, both novels are concerned with what speech gets silenced (does not get to be heard as voice) so that others may speak. In *Their Eyes* every domestic partner that Janie has must be silenced in one way or another for her to be able to attain a voice. Nanny, Logan, Jody, and even Tea Cake are all heard as powerful voices by Janie, Nanny perhaps the most powerful among them. Overcoming Nanny's voice, which is powerful because it draws on racial and gender ideologies of the dominant white supremacist society, is not presented by Hurston as a celebratory event, but as one that requires Nanny to die having never experienced her life other than as an "infinity of conscious pain" (23-24). Likewise, in *Native Son* Bigger finds it necessary to overcome, by silencing, a series of female voices. The most powerful in relation to Bigger, if, like Nanny, one of the least powerful in the fictional world of the text, is Bigger's mother. The novel begins with his mother's voice demanding that he silence the alarm. Repeatedly, like the autobiographical mother in *Uncle Tom's Children,* she encourages him not to fight, not to respond to the alarms going off internally. She insists that working hard as a servant in a rich white household will "make a man out of" him (101). And she is the only person that he insists on not talking to while in his jail cell: "Bigger cringed. Not this! Not here; not *now*!" (295). Bigger's mother does come into the cell and the family has what appears to be a moment of bonding and identification. This identification is undone, however, by Bigger's mother's plea to Mrs. Dalton. The effect of shame that Bigger's mother's words have on him is more powerful than any other in the book, implying that while Bigger's mother's voice holds great power over him it also holds great destructive power, perhaps the power that led Bigger to murder: "Bigger's shame for his mother amounted to hate" (302). Again, the black female voice has incredible power in relation to black men, but this power becomes destructive via women's uncritical enactment of dominant ideals of femininity and motherhood.

The other two women whose voices clearly threaten Bigger and whose voices he can and does silence are Mary and Bessie. Though both Jan and Mary approach Bigger it is she, says Bigger, who "acted and talked in a way that made me hate her" (305). And it is in the act of silencing Mary with a pillow that Bigger accidentally kills her. Similarly, Bigger says that he killed Bessie, "To keep her from talking" (352). The threats these female characters pose suggest that, given the highly politically constructed and tenuous nature of black American men's relationship to masculinity and sexuality, women's voices are intensely powerful and potentially dangerous, rather than (as has been suggested by most critics) that women in *Native Son* are less significant than men to Bigger or simply the receptacles of masculine violence. This is not to suggest that violence against women is not prevalent in the narrative of *Native Son,* but that as readers we are expected to recognize that the narrative is focalized through Bigger Thomas, a character whose actions we are not intended to have a comfortable relation to and a character who dramatizes rather than announces the politics of the novel. Bigger's silencing of women is the inverse of his political voice work with Max. This kind of violence has no political effects and in fact only reinforces Bigger's already powerless position. As readers we are led to understand that Bigger misunderstood the power of female voice and the power of women as allies in his own struggle via Wright's positioning of women as audience.[20]

Aesthetics of reception

Native Son is a novel that has historically and continues to offend and anger female critics and readers. In 2006, Mary Helen Washington said of the novel: "I have always found it so misogynistic that I resist rereading it or anything about it" (168). Wright himself presented it, against *Uncle Tom's Children,* in masculinized terms: "so hard and deep that [readers] would have to face it without the consolation of tears" ("How Bigger" 454). Nevertheless, there is little indication that his contemporary female readers found it unbearably misogynistic.[21] In fact, *Native Son* positions women as the most important audience within the text itself: Bigger's mother expects explanations of him, Mary asks him to respond to her, Mrs. Dalton (though blind) is the one "watching" when Bigger kills Mary, and Bessie becomes the single witness to Bigger's confession. Implicitly, then, the text figures women as an audience for the novel itself. We have

already seen the way in which Bigger tries to use Max as an audience. He calls on him to participate in an interdependent performance that will give Bigger access to political speech, but Max is unable to respond. Audience here is of central political importance to the novel. Like the narrative relation between Janie and Pheoby in *Their Eyes,* the climactic interaction between Max and Bigger makes it clear that performing as audience is an active and necessary role for meaningful voice work to occur. In placing women in the role of audience, Wright may be moving away from radical representations of female voice work such as his character Aunt Sue, but he is still far from assigning women an entirely passive role.

If Max becomes the central figure representing the realm of political speech and its failure to hear Bigger, Bessie becomes the central figure representing a potential counterpublic audience that could. Max is the character Bigger asks to hear him, but Bessie is the character that actually provides a space in which Bigger can speak. Barbara Johnson has suggested that Bessie, reading Bigger's ransom note over his shoulder and guessing his guilt in the murder of Mary Dalton, stands in for the black woman reader "whose reading is both accurate and threatening" ("Re(a)d" 69). I would suggest that not only does Bessie turn herself into an accurate reader, but Bigger in fact asks her to be a reader and an audience to his texts. Ultimately, the possibility of her speech becomes too threatening for him, but before this scene of reading he looks to her as the sole audience who can hear and confirm his experience. After he murders Mary he wants to speak, "to stand up and shout, telling them that he had killed a rich white girl" (129), and in this state of mind the first thing he thinks to do is to go see Bessie. Here Bigger has a double audience in the same way that the book itself does. He has a white male audience, to whom he desires to speak but cannot. He also has a black female audience, to whom he can speak and who gives him something back in return: "he saw her looking at him, her black eyes wide with eager interest. . . .It made him feel alive and gave him a heightened sense of the value of himself" (143). Certainly women as a validating audience for men is not a radically feminist construction of the male/female relationship. At the same time, for a character like Bigger who is undoubtedly misogynistic and has almost no sources for any sense of self-worth, the power of Bessie's response to him is striking.

This same split in audience happens again when Bigger writes his ransom note to the Daltons. He explicitly addresses the letter to a white

male reader (Mr. Dalton) and yet he needs Bessie as an audience for the note's creation. Bessie plants the idea of a letter in Bigger's head, which prompts his act of writing in the first place. Moreover, Bigger equates writing with Bessie's presence: "He should see Bessie tonight. And he ought to pick out the pencil and paper he would use" (164), the "and" suggesting not just a series of thoughts but an explicit link between Bessie and writing, almost as if he's picking out what to wear for a date. Bigger then proceeds to write the note in Bessie's presence. There is no good reason for this other than that Bigger needs or wants an audience, a second audience, a black female audience. Interestingly the one edit he makes to the letter is to change "if you want your daughter back safe" to "if you want your daughter back alive" (176–77). This appears at first as yet more evidence of Bigger's willingness to perpetuate violence, both physical and textual, against women. However, if we think of this scene of writing as a kind of parable for Wright's writing or African American writing in general, the fact that he "crossed out 'safe' and wrote 'alive'" can also be read as the politico-aesthetic philosophy behind the text. Just as Wright represents Sue as a heroine for giving up safety in exchange for a live and active politics, so here we might read the text written by a black man and witnessed by a black woman as a call to replace safety not with not being dead but with truly being *alive*.

One final note on Bessie, and again this is not to suggest that Bigger himself values her as he should, treats her as he should, or even considers her to be fully a human being, but rather to suggest that the text shows us her power as an audience for Bigger's desire to be known and heard—a potential but failed partner in voice work. The consensual sex scene between Bessie and Bigger is described in the following language:

> [He] slept in her body, rising and sinking with the ebb and flow of her blood, being willingly dragged into a warm night sea to rise renewed to the surface to face a world he hated and wanted to blot out of existence, clinging close to a fountain whose warm waters washed and cleaned his senses, cooled them, made them strong and keen again to see and smell and touch and taste and hear, cleared them to end the tiredness and to reforge in him a new sense of time and space;—after he had been tossed to dry upon a warm sunlit rock under a white sky he lifted his hand slowly and heavily and touched Bessie's lips with his fingers. (135)

I have quoted this passage at some length in part to illustrate its lyricism, its near Romanticism in what has been agreed to be a highly Naturalist novel. This is not simply a representation of Bigger's response to getting off (which it is suggested he does in the theater without the accompaniment of this lyrical language). Something different is happening here. For Bigger to figure Bessie as the sea on which he rides, or as a figure of care or renewal does not challenge ingrained understandings and images of woman. However, the narrative suggests that her power here goes beyond attending to his physical desires. The language of this passage is transformative: "washed," "cleaned," "made strong," "cleared," "reforged," "new sense." Additionally, the natural imagery of rock and sun is repeated, if in a slightly less lyrical form, at the moment in the "Fate" section just after Max has first spoken to Bigger about the murders. Here Bigger begins to feel "a recognition of his life" and a "sense of the value of himself." "For the first time in his life," the narrative, focalized through Bigger, tells us, "he felt ground beneath his feet" (361). And on the following page an image forms in Bigger's head of "a strong blinding sun sending hot rays down and he was standing in the midst of a vast crowd of men, white men and black men and all men, and the sun's rays melted away the many differences, those colors, the clothes, and drew what was common and good upward toward the sun" (362). The reader will note that this is not the first image of Bigger feeling himself to be on solid ground. It was, in fact, in the afterglow of sex with Bessie. And this image of a sunny sky that could melt away differences is also prefigured in Bessie's lips, to which Bigger lifts his hand while feeling himself "upon a warm sunlit rock under a white sky." The narrative, then, complicates Bigger's sexist uses of Bessie, suggesting that—while he may not realize it in his drive for recognition in a white male public realm, and while his gestures to reach for her also silence her (his hand covers her mouth to touch her lips)—he has indeed had other chances for a sense of self-worth, self-understanding, and the warmth of a hope for a world where race and gender are not insurmountable differences between people.

While I am not arguing that we ignore the misogyny in *Native Son* or depreciate the differences between Wright's and Hurston's literary approaches, and while I certainly do not think that the readings that feminist and particularly black feminist theory have given us of these novels should be devalued, these readings have to some extent limited our ways of reading and hearing these texts, particularly in relation to one another.

Reading Wright's and Hurston's aesthetic approaches to politics in the context of voice work in the early civil rights era can help us to read beyond what remain heavily gendered understandings of the racial politics of both authors. Wright and Hurston produced their texts at a historical moment when US public discourse was such that they both felt it useful and necessary not only to produce an African American literary voice but also to mark a lack, an absence of political voice. They both employ voice work in their texts to call on readers, particularly black female readers, to engage (violently if necessary) in a struggle to disrupt the power structures in place so that such a political voice might be able to emerge.

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Notes

1. William J. Maxwell makes a similar argument regarding the "vision of a Hurston/Wright divide" that "underwrites genealogies of audacious black women's writing burdened by Wright's male line but boldly, dialogically responsive to it" as well as "dramatiz[ing] less gendered oppositions undergirding the black modern within contemporary African American criticism, oppositions such as race versus class, modernism versus naturalism, Harlem Renaissance versus Chicago Renaissance, black nationalism versus Marxism, and so on" (155-56).

2. The importance of voice in African American fiction has been discussed by critics such as John F. Callahan, who discusses the "pursuit of voice" in African American fiction; Michael Awkward, who claims that "the dominant image" in black women's writing is "the struggle to make articulate a heretofore repressed and silenced black female's story and voice" (1); and Robert Stepto, who tells us that in slave narratives, "The voice is striking because of what it relates, but even more so because the slave's acquisition of voice is quite possibly his only permanent achievement once he escapes and casts himself upon a new and larger landscape" (3).

3. For more on speech act theory see J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* and John R. Searle's *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language.*

4. Hurston and Wright were both concerned with the systems through which

their state and society functioned. Wright spent many years organizing with the Communist party and Hurston notoriously objected to the government's legal enforcement of desegregation. This is not to suggest, then, that Hurston and Wright would have explicitly agreed with Rancière's definition of the political. However, both Hurston and Wright were ultimately not particularly confident in the power of either the US government or established political and social movements (communism, cultural nationalism, popular front, etc.) to speak to the state of American racism and racial violence. And both used their literary work to negotiate and critique the sites at which their confidence in state and social systems failed. Thus, Rancière's theorization can help us to read the politics of voice work at play in their respective texts, which functions to create the speaking subject or point to its lack rather than to speak to pre-existing political systems, ideologies, or disciplinary structures.

5. Though this term has come into relatively wide acceptance, I am following Nikhil Pal Singh's usage and definition specifically. Singh suggests that "black subaltern struggle, white resistance, and open and surreptitious racial discord" (12) defines a civil rights struggle that began much earlier than the legal codifications of the 1950s and continues to the present day. Though he does not give a specific date of origin, he begins his own study in the 1930s, suggesting this decade as the beginning of the long civil rights era.

6. Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front* (New York: Verso, 1997) and Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations* are two recent works that have helped define radical political writing in the pre-Cold War US. Both mention Hurston only in passing and both use her specifically as a foil to a longer more engaged reading of Wright. Though Foley has a chapter on "Women and the Left in the 1930s," she discusses no African American women and she categorizes most women's writing as consisting of "representations of identity and selfhood" (237). She acknowledges that these themes represent "the centrality of cultural change to the process of revolutionary transformation," but her decision to segregate this discussion implies that while issues of culture, identity, and selfhood are indirectly important to revolution, they are a secondary and particularly female-oriented area, not intimately connected to or overlapping with other "radical representations" (237). Additionally, Singh's insightful rethinking of the civil rights movement addresses very few women thinkers, writers, or activists, again implying that the persons central to the thinking of civil rights and black politics in the early to mid-twentieth century were men, and their subject matter publically and politically oriented.

7. Singh argues that our current understanding of the civil rights movement has been distorted by the ultimate success of strategies of "Cold War civil rights" that made significant legal gains against segregation, covering up the complex transnational and local movements that made up the long civil rights

era. "By accepting a vision predicated on the subordination of racial equality to national security," Singh writes, "mainstream black civil rights leaders acquiesced to the state-sanctioned thinning of the field of robust and independent black public interaction that had been developing since the 1930s" (168). My rereading of Wright and Hurston is an attempt to uncover connections between their work, the vast criticism on it, and the complex and robust possibilities for black politics and political articulations being constructed in the era leading up to Cold War civil rights.

8. See for example, Martyn Bone's "The (Extended) South of Black Folk: Intraregional and Transnational Migrant Labor in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," which brings historical information on intrastate and regional migration in the South to a reading of *Their Eyes*; Leif Sorensen's "Modernity on a Global Stage: Hurston's Alternative Modernism," which reads *Their Eyes* in the context of Hurston's ethnographic productions and her experiences in the Caribbean; and Hildegard Hoeller's "Racial Currency: Zora Neale Hurston's 'The Gilded Six-Bits' and the Gold-Standard Debate," which reads "The Gilded Six-Bits" in the context of the gold standard debate and the relation between monetary and racial essentialism.

9. Exceptions to this are Leigh Anne Duck's "'Go there tuh *know* there': Zora Neale Hurston and the Chronotope of the Folk," which sees Hurston's critique of bourgeois white modernity as a critique of its patriarchal structures; and Sorensen's "Hurston's Alternative Modernism," which reads gender discrimination within Hurston's authentic ethnographic representations of folk culture as prompting the writing of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Nevertheless, both critics ultimately retain the public/private and ethnographic/fictional divides, reading *Their Eyes* as a feminist but private, less directly political, engagement of marginalized experiences of modernity.

10. See for example, Deborah G. Plant, *Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom*; M. Genevieve West, *Zora Neale Hurston & American Literary Culture*; and Stephen Spencer, "Racial Politics and the Literary Reception of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*."

11. Gates refers to it as "the killing timbre of Janie's true inner voice," (190) and Callahan as, "the volcanic potential of women's voices" (134).

12. For more on Hurston's publishing history and her contemporary critical reception by African American critics see West's *Zora Neale Hurston & American Literary Culture.*

13. For reviews of criticism that positions Wright's fiction as misogynistic see Sondra Guttman's "What Bigger Killed For: Rereading Violence Against Women in *Native Son,*" and Cheryl Higashida's "Aunt Sue's Children: Re-viewing the Gender(ed) Politics of Richard Wright's Radicalism."

14. James Baldwin notes this connection in "Everybody's Protest Novel." Rather than appreciate this connection as a literary lineage that challenges dominant masculisit norms, Baldwin uses it to reinstate himself in the properly male black literary tradition of "revelation" and "truth," while exiling Wright not only to a white and therefore inauthentic position but moreover to a female position that can never reveal "truth" but is rather "the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion" (15).

15. John Lowe notes another narrative similarity between Stowe's and Wright's texts: "As in *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Uncle Tom's Children* presents a general pattern of disintegration, with each story beginning with a whole family and then proceeding to chart its destruction and dispersal through racism" (71).

16. These opening and closing chapters, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" and "Bright and Morning Star" were added in 1940, two years after the collection's original publication. This fact does not undermine their structural importance but rather suggests an acknowledgment on both Wright's and his editiors' parts that the addition of these stories would highlight elements of importance in the original stories.

17. James R. Giles notes that Sue in "Bright and Morning Star," "triumphs over the forces which have limited the characters in the first four stories" (266). And Cheryl Higashida sees "Bright and Morning Star" as "the culmination of radicalism" in *Uncle Tom's Children* and "a recognition of African American women's revolutionary energies" (410).

18. Higashida calls this Sue's "subversive minstrelsy" (417) a term I find useful as long as we consider it subversive in relation to both racial and gender expectations.

19. Higashida reads these aspects of Sue's character as an historical acknowledgment of the "radical black mother"—"a new heroine on the Left" (412) exemplified by the mothers of the Scottsboro boys. I find this a convincing reading but would suggest that even without the historical context of actual radical black mothers, we can see Wright's narrative construction itself as a "call to action" prompted by the "emergence of another state of radicalism yet to be written" (418).

20. I am not suggesting this was entirely Wright's conscious purpose in the creation of Bigger. Clearly Wright was himself threatened by the idea of a particular kind of female audience (rich, white "banker's daughters") as potentially undermining his authority as a black male writer. Nevertheless, this politics of address positions women as a desired audience in *Native Son.*

21. Women critics at the time of the novel's publication appear to have been less concerned about the violence against women in the text than later crit-

ics of the 1970s and 1980s. The first extended critique that argues *Native Son* is misogynistic that I am aware of is Sylvia Keady's "Richard Wright's Women Characters and Inequality" (1976). This would indicate that second wave feminisms and their related effect on literary criticism were largely the source for reading Wright's representations of violence against women as indications of a misogynist text. Sondra Guttman argues that such readings have overlooked the ways in which representations of violence against women in *Native Son* critique the ways in which "women's bodies served as sites of conflict between men" (171). This article continues Guttman's work of challenging overly-simplistic readings of Wright's representations of violence against women; it also attempts to move away from reading gender in relation to direct representations of women's bodies (as objects) and to look for the way female subjectivity circulates through indirect narrative address.

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