Reading the Rhetoric of Universality:
The Discursive Transformation of Race in 1930s Public Discourse

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Kasi L. Williamson

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Kirt Wilson, Adviser

May, 2013

© Kasi Williamson, 2013

Acknowledgments

I count myself lucky to have worked among such smart and generous teachers, colleagues, friends, and family members. I am indebted to their wisdom, kindness, and support.

First, I must thank my husband, Rob Schlette, whose daily support and encouragement over many years enabled me to complete this project.

My adviser, Kirt Wilson, made this dissertation better and more focused at every step. I have learned from his insights, but also from his example as an exceptional scholar, a challenging teacher, and a generous mentor. I am grateful to have been his student. I am also grateful to the members of my committee. The thoughtful questions and observations of Richard Graff, Mary Vavrus, and Art Walzer urged me toward greater clarity and precision in my critical language and theoretical claims. For my work to receive such attention and care from these remarkable scholars is a true gift.

I also want to thank Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, whose standards for rigor and elegance will always guide my work, and Ed Schiappa, whose mentorship has been instrumental to my professional growth. Bea Dehler deserves special acknowledgement for all that she has done to support me and so many other Communication Studies graduate students.

Joe Messina and Mary Ann Klein were the professors who helped me to find my voice; they became friends who have shown me what it means to be scholars in community. In a profound sense, all of my work is shaped by their influence. In a more direct way, conversations with them helped to refine and improve this dissertation.

My colleagues in Academic Support Resources at the University of Minnesota provided support and encouragement throughout my doctoral work. I am especially grateful to Sue Van Voorhis, Tina Falkner, Tracy Fischer, and Ingrid Nuttall, whose friendship is a gift that I treasure.

By showing me that reading and writing do things in the world, my colleagues at The Loft Literary Center set me on the path that led to this project. In particular, Bao Phi's dedication to building community and opportunities for artists of color widened the lens through which I see the world.

The support from my colleagues at the School for Professional Studies (SPS) at Saint Louis University, especially Stephanie Mooshegian, was invaluable as I completed the final stages of the dissertation process. My students at SPS are an inspiration.

I am deeply grateful to my parents for always believing in me, and for putting their full enthusiasm behind whatever it was I decided to do. I also want to thank my brothers for making me strong, my sisters for laughter and friendship, and all of their children for the remarkable and beautiful things they will do in the world.

Dedication

To Terrence Riddell

A brilliant mind and a great soul

Keep on truckin'

Abstract

This dissertation utilizes three case studies to explore changing conceptualizations of race at a turbulent moment in rhetorical history. In particular, this dissertation traces evidence of conceptual change by analyzing the textual form and critical reception of James Truslow Adams' *The Epic of America*, Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*. This project argues that the discursive transformation from the ideology of scientific racism to a more egalitarian vision of universal humanity was facilitated by specific rhetorical processes, which have had ongoing, ambiguous consequences for contemporary public discourse.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements…………………………………………………………………...i

Dedication…………………………………………………………………………...iii

Abstract……………………………………………………………………………...iv

Chapter one

Introduction……………..…………………………………………….……………..1

Chapter two

A Dream is Born: Figurative Transformation in *The Epic of America*………………….33

Chapter three

Drawing the “other” close: Narrative dialogism in *The Good Earth*…………………….72

Chapter four

Shifting the Discursive Center: The Vernacular Rhetoric of *Mules and Men*…………119

Chapter five

Conclusion...………………………………………………………………………162

Works Cited…………………………………………………………………………178

Chapter One

Introduction

A recent round of post-Presidential election “internet memes” shows a red-and-blue U.S. map of the 2012 Electoral College results next to two additional, color-coded maps of the United States. The first map contrasts the former slave states and territories with free states and territories. A second map highlights the states that legally endorsed, prohibited or tolerated racial segregation in 1950. In all three maps, the color-coded states demonstrate remarkable symmetry—the former slave states and territories predominantly correspond to the Jim Crow states in 1950, and both correspond well to the states that awarded their electoral votes to Mitt Romney in 2012 (“Three Somewhat Similar Maps”). The temporal state-by-state comparison is imperfect, and the implied argument is not without possible refutation; nevertheless, the images are remarkable for how they collectively communicate a complex social meaning in a persuasive fashion. Through a comparison between the proud present and a shameful past, the juxtaposed maps imply that we continue to be a racist nation. Or, perhaps more specifically, they communicate that certain sections of the United States—the “red states”—are antebellum throwbacks, citizen populations who refused to vote for Barack Obama simply because he is African American. Is the United States stuck in a historical feedback loop? Or, as the nation travels to what many hope will be its inevitable post-racial and post-racist destiny, are the red states just running a few decades behind? The three images gesture toward a meaning that is damning yet ultimately incomplete; the images resonate with a range of public beliefs, but they do not articulate a clear message.

This disjuncture between observation and articulation is at the center of this project. Imani Perry investigates a similar disjuncture in her 2011 book as she works “to understand our ongoing embrace of racial inequality in the United States, despite the fact that we are a society that formally and colloquially decries racism and proclaims equality” (xiii). Perry traces the difference between what she calls the “practices of inequality”—the documented, material, systematic disadvantages faced by people of color in the contemporary U.S.—and the “race-neutral” language used to describe those practices. As she states:

> Because of Americans’ resistance to acknowledging the existence of racial discrimination and because of the widespread availability of race-neutral justifications for the practices of racial inequality, those who “see” bigotry as shaping American culture and those who don’t often remain at a standoff, both relying on what they perceive to be good information. (32)

Perry incorporates insights from a variety of disciplinary perspectives in her study, but for my purposes here, I view the problem she describes as a rhetorical one with a history in U.S. public discourse.

To better understand the history of this rhetorical problem, I will address three questions in this dissertation:

1) What are the rhetorical characteristics of a discourse that allows us to observe, but not understand or articulate, the realities of racial inequality?
2) Given that public discourse in the United States was once very blatant about the “reality” of race and racial hierarchy, how did we get “here” from “there”?

3) What texts and critical practices can rhetorical scholars use to illuminate and understand the rhetorical underpinnings of such historically-significant shifts in public discourse?

It would be impossible to address these questions in either their historical or critical fullness; therefore, I have chosen to examine them through the rhetorical analysis of three cases. These cases arise out of a historical moment when, with the notable exception of the modern civil rights movement, public conceptions of race in the United States were undergoing their greatest transformation.

Between 1930 and 1935, U.S. citizens confronted the Great Depression, but also during this period they were reading and thinking about race in ever new and interesting ways. Due in part to World War I, the Harlem Renaissance, and a growing realization that race and citizenship were not antithetical, the U.S. public began to rethink both its own identity and the identities that it attributed to "others." Three books were and continue to be important reflections of this public consideration. Published in 1931 and topping their respective bestseller lists in 1932, *The Epic of America* and *The Good Earth* demonstrate the tensions that existed at that moment between nationalist and racial identities; furthermore, they illustrate the preoccupations of a white, dominant, middlebrow reading public. In contrast, but also engaging with the reading habits of that same period, Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935) illuminates the complex interaction between rural African American voices, the African American "counter-public," and the dominant reading public. While I do not claim that these three books caused the conceptual shifts that reside at the core of this project, together these three

books and their historical, critical reception embody and reveal the conceptual collisions and contradictions of a national/racial discourse in flux.

Conceptualizations of racial difference always had been an important dimension of national identity in the United States, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries U.S. citizenship and national identity had been predicated on a public discourse that made sharp and explicit distinctions between Americans of British and Anglo origin and "others" who hailed from less desirable parts of the world. By the 1930s, national and racial identities still were not easily separated, but public explanations as to what "separated" the races and who constituted the racial other were being unsettled. Furthermore, as the United States grappled with its own destiny in increasingly international, global political and economic contexts, the concepts and distinctions that comprised American identity were realigned in important ways. I contend further that this realignment was sparked in no small part by the failures of nineteenth-century scientific racism. Scientific racism, which would continue in various guises, was nonetheless being subsumed within poetic, transcendent notions of universal humanity and an accompanying sense of national pride.

One might presume that as the idea of a universal humanity came to the forefront of public discussions, racial inequality would decline. Of course, that was not the case. Scientific racism may have served as the rationale for social and economic inequality, but material inequalities persisted even as the discourse of universal humanity emerged. This project investigates the rhetorical characteristics of a discursive change that circumvented the examination and transformation of social practices. I propose that an examination of

The Epic of America, The Good Earth, and *Mules and Men* allows scholars to observe particular ways in which rhetorical shifts within each text's intrinsic form and the printed reviews of each text did not necessitate a more equitable present for African Americans and other people of color in the United States. Put differently, this project seeks to uncover how, as scientific racism declined and claims about the universality of "man" [sic] increased, hierarchies grounded in racial difference were maintained.

In addition, by tracing the rhetorical shifts related to representations of race in 1930s public discourse, I hope to contribute to the scholarship about a historical moment that had a critical and enduring effect on U.S. public discourse related to race, but which has received little attention from rhetoric scholars. Scholars working within this period have mainly focused on the contributions of key figures, including Father Coughlin, Aimee Semple MacPherson, and Dorothy Day, along with the presidential rhetoric of Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt.[1] Though these figures certainly merit the attention of existing and future scholarship, this project seeks to take a more constitutive view of rhetorical history, using evidence of a series of discursive interactions to understand the development and implications of discursive change during a significant historical moment. Scholars working on issues of race and public discourse have focused mainly on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the civil rights movement, bookending the interwar years.[2] Aric Putnam's work on African American discourse in

---

[1] For studies of Father Coughlin, see Casey and Rowe, and Ogles and Howard. For studies of Aimee Semple MacPherson, see Bartow and Maddux. For a recent study of Dorothy Day, see Marsh. Notable book-length studies of Hoover's and Roosevelt's presidential rhetoric include those by Houck and Kiewe.

[2] Studies of African American rhetoric in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries include those by Bacon, Parker ("Desiring Citizenship"), Watts ("Cultivating a Black Public Voice"), and

the 1930s and Eric King Watts' work on Alain Locke's *The New Negro* are notable exceptions that demonstrate the importance of this historical moment in transforming U.S. public discourse related to race.[3] This project endeavors to show that the discursive shift from nineteenth-century scientific racism to the more egalitarian discourse of the late twentieth century can be located historically within particular texts and understood through an analysis of their rhetorical form and the subsequent articulations that result from their circulation. The significance of this work is highlighted by the electoral map memes and Imani Perry's observations that began this introduction: The material reality of ongoing racial injustice in the United States can be observed, but it is seldom articulated in mainstream public discourse. It is difficult to imagine a solution without first understanding the origins of the problem. By closely examining three particular instances of discourse that illustrate how contemporary "post-racial" discourse emerged from an explicitly racist past, this project endeavors to contribute to the rhetorical history of a significant historical moment.

This introduction will contextualize the analytical work of subsequent chapters, first, with a discussion of my approach to rhetorical texts; second, with an elaboration on the significance of this historical moment and the particular texts in question; finally, with a preview of each chapter.

Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and History

Wilson ("The Contested Space of Prudence"; "The Racial Politics of Imitation"; "Towards a Discursive History of Racial Identity"). Several of these scholars also explore rhetoric of the Civil Rights era, including Parker ("Ironic Openings") and Wilson ("Interpreting the Discursive Field"), along with Houck ("Killing Emmett"), Lucaites and Condit, and others.

[3] See Putnam, "Modern Slaves" and "Ethiopia is Now."

In the context of scholarly debates that contrast the autonomy of rhetorical texts to ideology, the single text to the many, the inside to the outside, this project takes a decidedly "both/and" approach. Following the theoretical insights of Michael Leff and Steven Mailloux, who both argue and agree that rhetorical production is interpretive and that interpretation is produced rhetorically (Leff, "Hermeneutical Rhetoric"; Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power*), my objective is to probe the intersection of interpretation and production in order to trace the incremental continuities and transformations of rhetorical discourse. In my analysis, I view interpretation as a productive act, particularly when it results in rhetorical artifacts. I likewise view rhetorical production as deeply informed by interpretation.

As a historical project, my work here aligns with James Jasinski's delineation of a "constitutive approach to rhetorical historiography" (74). Viewing rhetoric as constitutive, and therefore as substantially embodying (rather than simply representing or effecting) historical change, allows one to observe history's continuity and change within the discourse itself. A constitutive view of rhetorical history also allows one to view text and context as an interactive continuum, rather than as discrete components that a critic must choose between. As Jasinski states:

> The constitutive dimension of discursive influence can be specified further by modifying Leff's intentional and extensional distinction. Intentionally, texts exhibit constitutive potential through the invitations inscribed in various discursive forms (tropes, arguments, etc.). Extensionally, texts exhibit constitutive force through the cultural circulation and discursive articulation of their textual

> forms in ways that enable and constrain subsequent practice. Texts invite their audience to experience the world in certain ways via concrete textual forms; audiences, in turn, appropriate, articulate, circulate, and/or subvert these textual forms in ways that release and transform their potential constitutive energy. (Jasinski 74-5)

Jasinski explores how "conceptual change" can be traced by observing the tension of "contradiction and criticism" in public discourse—that is, the embedded contradictions that occur when changing conceptual visions of the world appear in a single discourse, and the criticism that then illuminates the contradiction and introduces a resolution that constitutes the discursive change (Jasinski 81). In other words, conceptual change happens in discourse when "new" ideas conflict with the "old," in a kind of textual dissonance; harmony is restored as interpretations resolve the discord, propelling the discourse forward. Jasinski contributes the insights of rhetorical theory and criticism to this discussion, insisting that conceptual change is not merely an "epiphenomenon," but a "process" in which "textual action" plays a part (Jasinski 79). As Jasinski argues, "[a]ttention needs to be devoted to the integrity of the text as a field of discursive action, to the specific textual or discursive forms that do the work of criticism and the negotiation of contradiction" (Jasinski 82).

Following the historiographical lead of Jasinski, then, I will approach the three primary texts of this study as "field[s] of discursive action" that illustrate the conceptual terrain of race and national citizenship in the 1930s. My primary interest in this project is to elucidate the rhetorical process of conceptual and discursive change by tracing

evidence of that change through specific texts and rhetorical interactions. Each text in this study embodies and enacts specific conceptual tensions through its rhetorical form and action; these rhetorical forms then "circulat[e]" through the discourse "in ways that enable and constrain subsequent practice" (Jasinski 74). The embedded contradictions of each text will receive attention in each chapter, as I analyze the conceptual tensions embedded in *The Epic of America's* indeterminate use of images as both scientific representation and rhetorical figures, the contradictions woven through the dialogic narrative voices in *The Good Earth*, and the internal coherence of the African American vernacular discourse of *Mules and Men*. I then trace the conceptual change embedded in each text as the books circulate among readers (in this case, book critics) who articulate interpretations of the texts' meanings and influences. The conceptual changes I track are neither dramatic nor linear. Rather, they are incremental, ongoing, and often chaotic. By examining first the rhetorical forms of discrete texts, then the "refractions and modifications" (Jasinski 73) of these forms found in readers' subsequent articulations, I will show the inevitable messiness of textual influence—as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell points out, "texts have agency" (7), but rhetorical agency is "perverse, that is, inherently protean, ambiguous, open to reversal" (2). The changing conceptual terrain is evident in both the texts and their reception, but also evident are the residue of nineteenth-century scientific racism, the resistance to change, regional differences in racial representation, and the potentially harmful implications of the emerging discourse. By focusing on both single texts and the position of those texts within a broader context, I hope to illuminate

the complex, but still significant, impact that discrete rhetorical forms can have within a larger, national discourse.

In the context of this study, it is useful to imagine the “reader” at the center of discursive action. By “reader,” I do not mean the “ideal reader” of reader response criticism, who, like the “second persona” of Edwin Black, is the reader (or auditor) that the text presumes or projects (Tompkins xii; Black 91). Rather, this project understands its reader as embedded in the “cultural fictions” that Stephen Hartnett describes—fictions that embody contradictions, enable coherent interpretation, and structure the reader’s reality (*Democratic Dissent* 2). This reader is a navigator of complex discursive terrain who makes meaning and takes action through a fluid series of interpretive and productive practices. The reader encounters one text among many others; as Roland Barthes suggests, the reader encounters not a seamless “work,” but a “plural” text that “join[s the reader and writer] together in a single signifying practice” (162). McGee likewise emphasizes the productive element of the textual encounter, noting that “rhetors make discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence,” and that what critics have viewed as discrete texts are therefore “simultaneously structures of fragments, finished texts, and fragments themselves to be accounted for in subsequent discourse” (279). These observations have been used to proclaim the death of both the author and the single text as useful object of analysis, but, like Jasinski, I prefer to negotiate a middle way. Individual texts do have integrity—their rhetorical form invites one set of interpretations, rather than another. However, rhetorical form alone does not determine interpretation, “effects,” or the trajectory of rhetorical history. The reader encounters the text within a

complex historical, discursive situation, some of which has passed without leaving a trace.

The reader, however, is also a rhetor. This is true for all readers, as evidenced in both the casual "re-tweet" of a circulating internet meme and the carefully reasoned book review that carries within it the values, facts, and habits of reasoning of a lifetime of textual interactions. Whether we acquire knowledge by listening to a university lecture or gazing at a blinking smartphone screen, what goes in is likely to re-circulate through an ongoing cycle of interpretation and rhetorical production. This cycle is often ephemeral, as the reader's rhetorical activities are lost in so many marginal notes and fleeting conversations—but, as Rosa Eberly has shown, readers are rhetors in a meaningful, public sense when their interpretations are articulated and circulated in print.[4] As readers with a particular, public voice, book reviewers' subsequent articulations include evidence of both their interpretations and the framework for their interpretations. To appropriate Jaskinski's view of constitutive rhetorical history, placing the reader at the center: Books "invite their audience to experience the world in certain ways via concrete textual forms"; and book reviewers, "in turn, appropriate, articulate, circulate, and/or subvert these textual forms in ways that release and transform their potential constitutive energy" (Jasinski 74-5). The book and the book review, then, become ideal material for the

[4] Eberly's purpose in *Citizen Critics* is to demonstrate how "literary public spheres" can form as "citizen critics," rather than professional critics, respond to the public issues they see in literary texts (1). Though my critical objectives differ, I am nevertheless indebted to Eberly's method, and to her observation that "rhetorical theory offers literary criticism, political science, and social theory possibilities for articulating how fictional texts and the public discourses written in response to them can influence social practices by fostering public debate about values and actions" (3).

tracing of conceptual change in rhetorical history. The reader/rhetor offers a useful critical lens through which to observe this rhetorical process.

This project's focus on books and readers also contributes to a disciplinary bridge between rhetorical studies in English and Communication Studies. Steven Mailloux has traced the disciplinary split between the interpretive practices of literary studies and the productive practices of Communication Studies, noting that it "make[s] for a highly fragmented approach to all things rhetorical in academic scholarship" (Mailloux, "Places in Time" 57). This project views interpretive and productive practices as tightly interwoven, recognizing that reading and listening are both essential interpretive practices in the everyday lives of the U.S. public, just as writing and speaking naturally reflect those activities. The distinction between reading and writing on the one hand, and listening and speaking on the other, is neither absolute nor necessary; it is, rather, a result of disciplinary emphasis. Many rhetorical scholars, including Rosa Eberly, Stephen Hartnett, Michael Lee, and Aric Putnam, just to name a few, have crossed the disciplinary divide, examining literary texts using the critical vocabulary of Communication Studies.[5] Like them, I found texts that some might narrowly place within the domain of literary studies are useful for illuminating the rhetorical workings of the public sphere. Further, critical tools and concepts from Communication Studies "open" these texts in new ways. Putting the reader at the center of this study helps me to examine the rhetorical form, circulation, and reception of individual texts, and to trace the "contradiction and criticism" that, according to Jasinski, are evidence of conceptual change in rhetorical

[5] In particular, see Eberly, Hartnett ("Fanny Fern"), M. Lee ("Creating Conservatism" and "The Conservative Canon"), and Putnam ("Modern Slaves").

history (81). This modest disciplinary intervention allows me to approach *The Epic of America*, *The Good Earth*, and *Mules and Men* as noteworthy contributors to public discourse, providing additional terrain on which to investigate and understand a significant discursive transformation at this critical moment in rhetorical history.

Readers and race in the 1930s

In addition to providing a helpful critical perspective for this study, reading and readers were historically important in the interwar United States. Indeed, the historical audience had, by 1940, become what Radway and Kaestle refer to as a "nation of readers" ("Introduction" 471). The sheer number of readers and circulating print publications in the early decades of the twentieth century supports their assessment. In 1910, nine copies of daily newspapers circulated for every ten New York City residents, and "slightly more than one" newspaper copy circulated for every one person living in "America's next five largest cities" (Kaplan 122). The authors of *Middletown*, a study of Muncie, Indiana, in the early 1920s, found that one hundred percent of "blue-collar households" surveyed "subscribed to a daily journal" (Kaplan 123). A 1923 study shows that 96% of Chicago interviewees under 30 read the daily newspaper, while 100% over 60 did so (Gray and Munroe 30). The rates of general literacy also increased in the first decades of the twentieth century. "Illiteracy among persons ten years and older declined from 7.7 percent in 1910, to 4.3 percent in 1930, to 2.9 percent in 1940. In 1900 44 percent of the black population was illiterate. By 1930 that figure had been reduced to 16 percent" (Radway and Kaestle, "Introduction" 471). Literacy had become nearly

ubiquitous in this historic moment, and the circulation of print media met the demand of the growing reading public.

The rise of reading and literacy during this time intersects in interesting ways with the turbulent discourse that this study examines. Scholars have demonstrated the significance of the first decades of the twentieth century when it comes to the troubled and evolving understanding of race and national identity in the United States. George Frederickson observes the general outlines of the discursive shift when he states that dominant U.S. discourse about race changed from what he calls "romantic racialism" to an approach that stressed cultural and environmental (rather than hereditary or biological) factors in racial difference (328-330). Frederickson credits this shift to the work of psychologists and anthropologists during the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the "tendency of black intellectuals to reject the image [of romantic racial stereotypes] *in toto* as part of a more militant protest orientation" (329). Lee Baker's cultural history of "the meaning and structure of race for African Americans" denotes a clear marker for this cultural shift in the years between the U.S. Supreme Court cases Plessy v. Ferguson (which affirmed the "separate but equal" doctrine as constitutional in 1896) and Brown v. Board of Education (which voided that very doctrine in 1954) (L. Baker 2-3). Roediger identifies a similar period of time, 1890-1945, as key years in the progressive acceptance of Eastern and Southern European immigrants as "white." As Roediger states:

> The racial landscape discovered gradually by new immigrants to the United States was a mess. … [E]xpert opinion divided the world into either a handful of races or several dozen. The range reflected the practice of making racial designations on at

> least two axes. One sorted the world's population into a few broad categories, invidiously separated, and the other divided Europe into many fragments, also invidiously separated. Race was at once biological and cultural, inherited and acquired. Race identified, depending on context, both a category and a consciousness. (35)

This span of decades that was significant and transformative for African Americans and European immigrants was also critical for Chinese in the United States. The "Exclusion Era" extended from the enactment of the first Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 to its repeal (in name if not in real effect) in 1943. As Erika Lee points out in *At America's Gates*, "the Chinese Exclusion Act marks a 'watershed' in U.S. history. Not only was it the country's first significant restrictive immigration law; it was also the first to restrict a group of immigrants based on their race, nationality, and class" (E. Lee 24). Lee goes on to assert that Chinese exclusion "established Chinese immigrants—categorized by their race, class, and gender relations as the ultimate example of the dangerous, degraded alien—as the yardsticks by which to measure the desirability (and 'whiteness') of other immigrant groups" (E. Lee 25). Roediger's study in part builds on Lee's observation, as he observes numerous ways in which Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans, along with African Americans and Mexican Americans, served as the permanently unassimilable others against whom the new Southern and Eastern European immigrants would ultimately define and defend their once questionable "whiteness." During the first part of the twentieth century, Roediger shows, this discourse was marked by radical inconsistency, as certain immigrant groups were in turn aligned and compared, then

defined and aligned politically against one another, particularly in situations related to labor and housing. The decades in which this study is situated were clearly significant decades for the discussion and redefinition of race in public discourse.

Undergirding this shift in public discourse was a transformation in the specialist discourse of anthropology. Definitions of race and the origins of racial difference were disputed in the early decades of the twentieth century, as a socially derived understanding of culture gradually gained precedence over a biologically determined understanding of race.[6] The meaning of the word culture itself shifted at the beginning of the twentieth century. Within the ideology of scientific racism, "culture" was the equivalent of "civilization." Civilization, with its refined arts and letters, resulted from the evolution of racial groups through the stages of savagery and barbarism. In contrast, the more recent, plural form of "cultures" was characterized by "historicity, plurality, integration, behavioral determinism, and relativity" (Stocking 200).[7] Franz Boas was instrumental in creating the conditions for this conceptual change by gradually clarifying the distinction between civilization and culture; as Stocking observes, "[t]he plural [form of 'cultures'] appears with regularity only in the first generation of Boas' students after 1910" (Stocking 202-3).

Even within the field of anthropology, however, this shift was neither linear nor complete. Though some anthropologists were working to distinguish biologically and socially derived human characteristics, the nineteenth-century tendency to blur this line endured. For example, the neo-Lamarckian principle of "use inheritance," or the

---

[6] For an overview of this cultural history, see, for example, L. Baker, Degler, Malik, Stocking, and V. Williams.
[7] See also Degler 61-83 and Malik 161-3.

biological inheritance of socially acquired traits, continued to circulate in popular discourse (Degler 85; Haller ix; Stocking 242). Even the socially progressive Boas was not able to excise racial biases from his work. As Vernon Williams argues:

> [W]hile it is true that Boas's antiracist stance before 1930 was forward-looking, it is also true that he debated within the essentialist terms laid down by the staunch racists of previous generations and his own, which muted his affirmation of African American equipotentiality… [I]t is clear that as late as 1938 his thought was marked by the contradiction between the assumptions of physical anthropology and his liberal values. (V. Williams 4)

In addition, Kenan Malik observes the "ambiguity" that became evident in "the new concept of culture" (156) when one method of "classification" simply came to stand in for another. Malik points out that *Patterns of Culture*, written in 1934 by Boas' student Ruth Benedict, assigns the same sort of behavioral determinism to the notion of culture as the "racial formalists" assigned to "race" (161). These observations make clear that certain elements of scientific racism remained evident in anthropological discourse, even as anthropologists began to consciously denounce these ideological roots. The concepts of "race" and "culture" were contrasted, conflated, negotiated, and in competition with one another as various meanings receded and emerged in fits and starts.

Meanwhile, an intersecting battle over "Culture" was brewing in the field of literature in the 1920s and 1930s. As Janice Radway and Joan Shelley Rubin have explored in depth, middlebrow reading was both a popular and a contentious trend. "Middlebrow" signifies an attempt to adapt high art to a middling audience, turning

culture (in the sense of civilization) into commerce for both profit and individual advancement. The Book of the Month Club is a quintessential middlebrow institution that was responsible for much of the popularity and sales of *The Good Earth* and *The Epic of America*. (*Mules and Men* also was recognized by the organization, though in a marginal way.) The Book of the Month Club selected, promoted, and circulated books that straddled the line between high art and commercial entertainment. As economically and intellectually accessible "culture," the books served as "a kind of social pedagogy" for a growing professional class (Radway 15). Radway explains that The Book of the Month Club therefore constituted a threat to the guardians of high culture:

> If culture was only one more material object, if it could be manipulated to produce the artificial facade of a made self, then it could no longer function as the special, unmarked mark of human distinction. No longer either transcendent or pure, culture as it was marketed by middlebrow agencies like the Book-of-the-Month Club was sullied by the particular terms of its embodiment and therefore exposed as just one more material form penetrated by interest, by the economic. … Books, as a consequence, could be constituted as mere propaganda and promoted as an instrument for welding bodies into an amorphous mass, into an ambiguously embodied collectivity all the more difficult to police because of its unlocalized, fluid character. The critics of the book clubs feared not so much engulfment, ingestion, and absorption by the spreading ooze of middlebrow culture as by the masses middlebrow culture apparently materialized in its scandalous address (245).

In this passage, Radway reveals the anxiety that highbrow writers and critics felt as culture became "fluid." Rather than an innate part of (a chosen) one's character, culture became a mere object, mass produced and available to anyone.

Mass-produced culture's loss of singularity parallels the development of the modern anthropologists' plural and relative "cultures" in interesting ways, especially considering the historical tendency to conflate racial and cultural concepts into what Stocking refers to as a "raciocultural hierarchy" (121-2). The notion of high culture, defended in Radway's terms as "transcendent" and "pure," here equates with civilization, that last (white) stop on the Great Chain of Being. And as Richard Butsch, Richard Venezsky and Carl Kaestle, and others have shown, the "masses," especially the urban masses whose growing literacy was shaped by mass consumerism, were often immigrants (Butsch 42-5; Venezsky and Kaestle 426). In Radway's discussion of the literati's fear of being "engulf[ed], ingest[ed], and absorb[ed]" by mass culture, one can hear echoes of James Barrett and David Roediger's analysis of white Americans' fears of being "swamped" (12), "polluted" (22), or "degraded" (29) by Southern or Eastern European immigrant "races." The literati's defense of culture from the middlebrow masses was not unambiguously "cultural." The cultural hierarchy was at once racial and social, and so the possibility that culture could be acquired threatened both race- and class-based hierarchies. I contend, then, that the circulation of middlebrow texts such as those within this study played a unique role in the turbulent discourse related to race in the interwar years. As symbols of culture that could be put on like an off-the-rack dress, these

middlebrow texts represented the incremental unraveling of a stable and inherited "raciocultural" hierarchy.

History, Fiction, Folklore

The three texts at the center of this study are significant for more than their status as middlebrow artifacts. Penned by authors of considerable public standing, these texts engage the turbulent discourse on race through their rhetorical form and content. Moreover, their reception contains evidence of emerging conceptual change, as the ideology of scientific racism receded and a more egalitarian understanding of universal humanity began to take shape. I view these texts as embedded in a larger national discourse and an ongoing pattern of transformation. Though different critical perspectives may highlight additional rhetorical work that the texts perform, my analysis traces their participation in conceptual change related to race and national identity at this historical moment. Likewise, the rhetorical mechanisms and processes I trace were doubtlessly exhibited by other texts from the same era. Nevertheless, the popularity, reputation, and social function of the texts included in this project demonstrate their significance as particular exemplars of the trends in question.

The first book in this study, *The Epic of America*, is a sweeping interpretive history of the United States that identifies the weaknesses and strengths of the "American character"—a "character" that "evolved" from racial, national, and cultural origins—as the root of, and the ultimate solution to, the Great Depression.[8] Today, the book is mainly

[8] Though I understand that there is truly no single "American" identity, the historical concept of "American identity" is the focus of my study. Subsequent references to "American" identity or

remembered as the publication that coined the term "American dream." The few contemporary critics who have treated the book in any depth, however, do not discuss how the *Epic* describes this "dream" as a product of a "national mind" that literally "evolved" within a raciocultural, neo-Lamarckian framework (Decker 97-101; Nevins). Embodying both an egalitarian vision and the ideological residue of scientific racism, *The Epic of America* and its historical reception provide an ideal opportunity to explore the "contradiction and criticism" that allow rhetorical historians to trace conceptual change in public discourse (Jasinski 81).

Moreover, the *Epic*'s status as a significant piece of public discourse is evident in its popularity during its historical moment. *The Epic of America*, published in the fall of 1931, topped the *Publishers' Weekly* nonfiction bestseller list in 1932. An indicator of Adams' ubiquitous popularity, his next book, *The March of Democracy*, was number seven on the same list (E. Hill 332-3). *The Epic of America* was a Book of the Month Club selection (Decker 97), so it also benefited from an aggressive national marketing campaign. The Book of the Month Club made a concerted effort to reach readers across the country. The Kansas native William Allen White served on the club's selection panel as the "consummate symbol of small-town America" and helped to choose books that would sell to a rural and small-town audience (Rubin 141-2). Marketing efforts and general popularity evidently paid off: *The Epic* reportedly had 131,000 copies in print in

---

character are therefore references to a historical concept, not to a phenomena I believe to exist. Where I am not referring to the historical concept, I will refer to "U.S." history, etc.

the United States by the end of 1932 ("Book Notes" 15).[9] The book also received significant press attention, as evinced by many reviews and author profiles. In addition, a broad range of newspapers and magazines published essays by the author; he was heralded as an expert on topics related to his books. Reflecting Adams' somewhat "serious" reputation, the articles he authored appeared in "better" publications like the "*Atlantic, Harper's Monthly, Scribner's…* the *Forum*" (Nevins 48), and *The New York Times* magazine (Adams, "Abounding Zest" 5.1; "America Faces" 6.1), though he also published an essay in *The Woman's Home Companion* (Adams, "Our Heritage" 13-15). *The Epic of America* was also quoted in speeches by John Dewey, George S. Counts, and Herbert Hoover, all of which were reprinted or excerpted in *The New York Times* (Dewey E7; Counts E7; Hoover A12). In short, the book provided "equipment for future rhetorical production" (Leff, "Hermeneutical Rhetoric" 201) for many public figures. Altogether, the widespread re-articulations of the book's key concepts would have reached many more readers than the book's initial buyers.

The second book in this study is Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*. Buck's audience was undoubtedly larger than Adams' audience, and, given the anti-Chinese racism that was ubiquitous during the Chinese Exclusion Era, *The Good Earth* was perhaps an unlikelier bestseller. A novel set entirely in rural China with a Chinese farmer as protagonist, *The Good Earth* offers a sympathetic, even intimate, portrayal of its Chinese characters. Buck's experience growing up in China as the daughter of missionaries, along with her training as an anthropologist and her skill as a fiction writer,

---

[9] This *New York Times* article from December 5, 1932, actually states that the book "is in its second printing in England and its 131-thousandth in America." I find it unlikely that there were 131,000 separate print runs of the book, and more likely that there were 131,000 copies in print.

make *The Good Earth* a compelling work of fiction that embodies considerable discursive conflict. The narrative depicts a Chinese other even as it draws that other close to the reader, enacting a dialogic tension that echoes the rhetorical turbulence that I contend existed within the larger national discourse over race. The novel and its historical reception offer evidence of both continuity and change in the popular understanding of race in the United States.

The Good Earth also occupied a prominent place in the public sphere. Published in late 1931, it topped the *Publisher's Weekly* fiction bestseller list in 1932. Like Adams, Buck wrote a subsequent book, the novel *Sons*, which appeared a few spots further down the same list (E. Hill 332-3). *The Good Earth* was also a Book of the Month club pick, which spurred its early popularity and rise to bestseller status (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 122-3). But *The Good Earth* significantly outranked Adams' work of history in sheer numbers of books sold. In *The American Scene*, a book-length overview of cultural events in 1932 that was published in early 1933, Edwin C. Hill reported:

> Since 1895 there have been three books that hundreds of thousands of Americans read, books that have had literally a national success. 'Quo Vadis' set the record soon after its publication in 1896. 'The Good Earth' is in second place. (331)

The Good Earth was enormously popular and a historic bestseller, with 180,000 copies sold by June 1932 (Harker 99). Given that book sales in general were down in 1932 ("1932 Bestsellers in Nation" 17; E. Hill 333), the novel reached a remarkably large audience.[10]

---

[10] In *Books for Pleasure: Popular Fiction 1914-1945*, Suzanne Ellery Greene highlights mystery novels as some of the biggest sellers published in the 1930s. However, Greene is most concerned

Like Adams, however, Buck's public presence and rhetorical influence extended beyond the book itself. In 1931-1934, for example, articles or stories authored by Buck were published in the *New York Times* ("Mrs. Buck Replies" BR2), *Opportunity* ("A Letter from Abroad" 70; "As Man Thinketh, So Is He" 361), *Woman's Home Companion* ("Frill" 7; "Two Women" 7), *Colliers* ("Beautiful Ladies" 18), *Harper's* ("Is There a Case?" 143-55), *Ladies' Home Journal* ("Quarrel," 6), and the *Saturday Review of Literature* ("Early Chinese Novel" 873-874), among others. There is also evidence that the book was discussed at libraries and in local woman's clubs ("Creative Reading Enriches Mind" III.4; "Symposium on China" II.1). In addition, Buck became an active commentator on social issues, "inveigh[ing] against racism, sexism, and imperialism" (Harker 113). For example, in an event that scholars frequently discuss, Buck delivered a speech entitled "Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?" Remarkably for its time, the speech condemned the practices and attitudes of many U.S. missionaries to China. The speech achieved broad circulation when it was re-printed in *Harper*'s magazine and as a pamphlet by her publisher, The John Day Company. Buck also spoke to African American audiences about the injustices of white racism. Each of these events was commented on throughout the print media, and especially in the Black press.[11] Beginning with her novels but extending beyond them, Buck advocated for a new, more egalitarian

---

with books that sold high numbers over a longer span of time. She points out that the mystery novels in her study "appeared from 1926-1941, the majority of them during the thirties, but their heaviest sale occurred in the years immediately following 1939 when Pocket Books, Inc. went into business" (96). In 1932, then, *The Good Earth* was still the bestselling novel around.

[11] For one such example, see reportage of Buck's speech to the National Urban League in "Pearl Buck Speaks," 14.

understanding of race in the United States, and she, like Adams, was viewed across the national public as an expert on issues related to race, identity, and nationhood.

The third book in this study is *Mules and Men* by Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston possessed anthropological training and expertise that far exceeded that of Pearl Buck, and she incorporated anthropological insights and methods into both her fiction and nonfiction works in an effort to transform representations of race in the United States.[12] *Mules and Men* is a folklore collection, the result of Hurston's expeditions to the south from 1927-1930 (Hemenway 84-133). The collection includes folklore, songs, and "conjure" stories. This primary material is contextualized within the everyday lives of the rural African American residents of Eatonville, Florida, and an Everglades lumber camp, along with the lives of New Orleans hoo doo practitioners and the men and women who sought their help. By representing the voices of rural African Americans in systematically-rendered dialect, Hurston asserts their validity and significance. But while her portrayal of regionally specific dialogue gives the work a unique sense of specificity, when read by a national, predominantly white audience the work risks associating her local "informants" with the minstrel show performers with whom white audiences were familiar (Jones 141). The interaction between Hurston's narrative and the book's historical reception in the mainstream press reveals the difficulty of representing racial particularity when neither the "old" ideology of scientific racism nor the "new" language of egalitarian universality could offer a just interpretive frame.

---

[12] For discussions of how Hurston incorporated anthropological expertise in her work see, for example, Barry, Boxwell, Meisenhelder, and Walters.

Like Adams and Buck, Hurston was, for a short time, a prominent public figure. But unlike the two white authors in this study, she did not sell an astonishing numbers of books. Indeed, the historical contrasts that exist between Hurston on one side and Adams and Buck on the other reveal, in a material fashion, the very problems and contradictions that this study examines through rhetorical criticism. As biographer Peter Conn recounts, Buck was born to nearly penniless Presbyterian missionaries (*Pearl S. Buck* 1-44); however, the Book of the Month Club propelled *The Good Earth* to popular, and, subsequently, financial success (*Pearl S. Buck* 122-3). After winning the Pulitzer Prize and returning to the United States, Buck divorced her Presbyterian missionary/college professor husband to marry her publisher (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 182). As a flagship author who financially provided for her disabled daughter's care, her additional children, and the work of various charities, Buck earned a steady and comfortable living even as the quality of her writing declined (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 330-1). According to his biographer, Adams was "reared in an austere, gloomy home, his father a morose failure in Wall Street and his mother an invalid" (Nevins 2). Nevertheless, he attended a respectable but second-tier college, and after "he made the mistake of going to Yale" for a year to study philosophy (when apparently Harvard would have been the choice of any "competent adviser" of the time) (Nevins 14-15), Adams began a career in finance that he never enjoyed. He determined that he would "get out of Wall Street as soon as [he] reach[ed] thirty-five or save[d] a hundred thousand dollars" (Nevins 20). As luck would have it, he accomplished both goals simultaneously and launched his writing career (20). His writing

paid steadily throughout his life, and Adams died comfortably in a large Connecticut home he purchased in 1934 (Nevins 81, 102).

In contrast, Hurston's family was of modest means, though her fortunes changed when her mother died and she was sent away to school and to live with various relatives (Hemenway 15-17). Hurston worked her way through Howard University as a manicurist (18), arriving in New York City in 1925 "with one dollar and fifty cents in her purse, no job, no friends, but filled with 'a lot of hope'" (10). Though Hurston ultimately became the first African American graduate of Barnard (Pahler), studied anthropology with Franz Boas, and became one of the most heralded African American writers in contemporary literary studies, her actual living was pieced together with a series of menial jobs, literary prizes, scholarships, fellowships, and the patronage of a woman who contractually owned the rights to all of the material Hurston collected for *Mules and Men* (Hemenway 110). As Alice Walker bluntly stated, Hurston "was broke." And "*[b]eing broke made all the difference*" (Walker xvi, emphasis in original). Even as Hurston's literary career was celebrated during her life and years after her death, "her last days [were] spent in a welfare home," her "burial was paid for by 'subscription'," and, without the knowledge of even her family, she was buried in an unmarked grave in Florida (Walker xiv). Hurston never experienced the commercial success of middlebrow authorship that Adams and Buck enjoyed, but it is precisely this difference that makes her an important part of this project. She possessed compositional skills and interpretive abilities that rivaled or exceeded those of Adams and Buck, and she published work that participated fully in the

evolving conceptual process that re-characterized race and nationhood in the 1930s. Nevertheless, her life represents and embodies the contradictions of that same period.

The publication of *Mules and Men* itself was a fraught process. Hurston finished the manuscript and began circulating it to publishers by 1932, but it was not published until 1935 (Hemenway 159, 163). In the meanwhile, much of the material in *Mules and Men* found a means for public circulation as a series of well received theatrical performances that Hurston produced beginning in 1932, after wresting both a loan and grudging legal permission from her patron to use specific material from her folklore collection for that purpose (Hemenway 178-82). Though *Mules and Men* was widely and often positively reviewed after its publication, its overall public presence was modest. In terms of its role within the mainstream, middlebrow reading public, the Book of the Month Club's recognition of *Mules and Men* is telling: While *The Epic of America* and *The Good Earth* were Book of the Month Club picks and therefore nearly instant best sellers, *Mules and Men* is only mentioned in relation to a 1937 Book of the Month Club fellowship for "books [that] seem to the committee to have been insufficiently read by the general public" ("Writer Receives" 6). Hurston did not even win this $2,500 fellowship; rather, *Mules and Men* was listed as "honorable mention." Clearly, the Book of the Month Club never threw its substantial weight and power behind the work. All of this goes to show the different role that *Mules and Men* played in the discourse related to race in the 1930s. The text, its reception, and its circulation demonstrate the difficulty of finding a place for African American vernacular voices in an emerging discourse of universal humanity.

By embodying both contradiction and criticism, these three texts and their historical reception offer rhetorical scholars insight into the conceptual change in discourse related to race in the interwar United States. Scholars of history, race, and national identity view this discursive change as a move from nineteenth-century scientific racism to post-World War II cultural egalitarianism. A close look at this published work provides deeper insight into the turbulent, halting, and ambiguous rhetorical process that constituted that discursive evolution.

Overview of chapters

In chapters two through four, I will trace the complex process of conceptual change by first analyzing the rhetorical form of each primary text, then exploring how book reviewers' interpretations interacted with each text's distinctive rhetorical form.[13]

Chapter two analyzes rhetorical form at the level of the symbol or figure, as *The Epic of America*'s ambiguous use of "scientific" representation, metonymy, and metaphor demonstrates the ongoing presence of neo-Lamarckian scientific racism in public discourse, alongside rhetorical attempts to transcend the limitations of that discourse with an egalitarian vision of a universal national "self." Though elements of Adams' articulation of the American dream are likely to appeal to many contemporary readers, I contend that that dream is first embedded in a racialized narrative, then presented as a transcendent symbol that embodies an idealized national identity. Drawing especially on

[13] I am interpreting "rhetorical form" broadly here, referring to the intrinsic dynamics of a discrete text, as those dynamics can be understood through an analysis of a range of rhetorical characteristics. This understanding is indebted to Jasinski's discussion of constitutive rhetorical historiography, which calls for an analysis of the text's intrinsic form and extrinsic circulation (74).

Kenneth Burke's *A Grammar of Motives*, this chapter illuminates how ideological contradictions can be embedded in the ambiguous use of rhetorical figures. The book's historical reception shows that critics re-articulated a vision of U.S. history that was both racialized and universal. Affirmative reviewers, however, embraced the transcendent symbol as a means to represent a universal, de-racialized vision of national identity.

Chapter three investigates rhetorical form at the narrative level, as *The Good Earth*'s dialogic voices dissolve the distance between the universal "self" and the racial "other." Following insights from Mikhail Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel," this chapter analyzes the "diversity of individual voices" found in the novel (262) in order to reveal the ideological contradictions embedded in the novel's form. Through indirect and direct narration, moving seamlessly between a third-person omniscient anthropological perspective to the voices of the characters themselves, *The Good Earth* creates both distance and intimacy between the book's Chinese protagonists and its predominately white U.S. readers. Ultimately, I argue that the narrative's internal contradictions can only be resolved in a reader who is embedded in a certain structure of beliefs, one that absorbs racial otherness into a framework of universal humanity. The book's historical reception demonstrates that conceptual change, like rhetorical agency, is "protean" and "open to reversal" (Campbell 2), as reviewers reveal discrete and conflicting ideological threads in their interpretation of this dialogic work.

Chapter four explores the rhetorical form of vernacular discourse, as a systematic representation of this discourse is created within *Mules and Men*, then interacts with the discourse of the mainstream public and the African American counter-public. Building on

critical discussions of vernacular rhetoric, this chapter analyzes the internally-consistent and verifying rhetorical form of *Mules and Men*, emphasizing the importance of the particularity and integrity of a discourse that re-centers the "other" as the "self." Ideological contradictions emerge as critics review *Mules and Men*, employing elements of the folklore collection to reinforce interpretive frameworks that exist outside of the book's vernacular context. I contend that the reception of *Mules and Men* reveals the gaps or fissures that existed in dominant discourse, even as a nineteenth-century understanding of racial hierarchy was evolving to make room for a more egalitarian vision. Thus, even when public discourse is centered around an ideal of universal humanity, or, perhaps because of this universal conceptualization, representations of racial particularity like those in Hurston's text are neither "seen" nor interpreted on their own terms as voices that require the public's consideration.

Though each chapter emphasizes a different element of rhetorical form and observes a range of interpretive responses, certain trends emerge throughout: As the discourse of nineteenth-century scientific racism both persists and recedes, rhetorical voices also seek to recognize and articulate a vision of universal humanity. Though the gradual move away from explicit racism is a welcome change, it also has ambiguous implications. Close textual analysis of both individual texts and consequent discursive interactions reveals that as the ideology of scientific racism became less explicit, it was not replaced by a more just means of articulating racial or cultural particularity, or of describing and remedying racial injustice. The transcendent impulse to envision a

universal humanity may have been admirable, but it left a lot unsaid. The implications of this historical discursive shift continue to be evident today.

Chapter Two

A Dream is Born: Figurative Transformation in *The Epic of America*

> "That dream was not the product of a solitary thinker. It evolved from the hearts and burdened souls of many millions, who have come to us from all nations" (J. Adams, *Epic* 416).

Though James Truslow Adams notably coined the term the "American dream" in his bestselling *Epic of America*, his book is less significant for its originality than for its encapsulation of popular views on national identity. This chapter engages Adams' text as an articulation of national history that re-circulates neo-Lamarckian strains of scientific racism even as it introduces a more transcendent, universal vision of the national "self." The appearance of universality hinges on the selection of metonymic terms (in this case, the "American mind" and "American character") that are initially employed within a discourse of racialized assumptions. I argue that the book's reliance on scientific racism weakens as the metonymic terms become more poetic than referential, making the "American dream" (rhetorically) available to all. Employing Jasinski's framework for understanding constitutive rhetorical history, I contend that tracing the contradictions embedded in the *Epic*'s explicit and implicit representations of race, along with the critical reception of the book, can help us to understand the particular rhetorical mechanisms and processes that facilitated the shift from scientific racism to egalitarian universality in public discourse. Ultimately, I argue that, as *The Epic of America* demonstrates, the transformation of racialized terms into figurative images is one rhetorical process that moved national discourse toward a vision of the universal.

I begin this chapter with a brief overview of how neo-Lamarckian ideology conflated "racial" and "cultural" characteristics in the early twentieth century; understanding this confusion is critical to understanding Adams' historical narrative in the *Epic*. I follow with an analysis of Adams' depiction of the "American mind" and "American character"—a depiction that, I demonstrate, confuses environmental (or cultural) and hereditary (or racial) characteristics in meaningful ways. Next, I discuss how the *Epic*'s conceptual confusion also is iconically manifest in a terminological confusion, as the metonymic representations employed throughout the book slide from the substantive and material to the figurative and conceptual. Finally, through an analysis of the *Epic*'s reception, I discuss the consequences and possibilities that emerge from metonymic representations of race and national identity that transcend, rather than correct, the assumptions of scientific racism.

Environment and heredity in national identity

The Epic of America traces the evolution of the nation—from a vast land of extremes sparsely populated by "savages" to the pivotal arrival of the "white man," through key events that shaped the nation's "mind" and "character," to Adams' present day of crisis and qualified hopefulness. Adams does not intend to catalog the minutiae of dates and events in his sweeping one-volume history. Rather, he seeks to shape a historical narrative that will lead to a better understanding of the present moment. As he states at the beginning of his overview of the Revolutionary War, "History has concerned itself greatly with forms of government and the records of politicians and parties. These

have their place and importance, but more deeply essential is the character of a people" (47). It is, in fact, the "American character" and the "American mind" that are the protagonists of Adams' narrative. These guiding images lend structure to his assemblage of historical details, and it is from them that the "American dream" will grow.

To the twenty-first century reader, "mind" and "character" are relatively benign terms that might stand in for any number of general beliefs, morals, or characteristics. But within the context of nineteenth-century scientific racism, "mind" and "character" were terms tied to biology and heredity, rather than society and culture. In her analysis of American fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cathy Boeckmann observes:

> In current usage, *character* is a figurative term, signifying the imagined structure of an individual's moral and ethical orientations, but in the nineteenth century it referred to a quantifiable set of inherited behaviors and tendencies that were almost always racial (Boeckmann 4).

"Character," at least in the nineteenth century, was code for one's "race"—and, because the "inherited behaviors and tendencies" that were believed to be characteristic of a "race" were psychological as well as physical, the "mind" was likewise entangled in this racialized discourse. The "American mind" and "American character" were, therefore, not general terms that signified the range of characteristics and ideals of the U.S. population. They were specific terms that demonstrated the ambiguous place of race in the early twentieth-century understanding of culture.

The conceptual intertwining of racial and cultural concepts plays an important part in Adams' text. Gary Gerstle has helpfully traced the co-existence of "civic nationalism" and "racial nationalism" during this historical time (Gerstle). To understand the *Epic*, it is essential to understand how the civic and racial conceptions of national identity, which seem distinct in contemporary terms, were conflated in a single system of thought. In particular, the historical narrative in *The Epic of America* relies on the neo-Lamarckian belief that the characteristics acquired by humans in response to their environment would be inherited by subsequent generations (Degler 20-25; Haller ix; Stocking 238-240). The nineteenth-century neo-Lamarckians believed that "race formation" and "mental evolution" took place through a process of "use inheritance;" that is, habits were repeated in response to environmental factors, and the repeated habits solidified as "instincts." These "instincts" were inheritable traits, and the group of people who shared these traits would ultimately form a unique "race" (Stocking 245-7). According to Stocking, this belief appeared "in the work of so many writers" that it must have "reflect[ed] a widespread popular scientific attitude" (242).

Stocking traces the legitimacy of the concept of acquired heredity in the nineteenth century to Lamarck, a pre-Darwinian thinker whose influence on late nineteenth-century scientific racism was significant. Herbert Spencer, "the father of neo-Lamarckian biology" (Stocking 240) in the late nineteenth century, articulates the concept of use inheritance in a way that is especially applicable to Adams' history of the "American mind" and "character":

> Hereditary transmission applies to psychical peculiarities as well as to physical peculiarities. While the modified bodily structure produced by new habits of life is bequeathed to future generations, the modified nervous tendencies produced by such new habits of life become permanent, the tendencies become permanent. … It needs only to contrast *national characters* to see that mental peculiarities caused by habit become hereditary. (Spencer qtd. in Stocking 240, my emphasis)

Notice that Spencer's understanding of psychology is grounded in a biological framework; this is consistent with Boeckmann's definition of nineteenth-century "character" as "a quantifiable set of inherited behaviors and tendencies that were almost always racial" (Boeckmann 4). Notice, also, that *national* characters serve as evidence that "habits" are inherited as "mental peculiarities." The contrast in "national characters" is represented as universally accepted, common knowledge that can help to prove the existence of socially acquired, yet biologically inherited mental traits. It may be impossible to overstate the significance of this conceptual entanglement: Without a terminological distinction between the biological and social aspects of human life, all human interactions and characteristics were necessarily understood within a framework of biological heredity, and, therefore, through the lens of race. The *Epic* is embedded in this framework of common beliefs.

Neo-Lamarckian influences in the Epic

Adams' reliance on neo-Lamarckian concepts by no means made him an extreme thinker in the context of his time. American Studies scholar Jeffrey Louis Decker

contrasts the *Epic*'s vision with the "nativist" views expressed by the character Tom Buchanan in the *Great Gatsby*, observing that Adams "appeal[ed] to a shared, rather than tribal, sense of national identity" (97). Decker is right to point out that Adams is no "nativist" or "Nordicist." The *Epic* does not espouse white supremacist objectives. In noting Adams' "secular belief in the American dream" (97), however, Decker does not identify the basic structure of reasoning that does underlie the *Epic*'s historical narrative. Within the text, the concepts of "acquired characters" and "use inheritance" are marshaled to support Adams' claims about the development of "American character" and the "American mind." Decker, like other scholars who have attended to *The Epic of America*, misses how Adams' conceptualization of the "American dream" is initially based on a neo-Lamarckian logic. In the *Epic*, neo-Lamarckian thought is revealed in discussions of how the environment determines behaviors and traits that are then inherited, ultimately becoming national/racial characteristics.

The Epic of America begins with a two-part prologue that sketches the sweeping terrain of the pre-nascent nation and the first several entries of Europeans to the scene.[14] Adams' descriptions of the continent's topography and climate set the scene for the national drama in a particular sense.[15] The continent is the setting, but, in concert with a

[14] The sweeping descriptions of the American terrain, and accounts of the effects of the American terrain on the national character, have rhetorical precedents, including Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (which Adams does not refer to by name), and Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier history (which he does) (J. Adams, *Epic* 303-4).

[15] Burke's description of the "scene-act" and "scene-agent" ratios are helpful in understanding the significance of the *Epic*'s opening "scene." Burke observes that, in situations that emphasize the dramatistic "scene" in relation to an "act" or an "agent," "[o]ne set of scenic conditions will 'implement' and 'amplify' given ways and temperaments which, in other situations would remain mere potentialities, unplanted seeds, 'mute inglorious Miltons'" (19). Likewise, Burke observes that the "notion…of the natural scene as sufficient motive for an act" becomes evident "in certain

neo-Lamarckian understanding of the impact of environment in trait development, that setting will also play an important role in the development of the nation, its people, and their character.

Adams' first sketch of the North American continent portrays a vast, uncivilized land of extremes in terrain and climate. He emphasizes the continent's scale, from the freshwater Great Lakes (which "held half of the fresh water of the entire world" [4]) to the great Mississippi River valley ("drained by a river system four thousand miles long, [through which] one could travel in a straight line for a couple of thousand miles across rolling prairies and plains, from the heat of the great Gulf to the cold of the north" [4]). The river valley leads to the expansiveness of the western Rockies ("range after range of one of the great mountain systems of the earth, rising to heights of over fourteen thousand feet and traversable by man at only a few points" [4]). The continent boasts some of the world's most extraordinary features, including a canyon that is "twenty miles wide, three hundred miles long, and averages over a mile in depth" (4), and a particular grand tree "with a girth of ninety-three feet, [that] is estimated to be four thousand years old, perhaps the oldest living creature in the world" (5). Adams defines the North American continent in terms of its largest, most extreme elements: enormous bodies of fresh water, great river valleys, overwhelming mountain ranges—even the world's "oldest living creature."

---

scientific theories (of Darwinian cast) according to which men's behavior and development are explained in terms of environment" (6). From Burke's point of view, a dramatic narrative's emphasis on "scene" indicates an element of environmental determinism that is evident in Adams' text.

This depiction of remarkable and extreme features extends from the landscape to the climate, which Adams describes at length as varying greatly from section to section. Adams dwells on these environmental extremes for some time, indicating their significance. After he describes the geographical terrain and the climate, Adams turns his attention to the environment's effects on the continent's native inhabitants:

> For the most part throughout the continent the climate seems always to have been one which tended to produce a high nervous tension in the living beings subjected to it, even the savages, not only from its sudden changes, but from some quality which we do not know. In every way the land was one of strong contrasts rather than softly graded ones, a land of dazzling light and sharp shadows, of overwhelming drought and overwhelming flood, of sunshine and appalling storm. (5-6).

The connection between environment and psychology is important here for a couple of reasons. First, it shows that the environment has a very particular effect on inhabitants—that is, it creates a "high nervous tension." Second, though the effect of the environment is consistent across all "living beings" in this case, it apparently can differ depending on the category of the "living being" in question. Adams feels compelled to clarify that "*even* the savages" (my emphasis) were affected by the climate in the same way. Adams apparently believed that he was countering common knowledge by declaring that everyone had the same response to environmental influences. The underlying audience assumption, which Adams extends later in the book, is that inhabitants of different racial

backgrounds will respond to each environment differently, developing distinct habits and traits.

The "high nervous tension" elicited by the environment returns as a theme in Adams' account of the 1830s – 1850s, a time of increased industrial and capitalist productivity. As Adams explains, "The conditions of the period were developing several of those traits which we consider rather distinctively 'American,' but which really date from this time" (183). Speaking of the mid-nineteenth century, Adams notes the "staggering rate" of "growth" in "population…, manufacturing, commerce," "wealth," and the "marvelous changes" in general (183). He describes one of the "American traits" developed by the rapidly changing environment as follows:

> Better roads, railways, and steamboats had all speeded [sic] up the actual tempo of life a bit, but not sufficiently to account for that nervous haste that from now on was to be another distinctive American trait. New York, wrote one traveler about 1840 'is the busiest community that any man could desire to live in. In the streets all is hustle and bustle' … 'The whole of the population, he adds, seen in the streets seem to enjoy this bustle, and add to it by their own rapid pace, as if…under the apprehension of being too late.' Nervousness became a common physical trait. All observers of the period note the new haste with which Americans gulped down their meals, and hurried from the table. The American jaws began their ceaseless motion, and the chewing of tobacco, precursor of gum, became almost universal. (186)

In this passage, the changing environment influences (but, interestingly, does not entirely account for) the "nervous haste" that "became a physical trait . . . from now on" (186). New Yorkers join in the hustle of their streets, which seems to instill in them an anxiety that they cannot keep up.

The influence of neo-Lamarckian presumptions about environment and behavior are evident even in how the passage above describes the habits of mastication. The pace of the streets influences the way that people eat; the habit of chewing becomes ingrained and leads to the adoption of "almost universal" tobacco chewing; this habit will become manifest in future generations' tendency to chew gum. This example is rather benign, but it is a clear example of neo-Lamarckian reasoning: Individuals develop new habits in response to the environment; those habits are ingrained as instincts or tendencies; and those instincts are passed to future generations. "Nervous haste" is also explained by the environment the initial European inhabitants of the continent encountered—the "extremes" "which tended to produce a high nervous tension in the living beings subjected to it" (J. Adams, *Epic* 5-6). The descriptions in the prologue foreshadow the development of this "American trait" of nervous haste, as they also foreshadow what Adams believes to be a uniquely "American" value for all that is "bigger and better" (J. Adams, *Epic* 216).

Adams follows a similar line of reasoning to account for several additional traits, including the American spirit of "optimism":

> We no longer feared any nation on the earth. The future seemed clear and glorious. A great wave of optimism swept over the country, and re-enforced by

> the material development of the next three quarters of a century was to become a lasting trait of the American character. (184)

The tendency for risk-taking:

> The influence of this taking a chance, of matching with Destiny for beers, had been cumulative generation after generation, but it was the West that had made the winning chance so dazzling even for the Easterner (188).

And the elevation of "money making" to a kind of virtue:

> [M]oreover, there has been one factor in American money-making of deep and lasting importance to American social life and character, present from the start but becoming more marked in this period. … The more men who devoted themselves to the material development of the country, the more quickly it developed and the greater the chance of everyone to get something out of it for himself. Thus, superimposed on the old Puritan and pioneer raising of work to the rank of a virtue, was the new conception of business as somehow a social and patriotic duty. (190)

(The latter trait, predictably, becomes a problem within the American character when Adams discusses the financial shenanigans of the 1920s.) These characteristics are rooted in previous generations, reinforced by developments in the economic and social sphere, and passed on to future generations. The development of these "acquired characters" follows the patterns of neo-Lamarckian reasoning.

There is an ambiguity in these passages that will become more critical later in my analysis. It seems possible, at least from a contemporary point of view, to read Adams'

historical account as a mere analogy between the biological and the social.[16] Habits or tendencies that we see as cultural can be understood as passed down to (really, learned through social processes by) subsequent generations. For example, I may have inherited my grandmother's values, inasmuch as my parents enacted those values for me, and I learned from their example. But to accept only the cultural reading of these passages in the *Epic*, one must ignore some clear textual cues: As represented in the passages above, the traits Adams describes are at least partly "physical" (J. Adams, *Epic* 186); they are certainly constitutive of the "American character" (184), which was understood to be synonymous with race; and they are "cumulative generation after generation" (188), which, in combination with the racial understanding of "character," strongly implies biological heredity. Adams' understanding of these social traits is, to some extent at least, fused to the biological.

At several points in the text, Adams also stresses an explicitly racial element in the "evolution" of the American character. For example, as he accounts for the enormous influence of the frontier in American life, Adams states:

> We have had much, and shall have more, to say of the influence of the frontier on our national life. However, we must not forget that, as has been already pointed out in regard to the form of colonial governments, the influences of institutions and environments are always dependent upon what, for lack of clearer knowledge, we call race. The French voyageurs who paddled their canoes along the streams, or the French farmers who filled their fields around Detroit and remained almost

---

[16] Alfred Kroeber observes the analogy between the two processes in an argument against neo-Lamarckian thought in "Inheritance by Magic" (1916), which I will discuss later in this chapter.

> unchanged Norman peasants generation after generation, did not react to the frontier as did the English. No more did the Spaniards in California. (121)

Adams goes on to explain that the frontier's tremendous impact on America's development "was because the people who came under its influence were for some reason peculiarly receptive to it … it is well to remember that, just because the frontier influence has not been universal, there must also be racial factors in our case to account toward our receptivity toward it. That the Americans, and to a lesser extent, the English race everywhere were receptive is all that need concern us now" (122). In these qualifications by Adams of the role of environment in the determination of national character, the part played by biological race is at once certain and indeterminate. Adams feels compelled to point out that the national traits he describes would not have developed as they did were it not for the Americans' essential origins in the British people—he insists that we "must" remember, and that the influence of the environment "always" depends on race.

While the role that race plays in Adams' text seems to reflect a nineteenth-century understanding of racial identity, there are some key differences. In particular, Adams' analysis of the actual role that biological race played is rather vague: "We" understand this element as "race" only "for lack of clearer knowledge" (121); the American-born (of, it is implied, British ancestry) were "for some reason" influenced by the frontier environment (122); and this discussion ends without clearer explication, since this is "all that need concern us now" (122). Race is taken as a given in Adams' text, but for that very reason it lacks the level of specificity and attribution that one often found in late

nineteenth century accounts of racial difference as a defining element of social life. Adams seems to indicate that the "American character" *is* essentially white and of British origin. But even as he posits this national/racial origin as a foundational element of American national identity, his depiction of the role of race is vague, as if it needs little elaboration or defense.

The *Epic*'s assumption that racial hierarchy serves as a limit to the role of environmental influence is in concert with historian John Haller's account of American neo-Lamarckians:

> Ironically, … the environmentalist tradition became weighted with hereditarian ideas as soon as race analysis focused upon the non-Aryan peoples. Nineteenth-century assumptions of racial inferiority precluded a firm commitment to the agency of use-inheritance. (Haller ix)

Though the *Epic* devotes relatively little time to any discussion of the "character" of American Indians, African Americans, or any other "non-white" group inhabiting the U.S., Adams does make it clear that the "American character" he describes is exclusively "white." For example, he describes the wave of immigration at the end of the nineteenth century: "These Slavs, Poles, Hungarians, Greeks, Italians, Russians, Lithuanians, Jews, and others, representing many races and their blends, were of a very different type from the Irish, British, Germans and Scandinavians"—this "type" was "[m]ore 'foreign'...less easily assimilable to our social life and institutions" (312). These largely urban, largely isolated immigrant communities constituted, for Adams, another "race problem." As he observed, "The earlier demand for slave labor had left us with the free-negro problem.

This later demand for cheap white labor left us with another racial problem, although one somewhat less serious, since, after a generation or two, these people can be absorbed, whereas the negro cannot" (315). Here, the concept of environmental influence hits the wall that Haller described—as soon as individuals who are not ethnically "white" come into the picture, biological race, not just the environment, becomes a key factor in determining both character and potential. It becomes evident that racial hierarchy is an underlying assumption in Adams' narrative. Whatever else they might be, the "American character" and "American mind" are "white," and "whiteness" is defined in (at times, vague) terms of some combination of ethnic heritage and cultural participation. The notion of biological race is inextricable from the mental or cultural characteristics that Adams describes.

Nevertheless, it remains unclear *how* or *why* or *in what way* biological race limits the acquisition of cultural traits. The type of non-specific depiction that we see in Adams' text was criticized by Boas' student Alfred Kroeber in a 1916 essay, "Inheritance by Magic."[17] Kroeber condemns biologists and scientists in other disciplines for continuing to advance the doctrine of use inheritance well after "the Lamarckian structure proved to be absolutely hollow," and the "[e]xperiment [had] failed to produce even a scrap of positive evidence in its favor" (Kroeber 26). Kroeber goes on to acknowledge the "analogous" similarity between biological "evolution" and the "other non-organic process of evolution," which he refers to as "that of civilization, of human accomplishment" (Kroeber 31). Kroeber is careful to point out that these "two

---

[17] For a discussion of Kroeber's efforts to distinguish between the social and biological processes of inheritance in "Inheritance by Magic" and several other articles, see Degler 90-100.

evolutions" are, in reality, "dissimilar in their material and unconnected in process" (31). Kroeber argues that social and biological processes of evolution *should be* clearly distinguished among biological and behavioral scientists, though the "two evolutions" "are still not separated in the public mind, which always in its bulk is the mind of former periods" (31). Kroeber later makes an observation that, though articulated 15 years before the *Epic*'s publication, is *a propos*:

> If heredity by acquisition is still taken seriously by many earnest students, it is not because the evidence compels them, but because they make evidence in behalf of what they want to believe, just as all men in all matters tend normally to believe what is most satisfying and then to find corroborative arguments. The theory of acquired heredity is at the present time almost as belated a survival as the popular doctrine of prenatal influence which maintains itself with similar vigor in the face of every scrap of unbiased evidence. Both are processes of thinking which if found in the minds of uncivilized people would be described as belief in sympathetic magic. (Kroeber 38)

In "Inheritance by Magic," Kroeber acknowledges the legitimacy of an *analogy* between biological and cultural forms of "evolution." But he argues that to conflate the two processes in real, material terms—to represent something as scientific fact, without the support of empirical evidence—is simply magical thinking.

I contend that the vague language surrounding Adams' depictions of the biological role in the development of culture contains exactly this residue of "magic." The traits he describes "accumulate" over generations to form an "American character"

and "American mind." But when it comes to supplying any details about the process by which cultural traits are biologically inherited, he seems to rely on vagueness, poetic images, or the evident understanding that the process he is describing is so taken-for-granted by his audience that it needs no further explanation.

The conceptual confusion between biological and cultural processes, which I have been describing as fundamental to both the neo-Lamarkian strain of scientific racism and *The Epic of America*, is, therefore, a "confusion" in more than one sense. First, it is a confusion of scientific fact: As Kroeber argued pointedly in 1916, there was absolutely no evidence to support a biological process of use inheritance, and a belief in such a process was magical thinking. Second, the confusion is terminological: The "evolution of civilization" could be a valid term if it were an analogy; the flaw is to mistake the figurative phrase for a representation of fact.[18] As Kroeber makes clear in his essay, this confusion also serves a rhetorical, rather than a scientific, purpose—those who rely on neo-Lamarckian reasoning do so to "corroborat[e] arguments" that support what they already believe. I will address this confusion of representational and figurative language for rhetorical ends in the next section of this chapter. I will argue, ultimately, that the use of metonymy in the *Epic* at first establishes the neo-Lamarckian narrative as (mistaken) representation, then, through the use of poetic language, begins to loosen the idealistic images from their racialized, representational moorings. I conclude that the resulting

---

[18] This observation owes again to Kroeber, who so accurately addressed the conceptual flaws in the *Epic* more than decade before its publication. As Stocking recounts: "Writing in 1894, Le Bon had offered a racial interpretation of history, arguing that it was 'not the 18th Brumaire but the soul of his race [which] established Napoleon.' Kroeber argued that this statement was meaningless, but that it could be made perfectly good history by substituting 'civilization' for 'race' and interpreting 'soul' metaphorically" (259).

terminological indeterminacy helps to create a shift in the discursive landscape related to issues of race and national identity.

Metonymic reasoning in the Epic

According to Kenneth Burke, "[t]he basic 'strategy' in metonymy is this: to convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible. E.g., to speak of 'the heart' rather than 'the emotions'" (506). Others have made more detailed observations about this rhetorical figure—that metonymy is "[t]o substitute the contained for the container, the effect for the cause" (Quinn 52); or to reverse "cause and effect," "container for contained," or "possessor and thing possessed" (S. Brown, *The World* 153-156). Among these thinkers, there is some disagreement as to what constitutes metonymy vs. synecdoche. Rather than focus on issues of classification, I will follow Burke's line of reasoning, which is echoed by rhetorical scholar Stephen Hartnett:

> Metonymy, then, using the Lanham-Burke definition, amounts to a form of representational conflation in which essentially inexpressible concepts are reduced or condensed into a more recognizable object or category of perception (*Democratic Dissent* 25).

Raymond Gibbs, in a social psychological vein, makes a similar observation when he refers to metonymy as "not simply a figure of language requiring special processes to be understood. Instead, metonymy constitutes one of the primary ways people refer to people, events, and situations and thus reflects a particular mode of thought" (321). By referring to one image on the "connection access" (Gibbs 321) of language, a speaker can

call up “some underlying metonymic model,” which, if the metonym is to be effective, must be familiar to some extent with his or her audience (Gibbs 345). In short, a metonym is an image that is *fundamentally related to* but *stands in place of* some larger, complex concept. I contend that metonymic reasoning is fundamental to the *Epic*’s narrative of U.S. development, because the “American mind” and “American character” are “reductions” of the larger body of values, beliefs, characteristics, tendencies, and behaviors of the people who inhabit the U.S.

In a technical sense, the “American mind” functions as a metonym defined as the “container for contained,” in which the “mind” is where the range of beliefs and emotions that Adams’ describes as “traits” reside. For example, returning again to the *Epic*’s description of the influential decades from 1830 – 1850:

> As we compare the East of 1850 with that of 1750, I think we find the most essential contrasts to be in the field of morals and the scale of values … Unfortunately, however, just as the pioneer period on the frontiers left scars on the American mind, along with some excellent legacies, so did the Eastern period. Chief among them were the moral confusion caused by the expansion of the old conception of work as a moral virtue into the further conception of money-making as both a personal virtue and a patriotic duty, with the resultant confusion as to its relation to the rest of the virtues and the whole scale of social and moral values. (J. Adams, *Epic* 194)

In this passage, “confusion,” “virtues,” “conception[s]” and “social and moral values” are all a part of the “American mind.” The “American mind,” the “container” for these

beliefs, comes to stand in for them through a process that Kenneth Burke refers to as "reduction" (507).

Likewise, "American character" is also a reduction that calls to mind an entire range of characteristics with a singular term. Perhaps more than the "American mind," the "American character," with its connotations of biological race, functions as what Burke would call, in the tradition of "scientific behaviorism," a "real" or "substantial" reduction (507). Recall from the analysis earlier in this chapter that the neo-Lamarckian process of use inheritance helped traits like "optimism" and "money-making" become permanent aspects of the national "character" (J. Adams, *Epic* 184; 190). In these cases, the "American character" is a single term that substantially embodies multiple, abstract mental traits and sentiments. As the "incorporeal" made "corporeal" (Burke 506), the "American character" is a terminological reduction. A similar pattern of reduction is evident in this passage:

> We naturally like to stress the courage, hard work, and ability of our empire builders. It is well that we do. But, on the other hand, we cannot fully understand our own national mind and character if we do not ponder the other side of the coin. Almost every man who has migrated from Europe to America, from old settlement to newer, from East to West, has, at the same time that he has shown the qualities noted above, shown also a certain lack of courage when he decided that things had got too much for him 'at home' and that he could no longer remain, that he could not fight through to success where he was. (J. Adams, *Epic* 241)

The abstract "courage, hard work, and ability" of the people, along with the "lack of courage" that is also evident, become tangible and inherited when they become a part of the "national mind and character." Through a process of terminological reduction, the "intangible" aspects of national identity become "tangible" components of the national "character."[19]

The distinctions that Burke draws between the "poetic" and "scientific" forms of metonymic reasoning are useful here. As Burke explains, "'Metonymy' is a device of 'poetic realism'—but its partner, 'reduction,' is a device of 'scientific realism.' Here 'poetry' and 'behaviorism' meet" (507). Both the poet and the scientist may call on the same evidence to illuminate human motives and action. For example, they may describe the physical manifestations of an emotion (e.g., crying) to "represent" that emotion. But the poet "knows … that these bodily equivalents are but part of the idiom of expression involved in the act. They are 'figures.' They are hardly other than 'symbolizations'" (507). In other words, the poet "us[es] metonymy as a *terminological* reduction whereas the scientific behaviorist offers his reduction as a 'real' reduction" (507).

Notice the resonance here between Burke's critique of scientific behaviorism and Kroeber's critique of biologists who "do" behaviorism poorly. Kroeber acknowledges a valid "analogous" relationship between the evolution of "biology" and the evolution of

---

[19] It would be convenient to make a clear distinction between the use of the terms "mind" and "character" throughout the book—for example, that "character" always has a more representational function, and "mind" a more figurative function. However, Adams' terminology does not seem to follow any such careful lines. These terms are used alone and together, and are on occasion replaced with terms like "American life" or "the American mentality." The two terms seem to refer to the same general set of characteristics, though "national character" carries a more clear historical reference to the racialized body. The lack of clarity in terminology reinforces my view that the confusion between race and culture is endemic to the *Epic*'s historical narrative, and to the popular understanding of national identity during this historical moment.

"civilization," but notes that the available scientific evidence cannot show this relationship to be substantial. Burke, in a similar sense, approves of the poetic use of metonymy, but criticizes the mistaking of this representational "figure" for fact. These two men are certainly arguing toward different ends: Kroeber is advocating for an anthropological method that is purely cultural, a social scientific method that Burke would likely eschew as he advocates for his "representative anecdote." Nevertheless, both thinkers criticize the confusion of figurative language and substantive representation.

This mistaking of figure for substance is evident when Adams condenses the "traits" of the American people—like optimism, courage, cowardice, and the mistaking of money-making for virtue—into the image of the "American character," a term that in the language of the early twentieth century signified racial essence and biological heredity. What should be a "terminological reduction" in Adams' text becomes substantive; that is, a phrase that should call to mind cultural characteristics instead denotes scientific fact. This representation is not only false, I contend that it is harmful, as it embeds notions of racial hierarchy and white supremacy into the very core of national identity. Borrowing Burke's terms again, as "terminological reductions" are taken for "real" reductions, national identity is inextricable from a biological conception of race, and "American character" is expressly made "white." In this way, the core assumptions of scientific racism are embedded in Adams' narrative.

There are moments throughout the *Epic*, however, when metonymic reasoning functions in a more figurative sense and the ideology of scientific racism recedes to

various degrees. In the epilogue, for example, Adams reflects on the implications of his historical narrative on the nation's near future:

> But whether, in the next decade, we shall have again to face a furious economic pace or whether we shall be confronted by a marked slowing down of our economic machine, the chief factor in how we shall meet either situation is that of the American mind. One of the interesting questions with regard to that is whether our long subjection to the frontier and other American influences has produced a new type or merely a transient change. Can we hold to the good and escape from the bad? Are the dream and the idealism of the frontier and the New Land inextricably involved with the ugly scars which have also been left on us by our three centuries of exploitation and conquest of the continent? (J. Adams, *Epic* 405)

Here again appears the "American mind," which functions as a reduction of all of the psychological and social traits that Adams has described throughout the book. At first, Adams wonders if the "evolution" he has traced will result in a "new type or merely a transient change." This distinction alludes to a neo-Lamarckian "race formation," and it is a clear example of the confusion between biological and cultural processes. In one sense, then, the "American mind" attempts to function as a "real reduction." But then, Adams rephrases the question, asking if the "dream and the idealism" can be separated from the "ugly scars" left by history. "Ugly scars" is an organic term, to be sure, but it is a *metaphor* for the damage done to the "American mind" during the trials of national

development, and it is clearly figurative. In this sense, the "American mind" becomes more of a "terminological" reduction—a mere "figure of speech."

These figurative, organic images arise several times throughout the *Epic*, especially when Adams attempts to describe the negative effects of the environment on the American mind or character. For example, Adams describes the "moral muddle into which we got by raising money-making to the rank of a … virtue" as a "cancer that ate deep into the vitals of our life" (225). This "cancer" is an organic metaphor for a psychological trait—a figurative image, rather than a substantive reduction. Adams then portrays the trait of "lawlessness" as "[l]ike a disease suffered by a youth of abounding vitality," wherein "these centres of infection in the body politic were lightly thrown off" (226). Here, the "disease" is figurative, and the "body politic" is a corporate symbol for the nation, unlike the "national character," which is represented as a biological reality. Later, as Adams describes Reconstruction (which he calls "the most shameful decade in our entire national history"), he refers to the "centre of infection" as the North, in which the "moral confusion of the preceding decades … prepared the soil for the rapid growth of the rankest weeds which war could nurture" (276). Again, the "infection," the "soil," and the "weeds" are metaphors, not depictions of a neo-Lamarckian, scientific process. The use of figurative terms to represent the "character" of the nation has the curious effect of pulling the *Epic*'s narrative toward the poetic. The neo-Lamarckian elements of the narrative are undoubtedly central and the sense of racial hierarchy is foundational. Nevertheless, a figurative reading of the nation's "evolution" is increasingly encouraged

as the narrative continues. In this way, the *Epic* becomes a platform for a transcendent vision of national identity.

The primary metaphor that pulls the neo-Lamarckian narrative from its pseudo-scientific frame is, of course, the most famous product of the "American mind": the "American dream." Early in the narrative, the "dream" is in part an artifact of the metonymic "mind" of the nation that emerges through a relatively neo-Lamarckian process:

> English, Irish, Scotch, Germans, all who had come to our shores, had come to find security and self-expression. They had come with a new dynamic hope of rising and growing, of hewing out for themselves a life in which they would not only succeed as men, a life not only of economic prosperity but of social and self-esteem. The dream derived little assistance from the leaders in America. It was arising from the depths of the common mass of men, and beginning to spread like a contagion among the depressed in the Old World. (68)

In this passage, the "hopes" of the various national (or, to Adams, "racial") groups grow into the "dream," in a similar way that the other "traits" described by Adams emerge as a part of the American mind or character.

However, the "dream" takes a figurative turn as it spreads "like a contagion"—an organic simile for a social process. The "dream" is at once the literal product of the substantive "American mind" and a symbol of something greater. This figurative turn pursues the image of the dream throughout the *Epic*. For example, the "dream" moves

from the substantive to the poetic when Adams describes its expression through the words and spirit of Emerson:

> The American dream—the belief in the value of the common man, and the hope of opening every avenue of opportunity to him—was not a logical concept of thought. Like every great thought that has stirred and advanced humanity, it was a religious emotion, a great act of faith, a courageous leap into the unknown. As long as the dream persists to strengthen the hearts of man, Emerson will remain one of its prophets. (198)

This "religious emotion" is not represented as the result of a neo-Lamarckian process. It is a "leap into the unknown" and a "prophe[cy]" that becomes an image with poetic power. The poetic form of the dream is again strengthened later, as Adams is inspired by Whitman's articulation of the dream in a poetic reflection of his own:

> It [the 'peculiar contribution' of the nation] had come into being from the wedlock of the common man and the frontier, a marriage consummated over and over again in our history. The brood born of those who dreamed the dream grew and increased. But there would be nothing in the dream unless the new life for the common man could be made uncommon, unless out of the womb of democracy could come forth beauty of art and living that should fill the spirit with gladness and make the daily round of living something more than a perpetual subduing of the soul's wilderness for material purposes as we had subdued the wilderness of the continent. (326)

In this passage, the notion of "use inheritance"— the passing on of cultural traits to subsequent generations—is transformed into a figurative image. The image of the "brood born of those who dreamed the dream" could be interpreted in a neo-Lamarckian sense, but the surrounding metaphors help the image to transcend its neo-Lamarckian roots. The poetic language of marital "consummat[ion]," birth, "beauty," and "spirit" create ample room for a figurative interpretation of the American dream that transcends particular national origins. Indeed, in the more poetic language of Adams' *Epic* we see the seeds of what Martin Luther King, Jr., will use to reinterpret America's dream as his own dream of equality.

The poetic nature of the American dream becomes most evident in the *Epic*'s epilogue, as the neo-Lamarckian logic recedes into an ever-smaller sub-text. Take, for example, this key passage:

> But there has been also the American dream, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement... It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of birth or position. (J. Adams, *Epic* 404)

Though there is a shadow of biological determinism expressed in the allusions to "innate[] capa[city]," this passage mainly stresses the importance of the "social order" and the "opportunity" it provides for each individual to act purposefully and "attain" his

or her dream, unimpeded by such issues as “birth or position.” The narrative of development implied by this passage is one of social and cultural processes, and if “birth or position” are interpreted to include race in addition to social class, this narrative could be available to *all* Americans. Most certainly the passage above reflects the concept of meritocracy that, by the end of the twentieth century, shaped how individuals interpreted and explained the “American dream.”

Adams gestures toward this vision of a multi-racial American identity for the first time when he describes the “institution” that “best exemplifies the dream[,]…the greatest library in this land of libraries, the Library of Congress” (413):

> As one looks down on the general reading room, which alone contains ten thousand volumes which may be read without even the asking, one sees the seats filled with silent readers, old and young, rich and poor, black and white, the executive and the laborer, the general and the private, the noted scholar and the schoolboy, all reading at their own library provided by their own democracy. It has always seemed to me to be a perfect working out in a concrete example of the American dream—the means provided by the accumulated resources of the people themselves, a public intelligent enough to use them, and men of high distinction, themselves a part of the great democracy, devoting themselves to the good of the whole, uncloistered. (415)

This culminating passage is entirely distinct from the book’s earlier neo-Lamarckian perspective. By placing “rich and poor, black and white” within his image of the Library of Congress, Adams removes both social and racial barriers to attaining the “dream.” The

distinctions based on race and culture that undergird the rest of the *Epic* are absent; rather than defined and limited in terms of biological origins, the potential of the nation is now represented and realized through the actions of the individual, who might be of any race.

The shift from a neo-Lamarckian perspective that affirms differential capacities based on one's racial inheritance to a more poetic and seemingly egalitarian language is especially evident in the *Epic*'s closing passage. Adams concludes his epic narrative with a quotation from Mary Antin, a Russian immigrant to the United States:

> Sitting on the steps of the Boston Public Library, where the treasures of the whole of human thought had been opened to her, she wrote... 'No! It is not I that belong to the past, but the past that belongs to me. America is the youngest of the nations, and inherits all that went before it in history. And I am the youngest of America's children, and into my hands is given all her priceless heritage, to the last white star espied through the telescope, to the last great thought of the philosopher. Mine is the whole majestic past, and mine is the shining future.' (416-7)

This passage, in effect, narrates the neo-Lamarckian process in a way that reverses it and renders it completely figurative. Antin is not a product of the American environment, or of the inheritance of the traits created by that environment. Instead, she is the *owner* of that past. The "nation" (not the "national character") is the "inheritor" of history; Antin, herself, is bequeathed that history. She does not "hold" the history as a substantial component of her "mind" or "character"; she holds it in her "hands," as something external to her own being. Moreover, history is not a series of beliefs, tendencies, emotions, and traits; rather, it is "the last white star espied through the telescope" (a

metonymic representation of science) and “the last great thought of the philosopher” (a metonymic representation of the arts). These symbols are passed to her through poetic imagery, not biological processes. Importantly, she receives the inheritance regardless of her Russian heritage, an origin that Adams had initially thought inassimilable. In fact, her immigrant status is presented as an advantage—as the “youngest” of the nation’s children will inherit the “priceless” gifts. Most importantly, in the text Antin seems to own not only the “whole majestic past,” but also “the shining future.” Whereas previously the “scene” of the American environment seemed to determine the nation’s mind and character and therefore its destiny, in a moment of chiasmic reversal, Antin now becomes the agent who will determine the nation’s future.[20] In this quotation that serves as the poetic ending of the *Epic*, the pattern of *substantial* reduction that characterized the metonymic “American mind” and “American character” is replaced by Burke’s “representative anecdote.” The confusion between biological and cultural processes is absent, replaced by a figural notion of the idea of “inheritance.” The poetic vision of national identity has triumphed, and, in the process, race is rendered invisible. Through figurative transformation, Adams, perhaps despite himself and his work’s earlier claims, has created a seemingly de-racialized national “self.”

---

[20] Drawing on Burke’s understanding of metonymy, Hartnett observes that “[m]etonymy thus involves a convertibility of cause and effect in which, by reversing agent or cause and act or effect (for example, switching from ‘the thunder roars’ to ‘the roar of the thunder’), ‘the phenomenal world can be populated with a host of agents and agencies that are presumed to exist behind it’” (Hartnett, *Democratic Dissent* 25-26). From this point of view, Adams’ narrative as a whole functions metonymically: It begins with a scene/agent ratio that emphasizes the “scene” as “cause,” with the “agent’s” characteristics and actions as an effect of that “scene”; the narrative then reverses that cause and effect, ending with an “agent” that will serve as the cause of the nation’s (i.e., the “scene’s”) epic future.

The consequences of a poetic dream

On the one hand, the absence of explicit articulations of scientific racism at the end of the *Epic* signals the victory of what Gerstle calls “civic nationalism,” and the resulting picture of national values offers hope for an egalitarian future. If the American dream is freed from its lineage of white superiority, then the nation can be a home for racial equality—or, at the very least, the rhetorical landscape will allow for individuals of all races to argue for inclusion in America, *as* Americans. If America is not explicitly and *de facto* a white nation, derived through a process of social and biological evolution from particular European “races,” the possibility emerges for the re-definition of a multi-cultural national identity. While this potentiality is evident in the text, the historical reception of the *Epic* reveals a more “ambiguous” and “protean” (Campbell 2) path of conceptual change. I contend that the book’s internal conceptual tension between substantive and figurative representation is reinscribed in its reception, as reviewers discuss the historical facts and the mythic truths that the book encompasses. Ultimately, through the re-articulation of and emphasis on the transcendent American dream, the neo-Lamarckian reasoning that buttresses Adams’ narrative is further obscured, leaving racial hierarchy an unspoken mainstay of national ideology.

Reviewers of the *Epic* overwhelmingly re-articulate Adams’ transcendent vision of the American dream. According to Allen Sinclair Will, in the *New York Times*: “With a passion for searching into origins, [Adams] seeks to find how the ordinary American ‘has become what he is today in outlook, character, and opinion’” (61). And he finds, according to Will, that “we are predominately a nation of dreamers” who foster “an

'American Dream' of a better, richer, and happier life for citizens of every rank" that is "held by a large body of the people with a tenacity which nothing has been able to shake" (Will 61). Similarly, in the *Los Angeles Times*, Lillian Ford asserts that "[i]n every chapter [Adams] cuts through the mass of accepted material that has been put out as history and endeavors to discover what ferment has been at the heart of things" (Ford B8). At this "heart of things" is "the American dream, the belief in the common man and the insistence upon his having, as far as possible, equal opportunity in every way with the rich one" (J. Adams qtd. in Ford B8). Among all of the ideas and concepts in the *Epic,* the book's notion of the "American dream" gains rhetorical traction as it is highlighted and emphasized throughout the book's reception, in reviews that unconditionally praise the book and in reviews that take particular issue with some of its aspects.

Among this general acceptance of the nation's transcendent symbol, however, the text's internal contradictions between figurative and substantial representations are reinscribed to varying degrees. The conceptual tension is evident in discussions of the *Epic*'s rendering of historical "facts" (i.e., substantive representations) versus greater "truths" (i.e., figurative renderings). Adams credibility is gained, paradoxically, from his ability to capture both. The review in *World Affairs* offers a typical interpretation of the *Epic*'s figurative potential:

> [T]he work here is more than a factual history of America. It is especially a biography of the "American dream,"—that dream which the author variously alludes to in some fifty or more passages, but which he perhaps best defines as a

> "dream of a better, richer and happier life for all our citizens of every rank" ("Rev. of *Epic*," *World Affairs* 131).

The reviewer continues his or her account of the *Epic*'s figurative significance, with a visual metaphor:

> And so, in broad, bold outline he sketches a picture, which is in the main so true, so artistic, so eternal that it may well be called epic ("Rev. of *Epic*," *World Affairs* 131).

In the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, David Hazen creates a similar, aural metaphor:

> The *Epic of America* is a symphony in history. It sweeps along with the majesty and color of a Beethoven masterpiece. (84)

When she compares the *Epic* to Adams' subsequent book, *Chicago Tribune* reviewer Fanny Butcher eschews the artistic or musical for the philosophical, but echoes Hazen's sentiment:

> "The Epic of America" was more than a history of our country; it was a vivid interpretation of it, a searching into the philosophical foundations of all history and of the peculiar significance of the United States. It told the story of our country, but it did something much more than relate incidents. (17)

Reviewers praise the "broad strokes" of Adams' historical rendering, emphasizing the figurative truths they see in Adams' hopeful vision.

According to the texts I studied, the book's hopeful vision is, interestingly, warranted by Adams' no holds barred representation of the "less attractive" aspects of "American traits" (Rippy 331). Adams is praised repeatedly for his realistic and accurate

assessment of historical facts. For example, in the *Chicago Tribune*, the chair of the history department at the University of Chicago notes that the *Epic* “is a solemn and sorrowful appraisal of the ideals, the tergiversations and the hypocrisies of the men and the parties that have directed the course of American history” (Dodd 15). In the *Los Angeles Times*, Ford states that “Mr. Adams is entirely patriotic, but his is critical patriotism that faces the facts and judges his own country even more surely than any other” (B8). Ford’s admiration for Adams’ idealism, as manifested in his belief in the American dream, is explicitly bolstered by his attention to the least admirable attributes of the American character:

> His belief in a prevailing ideal does not make Mr. Adams romanticize the past. He is able to examine the record with scientific exactitude and to judge according to the facts. (B8)

Will’s *New York Times* review underlines Ford’s sentiment:

> [Adams] idealizes nothing and nobody, but searches, in the pursuit of the highest mission of his craft, for the truth as he may find it by the exercise of insight fortified with sound scholarship. (61)

The flaws that Adams is praised for bringing to light include “[t]hrift and shrewdness,” “haste,” “wealth,” and “hurry” (Will 61); the “worst” that was brought out in soldiers by the Revolutionary War (Hazen 84), as well as that war’s “propoganda [*sic*] and oratory” (Ford B8); and, more generally, “the greatest betrayal in all history, the abandonment by a rich and powerful people of the generous aspirations of their hard pressed and high minded ancestors” (Dodd 15). In this way, the *Epic* is interpreted as both earthly and

transcendent, with substantive representations serving as "factual" evidence for Adams' figurative vision. In these positive reviews of the *Epic*, the figurative vision is emphasized as the most significant and lasting element of Adams' text, and Adams' neo-Lamarckian reasoning remains, for the most part, implicit or absent. (Reviews in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* and *World Affairs* do refer to racial categories through passing references to Adams' account of "white man's" arrival and move across the continent, but these mentions are fleeting.) The positive reviews of the *Epic* reflect a resolution of the text's internal contradictions and a conceptual move toward a more transcendent and egalitarian view of national identity. When the critics believe in the *Epic*'s historical narrative and ideals, the figurative "American dream" triumphs.

A handful of reviews, however, demonstrate the ambiguity of conceptual continuity and change. These reviews appear in national academic journals or in regional historical society journals from southern states. Even as they praise part of the text, they explicitly emphasize neo-Lamarckian ideals, inherited racial traits, specific factual errors in the text,[21] and/or the dubiousness of the *Epic*'s unified vision of a transcendent national identity. These reviewers do not believe in Adams' dream, and their disbelief is tied to a perceived failure in his transcendent vision. In *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, David Thomas's disbelief seems to be rooted in regional concerns; he argues from the beginning of the review that "[t]here really have been two dreams running at the same time," the "Hamiltonian" dream rooted in cities, capitalism, and industrialism, and the "Jeffersonian" dream "of a rural and virtuous democracy ruling for the benefit of all"

---

[21] The southern journals in particular, from Mississippi and Georgia, list several specific and concrete factual errors found in the text (Thomas 550; "Rev. of *Epic*," *Georgia* 318).

(549). Thomas seems to doubt that both dreams can "be realized in the same country at the same time" (550). In a review in *American Literature*, J. Fred Rippy doubts the "single dream" proposition for a different reason. He observes Adams' lack of insight that "our population might be divided into two or more groups having different traits" (332). As he concludes the review, Rippy makes his meaning explicit, noting that Adams "failed to take into account the contribution of racial psychology to our national traits" (332). In Rippy's view, the *Epic* is unconvincing because it is does not sufficiently emphasize the role of race and the reality of a racial hierarchy. In the *American Historical Review*, on the other hand, Carl Becker notices the neo-Lamarckian reasoning in Adams' text, identifying the "less amiable traits" in the *Epic* with the neo-Lamarckian term "acquired characteristics" (559-60). Nevertheless, Becker ultimately finds the *Epic* to be not "epic" enough. He concludes by stating:

> I close the book feeling that I have been ably instructed, but with no sense of having had my soul purged by fear and pity. (561)

For Becker, Adams is too caught up in details, "advice," and "laudable irritation" (560-1). Becker seems to find merit in the neo-Lamarckian narrative, but does not find in that narrative a persuasive, transcendent vision. These reviews demonstrate that, though a unified vision of transcendent national identity may have been gaining ground, it was not universally persuasive. *The Epic of America*'s move from neo-Lamarckian, racial particularity to universal, egalitarian humanity did not reflect a wholesale change in public discourse. Rather, the book and its reception are evidence of a gradual shift, in

which the ideology of scientific racism is incrementally overwritten, facilitated by a process of figurative transformation.

Taken as a whole, these reviews also illuminate a growing absence in discourse related to race in the 1930s. When the ideology of nineteenth-century scientific racism is used as a standard against which to judge the *Epic* and its claims, the *Epic* is found to be unconvincing, and its notion of a common “American dream” is termed a falsehood. On the other hand, when reviewers of the *Epic* embrace and rearticulate the notion of an “American dream,” race as a determining characteristic of social conditions or potential futures drops out of the frame. Praise for the American dream is often accompanied by a serious appraisal of the nation’s flaws, but, importantly, neither racial inequality nor white superiority are numbered among the national flaws that critics observe. As the neo-Lamarckian logic of Adams’ narrative recedes, only the figurative representations are re-circulated in the broader discourse. An incipient pattern begins to take shape, in which explicitly negative or contradictory representations of racial difference are transcended through figurative images. To be clear, the *Epic* does not attempt to correct or directly refute the scientific racism of the nineteenth century; consequently, racial hierarchies remain an implicit, embedded possibility in discourse related to national identity.

Conclusion

This chapter proposes that metonymic representations of race and national identity played a part in the transformation of rhetorical discourse related to race in the early twentieth century. *The Epic of America*, in this sense, is an example of a

"transitional text," in which terms embedded in the ideology of scientific racism are figuratively transformed to create a transcendent vision of universal humanity, and with it, the possibility for a de-racialized (or less-racialized) national "self." The text's internal contradictions take the form of a symbolic tension, in which key images slide between substantive representations and figurative transformations. These contradictions are both resolved and reinscribed in the text's reception, determined in large part by whether the review is published in a regional publication. Though the transcendent image of the American dream mostly triumphs, critics who re-articulate the ideology of nineteenth-century scientific racism find Adams' unifying dream unconvincing.

The figurative transformation of idealized national symbols therefore facilitates the emergence of a discourse of egalitarian, universal humanity—but this rhetorical process also creates a problem. While explicit representations of race continue to rely on elements of scientific racism, figurative renderings of a transcendent national identity, like those found in the *Epic* and re-circulated in the book's reception, entirely eschew representations of race. Even as the rhetorical possibilities for an egalitarian national life emerge, the underlying foundation of racist beliefs in the *Epic of America* is left undisturbed.

In contrast to the *Epic*'s figurative transformation of national identity, which did not explicitly refute but sometimes accommodated prior notions of racial difference, Pearl S. Buck's novel *The Good Earth* directly challenged and corrected prior racial representations. Buck presents a detailed and intimate portrait of the racial other, coping with the conceptual contradictions of the 1930s' turbulent discourse on race in a manner

that differs from Adams. In the next chapter, I contend that the narrative dialogism of *The Good Earth* reveals the complexity of Buck's endeavor and highlights additional possibilities and limitations of the emerging discourse of universal humanity in the 1930s.

Chapter Three

Drawing the “other” close: Narrative dialogism in *The Good Earth*

> “By birth and ancestry I am American; by choice and belief I am a Christian; but by years of my life, by sympathy and feeling, I am Chinese” (Buck, *Is There a Case* 30).

If *The Epic of America*’s articulation of American character moved representations of race to the background, *The Good Earth*, with its intimate look at the lives of Chinese protagonists, placed racial representations back into the public spotlight. The concurrent popularity of *The Epic of America* and *The Good Earth* is a study in contrasts, as is Pearl S. Buck, herself. Her life crossed national borders; her writing traversed genres and languages. She moved from poor missionary child to wealthy (sometimes ostentatiously so) American public figure, from a culturally-privileged other in her youth in China, to a culturally-privileged spokesperson for Asian and African American others in her American adulthood (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*; Harker 113). Bilingual, she not only wrote novels and nonfiction about her Chinese experiences, she also studied, translated, and spoke about the Chinese novel during her literary career (Cevasco; Engar; Harker 91-92; So 91-92). Pearl S. Buck developed a public persona that crossed national and cultural lines. In the process, she inhabited an ambiguous position of authority, privilege, and popularity.[22]

---

[22] Karen Leong discusses how Buck’s cultural privilege allowed her to be accepted as “a ‘China expert’ for many in the United States” (4), even as her inability to “fully acknowledge the privilege of her position as a Euro-American foreign missionary in China” influenced her understanding of race, racism, and multiculturalism in the U.S. (43).

Critics and historians have discussed Buck's role in transforming popular opinions about China in the United States (Conn, "Introduction" 1; Leong 12; Thomson 13-14). This chapter is not necessarily interested in the question or process of popularizing China, but in a related and more narrow question: How does Buck help her U.S. readers to identify with her representation of the Chinese people? Specifically, I am interested in how Buck utilizes multiple narrative voices—what Mikhail Bakhtin calls heteroglossia—to close the distance between the racial "other" and the universal "self." I contend that the novel's internal contradictions are resolved by book reviewers' interpretations, which in many cases gloss over that heteroglossia to posit a universal and unitary style. Paying heed to the novel's dialogism reveals the author's intentions to make the "other" appear to be "real" or "authentic" to the American reader. Book reviews reveal a range of responses to *The Good Earth*'s heteroglossia. Critical readers are skeptical of the author's ability to accurately render Chinese characters and culture, while laudatory reviews, which come from "middlebrow" sources, praise both Buck's authentic representations and the novel's apparent universality. The former interpretations, I will show, are entangled with the raciocultural hierarchy of scientific racism. The latter interpretations, I will argue, demonstrate how narrative dialogism is an additional rhetorical mechanism that facilitated the conceptual emergence of a vision of universal humanity—a vision that undermined many of scientific racism's core tenets.

I will begin with a brief review of critical and historical literature related to the popularity of *The Good Earth* and the complexity of Buck's role as an American writing about China. Then, I will discuss Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and

dialogism, revealing the interplay between Buck's language of anthropological observation and the rendering of her Chinese protagonists' voices, emotions, and thoughts. Finally, I will discuss the historic reception of *The Good Earth* in some depth, noting in particular how "highbrow" and "middlebrow" reviews interpret the heteroglossia of *The Good Earth* quite differently. Ultimately, this chapter should contribute to a historically-grounded understanding of changing representations of race in U.S. public discourse, highlighting the possibilities and limitations of racial representations that use narrative dialogism to cast the "other" as a version of the universal "self."

Popularity in context

How popular and influential was *The Good Earth*? In addition to becoming, for a time, the second bestselling book of all time, *The Good Earth* was so popular that Will Rogers wrote a syndicated blurb that appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* in March 1932, which stated: "Don't tell me we got people that can read, and they haven't read Pearl Buck's great book on China, 'Good Earth'" (Rogers 1). A few years later, *The Good Earth* was the first "Pocket Book" ever published (Welky 158). *The Good Earth*, the movie, had "the most [viewers] ever, prior to *Gone With the Wind*" (Thomson 13-14). James C. Thomson elaborates:

> Beyond simple numbers, we have Harold Isaacs' [1950s] study of the mental baggage that American opinion molders—all the way from secretaries of State to editors, labor union leaders, professors, and corporate executives—carried in their

> heads when the words 'China' or 'the Chinese' came to mind. More than half of his interviewees, free-associating, came up with Pearl Buck's name and the decent, hard-working, long-suffering Chinese she depicted in her words. (14)

Karen Leong recounts how Buck became a trusted authority in terms of representing China to the United States public (Leong). Richard Jean So elaborates on how this authority translated into Buck's pivotal speech at congressional hearings advocating for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts (102-105), and Colleen Lye argues that "*The Good Earth* provided the key cultural resource for World War II's military alliance between the United States and China" (237). The *Good Earth* was more than popular; it was ubiquitous, and its popular and even political impact was evident for decades.[23]

As Chapter One of this project makes clear, the conceptual tension surrounding race and its definition in the first half of the twentieth century was formidable, and as Chapter Two reveals, the neo-Lamarckian conflation of national and racial identities was widespread and foundational to public discourse. Within this context, *The Good Earth*'s popularity deserves careful critical attention. Even as Chinese Americans were represented stereotypically in the media, discriminated against in housing and employment, given limited access to emigrate to the United States, and barred from achieving citizenship once they arrived in the United States[24]—hundreds of thousands of Americans were drawn toward the intimate relationship that *The Good Earth*, as a

---

[23] Buck's subsequent popularity among literary scholars is a separate issue. For discussions of the decline of Pearl Buck's literary reputation after the 1930s and 1940s, see the works of Stephen Spencer ("Popular Culture") and Jane Rabb.

[24] For accounts of the discrimination that encountered Chinese Americans during the Chinese Exclusion Era, see Erika Lee's *At America's Gates*, as well as *Claiming America* (Wong and Chan, eds.).

rhetorical text, invited with its Chinese protagonists. Readers join Wang Lung in the Chinese countryside as he wakes and bathes and visits the barber in preparation to meet his wife for the first time; as, together, they conceive and bear children; as they plant and harvest the fields, suffer hunger and poverty, achieve material success, and prepare to face death. Even as Chinese Americans were regularly de-humanized, American readers embraced the opportunity to form very human bonds with Buck's fictional characters. As Spencer asks, "Why was a novel about Chinese people so popular at a time when isolationism and entrenched racism dominated American culture?" ("Discourse of Whiteness"). From my point of view, this contradiction is a part of the process of conceptual change in U.S. rhetorical history.

Contemporary scholars and critics are also intrigued by the book's popularity and account for it in multiple and diverse ways. The marketing machinery of the Book of the Month Club and the savvy promotional efforts of Buck's publisher boosted the book's public presence (Harker 100). The novel's plot and rural setting appealed to Americans' Great Depression-related interest in a "story of the land" (Conn 131) and "fit perfectly the tendency in the thirties to romanticize rural life" (Spencer, "Popular Culture" 128). Moreover, the often-noted style of the novel, the "formal, quasi-biblical rhetoric … len[t] a degree of dignity to the events" and "helped to lift the plot toward a sense of universality" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 131). *The Good Earth* also was published at a time when the global context, and the position of the U.S. within that context, was shifting. For example, American sympathy for China was growing as the Japanese threatened Manchuria in the lead up to World War II (Thomson 12-13; Spencer, "The Discourse of

Whiteness"). Because of the poverty U.S. readers were experiencing or witnessing during the Great Depression, *The Good Earth* provided an opportunity to connect national and global issues—to "reimagin[e] …1930s American poverty as a universal global condition" (So 96). Perhaps most simply, then: "Americans also read *The Good Earth* to gain a better understanding of their own lives" in the midst of the Great Depression (Welky 162).

In tandem with their discussions of the novel's popularity, contemporary critics explore ways in which *The Good Earth* appealed to so-called "universal" sentiments, even as it proliferated images that were stereotypical or orientalist. In the words of Edward Said, orientalism is the "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3) through a system of institutions and representations that define, study, and portray "the Orient" from the hegemonic position of "the West." Said describes the process and perspective of orientalist representation:

> Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. … What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation. (20-21)

Most scholars draw a very nuanced line when it comes to Buck's relationship to orientalist discourse. She was clearly working from a place of personal knowledge and respect, even as she operated within the orientalist discourse of the missionary

community and the United States. Critics acknowledge Buck's position within the discourse of orientalism, but they also credit her for her "ability to reorient Americans toward a more positive assessment of China" (Leong 12), to create "a kind of cultural synthesis" (So 96), and to "offer[] a realistic portrayal of difference" (Suqiao 163). To varying degrees, these critics see Buck as both an "insider and outsider" of the place and people she represents in her work (Goodwin 125). If, as Said states, orientalism works to "make[] the Orient speak, describe[] the Orient, render[] its mysteries plain for and to the West" (20-21), then Buck's endeavor is, at its core, orientalist. If orientalist representations depend upon "exteriority," however, Buck's position in that discourse is not completely clear. Buck's intention to create a new kind of representation that eschews egregious stereotypes, along with her position as both a privileged Westerner and what Suquiao calls a "bi-national" or "cosmopolitan" subject (153-4), prevent a simplistic assessment of her work.

I believe that *The Good Earth* allows for all of the interpretations discussed above, and I will investigate the same ambiguous territory that these scholars illuminate. In concert with a constitutive view of rhetorical history, I am primarily interested in understanding the text's rhetorical form and how that form embodies the ideological contradictions that critics and scholars have observed. I will add to their work by drawing links between the distinct narrative voices within the novel's dialogic text, the varying historic interpretations of the novel that resonated (or failed to resonate) with elements of those voices, and the discourse of universal humanity that was emerging during this time, facilitated by trends in middlebrow reading.

Dialogism in The Good Earth

In my analysis of *The Good Earth*, I interpret the "realistic portrayal of difference" that Suqiao observes (163) as a stylistic effect. I contend that this effect results from the contrast between Buck's representation of her novel's characters and the stereotypical caricatures of the Chinese that were widespread in popular culture, as well as the subtle difference between the novel's authorial voices and the voices of the characters.[25] These tensions in language and representation are examples of heteroglossia, or the inherent and irresolvable multiple meanings of any utterance, based on context. These different meanings inevitably interact and conflict within discourse, creating what Bakhtin calls dialogism. The dialogism in *The Good Earth*, I will argue, is wrought with a very fine grain: The stylized authorial voice adopts the characters' represented dialogue and internal life so seamlessly as to conceal the internal dialogic tensions, endowing the novel with the sense of both objective, anthropological truth and universal, emotional authenticity. *The Good Earth*'s narrative dialogism is therefore far from the "profound and unresolved conflict" among characters' voices that Bakhtin describes in the polyphonic novels of Dostoevsky (349). Nevertheless, Bakhtin states that "the language used by characters" is a "form for incorporating and organizing heteroglossia in the novel … that every novel without exception utilizes" (315). Bakhtin elaborates on the

---

[25] Colleen Lye makes a similar observation in the context of literary genre when she notes that "[t]he celebrated credibility of Buck's Chinese characters does not, of course, attest to the actual verisimilitude of her representation. It indicates the novelty of encountering Asian protagonists in a realist novel, instead of in their customary domiciles of fantasy and pulp fiction. As an instance of American writing about Asians, *The Good Earth* was notable in that it strove for a reality effect" (Lye 205).

sometimes subtle "speech diversity" that enters the novel through the language of characters and the "influences" that those characters' language have on "authorial speech":

> Even in those places where the author's voice seems at first glance to be unitary and consistent, direct and unmediatedly intentional, beneath that smooth single-languaged surface we can nevertheless uncover prose's three-dimensionality, its profound speech diversity, which enters the project of style and is its determining factor. (Bakhtin 315)

The dialogism in *The Good Earth* can, at first, have the appearance of a "smooth single-languaged surface." Careful attention to the subtle facets within this "unitary" narrative, however, reveals how the novel's dialogism works to minimize difference.[26] A critical analysis of the *The Good Earth*'s heteroglossia illuminates how an author can, for at least some readers of a particular type, create a sense of intimacy between reader and other, making the "exotic" familiar, and the familiar both true and universal.

Bakhtin's discussion of heteroglossia and dialogism in the novel is helpful in framing an analysis of *The Good Earth* for several additional reasons. First, Bakhtin

---

[26] It seems possible, even likely, that Bakhtin would be critical of Buck, disapproving in particular of the ways in which her apparently unitary narrative exhibits a certain "deaf[ness] to organic double-voicedness and to the internal dialogization of living and evolving discourse" (327). Bakhtin would likely approve much more of the "double voice unreconciled" that Henry Louis Gates, Jr., praises as Zora Neale Hurston's "greatest achievement" (Gates, "Afterword" 294-5). Bakhtin ultimately acknowledges, however, that "the languages introduced into the novel are shaped into artistic images of languages (they are not raw linguistic data), and this shaping may be more or less artistic and successful, may more or less respond to the spirit and power of the languages that are being represented" (Bakhtin 417). However subtle its representation, dialogism is present in *The Good Earth*, and it serves an important function. The importance of the novel's dialogism becomes especially clear as the novel encounters the ideological heteroglossia external to the text, as demonstrated in the novel's critical reception.

insists that an analysis of novels must take into account both the social and artistic forces operating in the discourse (259). In fact, Bakhtin argues that the novel's unique contribution to verbal art lies in its "system" or its "orchestration" of various social languages (416). Bakhtin's emphasis on the complexity of representing "alien" and often conflicting social languages in artistic prose offers many useful insights into a novel that seeks to provide a realistic and authentic representation of a given culture to readers who would view that culture and its inhabitants as other to themselves.

Second, Bakhtin acknowledges the affinity of rhetorical and novelistic discourse, even as he preserves the "qualitative uniqueness" of the latter (269).[27] What he sees as the "close[], genetic, family relationship" between rhetoric and the novel (269) leads him to emphasize two distinct (yet sometimes "indistinguishable" [283]) forms of novelistic heteroglossia: The first, "between the word and its object" (275), which is a more artistic concern; and the second, between the word and the "alien conceptual horizon of the listener" (282), which is a rhetorical terrain. Negotiating the first type of heteroglossia means facing the reality that "any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it" (276). In negotiating the second brand of heteroglossia, "[t]he speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background" (282). This understanding of the novel illuminates the

[27] The larger question of the relationship between Bakhtin's work and the rhetorical tradition is complex. For additional discussions, see Murphy and Farmer, ed.

challenges *The Good Earth* would have posed to its author and its readers. Growing up within and ultimate joining a missionary community that often represented the Chinese people as "barbaric and uncivilized" (Leong 18),[28] Buck understood the difficulty of representing the humanness of a people who had been systematically de-humanized in mainstream discourse. The Chinese people, the "object" of Buck's artistic efforts, were certainly "enveloped…by the 'light' of alien words that ha[d] already been spoken about [them]" (Bakhtin 276). It is hard to imagine, however, that Buck could have had a strong and comprehensive grounding in "the alien conceptual horizon" of the mainstream American reader. Outside of her time as an undergraduate in a small women's college in West Virginia, Buck hadn't lived in the United States for any extended period of time—and within the missionary community abroad, her exposure to U.S. popular culture was limited (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*). Bakhtin's depiction of the inherent challenges presented by the heteroglossia of language offers new insights into the artistic and rhetorical challenges Buck faced. In representing an over determined other to a relatively unknown audience, Buck made stylistic choices that resulted in dialogic conflict and tension. From this perspective, the ability of *The Good Earth* to generate multiple interpretations—both recently and in Buck's own time—becomes comprehensible.

Negotiating these multiple interpretations involves, first, attentiveness to the hybridity, heteroglossia, and dialogism of the text itself. I will analyze several instances of stylistic hybridity in *The Good Earth* to understand how the novel's multiple voices

---

[28] Leong points out that this kind of orientalism was present in Buck's letters and in her missionary activities in her early adulthood (18), though her perceptions and representations ultimately changed to become "more positive" if "still distorted" (27).

are both in conflict and, in Bakhtin's terms, "orchestrated" to form a stylistic whole. This approach allows me to avoid imposing a single, unitary meaning upon the novel—after all, a review of the historical and contemporary reception demonstrates that the novel generated a multitude of interpretations. Rather, I hope to capture the "contours," "overtones," and "artistically calculated nuances" that the novel creates from its assemblage of "voices and tones" (Bakhtin 278-9). Roland Barthes' comparison between interpreting a text and playing a piece of music is *a propos* (162-3): *The Good Earth* offers images, tones, and voices that can be "played" or interpreted in a number of ways. My purpose here is to show the rhetorical infrastructure (i.e., the novelistic dialogism) that makes these multiple interpretations possible.

The book begins with a hybrid construction, which is, in Bakhtin's words, "an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (304). In the first part of the novel, I routinely observe four such "semantic and axiological belief systems." First, an intimate authorial voice, which is an omniscient narrator, speaks from outside of the characters' points of view, but with knowledge of their personal histories. Second, an anthropological authorial voice contributes (apparently) objective details about the setting, cultural traditions, and artifacts—this voice serves an "anthropological" function, in particular, because it represents the cultural details and artifacts that may have seemed most "exotic" and "other" to a white

reading public in the United States.[29] Third, indirect narration embeds characters' emotions, sensory experiences, and interpretations into authorial narration. Finally, the characters' direct dialogue represents their actual speech. Beginning with the first few sentences and continuing throughout the novel, these four novelistic voices weave together, often seamlessly, with "no formal—compositional and syntactic—boundary between [their] utterances, styles, languages, belief systems" (Bakhtin 305). For example:

> It was Wang Lung's marriage day. At first, opening his eyes in the blackness of the curtains about his bed, he could not think why the dawn seemed different from any other. The house was still except for the faint, gasping cough of his old father, whose room was opposite to his own across the middle room. Every morning the old man's cough was the first sound to be heard. Wang Lung usually lay listening to it and moved only when he heard it approaching nearer and when he heard the door of his father's room squeak upon its wooden hinges. (Buck, *Good Earth* 1)

The first sentence ("It was Wang Lung's marriage day") establishes an intimate authorial voice—an external voice that, without communicating Wang Lung's internal perceptions, narrates privileged information about Wang Lung's personal history. The second sentence subtly signals a change in voice, to the character's indirect narration, by moving into Wang Lung's point of view of waking, seeing, and (not) remembering: For a moment, Wang Lung isn't yet aware of what the intimate authorial voice already revealed to the reader in the previous sentence. The third sentence shifts, once again, to an

---

[29] This voice also embodies the characteristics of what Fahnestock calls the "objective voice." See Fahnestock's *Rhetorical Style* for a helpful discussion of how the "spare, unattributed language" of the objective voice makes "a bid for fact status" (286-7).

anthropological authorial voice that observes the layout of the house, along with the house's stillness, and then its sole sound—the father's cough. The following sentence pivots on the image of the father's cough, transitioning back to the intimate authorial voice, which offers privileged, personal history, about the daily occurrence of said cough. And finally, the character's indirect narration concludes the paragraph, offering Wang Lung's sensory perspective on daily events, in which he "lay[s] listening" for some time before he "move[s]". This paragraph is not formally divided by quotation marks or by strong differences in syntax or style; the voices are identifiable by what they sense and what they know, but they flow seamlessly together into a single paragraph. This paragraph is a hybrid construction that illustrates the heteroglossia and dialogism in the text.

Another instance of these interacting voices can be found a few paragraphs later, as Wang Lung rises and begins the preparations for his wedding day:

> The kitchen was made of earthen bricks as the house was, great squares of earth dug from their own fields, and thatched with straw from their own wheat. Out of their own earth had his grandfather in his youth fashioned also the oven, baked and black with many years of meal preparing. On top of this earthen structure stood a deep, round, iron cauldron. (Buck, *Good Earth* 2)

In the first sentence of this passage, the function of the anthropological authorial voice becomes clear: This voice, from what Said might refer to as an orientalist perspective of exteriority, will offer empirical observations on the setting of the book—particularly observations about items that are unique to the Chinese setting. After all, Wang Lung is

unlikely to observe, on even a special day, that the house he has inhabited every day of his life is composed of "great squares of earth." This kind of observation would only be meaningful for readers who do not already know that Chinese farmers of this period often lived in earthen houses that they built themselves. The second sentence of this passage is rendered in the intimate authorial voice; this voice is less concerned with the artifacts in general, and more concerned with the particular role those artifacts have played in the characters' personal histories. The house is built from, not just any earth, but "their own earth," and the oven is "baked and black" through years of cooking their own meals. The final sentence of this passage, however, transitions back to the anthropological authorial voice. This is the voice that tells us that the Chinese farmers cooked in "a deep, round, iron cauldron." Again, if iron cauldrons were typical of Chinese farm kitchens, the narrator would have no need to describe the details of such a cauldron to a savvy audience. This observation is only necessary and appropriate for a Western audience that is new to Wang Lung's world.

In the following sentence, the narration pivots on the image of the cauldron, moving from the anthropological authorial voice to the intimate authorial voice, and ultimately to Wang Lung's indirect narration:

> This cauldron he filled partly full of water, dipping it with a half gourd from an earthen jar that stood near, but he dipped cautiously, for water was precious. Then, after a hesitation, he suddenly lifted the jar and emptied all the water into the cauldron. This day he would bathe his whole body. Not since he was a child

> upon his mother's knee had anyone looked upon his body. Today one would, and he would have it clean. (Buck, *Good Earth* 2)

The dipping of water from an "earthen jar" to the kettle is an objective description, but as soon as Wang Lung "dip[s] cautiously," the character's voice inhabits the third-person narration. "[F]or water was precious" is a motivation expressed in a farmer's voice. Wang Lung's "hesitation" is observed from the outside, but the urgency of emptying the water and the declaration that "[t]his day he would bathe his whole body" allows the reader to move inside of Wang Lung's thoughts. This evocation of the character's indirect narration foreshadows Wang Lung's upcoming direct dialogue with his father, when he tells him, "I have not washed my body all at once since the New Year," and ultimately shouts in frustration "It is only one day" (Buck, *Good Earth* 5). This later dialogue proves that the third-person narration in the earlier passage is indeed the character's voice embedded indirectly within authorial narration. The hybrid construction of this passage provides anthropological, intimate, and internal insight: We learn about the construction of the kitchen and the stove, along with typical culinary tools and the bathing practices of someone living in rural China. But we also witness, from the "inside," a man's simple desire to impress a woman through his appearance. The dialogism in this passage tacks back and forth between an inside knowledge of Wang Lung's desires and emotions, and an outside observation of a Chinese farmer in his rural domicile.

The tension between internal and external builds as this scene continues, and the reader witnesses Wang Lung bathe and dress so that he can collect his bride:

> In the light that streamed in a square block from the hole he wrung a small towel from the steaming water and he scrubbed his dark slender body vigorously. Warm though he had thought the air, when his flesh was wet he was cold, and he moved quickly, passing the towel in and out of the water until from his whole body there went up a delicate cloud of steam. Then he went to a box that had been his mother's and drew from it a fresh suit of blue cotton cloth. He might be a little cold this day without the wadding of winter garments, but he suddenly could not bear to put them on against his clean flesh. (Buck, *Good Earth* 5-6)

The first sentence in this passage is external and objective: The anthropological authorial voice describes the light in the room, the "small towel" that Wang Lung uses to bathe, and "his dark slender body." The reference to Wang Lung's "dark" body is a mark of both race and class, distinguishing Wang Lung as both Chinese and one who labors in the sun.[30] The next sentence makes a swift and brief internal move: Through the character's indirect narration, we learn that Wang Lung had thought the air warm, but sense with him the cold air on his flesh. Then, as "he moved quickly" to bathe, the anthropological authorial voice takes over, removing us from inside of Wang Lung's tactile senses to a point of outside observation from which we can see the scientific results of the warm water and his warm skin interacting with the cold environment. The authorial voice becomes intimate as Wang Lung retrieves his clothing from "a box that had been his

---

[30] In his discussion of how Buck represents race and whiteness in *The Good Earth*, Spencer, in a similar vein, observes that Wang Lung's negative assessment of O-Lan's "brown, common, and patient face" is embedded in assumptions about race and class. "These descriptions privilege light skin, associating dark skin with rural life, poverty, and labor, and, in short, equating dark skin with lower-class status" (Spencer, "Discourse of Whiteness").

mother's," and we move further into the character as we sense with him the antipathy toward placing dirty clothes against "clean flesh."

The interaction between the various voices in the novel's narration is, on the one hand, a skilled (and possibly commonplace) strategy for providing exposition of both the setting and the characters' histories, while providing a realistic and emotionally compelling representation of their actions. But to limit the novel's interpretation to its formal elements would be to ignore Bakhtin's insights that ideological and formal elements within the novel are inextricable, and that it is the organization of these elements that defines the novel as a genre. In other words: It is important to observe the ideological as well as the artistic implications of *The Good Earth*'s heteroglossia. What work are these hybrid constructions achieving?

The key tension in the passages I have reviewed so far is between the perspective of a Western outsider, who observes or needs explication of the cultural nuances of the Chinese agricultural household, and an insider who inhabits the characters and narrates their sensory experiences, emotions, and motivations. Again, this tension might be visible in any novel: A novelist must always decide how much to describe, how to describe it, and how much of a character's internal life or motivation to reveal. In this case, however, the novel negotiates, in Bakhtin's words, the "alien" contexts of both object and audience. Though ultimately translated into Chinese and several other languages, *The Good Earth* was initially written for a U.S. audience and sent to an American publisher. Knowing that the Chinese people were often presented stereotypically or unrealistically or worse, Buck sought to forward an alternative representation that could be read as more

authoritative and believable than other images in popular culture (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 129). As Buck said in a letter to her agent, sent from China months before *The Good Earth*'s publication: "[T]hese people in my book are very living for me, at least, and since they live for me, I hope they are alive for others, and that the Americans will see them primarily as people and not as Chinese, and so strange" (Buck qtd. in Harker 99). Buck's sentiment is interesting in part because she identifies both the audience ("the Americans") and the people her book depicts by their nationality, as if both groups are, to some degree, other to her. The characters in her book are "very living for" *her*, in the space that she inhabits that is not Chinese, but is apparently not quite American, either. It is important for her that the people she represents are recognized *as people*. I believe that the arrangement of narrative voices I have described was intended to achieve just this effect.

Throughout the novel, the anthropological authorial voice describes what an American reader is bound to read as most "Chinese." For example, we see Wang Lung comb and then re-braid his hair into the "queue," which Erika Lee points out was a prominent feature of stereotypical representations of the Chinese in U.S. popular culture (E. Lee 166):

> Then with swift fingers he unplaited the long braid of hair that hung down his back, and taking a wooden comb from the drawer of the small, unsteady table, he began to comb out his hair. (Buck, *Good Earth* 6)

And when his father calls:

> "I am coming," said Wang Lung, braiding quickly and smoothly and weaving into the strands a tasseled, black silk cord. (Buck, *Good Earth* 6)

These are objective descriptions, which are careful to mention such artifacts as the "wooden comb" and the "tasseled, black silk cord." However, the anthropological elements of this narration are embedded within the more intimate context of Wang Lung's preparations to meet his bride. The "tasseled, black silk cord" could be viewed as an exotic artifact (that is, one not utilized by European Americans), and the act of combing and braiding his hair could place Wang Lung outside of the norms of Western masculinity. Nevertheless, these anthropological details about Wang Lung's braid are disclosed as he is rushing to go prepare food for his elderly father—a concern that people of many nationalities could likely identify with. The placement of these anthropological images within intimate narration, along with characters' direct and indirect discourse, allows the reader to close the distance between the objective observer of the other, an intimate companion, and ultimately the other himself. The queue, a powerful symbol of Chinese otherness, becomes embedded in an identifiable narrative of everyday life. In parallel to the way that Adams' figurative transformation creates de-racialized national symbols, Buck's narrative dialogism helps the queue to become a more or less de-racialized object by associating it with "universal" concerns.

The heteroglossia in the novel similarly closes the distance between the white U.S. reader and another symbol of otherness, Wang Lung's "dark slender body" (Buck, *Good Earth* 5). As Wang Lung bathes, the reader moves from observing his dark skin to inhabiting it, feeling the contrast between the warm water and the cool room. Here, the

universal self is able to inhabit the body of the white reader and the novel's Chinese protagonist; the body itself is "universalized" through this imaginative, dialogic movement. In this way, the heteroglossia in the novel repeatedly opens, closes, and re-opens the distance between the American reader and the novel's characters. One effect of this dialogic tension is that it is possible to see the characters "as people," as thinking and especially feeling beings, rather than as "Chinese," or marked by distinguishing features, habits, or cultural artifacts. Since the transitions between the voices are not clearly marked semantically, it is possible for a reader to achieve this closeness seamlessly, looking past the particularly "Chinese" elements of the narration to the more emotional or personal elements, without clearly mapping points of identification or disidentification along the way. The hybrid constructions of the novel's multiple voices allow anthropological "truth" and emotional universality to weave together, until they are almost indistinguishable. The effect of this stylistic orchestration is, at times, a kind of racial transcendence. Here, *The Good Earth* and *The Epic of America* achieve similar results—the depiction of a national self that transcends racial origins—through different rhetorical processes.

There are moments, however, when the *The Good Earth*'s heteroglossia draws clear attention to issues of racial otherness. In an often remarked-upon scene in which Wang Lung encounters his first white American, for example, racial and cultural markers are exaggerated, rather than framed by intimate narration.[31] In this encounter, Wang Lung has moved from his farm to the city in order to work as a rickshaw driver and (barely)

[31] For additional discussions of this scene, see Spencer ("Discourse of Whiteness") and Lye 235.

survive when drought and agricultural famine have made successful farming impossible. He encounters a white American woman on one of his long, thankless workdays:

> He happened on this day to pass by the door of a shop from whence ladies sometimes came after purchasing silks within, and sometimes thus he secured one who paid him better than most. And on this day someone did come out on him suddenly, a creature the like of whom he had never seen before. He had no idea of whether it was male or female, but it was tall and dressed in a straight black robe of some rough harsh material and there was the skin of a dead animal wrapped about its neck. (Buck 115)

This passage begins with an objective narrative voice that has acquired an urbane manner ("from whence…purchasing silks within…and sometimes thus he secured…"), in contrast to the earlier narrative simplicity. Unlike the anthropological authorial voice that described the novel's rural scenes, this voice seems to be stylized by the wealthy ladies who visit the shop it depicts. The second sentence, however, shifts to Wang Lung's indirect narration—here we see his perceptions of a "creature" of indeterminate sex, dressed incomprehensibly and absurdly. Who, after all, would wear a dead animal around one's neck? After "[running] as fast he could for fear of the strange creature behind him" and receiving twice his normal fare:

> Wang Lung knew that this was indeed a foreigner and more foreign yet than he in this city, and that after all people of black hair and black eyes are one sort and people of light hair and light eyes of another sort, and he was no longer after that wholly foreign in the city. (Buck 115)

This passage is rendered in Wang Lung's indirect narration, as we witness his interpretations and conclusions. The scene as a whole is a representation of absurdity—Wang Lung is, in one of only a few instances in the novel, made to appear as a country bumpkin who has never before seen a person of another race, and who runs quickly with the rickshaw as if to escape from the very thing he is carrying. In other scenes, Wang Lung may have a country manner that others mock, but he also seems to have sincerity and authenticity on his side; he is the occasional "wise fool." But in this case, the narration sets Wang Lung up to be mocked by the reader. This scene, for its different use of heteroglossia, deserves further attention.

In his discussion of the historical development of the novel, Bakhtin observes the narrative use of "stupidity," or "incomprehension." He notes:

> Stupidity (incomprehension) in the novel is always polemical: it interacts dialogically with an intelligence (a lofty pseudo intelligence) with which it polemicizes and whose mask it tears away (Bakhtin 403).

Wang Lung's inability to comprehend the humanity of the white American woman is absurd, and it leads him to an absurd conclusion: That Chinese people "are one sort," and Americans "another sort" (115), and that the presence of white Americans in his city makes him somehow *less* foreign. In other words, the white Americans serve as the "yardstick" against which his belonging in China can be measured. This, of course, reverses the circumstances that Lee describes in the Exclusion-era U.S., in which Chinese Americans served as the "yardsticks" against which the otherness of all other immigrant groups was measured (E. Lee 25). In this scene, then, Wang Lung recounts the logic of

scientific racism, defining people absolutely by so-called racial characteristics like hair and eye color. The narration also subtly parodies the attitude that the presence of someone *more* “other” in your nation makes one somehow less “other,” an attitude in the history of whiteness that David Roediger discusses at length. Wang Lung’s incomprehension polemicizes the “lofty pseudo intelligence” of scientific racism and “tears away” its “mask.” It does so dialogically, by fusing Wang Lung’s voice with pseudo-anthropological observations. Rather than bringing the reader closer to Chinese characters, the novel’s dialogism works to make the white American woman strange, foreign, and other. In doing so, it “tears away the mask” of the racialized self/other dichotomy.

So, on the one hand, the dialogized voices in *The Good Earth* work to move the reader beyond racial difference to emotional empathy; this effect echoes the transcendent impulse of Adams’ figurative transformation in the *Epic*. On the other hand, and in contrast to the *Epic*, *The Good Earth* occasionally exaggerates and polemicizes attitudes toward racial difference in order to reverse and demonstrate the absurdity of racial dichotomies. Constituting these various ideological arrangements, the distinct narrative voices in *The Good Earth* place the U.S. reader in two simultaneous positions. First, the reader is an anthropological observer of the Chinese other, who notes various artifacts and attributes that are uniquely Chinese. Second, the reader inhabits the position of the other him- or herself, sharing in the Chinese protagonist’s sensory perceptions of and emotional responses to familiar themes like marriage, parenthood, vocation, family, and death. It is possible to see how, with an accent on any one of these voices or

arrangements, *The Good Earth* could be read as either a representation of an orientalized other, or as an empathic rendering of a universal humanity. It is, I think, both—but the orchestrated whole of the novel, placed within its particular social and historical context and the context of its historical readers, is also more than the sum of these parts.

It is important to remember that U.S. discourse on race at the time of the novel's publication was turbulent. As I have discussed in the previous two chapters, definitions of race itself were in question, terms like "culture" and "character" were in the process of re-definition, and the ideology of scientific racism continued to circulate along with more liberal views that prioritized social environments over biological race as determinants of individual difference. It is difficult to speak of "a" terrain of racial discourse in which *The Good Earth* was situated. A highly-dialogic text in its own right, the novel landed within a public discursive space that was even more dialogical and heterogeneous when it came to race. Nevertheless, public sentiment was not favorable toward the acceptance of Chinese immigrants in general, and especially not toward the acceptance of Chinese immigrants as U.S. citizens (E. Lee).

Within this turbulent context, one can see a novel like *The Good Earth* simply failing to gain notice, much like Pearl Buck's first novel, *East Wind, West Wind*. In a discursive context in which Chinese individuals were everything-other-than American, in combination with "the American public's longstanding indifference to books about China" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 131), how would an intimate and empathetic portrayal of Chinese individuals become comprehensible, much less popular, to an American mass audience? I believe that the novel's dialogism, fused with its position in the marketplace,

formed the foundation for its appeal. *The Good Earth* revises, but also incorporates, orientalist representations of the Chinese people; it closes, but also maintains, the distance between the Western reader/self and the Chinese protagonist/other; it minimizes, but also highlights, racial and cultural differences. The book's dialogism navigates the rhetorical reality that, in order to be understood at all, an utterance must to some degree incorporate and echo the audience's basic worldview. Bakhtin argues that, "[f]or the prose writer, the object is a focal point for heteroglot voices among which his [*sic*] own voice must also sound; these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they 'do not sound'" (Bakhtin 278). Karlyn Kohrs Campbell expresses a similar sentiment when she observes that the agency of texts "is linked to audiences and begins with the signals that guide the process of 'uptake' for readers or listeners enabling them to categorize, to understand how a symbolic act will be framed" (Campbell 7). *The Good Earth* is "heard" because it confirms, even as it modifies or disputes, certain commonplace stereotypes and beliefs. The text's dialogism enables these simultaneous moves.

This discussion of the text's agency highlights another crucial point: The activity of reading brings the act of representation and the formation of subjectivity into close relationship. The author's articulation of the various voices that constitute the novel is embedded in her own rhetorical terrain, her own sense of herself among others. Buck's ability to create representations that *will be believed* is dependent on her competence in negotiating the rhetorical terrain of her readers. Each reader encounters representations of

the other in the novel; that reader's ability to comprehend, believe, and identify with those representations hinges to an important degree on her beliefs about herself and her relationship to others in the world. In order to *believe* what one reads in *The Good Earth*, one needs to be able to follow the paths of the dialogic voices—to be both the Western anthropologist who can observe the Chinese "other" from the outside and the "universal" human who can inhabit the Chinese characters' body, physical sensations, perceptions, and emotions. On their own, these subject positions exist in conflict and tension. They become comprehensible, however, within a discourse that embraces the concept of universal humanity, rather than biological racial hierarchy. In Jasinski's terms, the "contradiction" that is embedded within the dialogic conflict of *The Good Earth* becomes resolved through "criticism" or interpretation that embodies this emerging conceptual change in the rhetorical history of race in public discourse.

The historic reception of *The Good Earth*, however, reveals that this coherent, unitary reading of the text was not universal among the novel's readers after its publication. Reminiscent of the reception of the *Epic*, affirmative readers help to push the discourse toward a vision of universal humanity, while critical reviewers re-inscribe or become entangled with the ideology of scientific racism. The particular characteristics of the reviews of *The Good Earth* tell us more about the rhetorical processes that facilitated the emergence of a discourse of universal humanity.

Analysis of Reception Texts

Because of Buck's popularity and her public role as an activist, many contemporary scholars have commented to some degree on the popular and critical reception of *The Good Earth*, including Conn, Harker, Leong, Spencer, and Welky. My analysis is indebted to them, and my work here builds on theirs in order to contextualize the reception of *The Good Earth* in relationship to the novel's dialogism and public discourse related to race at this historical moment. To link the heteroglossia in the novel to the critical reception, I first need to recall a few key points from Chapter One of this project, related to middlebrow reading in the modern era.

According to Radway, middlebrow reading existed at the intersection of culture (i.e., the refined arts and letters of a civilization) and commerce. Through bastions of middlebrow culture like The Book of the Month Club, the growing, professionalizing middle class was able to acquire culture by purchasing the relatively accessible reading recommendations of "experts" (15). Putting a price tag on culture, while introducing the homogenizing influences of mass consumerism, elicited both panic and disdain from culture's highbrow "guardians" (Radway 245). The panic that aimed to protect the "purity" of culture echoes, in interesting ways, those who were bent on defending the "purity" of their "race." Not only were the middlebrow "masses" that Radway described often also the immigrant masses targeted by Progressive reformers (Butsch 42-45), Joan Shelley Rubin points out that the very terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" were themselves rooted in "phrenology and carried overtones of racial differentiation" (xii). During a time when the word "culture" had not yet adopted fully its contemporary socially constructed, relativistic connotations in popular discourse, the defense of high culture reveals a

persistent belief in many of the underlying tenets of scientific racism. The hierarchy defended by the highbrow was ambiguously racial and cultural.

It is significant, then, that historical reviewers who are critical of the literary craft of *The Good Earth* mostly come from a highbrow point of view and also call attention to the otherness of the book's characters. For example, in the *Nation*, Eda Walton states:

> despite Mrs. Buck's very good narrative style, despite her familiarity with her material, her work has a certain flatness of emotional tone that is not characteristic of Knut Hamsun's studies of the toiler in the earth, nor again of the autobiographical narrative of a Korean childhood and boyhood, 'The Grass Roof' [by Younghill Kang]. Both Hamsun and Younghill Kang have much more than an accurate observation and objective analysis of their characters and scenes to present; both of them are able intuitively to penetrate into the emotions of their characters. This ability derives from their own traditional knowledge and racial inheritance. … Mrs. Buck is undoubtedly one of the best Occidental writers to treat of Chinese life, but 'The Good Earth' lacks the imaginative intensity, the lyrical quality, which someone who had actually farmed Chinese soil might have been able to give it. (Walton 534)

Here we see a direct critique of Buck's representation of the racial other, but one that is not made on the grounds we might expect today. Walton places Buck's deficiencies and the literary skill of Hamsun and Kang within the neo-Lamarckian scheme of inherited behaviors I discussed in the last chapter. Literary prowess is here aligned with "racial inheritance," and this is a terrain on which Buck can't measure up. Of particular note is

the fact that racial inheritance is the key to unlocking the door of authenticity. Without the requisite inheritance, Buck is incapable of standing as an authority on matters involving the lives of another race.

Also in the *Nation*, a later review of the sequel to *The Good Earth* (entitled *Sons*) makes similar criticisms, though on strictly literary grounds. Isidor Schneider paraphrases the attitudes of many highbrow critics' concerns about middlebrow bestsellers when she observes: "Certainly 'The Good Earth' and 'Sons' are good enough for success. But not good enough for the critical overestimates that have flattered that success" (Schneider 481). Schneider continues:

> Mrs. Buck is far from being a master. A great book involves its reader pretty closely either with its characters or its ideas, or it arouses a sense of allegiance to the author. The stories are absorbing spectacles, and the reader is an absorbed spectator. But at the moment of tragic crisis, the reader is not likely to put the book down, as many of Dostoevski's readers must, because they have been involved to a point beyond their endurance. (481-2)

Like Walton, Schneider sees a lack of depth in the novel, a lack of skill in representation that would involve readers with the characters in the most true and deep way. Schneider sees a similar superficial element in Buck's characters, arguing that they are represented as "sharply drawn types" rather than as real individuals (481). The readers are engaged with this surface show of "spectacle," as they might be in a popular film, for instance—but they are not brought deeply into the lives of the characters. In terms of the scheme of dialogic narration that I mentioned earlier, Schneider seems to have found the

anthropological authorial voice to be convincing enough, but not the intimate authorial voice or the characters' indirect narration and dialogue. A highbrow critic, she is not led to identify with the internal lives of the Chinese characters as Buck represents them.

Though not writing for as rarefied a source as the *Nation*, the unnamed reviewer for *Time* magazine is also skeptical of the novel's representations:

> The Author, Pearl S. Buck (Mrs. J. Lossing Buck), daughter of U. S. missionaries, has lived so long in China that she ought to know whereof she writes, but The Good Earth, except for minor details, might have been laid in the U. S., in any agricultural country. This may mean that men are the same everywhere; it may mean a U. S. authoress cannot (even imaginatively) go native in China. ("Books: Where Farmers" para. 3)

For this reader, the elements of universality (i.e., the intimate authorial voice and the character's indirect and direct dialogue) appear to have overridden the anthropological authorial voice. This reviewer seems to have wanted *more* "native" details, so that the "otherness" of the setting and characters could be understood as truly Chinese. The fault described here is that the characters and setting seem so identifiable to American readers, they must not really be Chinese at all.

Another highbrow source, *Harper's Bazaar,* skips the substantive review in order to engage in parody. Using the upcoming *Good Earth*-inspired play and movie as an excuse to satirize the novel, this article reimagines the novel's characters with stereotypical names and behaviors, and mocks Buck's so-called "biblical" style for its commercial appeal. In the *Harper's Bazaar* rendition, Wang Lung's parodic alter ego,

Whang the Gong, "had read enough of the Gospels to know the value of short words and the effectiveness of the use of the word 'and.' And so [he] spoke, and it was good. Good for fifty cents a word" (Benchley 49). This is a classic highbrow critique of middlebrow authorship, implying that Pearl Buck's prose style is nothing more than a commercial ploy. Apparently unconvinced by either the anthropological narration or the intimate renderings of the characters' lives, this parody transforms Buck's representations into racial stereotypes, placing the otherness of the novel's characters in high relief. This parody also aligns highbrow concerns about the commercial corruption of middlebrow literature with a strictly racialized self/other dichotomy.

These critical reviews and interpretations of Buck's novel share certain important characteristics: They are mostly from highbrow sources, and they link their criticism of the novel's literary elements with a sense that Buck's representations of the other are inauthentic and unconvincing. The reviewers' reasons for remaining unconvinced are not identical: Buck's representations are considered to be inauthentic because she is not Chinese (as in Walton's review), because the novel makes possible such a high degree of identification with white, U.S. readers that the novel must not be Chinese enough (as in the *Time* review), or because the novel creates a "spectacle" of the other that is entertaining, but does not allow opportunities for true identification (as in Schneider's review and Benchley's parody). What these reviews have in common is a shared tendency to leave *The Good Earth*'s heteroglossia unresolved. Critical readings of the novel are either skeptical of the anthropological authorial voice, which should faithfully represent the artifacts and traditions of the other's culture; the intimate authorial voice,

which should create sympathy with the characters' stories; or the characters' indirect narration and direct dialogue, which should create a deep identification with the characters' senses and emotions. If the reader is left unconvinced by any of these voices, the novel becomes inauthentic at either a cultural or a human register (or both), as these reviews demonstrate. It is important to note that these reviewers also maintain a strong sense of the dichotomy between the white American reader and author on the one hand, and the novel's Chinese protagonists and setting on the other. The Chinese other is either always already beyond the reach of the author, which means that the representation could never be convincing, or the novel causes the other to appear to be so similar to the reader that the representation must be false. Some of these reviews re-circulate racial stereotypes and explicitly re-articulate the ideology of scientific racism. But even when reviews are not overtly racist, they do question Buck's ability to transcend the divisions between the white reader and the novel's characters. In this way, the highbrow interpretations are not aligned with the emerging discourse of universal humanity.

There are also a few critical reviews that do not fit the highbrow mold. These Asian or Asian American critics, writing for a U.S. or trans-Pacific public, critique Buck's cultural representations as lacking, not because of her "racial inheritance" (Walton 534), but due to her insufficient knowledge of the Chinese people. Unlike many of the reviews discussed above, these reviews make critical arguments based on cultural particularity, rather than racial essence. In the *New Republic*, Younghill Kang strongly criticizes Buck for imposing a western ideological framework on her Chinese protagonists and setting without apparently understanding the basic tenets of Confucian

culture (185). In a much remarked-upon exchange in the *New York Times*, Kiang Kang-Hu calls Buck "more of a caricature cartoonist than a portrait painter," criticizing especially "her minute descriptions of certain peculiarities and defects of some lowly bred Chinese characters. They are, though not entirely unreal, very uncommon, indeed, in the Chinese life I know" (BR2). These reviews voice strong criticism of Buck's work.

Writing in a trans-Pacific journal, Sophia Chen Zen takes a more balanced approach, while still critiquing the accuracy of *The Good Earth*'s representations. She praises Buck for providing "observations … [that] are not only realistic and intimate, but also show a deep sympathy and a willingness to understand" (Zen 914-5). Nevertheless:

> In spite of her abundant sympathy, the native reader cannot but feel that the author of 'The Good Earth' is, after all, a foreigner, who has never mixed with the Chinese more than what is permitted by the relation between the mistress and the amah, or between a student and a tutor. There cannot have been any intimate association of minds and hearts such as could be obtained only from the free and frank comradeship of everyday life. (Zen 915)

Observing the transposition of a western cultural framework on to the novel's Chinese narrative, Zen, like Kang and Kiang, calls into question the accuracy of *The Good Earth*'s anthropological authorial voice, intimate authorial voice, indirect narration, and direct dialogue. Zen implies that the intimacy enacted by the novel is inauthentic, though its artificial elements would only be evident to a different kind of reader—one who knows the "everyday life" of the rural Chinese people through personal experience. Kang remarks that "Buck's people talk like Western people, violently … and with only one

Western virtue, that of frankness, a thing abhorrent to the traditional Oriental" (185). By stressing the importance of accuracy in cultural depictions (as opposed to the racial authenticity emphasized by some highbrow reviewers), these reviews neither re-inscribe the ideology of scientific racism nor advance a vision of universal humanity. Implicit in their critiques is a call for a different set of evaluative standards for Buck's work.

Interestingly, the harsher critiques of Younghill Kang and Kiang Kang-Hu are not allowed to stand on their own terms: The *New Republic* appends an editorial note to distance the publication from the critical tone of Kang's review (Kang 186; Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 401, n19), and the *New York Times* published Buck's "lively rebuttal" to Kiang's original essay (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 127). When these Asian and Asian American reviewers discredit Buck's apparent authority to represent Chinese culture, the "objective" Western voice intrudes, post-publication, to neutralize their critiques. This reaction of the Western voice is a telling anomaly in the novel's reception, and it highlights interesting confluences and contrasts in the two groups of critical reviews I have discussed.

On the one hand, the highbrow reviewers and the Asian or Asian American reviewers both critique Buck based on authenticity. They question the accuracy of either the anthropological characteristics Buck depicts or the emotional connections she attempts to create. None of these reviewers are persuaded by the novel's dialogism. Nevertheless, the groups of reviewers prioritize different criteria for evaluating Buck's work. Highbrow reviewers like Walton (who, interestingly, praises Younghill Kang in her critical review of *The Good Earth*) and the reviewer for *Time* identify Buck's

shortcomings as those of "racial inheritance" or an inability to "go native." Along with the satirist in *Harpers Bazaar*, these reviewers use the ideology of scientific racism to warrant parts of their criticism of *The Good Earth*. Schneider's critique, however, is based on "objective" criteria for literary value. Schneider is skeptical of Buck's universalizing impulse, but she relies on a sociocultural (rather than raciocultural) hierarchy of literary characteristics in order to make her claims.

Zen, Kiang, and Kang rely on a different set of sociocultural criteria to critique *The Good Earth*; their critiques are grounded in detailed knowledge of direct cultural experience. However, Kang and Kiang are denied the authority to access and utilize these criteria when their critiques are disputed in print in *The New Republic* and *The New York Times*. Highbrow reviewers discredit Buck's ability to depict or universalize the racial other, but mainstream publications likewise discredit Asian or Asian American critics' authority to evaluate a white author's racial representations. From the highbrow critics' point of view, Buck violates strict racial divisions, while the Asian or Asian American critics undermine the literary hierarchy. Both moves upset an ambiguously raciocultural hierarchy that is bound up in the logic of scientific racism. This hierarchy is restored in irrational ways: Younghill Kang, who Eda Walton held up as an example of racially authentic representation in the *Nation*, is critically neutralized by the editors of the *New Republic*; meanwhile, Kiang Kang-Hu is "corrected" in print by Pearl Buck, whose racial representations are elsewhere criticized as inaccurate. Through these actions in the mainstream press, scientific racism's raciocultural hierarchy is reinforced within this critical discourse. (Zen's review, from the trans-Pacific journal *Pacific Affairs*, stands as

the exception—a cross-cultural critique that was published in a legitimately transcultural venue.)

I have stressed these critical reviews as an important point of contrast in my analysis. Put simply, the negative appraisals of *The Good Earth* were, by far, in the minority with respect to the book's critical reception. I think that Peter Conn overstates his case when he concludes that "[t]he critical response to The Good Earth was virtually unanimous" (*Pearl S. Buck* 126); the "few dissenters" he mentions were not the only critics of the novel. Nevertheless, I agree with Conn's general sense that the majority of reviews of *The Good Earth*, and especially the reviews that reached the largest number of readers, praised the novel. And, as Conn states, "In particular, reviewers saluted the novel for rigorously avoiding stereotypes and for rendering Chinese life as recognizably human and even ordinary" (*Pearl S. Buck* 126). What Conn says here is important, and it is worth breaking his comment down according to the dialogic system I have established in my analysis. The majority of reviewers, those who viewed the novel positively, praised the accuracy of representation of the Chinese protagonists (what Conn describes as "rigorously avoiding stereotypes," accomplished through what I have called the anthropological authorial voice). In addition, Conn praises the book for how it connects those representations with readers in a way that is "recognizabl[e]" and identifiable (through what I have referred to as the intimate authorial voice, along with the indirect narration and direct dialogue of the characters). While highbrow critics seem to mock Buck's literary abilities, the cultural authenticity of her work, and her characters' ability to resonate with American readers, many other critics—critics who, incidentally, take a

more middlebrow approach—praise both the authenticity of the representation *and* the "universal" appeal of the novel. In fact, the authenticity of the cultural representations and the universality of the novel are often linked closely in reviewers' praise. For these reviewers, the tensions in the novel's dialogism—the "otherness" reinforced by the anthropological authorial voice, and the strong personal identification created by the more intimate narrative voices—are resolved into a coherent narrative. In these popular, middlebrow reviews, one can observe the often halting but evident process of conceptual shifts related to race as they emerge and are negotiated in public discourse. Evident, too, is a narrative dialogism that closes the distance between the self and other, facilitating that discursive change.

The reviews I am referring to as middlebrow are mostly published in the daily papers, for a mass, general audience. Many reviews were expressly prompted by the selection of *The Good Earth* by The Book of the Month Club, linking them with one of the strongest middlebrow voices of the period. Notably, these reviews praise elements that the highbrow critics critiqued: an absorbing plot, appealing (and sometimes exotic) details, and a strong emotional experience.[32] These elements add up to the kind of "spectacle" that Schneider criticized in her review in the *Nation*. For the middlebrow reviewers, however, these elements were the foundation of compelling fiction, a fiction that was both authentic in its representation and universal in its human connection and appeal.

---

[32] In her discussion of Pearl Buck and other middlebrow novelists, Jaime Harker emphasizes especially the role of emotional connection as a key element of middlebrow writing in this period, noting the potential influence of John Dewey's belief that emotional connection, facilitated by art, could provide a means for "vicarious experience" (92) and transcendence of differences in race and class (12).

For example, the *New York Times* affirms the apparent "universality" of the novel in sweeping terms:

> 'The Good Earth' is an excellent novel. It has style, power, coherence and a pervasive sense of dramatic reality. In its deeper implications it is less a comment upon life in China than upon the meaning and tragedy of life as it is lived in any age in any quarter of the globe. Notwithstanding the essential differences in manners and traditions, one tends to forget, after the first few pages, that the persons of the story are Chinese and hence foreign. ("Good Earth and Other Recent Works" 6)

Note here the emphasis on the novel's coherence, as well as this reader's experience of moving beyond the "essential differences in manners and traditions" (narrated, in my analysis, by the anthropological authorial voice) to make human connection with the characters. The characters and the story transcend their "Chinese-ness" to represent the "meaning and tragedy of life" as it is lived universally. Importantly, however, the universality of the story praised by the reviewer does not come at the expense of Buck's cultural expertise:

> One cannot doubt that Mrs. Buck knows her China. Except for her college years in the United States, she has spent the greater part of her life there. But she portrays a China unfamiliar to the average reader, a China in which, happily, there is no hint of mystery or exoticism. There is very little in her book of the quality which we are accustomed to label 'Oriental.' … There are, to be sure, fundamental differences in the life and attitude of Wang Lung which the Western

> reader will recognize—his sense of responsibility toward the past and the future, his inarticulate and unexamined consciousness of his family as a permanent entity, and the dignity and importance which this consciousness lends to his humble place in the scheme of things… Whatever process of observation and analysis underlies Mrs. Buck's writing, it has been completely transmuted here into the stuff of art. ("Good Earth and Other Recent Works" 6)

The otherness of the novel's characters is not entirely dismantled or transcended in this reading. Rather, Buck possesses the authority to represent her characters authentically, to render their otherness accurately. Her accurate representations of otherness (the "process of observation and analysis" that she employs) are, contradictorily, what allows the "otherness" to become "universal"—or, in the words of this reviewer, "the stuff of art." In the terms of my dialogic analysis, the anthropological voice, rather than standing in conflict with the other, more intimate voices, makes them coherent and believable. The characters' Chinese otherness makes them somehow closer and more identifiable to the Western reader. This reader has resolved the tensions in the novel's inherent dialogism by positing a self that is universally human. Both the author and reader gain the authority to inhabit this subject position in order to define and represent the other. A connection with the reviews of the *Epic* becomes evident here: One can imagine that the de-racialized national self that emerged through Adams' process of figurative transformation could very well inhabit this universal subject position.

The trends evident in the *New York Times* review continue in other middlebrow reviews, which praise the novel on the basis of both its representational authenticity and

universal appeal. These reviews also echo some of the arguments articulated by affirmative reviewers of *The Epic of America*, who praised Adams' "factual" representations as fundamental to his presentation of a "universal" vision. For example, in a later review of the sequel to *The Good Earth*, another reviewer states that *East Wind: West Wind* and *The Good Earth*:

> uncovered a new and distinguished talent in the recording of human lives. And these two books have unquestionably brought contemporary China closer to Western readers than all the massed columns of newspaper correspondence and the multitude of books written primarily to explain the East to the West. In them the seething life of China is reduced to simple human terms, is translated into values universal to mankind. (D. Adams, "Sequel" BR1)

This reading of *The Good Earth* links the author's anthropological authority and the characters' universal humanity, hinging the novels' believability on this somewhat paradoxical link. The *Los Angeles Times* review makes a very similar move:

> Though the story is rich in the detail of Chinese custom and tradition it has that universality that makes it true for all workers of the land everywhere. ("Books of the Month" 26)

As does the Book of the Month Club news, in which Henry Seidel Canby announces the selection of *The Good Earth* as the book club's monthly pick:

> *The Good Earth* is China. … The people in this rather thrilling story are not 'queer' or 'exotic,' they are as natural as their soil. They are so intensely human

> that after the first chapter you are more interested in their humanity than in novelties of belief and habit. (qtd. in Suoqiao 162)

And a brief mention in the *Advocate of Peace Through Justice*:

> Farming in China, famine in China, the life of the family, love for the good brown earth, all these are here. But deeper than this, the whole story is universally human. The pathos and tragedy of man's life everywhere is felt to be closely akin to that which one follows with keen and instinctive interest from beginning to end of this book. ("Rev. of *The Good Earth*" 253)

In contrast to the reviews that critique Buck's representation as inauthentic and that cast doubt on white readers' ability to identify with a story about Chinese protagonists, these reviews praise Buck's authenticity of representation and associate that authenticity with a universal human story with which all readers may identify. Convinced equally by the range of dialogic voices in the novel, these readers construct a vision of a universal humanity.

Together, the critical and the laudatory reviews of *The Good Earth* demonstrate a remarkable range of viewpoints toward the novelist and the China that she represents to her mainstream American audience. The critical reviewers are skeptical of the authenticity of Buck's representations, as well as her efforts to create universal connections between her characters and the audience. For some reviewers, underlying beliefs about racial hierarchy or literary value, and in many cases some interdependent combination of the two, make elements of the novel's dialogic narration unconvincing. For other reviewers, Buck's inaccurate representation of Chinese culture discredits her

narrative. The reviewers who represent a mainstream, middlebrow audience, however, are utterly convinced by *The Good Earth*, sometimes rapturously so. Buck's ability to represent Chinese characters without apparent exoticism, to see and show these characters "as people, and not as Chinese, and so strange" (Buck qtd. in Harker 99), allows her, in these readers' view, to strike deep into a core of shared humanity. This is a paradoxical move, and an incoherent one: On its own, it does not make logical sense that the "realistic" representation of the other's "otherness" will close the distance between the self and other. The novel, as my analysis shows, tacks between closeness and distance through distinct, if subtly-rendered, narrative voices. These voices are "orchestrated" and "systematized," but they are not "resolved" or "unitary." It is, to some degree, the belief that the Western self serves as both the universal human *and* the authority on defining and representing otherness that allows this novel to become coherent to middlebrow reviewers in the early 1930s. In this sense, *The Good Earth* is deeply complicit with the orientalist tradition. At the same time, the belief in a universal and equally-shared humanity establishes the ground upon which orientalism can be altered in substantial ways. *The Good Earth* inhabits this moment of contradiction in rhetorical history, and the book's reception demonstrates the ambiguous and protean character of the rhetorical transformation from the ideology of scientific racism to an egalitarian vision of universal humanity. In the end, what constitutes the universal is defined only by speakers who, like Buck, are granted authority within particular discursive contexts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used *The Good Earth* and its reception to show how an emergent understanding of universal humanity was fostered in the public discourse of the 1930s. Through its dialogic orchestration, *The Good Earth* seamlessly interweaves an anthropological voice that appears to authentically represent cultural traits and artifacts with intimate voices that relay the personal histories of the characters and their innermost sensory and emotional perceptions. The novel constitutes an audience that can at once define and identify with the other. This universal subject constitutes an important component of the emerging conceptual change in public discourse. Unlike Adams, Buck does not shy away from representations of the racial other. As a mass audience imagines a universal humanity that transcends race and nation, however, explicit articulations of racial hierarchies continue to recede. Narrative dialogism that creates an intimate portrayal of the racial other facilitates this discursive shift.

Of course, highbrow critics' reviews of *The Good Earth* remind us that universal humanity was not yet a ubiquitous concept in U.S. public discourse. Racial hierarchy was still discussed and defended in popular culture. At times that racial hierarchy was maintained by critiquing the universal voice for being too white, for not having a capacity to understand the other. One might presume that this would then grant agency to non-European or non-Anglo authors, but that does not seem to be the case. Further, the identification of middlebrow readers with Buck's novel adds another important valence to the "rhetorical turbulence" surrounding race and national identity in this historical moment. In the case of *The Good Earth*, (white) middlebrow readers did not define their whiteness against a representation of the Asian other, as both Roediger and Lee observe

was often the case in public discourse at this time (Roediger; E. Lee 25). Rather, they embraced an imaginative identification with that other through the intimacy of reading and comprehension. This is perhaps a step closer to equality and justice than the drawing of a strict self/other dichotomy along racial lines, but the disregard for the voices of Asian and Asian American critics in this conversation, evidenced by the printed rebuttals to the commentary of Younghill Kang and Kiang Kang-Hu, is cause for serious concern. Given the rhetorical opportunities and constraints in which it was situated, *The Good Earth*'s representation of universal humanity was, to borrow terms from Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "protean" and "subject to reversal." As middlebrow readers posit a universal connection with a fictionalized other, they also claim authority to know, define, and represent the degree of human difference that exists, and even to imaginatively assume the identity of the other. In this style of reading, the Western reader *becomes* the universal, and the discourse of orientalism is reinscribed.

In my analysis of the *Epic* and *The Good Earth*, I have identified two rhetorical processes that facilitated the shift from a discourse rooted in scientific racism toward a discourse that embraces the concept of universal humanity. The first utilizes rhetorical figures that transcend (and ultimately omit) their roots in racial hierarchy, creating the possibility for a universal national self. The second places that universal self in a narrative context, representing race in the terms of the white author and dialogically bringing the other closer to the white reader. Each rhetorical process embodies contradictions: In Adams' text, the transcendent symbols of a unified national identity explicitly emerge from neo-Lamarckian origins; and in Buck's novel, the dialogic

representations that "unify" the racial subject and the white audience also assert the primacy and authority of the white author and Western perspective. When these contradictions are resolved by affirmative voices that allow scientific racism to recede, an incipient conceptual change becomes evident. Where racial hierarchy was once explicitly at the core of both society and the individual, a universal substance is posited. What Henry Seidel Canby called the "intensely human" essence of Buck's characters that makes readers "more interested in their humanity than in novelties of belief and habit" (qtd. in Suoqiao 162) is also embodied in Adams' "dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of birth or position" (J. Adams, *Epic* 404). What is "human" about people—"what they *are*"—becomes separable not only from their "belief and habit," but also from their "birth or position," and, by implication, their race. The markers of racial difference are de-emphasized in favor of an understanding of humanity that is at once more flexible and more uniform. Immutable hierarchies give way, but European "civilization" still stands as the template for universal personhood. In other words, the misconceptions of scientific racism do recede—but even in Pearl Buck's representations of the racial other, the underlying racial hierarchy is not so much corrected, as redacted. Once again, rhetorical processes that facilitate a discourse of universal humanity do not adequately refute the notions of racial hierarchy upon which entrenched social inequalities were based.

The rhetorical processes highlighted so far, however, were not the only options performed by writers of this historical moment. We glimpse a third option—to represent

the particular voices of racial or cultural groups without endorsing notions of racial hierarchy—in a small set of critical reviews of *The Good Earth*. These Asian and Asian American critics writing for U.S. audiences did not see a universal vision in Buck's novel, but they also did not re-inscribe the tenets of scientific racism in their critiques. Zen, in particular, praises Buck's "deep sympathy and … willingness to understand" (914-5), but also calls for accuracy and depth in cultural representation. The next chapter explores the rhetorical form that an accurate but non-hierarchical representation of the racial other might take. Influenced by the emerging cultural relativism in the field of anthropology and by her own experience as an African American woman, Zora Neale Hurston contributed to the evolving conceptualizations of race in the1930s by presenting an alternative to scientific racism that also eschewed a uniform, European universal.

Chapter Four

Shifting the Discursive Center: The Vernacular Rhetoric of *Mules and Men*

> "There is no point of view from which the universal characteristics of the human, or of the woman, or of the black woman, or even of Zora Neale Hurston, can be selected and totalized. Unification and simplification are fantasies of domination, not understanding." (Johnson, "Metaphor" 218)

Though she wrote in the same historical moment as Buck and Adams, Zora Neale Hurston gives voice to a different impulse in her first folklore collection, *Mules and Men*. Instead of muting representations of race to create a universal ideal, Hurston provides richer and more accurate representations of particular African American communities in an effort to work against the presumptive stereotypes of that period. Hurston's experience equipped her for this task. She grew up in the nation's first incorporated African American town, which also serves as the backdrop for the first section of *Mules and Men*. By her own account, Hurston did not notice that her blackness was of any significant consequence until, at age 13, she left Eatonville for Jacksonville and became, "not Zora of Orange County," but "a little colored girl" (Hurston, "How it Feels" 827). Ultimately, she moved to Washington D.C., where she completed high school and studied at Howard, and then to New York, where she studied Anthropology at Barnard under the direction of Franz Boas. During this period she also earned acclaim for her fiction writing (Hemenway).

As an anthropologist, a gifted writer, and an African American woman who moved between black and white communities, Hurston observed, depicted, and urged others to recognize the valuable creative contributions of rural African American (and,

ultimately, Afro-Caribbean) communities. Though her published views on race and politics are not uniform throughout her career,[33] Hurston was largely interested in celebrating what made African American communities distinct and valuable, rather than promoting interracial equality or condemning oppression (Wall 77-8; Hemenway 221-2). In a famous essay published in 1928, Hurston writes that she is "not tragically colored," later observing that "[a]t certain times I have no race, I am *me*" (Hurston, "How it Feels" 827; 829). But even in moments like those at Barnard, when her blackness is made most apparent by the contrast with a "thousand white persons" and she is "surged upon, overswept by a creamy sea," she "remain[s] [her]self. When covered by the waters, I am; and the ebb but reveals me again" (828). In this image, Hurston recognizes herself as a racial "other," but she positions the "other" as the "self," the particular center of her own world view.[34] Likewise, in *Mules and Men*, Hurston celebrates racial particularity and creates a discursive system that is centered in the everyday language of rural African American communities.

In this chapter, I argue that the vernacular rhetoric of Zora Neale Hurston eschews the ideology of scientific racism while also resisting the discursive pull we saw in Buck to craft a uniform experience out of individual lives. Instead, Hurston attempts to establish the rural African American voice as a distinct and valid component of U.S. public discourse. I proceed, first, by describing my approach to vernacular discourse. Next, I analyze the text of *Mules and Men*, revealing how Hurston's systematic

[33] Rampersand and Gates both observe the complexity of Hurston's racial politics, which seemed to grow more conservative toward the end of her life and career (Rampersand xxi; Gates, "Afterword" 296).
[34] For a nuanced analysis of the ambiguous representations of racial difference and identity in "How it Feels to be Colored Me," see Johnson, "Thresholds of Difference" (132-6).

anthropological representations of rural African American speech create an alternative discourse that represents African American communities in their own terms, while continually de-stabilizing the notion of "truth" in racial representation. Then, I explore the complex reception of Hurston and her work in the 1930s, as her representations of an enclave public's vernacular discourse circulated in the dominant discourse of the public sphere. Ultimately, this chapter highlights the difficult position that discrete discourses of racial particularity inhabited within the context of this period's discursive transformation from the ideology of scientific racism to a vision of universal humanity. The emerging conceptual change in dominant discourse did not, to borrow Adams' words, allow the individuals in *Mules and Men* to "be recognized by others for what they are" (J. Adams, *Epic* 404).

A "tropological" approach to vernacular discourse

Analyzing Hurston's representation of vernacular discourse places the critic in a difficult position. When I employ traditional critical tools, I risk reinscribing Buck's narrative pattern, representing Hurston's textual "other" in the terms of my own (white, Euro-centric) "universal" critical voice, neutralizing difference in the process. I cannot entirely avoid this risk—to apply Campbell's insights on rhetorical agency to my current dilemma, my academic subjectivity is won only through the "guilty embrace of the law" (Althusser qtd. in Campbell 3). That said, I can proceed with an awareness of the potential pitfalls and implications of my critical choices. Houston Baker's "tropological"

criticism provides a helpful model for an ethical critique of vernacular texts, and it is an appropriate lens through which to view *Mules and Men*, in particular.[35]

Baker calls for the illumination and utilization of the vernacular's "already extant matrix" (H. Baker, *Blues* 9) through the application of metaphors or images that create new perceptions and understanding, ultimately transforming the critic and critical discourse. As Baker explains:

> Tropological thought is a discursive mode that employs unfamiliar (or exotic) figures to qualify what is deemed 'traditional' in a given discourse. To extrapolate from [Hayden] White, one might assert that attempts to signify the force of meaning of the economics of slavery by invoking buildings and blues (as I shall do forthwith) constitute an analytical move designed to incorporate into reality phenomena to which traditional historiography generally denies the status 'real.' The end of a tropological enterprise is the alteration of reality itself. (H. Baker, *Blues* 28)

Baker's effort is not to apply critical discourse to vernacular rhetoric, but to utilize the framework evident within vernacular rhetoric to revise the dominant discourse—or "reality itself." His approach recognizes vernacular discourse as its own "always already," as an origin, or a "womb." The Oxford English Dictionary defines the adjective "vernacular" as "spoken as one's mother tongue; not learned or imposed as a second language," and as "using the mother tongue of a country or region." The origin of

[35] For an additional discussion of vernacular discourse that is central to an understanding of the vernacular in rhetorical studies, see Ono and Sloop's "Critique of Vernacular Discourse." Because Ono and Sloop tend to characterize vernacular discourse as an oppositional discourse, Baker's theoretical terms are more helpful to my analysis in this case.

vernacular language, according to the OED, is from the early 17th century, "from Latin vernaculus 'domestic, native' (from verna 'home-born slave')" ("Vernacular"). One is *born into* one's vernacular, just as Hurston was when she, in her own words, "pitched headforemost into the world" and "landed in the crib of negroism" and her community's tales of "Brer Rabbit" and "the Squinch Owl" (*Mules and Men* 1). The African American language and folklore of Eatonville, Florida, constituted Hurston's own vernacular, her mother tongue, before she later returned as both a scholar and a native daughter, an academic collector and a fluent creator of folklore.[36] Like the blues artists and critics that Baker discusses, Hurston stands at a complicated "crossroads" or "junction." To do justice to her vernacular rhetoric, one can employ critical tropes that arise from the vernacular itself.

The first helpful critical trope appears early in *Mules and Men*. Hurston's "spy-glass of Anthropology" serves as her vernacular adaptation of the specialist discourse of Anthropology. The "spy-glass" is introduced in a passage quoted frequently by scholars (Johnson, "Thresholds" 136; Meisenhelder 267; Walters 350; Willis 115):

> When I pitched headforemost into the world I landed in the crib of negroism. From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like

---

[36] Many scholars have discussed Hurston's complex dual position as an anthropologist and a member of the vernacular community, including Boxwell, Frydman, Hemenway, Johnson ("Thresholds"), Meisenhelder, Rampersand, Wall, and Walters.

> somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that. (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 1)

The first part of this passage is a perfect description of vernacular rhetoric—the language one is born into, before one becomes "learned." The language of "inside" and "outside" that literary critic Barbara Johnson describes so well ("Thresholds" 136) becomes especially useful here in understanding the place of vernacular rhetoric in relation to dominant discourse. Once one becomes a member of the public at large and operates within its discursive conventions, one begins to "see" the vernacular discourse "like somebody else." Membership in the larger public changes one's vocabulary of perception and interpretation. The "spy-glass of Anthropology" becomes a necessary tool with which to make a different kind of sense out of what was once the only kind of sense one knew—home.

Except Hurston is not *only* on the outside.[37] The "spy-glass"—the vivid, hyphenated, descriptive object word—offers an important clue. "Spy-glass" is, first of all, a double-descriptive, which Hurston elsewhere defines as one of the "Negro's greatest contribution[s] to the language" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 832). It is also a vivid verb used to modify and illustrate a noun, embedding the physical use of the object in the descriptive term; one doesn't simply "look" or even "magnify" with the glass, one "spies." Hurston identified this kind of term as an adaptation of English common to

---

[37] Throughout this chapter, references to the dynamic relationship between "inside" and "outside" are indebted to Johnson, who states: "If I initially approached Hurston out of a desire to re-referentialize difference, what Hurston gives me back seems to be difference as a suspension of reference. Yet the terms 'black and 'white,' 'inside and 'outside,' continue to matter. Hurston suspends the certainty of reference not by erasing these differences but by foregrounding the complex dynamism of their interaction" ("Thresholds" 139).

African Americans in which a "detached idea" is transformed into a "hieroglyphic" that is part word/part picture-of-action, like "cook-pot" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 832). "Spy-glass" is a term that Hurston would see as characteristic of her rural African American community, and she uses that image as a metaphor (a trope she identifies as "characteristic" of African American speech [832]) for the anthropological endeavor. In the process, Hurston uses her vernacular fluency to modify the specialist discourse of Anthropology.[38]

If Hurston were to use the language of Anthropology she was taught at Barnard without modification, she would be doing the same kind of representational work as Buck—adopting the voice of the neutral, scientific universal, and casting the rural African American community into the role of other (and less than) by default. Likewise, if Hurston were to choose universal symbols, like Adams' "dream," to typify her worldview, she would be dissolving distinct portrayals of difference to embrace a more generic ideal. Either of these representational choices would advance a uniform, Euro-centric view of universal humanity. But, by re-imagining Anthropology as a "spy-glass," a trope rooted in the conventions of the community she is representing, Hurston maintains a dynamic interplay between "inside" and "outside" (Johnson, "Thresholds" 136). Using the spy-glass, Hurston adapts the useful aspects of her anthropological training to represent her community's vernacular rhetoric in a way that it is "true" to itself. I contend that, in *Mules and Men*, Hurston creates an internally-validating representation of vernacular discourse by adapting certain anthropological tools while

[38] For additional, helpful discussions of how Hurston simultaneously recognized, resisted, and transformed the academic discourse of anthropology, see Boxwell, Meisenhelder, and Walters.

displacing other disciplinary norms and assumptions. The resulting depiction corrects the misapprehensions of scientific racism while working to avoid universalizing, Euro-centric representations. *Mules and Men* therefore exemplifies an attempt to steer the emerging discursive transformation away from the universal, and toward the particular.

Rendering a self-referential discourse

Hurston's narrative style constitutes the most obvious departure from traditional anthropological studies. The folktales of *Mules and Men* are embedded within Hurston's first-person travel story, arranged for dramatic effect, and presented without the academic analysis that would characterize formal study in her historical moment.[39] Hurston's adaptations of anthropological method reflected both artistic and pragmatic concerns, as she used her considerable literary skill to negotiate the demands of her financial patron, academic mentor, mainstream publisher, and the marketplace.[40] I contend that the elements of Hurston's anthropological training that remain evident in the text gain significance within this freighted context. She chose the anthropological tools that were most critical for representing her community's vernacular discourse, using empirical observation to carefully construct a system of self-verification. In particular, Hurston utilized her spy-glass to create precise representations of both language and music.

---

[39] For a discussion of how Hurston's first-person presence in the narrative was criticized in her time but presaged important developments in anthropological study, see Boxwell. For discussions of the lack of explicit analysis in *Mules and Men*, see Hemenway 168-172, Meisenhelder 269, and Walters 348.

[40] For discussions of how the text of *Mules and Men* was adapted to negotiate the complex and often contradictory demands of these individuals, see especially Frydman (109-11), Hemenway (163-66), Meisenhelder (268), and Walters.

Hurston's use of dialect is central to the specificity of her representations. As linguistics scholar Betsy Barry demonstrates, Hurston created a system of dialectical rendering that is both "accurate" and "consistent," carefully constructed so that it would represent key linguistic features of the speakers, while maintaining textual cues necessary for readers in the "mainstream" public to find the prose comprehensible (Barry 182). The reader's first encounter with this carefully-rendered linguist system is in Hurston's introduction, before she enters the town of Eatonville to meet her informants. This folk tale is apparently from Hurston's memory, one of the "tales [she] had heard as a child" (*Mules and Men* 3). Hurston introduces the tale, and the first extended prose rendered in dialect is the voice of God:

> When I was rounding Lily Lake I was remembering how God had made the world and the elements and people. He made souls for people, but he didn't give them out because he said:
>
> "Folks ain't ready for souls yet. De clay ain't dry. It's de strongest thing Ah ever made. Don't aim to waste none thru loose cracks. And then men got to grow strong enough to stand it. De way things is now, if Ah give it out it would tear them shackly bodies to pieces. Bimeby, Ah give it out." (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 3)

Hurston has already told the reader that, in African American folktales, "even the Bible was made over to suit our vivid imagination" (*Mules and Men* 3). But to channel the voice of God through the voice of the vernacular signals a substantial shift in the discursive center. If "biblical" language is associated with timelessness and universality,

Hurston's remembered tale refutes the notion that the "universal" voice sounds like the so-called "biblical" prose of Buck. As Hurston "round[s] Lily Lake," the reader is oriented to the language of the vernacular community, in which the rural African American voice is central (not marginal), and the mythic system has its origin in the vernacular folk tale. The spy-glass, in this case turned on the ethnographer's own memories, provides the tools for Hurston to make this move.

The fact that the folk tale's language is rendered with linguistic precision adds a layer of authority to the representational claims implicit in Hurston's narrative. Specific examples are instructive. Drawing on Barry's analysis, which focuses on *Their Eyes Were Watching God* but notes that "*Mules and Men* … uses the identical conventions" (Barry 173), the passage I quoted above includes many of the phonological characteristics of African American Vernacular English or other, mainly southern, dialects of American English. The replacement of "de" for "the," for example, is an example of "syllable-initial fricative stopping" (Barry 184), a phonological feature that is consistent with "AAVE and other dialects of English." In the sections of *Their Eyes* that Barry analyzes, this re-spelling of "the" is present 96% of the time, and the syllable-initial fricative stop, in general, occurs in 68% of potential places in the dialect (185). This element of Hurston's dialectal rendering is therefore both phonologically accurate and consistently used. Similarly, the replacement of "Ah" for "I" in the above passage is an example of "glide reduction"; this particular re-spelling occurs in 100% of the dialectal prose that Barry analyzes, and "glide reduction" as a phonological feature is present in 98% of potential cases in the analyzed text (185). In looking at only the very

first, short paragraph of dialect in *Mules and Men*, it is evident that Hurston's system for rendering dialect was systematic, sophisticated, and consistent across multiple works.

This example makes clear that Hurston's spy-glass helped her to tell tales, but it also enabled her to observe particular patterns of speech and develop an internally-consistent system of transcription. The voice of God in her tale isn't impressionistic, and it isn't presented merely as an incongruity. In the African American rural folk tale, the voice of God sounds *precisely* like *this*. In the larger context of this project, Hurston's precision and specificity are important for a couple of reasons. First, even though dialectal renderings could not help but risk association with the negative racial stereotypes of the "minstrel tradition" (Jones 141-2), the sophistication of *Mules and Men*'s vernacular discourse counters these simplistic representations, which were characteristic of nineteenth-century scientific racism. The ideology of scientific racism would view dialectal speech as consistent across all African American people, and as "less evolved than" standard English in the context of the raciocultural hierarchy. In *Mules and Men*, Hurston demonstrates that African American Vernacular English was sophisticated, artistically expressive, and regionally-specific.

Second, even as Hurston's representations dispute the presumptions of scientific racism, her dialectal renderings also work against the universalizing impulse that was evident in *The Good Earth*. Recall that Buck was praised for rendering *The Good Earth* "in a formal, quasi-biblical" tone (Conn 131). Using what I called an intimate authorial voice, Buck "universalized" the thoughts and desires of the racial other by employing language that would have been familiar to the white reader. Hurston's dialectal

renderings signal a different approach. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., notably observes, Hurston modified the "standard English" of an objective narrative voice with the "black vernacular" of the speakers' direct discourse to create a "third language" that Gates calls "free indirect discourse" (Gates, *Signifying* 215). Whereas Buck draws the other toward the white reader using unadorned, standard English, Hurston utilizes free indirect discourse to move the reader in the other direction. The vernacular voice rendered in dialect—in particular, the vernacular voice of God—shows that Hurston intended to move the reader away from a so-called "universal" position and introduce him or her to the particular discourse of the African American vernacular. Hurston emphasizes not a single national language, but an appreciation for the contribution of distinct voices. In the context of the larger discursive change that this project is tracking, the careful representation of dialect in *Mules and Men* directly refutes the presumptions of scientific racism while positing an alternative to Buck's universalizing vision.

One less commented-upon feature in *Mules and Men* is the representation of music, both in the narrative and in the appendix. The thoroughness and detail of Hurston's musical transcriptions reminds the reader that the "spy-glass of Anthropology" is being used to bolster the empirical authority of her work. Take, for instance, the ballad of John Henry. The first mention of the song is in the introduction, just preceding the folktale about how people got their souls. Hurston introduces the role of folktales in her memory:

> I thought about the tales I had heard as a child. How even the Bible was made over to suit our vivid imagination. How the devil always outsmarted God and how

> that over-noble hero Jack or John—not *John Henry*, who occupies the same place in Negro folk-lore that Casey Jones does in white lore and if anything is more recent—outsmarted the devil. (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 3)

This initial mention of John Henry is a clarification of popular perception: John Henry is not to be confused with John, the folk hero who appears in many tales. John Henry is a specific character, with a specific place in folk music.

The song will reappear in Hurston's narrative of collecting folk tales as she prepares to leave Eatonville to move on to Polk County, in hopes of hearing songs and tales from the logging and railroad camps. On her final night in Eatonville, "Bubber picked the box and Charlie sang me songs of the railroad camps. Among others, he taught me verses of JOHN HENRY, the king of railroad track-laying songs which runs as follows" (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 55). This sentence is appended by a footnote, which states "See glossary." Then, the lyrics of "John Henry" are transcribed in full. Here, the song serves a narrative purpose of introducing Hurston to the folk material she is likely to encounter at her next destination.

The glossary entry serves a different purpose.[41] The song receives a lengthy explanation in the glossary (248), and an arrangement of the song in musical notation is reproduced in the appendix (253). The glossary entry begins:

> This is a song of the railroad camps and is suited to the spiking rhythm, though it is, like all other work songs, sung in the jooks and other social places. It is not a very old song, being younger by far than Casey Jones and like that song being the

---

[41] Boxwell points out that the glossary and appendices are two of the textual features that make *Mules and Men*, at least in part, a "work of anthropology" (607).

> celebration of an incidence of bravery. John Henry is not as widely distributed as 'Mule on de Mount,' 'Uncle Bud' or several of the older songs, though it has a better air than most of the work songs. *John Henry has no place in Negro folk-lore except in this one circumstance*." (248, emphasis in original)

This objective description of the song echoes Hurston's assertion from the introduction, which is evidently meant to refute ill-founded stereotypes of "John Henry" that circulated in popular culture. She places "John Henry" within the academic folklorist's matrix of understanding; she notes its "distribution" in contrast to other songs, emphasizes its historic point of origin by noting the presence of a steam engine in the ballad's lyrics, and observes that "[t]he last three verses show the internal evidence of being interpolated from English ballads" (248). Hurston's anthropological methodology is apparent here as she uses her spy-glass to transcribe the song, include an arrangement by C. Spencer Tocus in musical notation, and describe the song's characteristics in terms of form, content, and apparent derivation. The repetition of the song's lyrics within the text and the appendix serve as a kind of verification: The tools of empirical observation and notation allow the "truth" of "John Henry" to be established, beyond a doubt. Like her rendering of dialect, Hurston's rendering of folk music is accurate and consistent, creating an internally-structured system of both expression and representation.

Indeed, as the narrative of Hurston's time in Polk County proceeds, she will draw on her knowledge of "John Henry" to verify her own place within the community. The initial setting of *Mules and Men* was Hurston's hometown, so it was easy for her to immediately gain the trust of the community in order to hear their folk tales and songs.

Hurston is unknown in Polk County, however, and when her presence invites only muted conversation and polite laughter, she knows that she has encountered a problem.[42] She eventually learns that her Chevrolet and store-bought dress arouse suspicion, namely that she is some manner of undercover representative of the law (60-61). She is able to instigate a rumor that she is, indeed, a bootlegger on the wrong side of the law (61), but even that has limited effect. So at the next big Saturday night pay-day dance, finding herself with "no standing among the dancers," Hurston goes "outside to join the woofers" (62). (In the text, "Woofing" had been footnoted earlier, then defined in the glossary as "a sort of aimless talking. A man half seriously flirts with a girl, half seriously threatens to fight or brags of his prowess in love, battle or in financial matters. The term comes from the purposeless barking of dogs at night" [247]). One "pencil-shaped fellow with a big Adam's apple" teases her about her fancy dress, and when she responds with wit and laughter, the suspicions begins to dissolve and she is asked to dance by several of the men (63-64).

But to establish firmly her credibility so that she can accomplish her mission of collecting folklore, Hurston must at some point be direct. "John Henry" plays a decisive role in how Hurston is able to establish her role within the community:

> James Presley and Slim spied noble at the orchestra. I had the chance to learn more about "John Henry" maybe. So I strolled over to James Presley and asked him if he knew how to play it.

---

[42] Scholars point out that this "arrival story" is a "trope" of anthropological discourse and, in this case, a kind of personal "metaethnography" (Boxwell 607; 612) that highlights how "Hurston's affiliations with metropolitan institutions of literacy—which enjoin and enable her to collect oral traditions—expose her to generational, class, and gender conflicts that threaten to disable her access to those traditions" (Frydman 108).

> “Ah’ll play it if you sing it,” he countered. So he played and I started to sing the verses I knew. They put me on the table and everybody urged me to spread my jenk [footnoted as “Have a good time”], so I did the best I could. Joe Willard knew two verses and sang them. Eugene Oliver knew one; Big Sweet knew one. And how James Presley can make his box cry out the accompaniment! (65)

Hurston is able to establish her credibility within the community through a performance that demonstrates her knowledge of vernacular discourse. The song that she learned in Eatonville serves as proof, now, that she might belong, and her willingness to share that song, to perform it, completes her transformation from an outsider to an insider. This is an important example of how the vernacular discourse provides its own internal system of expertise and verification. Hurston continues her account of the power of “John Henry”:

> By the time that the song was over, before Joe Willard lifted me down from the table I knew that I was in the inner circle. I had first to convince the ‘job’ that I was not an enemy in the person of the law; and, second, I had to prove I was their kind. ‘John Henry’ got me over my second hurdle.
>
> After that my car was everybody’s car. James Presley, Slim and I teamed up and we had to do ‘John Henry’ wherever we appeared. …
>
> After that I got confidential and told them all what I wanted. (65)

Hurston’s knowledge of and ability to perform within the vernacular community firmly establish her membership therein. Within the text of *Mules and Men*, “John Henry” is a

truth that is illustrated, documented, and finally used to verify the validity of identity and belonging of individuals within social settings. Moreover, the singing of "John Henry" by Hurston and company in various social settings serves to verify the definition of "John Henry" within the glossary, as a song that, "like all other work songs, [was also] sung in the jooks and other social places" (248). This pattern of empirical observation, repetition, and cross-referencing shows how elements of anthropological methodology, adapted as Hurston's spy-glass, serve to represent the system of vernacular discourse. Rather than relying on reference points from an external "universal" to validate her representations, Hurston creates those points of validation within the vernacular discourse itself.

In short, the tools that Hurston retained from anthropological method in her adapted vernacular spy-glass allowed her to depict language and music with a degree of accuracy and a depth of evidence that would not allow her project to be mistaken as a mere telling of tales. Perhaps influenced by her mentor Franz Boas, she accumulated and presented copious evidence in an effort to create more accurate representations of race and culture—but the presentation and interpretation of Hurston's data in *Mules and Men* did not follow Boas' lead.[43] To wholeheartedly embrace the stance of the social scientist

[43] Though recent scholarship has helpfully analyzed ways in which Hurston departed from her anthropological training, as well as the weaknesses of Boas' understanding of race in several areas (Boxwell, Meisenhelder, Walters), it also seems worthwhile, in the context of this project, to emphasize Boas' contributions that align with Hurston's work. Boas attacked the foundation of scientific racism by arguing that inherited racial categories were both unstable and unreliable as determinants of human potential (Stocking 189-94) and emphasized the importance of "cultural factors" (as opposed to "heredity") as the cause of perceived differences in racial groups (V. Williams 34). He did so by emphasizing the importance of empirical evidence. As Jackson observes in his recent rhetorical study of Boas' work: "In the larger controversy about racial equality, Boas did not argue that there is evidence for racial equality; rather, he argued that he made a good-faith effort to find evidence of racial inequality and has failed to find any. Hence the burden of proof should fall on those who maintain white supremacy" (Jackson 446). From my point of view, it is evident in Hurston's work that she does not attribute racial particularity to

is to join the dominant discourse by adopting the voice of the objective universal—a voice similar to what I called Buck's anthropological authorial voice in *The Good Earth*, which gave the white writer the "expert" authority to define and represent the racial other. Hurston's text, however, works against this impulse by representing the discursive particularity of her African American community. As Walters states, Hurston "sought to represent aspects of the speech of the folk on its own terms: she sought to textualize what she knew and understood within that tradition itself rather than misrepresenting it by cutting it to fit the genres offered her by the discipline that had led her to study those patterns of language use in analytical fashion in the first place" (351). The discursive system I just described is not one in which truth is verified by applying external systems of analysis to collected data; rather, the system of verification is identified and illuminated "with the evaluative criteria used by insiders" (Walters 352). In Baker's terms, Hurston uses the trope of the spy-glass to illuminate the "already-extant matrix" (H. Baker, *Blues* 9) of this vernacular discourse. As she does so, Hurston rectifies the inaccurate representations of scientific racism, while countering the totalizing impulse of the emerging discourse of universal humanity.

Hurston's ability to avoid totalizing representations deserves further comment. For example, if Hurston's particular rendering of the dialect of one community were to become systematized across anthropologists as a method for representing the speech of all African American communities, this would be problematic; the speech Hurston

---

inherited racial "types," and she disregards any notion that cultural differences can be structured into a hierarchy. She also views the gathering and presentation of evidence as fundamental to demonstrating the value and beauty of her culture, though she would ultimately embrace a more artistic form for her work (Hemenway 213-15).

represented was particular to specific communities in specific regions. Assigning a single pattern of speech to an entire "race" would repeat the errors of scientific racism, which defined immutable racial categories by the consistent "traits" they supposedly shared. Likewise, if "John Henry" were to be understood as *the* "authentic" ballad of African American culture, this would be another false representation, one that associated an entire "race" with a single set of social knowledge. These kinds of false, universal representations of race were rampant and accepted in the discourse of nineteenth-century scientific racism. Boas sought to debunk these false representations with the careful analysis of abundant data, but in his revised search for general truths, his methodology implicitly endorsed the perceived superiority of "objective" European thought. Buck's dialogic narration in *The Good Earth* has a similar consequence, as it represents the Chinese other in a Euro-centric "universal" voice. Hurston's departure from the anthropological presentation and interpretation of folktales helped her to avoid these pitfalls. As a representation of particular communities rendered in their own language, *Mules and Men* resists the totalizing trajectories of both scientific racism and the emerging discourse of universal humanity.

Hurston marshals the discourse-specific trope of "lies" to further highlight the inherent instability of claims to "truth" and "universality." When Hurston introduces *Mules and Men*, she refers to the folk tales she seeks to collect as "Negro folklore," "material," "stories," and "tales" (1-3). When her Chevrolet rolls into Eatonville, however, her informants introduce the trope that will illuminate the complex role of

folklore in the vernacular discourse of *Mules and Men*. When Hurston is recognized and asked if she is home to stay, she replies:

> "Nope, Ah come to collect some old stories and tales and Ah know y'all know a plenty of 'em and that's why Ah headed straight for home."
>
> "What you mean, Zora, them big old lies we tell when we're jus' sittin' around here on the store porch doin' nothing'?" asked B. Moseley.
>
> "Yeah, those same ones about Ole Massa, and colored folks in heaven, and—oh, y'all know the kind I mean." (8)

Hurston is looking for "old stories and tales," but B. Moseley knows that she means "big old lies." The residents of Eatonville, however, don't necessarily understand why Hurston would be looking for such a thing. The dialogue continues:

> "Aw shucks," exclaimed George Thomas doubtfully. "Zora, don't you come here and tell de biggest lie first thing. Who you reckon want to read all them old-time tales about Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear?"
>
> "Plenty of people, George. They are a lot more valuable than you might think. We want to set them down before it's too late."
>
> "Too late for what?"
>
> "Before everybody forgets all of 'em."
>
> "No danger of that. That's all some people is good for—set 'round and lie and murder groceries." (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 8)

In teasing Hurston about not telling the "biggest lie first thing," George Thomas is demonstrating the multiple valences of the word "lie." The "big old lies" mentioned early

in the dialogue are clearly folk tales or tall tales—traditional, fictional stories. In the remark aimed at Hurston about her stated mission, however, her "biggest lie" is a misrepresentation of the facts at hand, much different from a folk tale. An additional valence of the word "lie" is revealed the next day, in the preamble to another storytelling session:

> "Now, you gointer hear lies above suspicion," Gene added. (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 19).

Here, Gene promises that Hurston will "hear lies above suspicion"—or lies that are believable as truth. This final use of the word lie reveals the instability of the ground they will cover together. If a lie is "above suspicion," then how is the reader to know the "truth"?

That question cuts to the core of problems related to representations of race in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States. If a misrepresentation is "above suspicion," how can one remain alert to the embedded untruths? The problem applies equally when one thinks about the pseudo-scientific representations of nineteenth-century scientific racism that are echoed in the *Epic*'s neo-Lamarckian passages, and about the poetic representations of Adams and Buck that dissolve race into universal symbols and narratives. Both are representations—one apparently empirical, one apparently poetic—that allow one to make sense of racial inequality and injustice. Both are false representations that, reinforced by discursive norms, came to be "above suspicion." Hurston's introduction of "lies" as the dominant trope within the structure of her careful anthropological observations helps to keep any one paradigm from settling into the

groove of accepted "truth." With the truth in a state of flux, the definitive racial traits of scientific racism and the uniform universal of the emerging discourse are both called into question.

The folk tales also question received truths by calling attention to instances of false speech and false perception. In one tale, for example, a man believed he was called by God to be a preacher. However, as it turns out, he was actually "called" by a mule hidden behind some shrubbery. This tale was introduced with a typical ritual of doubt:

> "Ah knowed a man dat was called by a mule."
>
> "A mule, Ellis? All dem b'lieve dat, stand on they head," said Little Ida.
>
> "Yeah, a mule did call a man to preach. Ah'll show you how it was done, if you'll stand a straightenin'."
>
> "Now, Ellis, don't mislay de truth. Sense us into dis mule-callin' business." (21)

The challenge to tell a good story is to gain "believers," or appreciators of one's story-telling craft. The call to "sense us into" the tale indicates that vivid descriptions will play a good part in assessing the storyteller's acumen. After that tale and another that followed, Ellis's "lies" are met with acclimation and good humor:

> "Now Ellis," chided Gold when she was thru her laughter, "You know dat's a lie. Folks over there in St. Lawrence holdin' class meetin' and you over here lyin' like de crossties from Jacksonville to Key West" (23-24).

The questions of truthfulness and believability are consistently raised and turned, as the trope of "lying" is the topic of continuous verbal play. Of course, the success of this

community's verbal play rests in the reality that everyone *believes* the lies in the appropriate context. Ellis's tale of the talking mule is a believable lie because it is a tall tale well told; no one bothers to verify the location and owner of the alleged talking mule. The "truth" or underlying meaning of the tale is revealed in the surrounding conversation, in which one woman comments, "Yeah; and hard work in de hot sun done called a many a man to preach," (21) and another woman later states:

> A many one been called to de plough and they run off and got up in de pulpit. Ah wish dese mules knowed how to take a pair of plow-lines and go to church and ketch some of 'em like they go to de lot with a bridle and ketch mules. (22)

The concern here is with misrepresentation of religious calling in order to avoid labor, not with the verbal behavior of farm animals. Illuminated by the trope of "lies," the proper audience attitude when it comes to religious calling is therefore suspicion and careful attention to the facts of the case.

Another Eatonville tale raises more oblique questions about the truth of representation, in this case in regard to the origin of race. The conversation begins in the midst of an ongoing dispute between a woman, Gold, and several of the men sitting around the store porch.

> Armetta soothed Gold's feelings and stopped the war. When the air cleared Gold asked, "Do y'all know how come we are black?"
>
> "Yeah," said Ellis. "It's because two black niggers got together."

> "Aw, naw," Gold disputed petulantly. "Well, since you so smart, tell me where dem two black niggers come from in de first beginnin'." (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 29)

Here, Gold hits on a significant matter of debate within the ideological threads of nineteenth century scientific racism. The question of racial origins is, as Hurston would know, a matter of serious anthropological dispute. The biological continuity of race from one generation to the next, which Ellis refers to, is one thing; the question of whether different "races" (imagined differently within different schools of thought) descended from a single point of human origin was a different issue entirely, taken quite seriously by "scholars" in the field.[44] The origin story that appears in *Mules and Men* provides a different take.

The story begins when "God was makin' up de people. But He didn't finish 'em all at one time" (29). After "[a]ll de nations" got "eyes," and "teeth and so on," God "set a day to give out color" (29). The scheduled morning arrived, and all of the people received their color, except for one group, which was late. God's angel emissaries were eventually sent to find them, "and tole 'em God wanted 'em" (30).

> They all jumped up and run on up to de th'one and they was so skeered they might miss sumpin' they begin to push and shove one 'nother, bumpin' against all de angels and turnin' over foot-stools. They even had de th'one all pushed one-sided.

---

[44] See Stocking for an overview of the conflicts and continuities in the "monogenist" and "polygenist" varieties of scientific racism (112-32).

> So God hollered, 'Git back! Git back!' And they misunderstood Him and thought He said, 'Git black,' and they been black ever since. (30)

This folk tale pokes fun at the people for being tardy, then scared, eager, pushy, and ultimately not very careful listeners. But it also points to the assignment of racial categories as arbitrary and unintentional. The fact that they were black didn't *mean* anything, except that there was a comical misunderstanding.

Like other accounts of racial origins, this tale is received with varying degrees of disbelief. The first reply is from Gene:

> "Now Gold call herself getting' even wid me—tellin' dat lie. 'Tain't no such a story nowhere. She jus' made dat one up herself."
>
> "Naw, she didn't," Armetta defended. "Ah *been* knowin' dat ole tale."
>
> "Me too," said Shoo-pie.
>
> "Don't you know you can't git de best of no woman in de talkin' game? Her tongue is all de weapon a woman got," George Thomas chided Gene. (30)

Notice that the criteria for evaluating the "truth" of the tale is whether or not it has been heard before. The issue isn't whether this is a "true" story in a representational sense—of course it isn't—but whether it is a story with a proven derivation within the vernacular discourse. Armetta and Shoo-pie can verify the tale's provenance by vouching for the story. This internal process of verification serves two purposes. First, it shows that the vernacular discourse defines and verifies its own notions of true or false. Rather than rely on the verifying functions of the ideology of scientific racism or of the emerging

discourse of universal humanity, the self-verifying system represented within *Mules and Men* advocates for the intrinsic validity of a distinct and alternative discourse.

More broadly, the racial origin story that is disputed and then verified in *Mules and Men* highlights the inherent instability of the "truth" in any racial origin story. The vernacular process of self-verification that follows the telling of the tale echoes what happens in dominant discourse. If enough people have heard a given story before, the story is accepted as valid—even if it is not factually accurate. The informants in *Mules and Men* are savvy enough to understand the difference between the mythic truth of a folktale and the representational accuracy of a scientific account.[45] No one involved believes that the folktale entitled "Why Negroes are Black" reveals the scientific origin of racial difference. To recall Alfred Kroeber's observations from Chapter Two, however, the "scientists" of scientific racism did not always make such clear distinctions between myth and fact. Kroeber, another student of Boas, criticized the magical thinking of neo-Lamarckian theorists who believed socially-acclaimed notions of racial inheritance that were not proved by empirical data. By encouraging a constant suspicion of received truth claims, Hurston's trope of lies performs a similar kind of critique. Importantly, however, Hurston's critique is embedded within the language and verification system of the vernacular discourse. In *Mules and Men*, Hurston's spy-glass creates a system for accurately representing particular vernacular communities. At the same time, the trope of "lies" continually questions representational validity. The text of *Mules and Men* both enables verification and foments suspicion, ensuring that the process of what Johnson

---

[45] For an extended discussion of the mythic truth portrayed by *Mules and Men*, see H. Baker, "Workings of the Spirit."

calls "representing difference" is always suspended in a dynamic state ("Thresholds," 139).

With the "spy-glass of Anthropology" and the "lies" of the vernacular community working against totalizing representations, *Mules and Men* offers a corrective to both the inaccuracies of scientific racism and the Euro-centric uniformity of universal humanity. In contrast to *The Epic of America*, *Mules and Men* eschews idealized national symbols for the concrete images of particular communities. And unlike *The Good Earth*, *Mules and Men* introduces readers to the particular voices of the racial other, rather than representing that other in "universal" terms. Because *Mules and Men* resisted the trajectory of the ongoing discursive transformation from scientific racism to universal humanity, however, it held a tenuous position within the emerging discourse. It is helpful to recall Jasinski's explanation of the role of discrete texts in larger discursive change:

> Intentionally, texts exhibit constitutive potential through the invitations inscribed in various discursive forms (tropes, arguments, etc.). Extensionally, texts exhibit constitutive force through the cultural circulation and discursive articulation of their textual forms in ways that enable and constrain subsequent practice. (Jasinski 74-5)

The vernacular system "inscribed" in *Mules and Men* is an "invitation" to readers. *Mules and Men* is significant in the context of this project because it invited readers to engage with an alternate vision of racial particularity and representation, one that is neither stereotypical nor hierarchical. Rather than endorsing a Euro-centric vision of the universal that dissolves the other into the self, *Mules and Men* re-centers the discourse

around particular, living communities. But Jasinski's framework reminds us that rhetorical form represents only "potential," which will not necessarily result in the intended "constitutive force." Discursive change results from the ways that a particular text is interpreted, re-articulated, and circulated in public discourse. As the following reception analysis shows, the self-verifying discursive system of *Mules and Men* did not encounter readers who would help to realize its full potential to transform national, public discourse.

Swept under the mainstream

Mules and Men was published in 1935 to "mixed" reviews (Hemenway 218).[46] The reception of the text reveals the interpretive difficulties that may emerge when a vernacular text encounters a dominant discourse—even a dominant discourse that was in flux, as was the case in the 1930s. Catherine Squires' terms for multiple African American public spheres provide a helpful framework for describing this complex discursive interaction. Squires points out that not all marginal publics are "counterpublics," which operate in visible and vocal political opposition to mainstream public discourse. "Enclave publics" result when "[m]arginalized groups are commonly denied public voice or entrance into public spaces by dominant groups and are thus forced into enclaves" (Squires 458). While counter-publics directly refute the views of the dominant discourse, sharing (at least some of) the same discursive terrain, enclave publics speak in "hidden transcripts" (Squires 458). I contend that the rural African

[46] An extended discussion of several reviews of *Mules and Men* is available in Hemenway 218-223.

American communities in *Mules and Men* can be viewed as enclave publics, which speak in the language of the vernacular. Because the dominant public and the African American counter-public do not share the enclave public's discursive conventions or interpretive framework, the "constitutive potential" of *Mules and Men* is realized in unpredictable ways when the text circulates in the public sphere.

Regardless of Hurston's careful and precise representational work, reviewers within the dominant discourse utilize the representations in *Mules and Men* to confirm their pre-existing beliefs, which are grounded in the totalizing racial stereotypes of scientific racism. Reviewers from the African American counter-public praise Hurston's artistic and academic ability, but they also critique her representations as limited. In all of these reviews, the de-racializing, universalizing impulse revealed in the mainstream reviews of *The Epic of America* and *The Good Earth* is absent. Instead, reviewers confine the characteristics of the enclave public and the vernacular discourse to broad racial categories or distinct social groups. The reception of *Mules and Men* reveals an additional consequence of the emerging discourse of universal humanity: Representations of racial particularity are associated with the negative stereotypes of scientific racism, causing distinct voices of color to inhabit a tenuous position.

The mainstream reception of *Mules and Men* demonstrates the power that the terms of the existing discourse have to determine the results of interpretation. Following the neo-Lamarckian logic that associates psychological traits with racial inheritance, mainstream reviews regularly ascribe Hurston's authority to her race and identify or allude to general racial "traits" that *Mules and Men* reveals. Several reviews note

Hurston's unique authority as a collector of African American folklore, authority deriving from her special "racial" knowledge, her privileged access to rural African American communities, or to some unclear combination of the two. The belief in special "racial" knowledge was espoused by some of the more progressive thinkers of this time and often used for positive ends; this belief, alone, is not evidence of the most insidious forms of scientific racism. Nevertheless, the implication that intellectual or creative capability is derived from an inherited racial "essence" (rather than a shared socio-cultural experience) betrays a reliance on the ideological tenets of scientific racism.

The *LA Times* review, for example, describes an ambiguous raciocultural origin for Hurston's expertise. It states: "In his forward, Dr. Franz Boas says that only a member of the race can extract the full essence of Negro folklore, for the white observer is excluded from the Negro's confidence" (Needham C7). The review goes on to clarify that Hurston "is a Negress; and she grew up among the darkies of Eatonville, Fla." (C7). The *New York Times* review identifies Hurston as "a young Negro woman with a college education," later adding that she "has gone back to her native Florida village—a Negro settlement—with her native racial quality entirely unspoiled by her Northern college education" (Brock BR4). Joseph Williams, in a review in *Folklore* that ultimately earns a published refutation from progressive anthropologist Melville Herskovits, seems to call on Hurston's purported authority based on race in a subtle effort to debunk her authority as an anthropologist. He limits his comments on the subject to quotations from published material: "As the jacket announces, Miss Hurston, the author, 'is a member of the richly imaginative race about which she writes'" (J. Williams 329). These reviews reinscribe the

logic of scientific racism by specifying Hurston's race and then associating her race with a "native racial quality," the capacity to be "richly imaginative," and the ability to "extract the full essence of Negro folklore."

Even reviews that praise Hurston's gifts as a writer betray an impulse to contextualize her talents within a framework of inherited racial traits:

> When Zora Hurston set out with an education in anthropology and a Chevrolet to collect the folk-lore of dark laughter and dark magic she counted much on her own Negro blood to make it possible for her 'to penetrate through that affected demeanor by which the Negro excludes the white observer from participating in his inner life.' But no advantage of skin or blood could have produced [this] book. … Only an ability to write, a rare conjunction of the sense of the ridiculous and the sense of the dramatic, could have produced this remarkable collection of Negro folk tales and folk customs. (Daniels 12)

This review manages to maintain the assumption that "skin or blood" *do* provide special knowledge, even as it makes an exception for Hurston's remarkable talent and education. Together, these reviews show that several underlying assumptions of scientific racism within mainstream discourse were left unmoved by Hurston's text; in fact, these very assumptions were verified within (or, at least, used as context for) the reviewers' interpretations. The fact that, in the introduction to *Mules and Men*, Hurston indicated the more nuanced reality that her upbringing within African American communities made it *difficult* to see and record their stories from the outside—that, "like a tight chemise," she

"couldn't see it for wearing it" (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 1)—goes unnoticed in these interpretations.

Mainstream reviewers also missed the particularity and complexity of the vernacular rhetoric in *Mules and Men*, instead using the text to verify their own totalizing representations of the racial "other." More specifically, mainstream reviewers use *Mules and Men* to confirm their stereotypical expectations that all African Americans are humorous, lively, talkative, and dishonest. "It is hardly necessary to add," states the reviewer for the *LA Times*, "that the tales and songs and descriptions contain fully as much amusement as information, for the Negro is never dull and in this book he has a skilled narrator of his own race" (Needham C7). Another reviewer confirms that, "[q]uite expectedly, most of these stories are humorous" (Chubb 182). The *New York Times* observes that *Mules and Men* captures the moments "when Negroes are having a good gregarious time dancing, singing, fishing, and above all, incessantly, talking" (Brock BR4). The *North American Review* notices, without irony, that *Mules and Men* has the proverbial something for everyone when it comes to confirming their pre-existing racial stereotypes, as "he who loves the negro, or is amused by him, or burns for his wrongs, or thinks he ought to know his place, will find, each of them, as good a portrayal of the negro's character as he is ever likely to see" (Chubb 181). These reviewers share two primary tendencies. First, they read Hurston's nuanced renderings as little more than a confirmation of longstanding stereotypes. But perhaps more remarkably, the reviewers disregard the regional specificity of *Mules and Men*. The "traits" they perceive are generalized to the entire "race," a totalizing gesture that Hurston is careful to avoid.

The harmful implications of the reviewers' stereotypical interpretations are amplified as the stereotypes themselves become more negative. The reviewers do not only acknowledge "the pliant and imaginative Negro" (Williams 330) and "the humor of grand black exaggeration" (Daniels 12) in such "positive" terms, as if so-called "positive stereotypes" aren't harmful in themselves. *Mules and Men* is used to verify "negative" stereotypes, as well. The *North American Review* observes that "[t]he gaiety, the poetry, the resourcefulness, and the wit are set down, but so also are the impulsiveness, the shiftlessness, the living in the moment only" (Chubb 181). The *New York Herald Tribune* summarizes Hurston's masterful depiction of the "lies" of her vernacular community as follows: "They all lied, as only a black man can lie, and only to a dark girl whom he trusts" (Gannett 11). The totalizing impulse of these stereotypical representations becomes especially clear in these reviews. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, *Mules and Men* meticulously represents the specific qualities of a distinct discourse. Hurston creates a system to accurately render dialectal speech and to represent the cultural touchstones that build credibility and verify the mythic truth of particular vernacular communities. Mainstream reviews, however, interpret *Mules and Men* as a uniform representation of a monolithic race. As the text circulates in the public sphere, its constitutive potential to transform racial representations is subverted. The characteristics of Hurston's vernacular discourse are first misread as equivalent to the "racial traits" typical of nineteenth-century scientific racism. Then, these "racial traits" are marshaled as evidence for uniform and immutable racial categories. Importantly, the stereotypical traits identified in these reviews are undesirable: Unlike the idealized characteristics of

Buck's protagonists that transcend racial boundaries, these traits are strictly confined to a single racial group. Within the context of the larger transformation from the ideology of scientific racism to a discourse of universal humanity, *Mules and Men* is embedded in the discourse of the past. Regardless of how sensitively it is rendered, Hurston's representation of racial particularity is associated with totalizing, negative stereotypes.

Voices from within the African American counter-public also engaged with *Mules and Men* and offered mixed reviews. On the one hand, these reviewers applaud Hurston's accomplishments, both in the text and in her career. In these cases, her authority is attributed to her education, her professional skill, or to her effort to establish connections with her informants, rather than to any manner of mysterious "racial" origin. For example, the *Amsterdam News*, after reciting Hurston's educational and literary resume, notes:

> The tales she gathered from her kinfolks, neighbors, and casual acquaintances she has reproduced in *Mules and Men* with a deep-felt sympathy that adds poignance to their recital, and a keen reportial accuracy that makes each one ring true. ("Folk Lore and Voodoo" 6)

In the *Journal of Negro History*, McNeill observes that "Miss Hurston's contribution is significant because of her close contacts" in Eatonville and Polk County (224). Sterling Brown describes Hurston's authority to approach her subject as follows:

> Miss Hurston…is one of the few Negroes fitted by upbringing, temperament, and training to make such a collection. She is fortunately free from the usual educated

> Negro's disdain for folklore and she has enthusiasm, a sensitive ear and a companionable personality. (24)

Notice that all three reviewers associate Hurston's strengths with aspects of "culture," as opposed to "race." Hurston became a successful folklorist through education, association, the cultivation of particular attitudes, and the refinement of her craft. None of these characteristics could be even remotely construed as a consequence of biological race. These critics inhabit a discourse with much different foundational assumptions than the mainstream critics whose work is reviewed above.

Critics from the African American counter-public are also careful to avoid reading *Mules and Men* as a totalizing representation of a race. Whereas the mainstream critics appear to recognize certain sweeping racial stereotypes in Hurston's representations, the critics within the counter-public often distinguish *Mules and Men* as referring to specific groups, within specific locales. These distinctions, however, often carry a certain ambiguity. For example, in *The New Republic*, Henry Lee Moon calls *Mules and Men* "more than a collection of folklore. It is a valuable picture of the life of the unsophisticated Negro in the small towns and backwoods of Florida" (10). In the *Journal of Negro History*, McNeill writes:

> The novelist, more than the student of cultural history, seems to have won out toward the end of Part I, for her account becomes worthwhile largely as a record of jookhouse epithets and gambling terms. The action illustrates the defense mechanism of an in-group of a lower strata of society against the inroads of an outside group. (225)

And later, in discussing Part II of *Mules and Men*:

> In great contrast with the broad humor of Part I do we find the serious portrayal of the dependence of Negroes of the Deep South upon 'conjure' when the police, physicians, and banks fail. (225)

The *Amsterdam News* review, similarly, argues that the focus on Hoodoo in Part II gives "insight into the reason for [the witch doctors'] hold upon the gullible Negroes of the Louisiana bayous" ("Folk Lore and Voodoo" 6). In these reviews, the portrayals that are troubling from the counter-public's point of view are made specific, rather than generalizing or totalizing.

Mules and Men cannot, from this point of view, be used as evidence for totalizing racial stereotypes. Instead, the book offers insight into only those people who are "unsophisticated," "of a lower social strata," and "gullible," and who live in "the small towns and backwoods of Florida," or "the Deep South," or "the Louisiana Bayous." Importantly, the counter-public's reviews do not work to disassociate Hurston's nuanced representations from the negative stereotypes of scientific racism. Instead, by limiting Hurston's depictions to the poor, uneducated, rural south, the urban and urbane reviewers disassociate Hurston's representations from themselves. As the larger discourse moves away from the ideology of scientific racism, the reviewers from the African American counter-public do not take up Hurston's careful representations as a valid alternative to the emerging vision of a uniform universal. Reviewers maintain the dominant discourse's association between *Mules and Men* and negative racial stereotypes, ultimately distancing themselves from both.

The position of the critics within the African American counter-public is understandable. Negative racial stereotypes continued to hold significant presence and power in the public sphere. The African American counter-public worked assiduously to dispute these stereotypes and to gain political and social equality. Within this context, advocating for the nuance and particularity of Hurston's text would have been a freighted—perhaps even an impossible—task. In contrast, the emerging discourse of universal humanity provided the African American counter-public with immediate inventional resources, like the American dream, that could be used to advocate for racial justice within the dominant discourse. Hurston's vernacular discourse, however carefully rendered, did not provide the same rhetorical resources.

Mules and Men therefore occupies an ambiguous position as it was received by an African American counter-public. The African American counter-public realizes that the book has intrinsic value, but also must cope with the ways that the book, through its public circulation, invites the re-articulation and acclimation of stereotypes that they are consistently working to defeat. Sterling Brown, in his review in *The New Masses*, rightly, and I think fairly, characterizes this as a problem of both representation and interpretation. The conclusion of his review is worth quoting at length:

> As one southern critic has said, Miss Hurston "portrays the white man but little, and then without bitterness." And Miss Hurston finds "the Negro story-teller is lacking in bitterness." Her characters are naive, quaint, complaisant, bad enough to kill each other in jooks, but meek otherwise, socially unconscious. Their life is made to appear easy-going and carefree. This, to the reviewer, makes *Mules and*

> *Men* singularly *incomplete.* These people live in a land shadowed by squalor, poverty, disease, violence, enforced ignorance and exploitation. Even if browbeaten, they do know a smouldering resentment. Many folk-stories and songs from the South contain this resentment; E.C.L. Adams *Nigger to Nigger* and Lawrence Gellert's *Negro Songs of Protest* are excellent cases in point. From the reviewer's own experience, he knows that harsher folk-tales await the collector. These people brood upon their hardships, talk about them "down by the big-gate," and some times even at the big house. They are not blind, and they are not being fooled; some have lost their politeness, and speak right out. *Mules and Men* should be more bitter; it would be nearer the total truth.

As a representation of vernacular rhetoric in an enclave public, *Mules and Men* is a vibrant, intricate rendering of a self-sustaining discursive system. But when the text circulates within the mainstream public and the African American counter-public, it becomes accountable, fairly or not, to the issues and questions that are active within those spheres. Brown articulates the "resentment" and "bitterness" that is certainly felt to some degree by at least some number of Hurston's informants, but which Hurston does not place at the center of her representation. And though the discourse in *Mules and Men* works against the notion that any kind of "complete" representation of a people is both impossible and undesirable, the text lacks the explicit analysis that would help Hurston to articulate her argument meaningfully within the counter-public's discourse. Within the terms of the African American counter-public, *Mules and Men* is, indeed, "*incomplete*."

Its unique, intrinsic potential to transform systems of racial representation in the public sphere is therefore unrealized during its historic moment.

The reception of *Mules and Men* ultimately demonstrates the normative power of this period's discursive transformation. The negative stereotypes of scientific racism will lose their representational validity over time, but their positive and negative associations persist. Positive characteristics, like the characters' hard work and love of the land in *The Good Earth*, become associated with the universal and have a prominent place in the emerging discourse. (Note that these characteristics embodied Euro-centric values to begin with.) The characteristics of the informants in *Mules and Men*, however, are classified as negative according to the logic of scientific racism. These "traits" are never equated with the universal—they continue to be associated with the racial other even as the explicit racial hierarchy recedes. The contrasting receptions of *The Good Earth* and *Mules and Men* demonstrate that the emerging discourse valorizes that which can be universalized. Rhetorical agency therefore lies with those who, like Adams and Buck, speak in a "universal" voice.

Conclusion

Contemporary scholars have endeavored to show how *Mules and Men* engaged with the discourse of the dominant public and counter-public, defending Hurston against Sterling Brown and similar critics by showing how she "confronted indirectly by asserting a positive view of black traditions" (Hemenway 223), "offer[ed] in veiled form a complex analysis of race and gender in Black life" (Meisenhelder 267), or strategically

"couched" her "barbed critiques" in terms that would be "missed or overlooked by those reading within other textual traditions" (Walters 365). From these concurring points of view, *Mules and Men* can be understood as a "hidden transcript," created by an "enclave public" and circulated in code. Though I believe these critics are correct to point out the subversive potential within this polysemous text, their analyses can have a curious effect that becomes especially clear in this observation from Hemenway:

> Hurston implicitly told whites: Contrary to your arrogant assumptions, you have not really affected us that much; we continue to practice our own culture, which as a matter of fact is more alive, more esthetically pleasing than your own; and it is not solely a product of defensive *re*actions to your actions. She felt that black culture manifested an independent esthetic system that could be discussed without constant reference to white oppression. (Hemenway 221)

By framing Hurston's "implicit" critique in this way, Hemenway paradoxically reads Hurston's text as a "defensive *re*action" to white readers' "actions," even as he expresses Hurston's disavowal of that very purpose. These contemporary critics reveal a tendency to place Hurston within the context of a counter-public—to understand her efforts as part of a "veiled" critical dialogue with the dominant discourse. My purpose in this project has been to add to those views, while shifting the focus. This chapter uses tropological criticism to highlight the intrinsic value of the "independent esthetic system" of the text.[47]

---

[47] It is also on this point that my analysis of Hurston's vernacular differs from Brooks' insightful analysis of the vernacular rhetoric of Fannie Hamer. As Brooks observes, Hamer strategically employed vernacular discourse to establish an "oppositional ethos" in the public sphere. While Hurston may also have done so by utilizing strategies of indirection, as these critics have pointed out, my purpose in this chapter is to illuminate the self-referential and self-verifying potential of vernacular discourse.

By doing so, this chapter emphasizes the rhetorical work that *Mules and Men* does to posit an alternative vision of racial particularity that departs from the ideology of scientific racism without embracing a European "universal" as the human norm. Hurston's "spy-glass," a generative re-imagining of anthropology, allows her to create a carefully-constructed discursive system with accurately-rendered speech and internally-verifying cultural touchstones. The "lies" of the African American community reveal the contingent nature of truth when it comes to racial representations. Together, these tropes allow Hurston to create a representation that is systematic, but not totalizing. Moreover, Hurston makes the tools for interpreting the vernacular system available *within the text itself*. As the reception analysis in this chapter makes clear, however, historical readers were unwilling or unable to pick up the interpretive tools. The dominant discourse used the text to reinforce stereotypes born from the ideology of scientific racism, while more progressive voices from the African American counter-public critiqued Hurston's lack of direct critical address toward the dominant discourse's views. Hurston's text, I posit, created a remarkable, non-hierarchical, alternative vision of racial particularity, but its place in the larger discourse was tenuous.

A comparison with *The Epic of America* and *The Good Earth* is useful here. Critics that embraced Adams' and Buck's texts articulated a shared sense of universal humanity, allowing the ideology of scientific racism to recede beneath transcendent national symbols or racial representations that depict the "other" as no more than a version of the Euro-centric universal "self." *Mules and Men* eschews both of these rhetorical processes, relying instead on culturally-specific images and a re-centered

discourse that positions the racial “other” as the “self.” The dynamics of the dominant discourse, however, subverted the text’s intrinsic meaning. Hurston’s culturally-specific images were associated with the negative stereotypes of scientific racism. These racialized “traits” were not eligible to join the vision of “universal humanity.” As a result, *Mules and Men* did not realize its constitutive potential within the emerging discourse. Intrinsically, *Mules and Men* demonstrated how difference could be represented with fidelity to and artistic respect for a particular community’s living vernacular discourse. When it circulated within the rhetorical turbulence of its historical moment, however, *Mules and Men* was misread as a relic of an outmoded ideology. Like the explicit stereotypes of scientific racism, the text ultimately (though, thankfully, only temporarily) faded from view.

The reception of *Mules and Men* reveals additional consequences of the larger discursive transformation from the ideology of scientific racism to a vision of universal humanity. In Chapters Two and Three, I discussed how the idealized and universalizing images of the emerging discourse had the potential to mute articulations of material inequalities. I argued that the racial hierarchy remained in place, even as the explicit, hierarchical language of nineteenth-century scientific racism receded. This chapter’s analysis of *Mules and Men* has shown that the perceived humanity of distinct groups also receded as “universal” norms emerged. The ideology of scientific racism placed the racial other on a lower tier of the human hierarchy. The discourse of universal humanity, on the other hand, simply did not include individuals or characteristics that did not fit the “universal” mold. The distinct beauty and particularity of Hurston’s representations were

therefore lost in the emerging discourse. Hurston, herself, disappeared from public view. This project has sought to uncover the rhetorical mechanisms that facilitated the transformation of public discourse from the ideology of scientific racism to a vision of universal humanity. Among those mechanisms are strategic exclusion, silence, and absence.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This project has, in many ways, traced a series of rhetorical disappearances and appearances. In each chapter, I have sought to demonstrate how the scientific racism of the nineteenth century began to loosen its hold on public discourse. As a more egalitarian discourse emerged, scientific racism was no longer the dominant logic in determining national identity and understanding the differences that existed among U.S. citizens. In *The Epic of America*, the vestiges of neo-Lamarckian scientific racism receded as idealized symbols became the preferred basis for a universalized national "self." In *The Good Earth*, an intimate narrative voice dissolved the distance between the universalized self and the racial "other." *Mules and Men* proposed an alternative to both scientific racism and the emerging universal vision—nevertheless, reviewers' association of the text's vernacular discourse with the stereotypes of scientific racism helped to ensure that the text's (and the author's) public presence would fade. But just as these various dimensions receded, a new set of claims, claims grounded in idealized notions of American character and universal "brotherhood," came to the forefront. *The Epic of America* advanced a set of de-racialized national values, grounded in "the American dream," as foundational to national identity and American progress. *The Good Earth* posited a Euro-centric self that could deeply and authoritatively know the racial and national other. Though it would wait thirty years for expansive public recognition and acclaim, *Mules and Men* ultimately advocated for the distinct value of all American voices, on their own terms.

Standing in the twenty-first century, it is easy to appreciate the conceptual moves of the 1930s from a discourse that articulates the tenets of scientific racism to one that embraces a vision of universal humanity. The overt racism of the nineteenth century was ugly, dehumanizing, and also, as we now know, based on fundamental misunderstandings and errors. As recent scientific advances in genetic research have proven, humans are, indeed, "99.9% similar" (Ratcliffe 13); biologically speaking, we are all "universally human." Nevertheless, despite our present perspective, it is crucial to observe how the conceptual shifts I have tracked in this dissertation did not lead, at least initially, to a more progressive era. Social justice for many minority communities was still decades away, if we can even call the 1960s the triumph of equality and inclusion. As critical race theorists have shown, the systemic social and economic inequalities based on "old" ideas of racial hierarchy often persist, even in the present day, as we proclaim egalitarian beliefs and values.

We are left, then, with an important question: If conceptual shifts in public discourse fail to secure the forms of material change that are implied by an era's rhetoric, what is the utility of studying said change? In the process of summarizing the major points of my project, I intend to answer this question. I conclude that the disjuncture between discursive transformation and material change in the 1930s is itself significant; the disparity that emerged between representation and reality has consequences that continue to be evident today. As I mentioned in Chapter One of this project, Imani Perry has observed a similar disjuncture in contemporary society between empirically-verified "practices of inequality" and the "race-neutral" language that is used to rationalize those

practices (32). A discourse that does not perceive, address, or work to modify material inequalities is problematic. Though discursive conventions and material conditions related to racial inequality have continued to change since the 1930s, this project traces the historical emergence of many contemporary conceptualizations of race and national identity to that period. A better assessment of the historical processes that led to their emergence can lead to a clearer understanding of our present moment, and, ultimately, the development of rhetorical strategies that would help us to perceive, describe, and transform material inequalities.

The contributions of this project are therefore grounded in its critical method for exploring and explicating rhetorical history. The preceding chapters have argued that it is possible to identify and trace the rhetorical processes of conceptual change related to race and difference by examining the contradictions revealed in particular rhetorical forms and the resolutions that "release and transform their potential constitutive energy" as the texts circulate among audiences (Jasinski 74-5). In *The Epic of America*, the text's tension between representative and figurative images was resolved by audiences' figurative transformation of the "American dream." In *The Good Earth*, the novel's dialogic tension was resolved through middlebrow audiences' universalizing interpretations. In *Mules and Men*, however, the text's carefully-rendered vernacular system is incompatible with the emerging universal vision, and its constitutive potential is subverted by readers in the dominant public and the African American counter-public. The misinterpretation and subsequent marginalizing of *Mules and Men* reveals patterns of exclusion in the emerging discourse. These particular texts and rhetorical processes were certainly not the only ones

to play a part in a radical discursive shift that happened over several decades. Nevertheless, this project highlights the utility of Jasinski's critical approach to understanding rhetorical history, identifies several important rhetorical mechanisms that helped to shift public discourse away from the ideology of scientific racism, and provides a starting point for further inquiry.

In this concluding chapter, I will reflect on the implications and contributions of the preceding chapters' work in tracing the rhetorical history of contemporary conceptualizations of race. First, I will summarize the conclusions of the previous chapters and highlight their potential contributions to critical whiteness studies. Second, I will delineate additional opportunities this project provides for future study in rhetorical history and criticism. Finally, I will reflect on the implications of the interdisciplinary aspects of this dissertation.

The "whiteness" of universal humanity

When one moves from the "micro" view of particular, textual mechanisms to a wider view that encompasses the overarching discourse as a whole, the discursive shift from scientific racism to universal humanity that this project depicts can be imagined in spatial terms: The discursive hierarchy that is at the core of scientific racism flattens into a center and margins; the "European races," once at the top of a "great chain," now sit at the discursive center, overlaid with a veneer of "universality." I have up to this point discussed the "figurative transformation" of images in the *Epic*, in which terms like the "American mind," "American character," and "American dream" that were once

explicitly linked only to European "racial" origins are "universalized." Through the rhetorical processes I have discussed, the American character is detached from its original, racially exclusive representational moorings. I have also described the narrative dialogism of *The Good Earth* that positions the Euro-centric perspective of the author and reader as a "universal" basis for racial representations. As I have stated, both of these rhetorical processes veil earlier articulations of racial hierarchy. What is perhaps not immediately evident, however, is that the national public discourse of the 1930s also stopped explicitly naming the terrain of whiteness.

This project's historical examination of rhetorical processes makes it possible to see how, in the 1930s, the "universal" became the medium through which "whiteness" was expressed but no longer articulated as such. Increasingly, from the 1930s onward, explicit claims to white supremacy and privilege were replaced in the national public discourse with a seemingly more inclusive language of ideal American character and universal citizenship. The rise of German Nazism, a fascist regime grounded in an explicit racial hierarchy, no doubt encouraged and extended the conceptual shifts I have studied in the dissertation. Nevertheless, the ideals and universal concepts that emerged in the 1930s were defined, implicitly, by whiteness. By tracing the changing representations of race at this historical moment, then, this project has created an additional scholarly opportunity: To historicize the study of discursive whiteness by tracing the particular rhetorical processes and mechanisms that facilitated its emergence. Following a brief discussion of how whiteness has been defined by contemporary

scholars, a review of the implications of each dissertation chapter will demonstrate their potential contribution to this ongoing scholarly work.

Nakayama and Krizek describe whiteness as a "strategic rhetoric" that is both "universal" and "invisible." They explain:

> "White" is a relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain. It affects the everyday fabric of our lives but resists, sometimes violently, any extensive characterization that would allow for the mapping of its contours. It wields power yet endures as a largely unarticulated position. (291)

While Nakayama and Krizek draw briefly on Roediger's work to acknowledge that "the history and tradition of the United States is replete with relentless efforts to retain and guard the boundaries of nationality with whiteness" (301), the transition from the contested whiteness of the first decades of the twentieth century to the "invisible" whiteness of the century's end deserves further attention from rhetorical historians. The preceding chapters of this dissertation offer one way that this work might be approached, using the critical tools presented by Jasinski's discussion of constitutive rhetorical historiography.

The rhetorical contradictions embedded in *The Epic of America* demonstrate that "white" was not always an "unmapped" or "unarticulated" terrain. It was, in fact, an extensively defined aspect of a widespread ideology that conflated different races, cultures, and national identities into a distinct and substantive whole. The commonplace acceptance of neo-Lamarckian scientific racism in 1930s popular culture is illustrated by

the role it played in the *Epic*, the bestselling history that introduced one of the nation's most treasured images, the American dream. I contend that "whiteness" emerged as an "uninterrogated space" (Krizek and Nakayama 293) in the *Epic* as the *substantive* reduction of the metonymic "American mind" and "American character" were transformed into *terminological* reductions, or symbolic expressions of socially-acquired characteristics. Recall that Adams said his "dream" was a product of the uniquely "British mind" as it encountered the extremes of the American environment and the challenges of the frontier. Each "trait" that "evolved" to support (or, sometimes, to endanger) the development of the dream is depicted as the result of a European pre-disposition, an environmental encounter, and a process of neo-Lamarckian use-inheritance. Until the concluding section of the *Epic*, American national identity is represented as the province of the "white races." However, in its final section, the specifically European origin of national characteristics dissolves into a transcendent dream that "evolved from the hearts and burdened souls of many millions, who have come to us from all nations" (Adams, *Epic* 416). Metonymic transformation makes the once explicitly Anglo qualities of the "dream" available to all.

The tension between neo-Lamarckian representations of and transcendent symbols for the national self is resolved in affirmative reviews of the text that endorse and re-circulate Adams' universalized vision of the "American dream." As the "dream" is embraced in a wider public reception, the once-quite-clearly-articulated terrain of white superiority remains in place. It is never interrogated or countered, but it is also not extended and expressed in the reviews. Rather than a nation derived from European stock

and transformed through neo-Lamarckian use inheritance, as Adams initially posits, the *New York Times* describes the American people as "predominately a nation of dreamers" who foster "an 'American Dream' of a better, richer, and happier life for citizens of every rank," a dream "held by a large body of the people with a tenacity which nothing has been able to shake" (Will 61). The *Epic* demonstrates first that "whiteness," in a specific ethnic sense, had once been an essential and articulated element of every aspect of the national social order. But it demonstrates, as well, that as the definitions of "race" and "culture" began to shift and the poetic "dream" took precedence over the represented "character," that "whiteness" faded into the background as an explicit dimension of social and national relations. In this way, the conceptual transformation of the "American dream" demonstrates a specific rhetorical process through which "whiteness" becomes an unarticulated or invisible aspect of public discourse. Further rhetorical study could elaborate on this rhetorical process in the *Epic*, identify a similar pattern of figurative transformation in additional texts, or trace the ways that the image of the "American dream," in particular, reinscribed a discourse of unarticulated whiteness over time.

Nakayama and Krizek observe that "[t]he invisibility of whiteness has been manifested through its universality. The universality of whiteness resides in its already defined position as everything" (293). If the analysis of the *Epic* highlights the invisibility of whiteness, the analysis of *The Good Earth* in chapter three illustrates a process through which "whiteness" and "universal" become consubstantial. By exploiting the potential of narrative heteroglossia, Buck is able to present anthropological observations that define racial "otherness," while closing the distance between the other and the self through

intimate narration of her Chinese protagonists' emotions and sensory perceptions. The tension between an orientalist perspective that defines the other from a place of "exteriority" (Said 20) and a more personal perspective that invites identification between the reader and other is carefully orchestrated through the novel's hybrid form. Gradually, the internal life of the racial other becomes an extension of a narrative self that can represent, sense, and speak for everyone. *The Good Earth* creates the potential for empathy between the reader and the racial other, but it also transforms a Euro-centric perspective into a de-racialized "blank slate" that is a pre-condition for objective understanding and representation. This "universal" self is endowed with the uninterrogated authority to define and identify with the racial "other," while the "other" has no independent voice.

The tension in the novel's dialogism is resolved by middlebrow reviewers who praise the novel's universal appeal. As the *Los Angeles Times* review states, "Though the story is rich in the detail of Chinese custom and tradition it has that universality that makes it true for all workers of the land everywhere" ("Books of the Month" 26). This "universality" that middlebrow reviewers argue for in their interpretations of *The Good Earth* is an emergent sign of the contemporary "whiteness" that Krizek and Nakayama describe. Though highbrow reviewers make it clear that accessible and intimate accounts of the other are not universally accepted, and Asian and Asian American voices dispute Buck's authority to formulate "universal" representations of particular groups, a majority of readers viewed *The Good Earth* as a welcome and enlightening encounter with the racial other. At one level, this acceptance of "a realistic portrayal of difference" (Suqiao

163) is a welcome change from stereotypical representations. However, as the "white" subject becomes the "universal" spokesperson, Buck also universalizes culturally-specific codes for authoritative speech. The "universal" voice earns the right to speak *for* the other, as Pearl S. Buck and her husband spoke before U.S. Congress to advocate for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, when "actual Chinese individuals, such as Lin Yutang and Helena Kuo, good friends of Pearl Buck," were not allowed to do so (So 105). The "other," herself, must negotiate with so-called "universal" discourse in order to gain a voice. The specific dialogic processes that universalize the "white" voice are therefore an important topic for further study, which would continue to historicize the emergence of discursive whiteness.

If *The Epic of America* and *The Good Earth* show that metonymic transformation of once-representative figures and the careful orchestration of "objective" and "intimate" narrative voices are both rhetorical mechanisms involved in the historical emergence of an unarticulated whiteness in the United States, the reception of *Mules and Men* is evidence of this incipient discourse's potential consequences. When the white voice of authority speaks in the language of the (white) universal, then "white" becomes both "everything and nothing" (Krizek and Nakayama 297), and voices of cultural particularity are always "outside" of what is visible and articulated. Hurston disrupts this "inside/outside" boundary, creating her own space for the vernacular discourse of rural African American communities with carefully-rendered systems of language, definition, and verification. *Mules and Men* posits the validity of particular representations of communities of color, while continuing to question the validity of any totalizing system

of representation, for any race. Even as Hurston's informants reveal patterns of misdirection and veil elements of dissent in humor, the text offers the "keys" to its readers. The "hidden transcript" of an enclave community (Squires 458) is here made whole and public. *Mules and Men* offers irrefutable proof that whiteness is not universal, as it affirms the humanity and exceptionalism of every community, regardless of its race or culture.

Unfortunately, as reviews of the text demonstrate, *Mules and Men* does not find a place in the emerging discourse of human universality. Reviewers in the mass market are quick to return to the assumptions of nineteenth-century scientific racism in their interpretations of the text. Hurston's reputation among this group of readers will disappear under a deluge of racial stereotypes that undermine the challenge that *Mules and Men* makes against a growing universal (white) American identity. Given the potential for *Mules and Men* to reinforce the very stereotypes they were trying to refute, reviewers from the African American counter-public critiqued the text and its author for not engaging issues of race and racism in the appropriate way. Without affirmative interpretations to weave the text into the broader discourse, *Mules and Men* and its author disappeared from public view until Alice Walker championed the text, in a much different historical context, some three decades later (Wall 77; Gates, "Afterword" 292).

Nevertheless, the public presence of *Mules and Men* in 1935 proves that the emergence of unarticulated whiteness in historical discourse was not uncontested; it also was not a universal characteristic of public discourse. Indeed, to call whiteness "universal" even in contemporary discourse demonstrates a kind of myopia. As *Mules*

and Men ultimately shows, unarticulated whiteness emerges as a result of a mass-mediated interpretive perspective, rather than a textual absence. Hurston certainly spoke, though her voice was misinterpreted and marginalized. In her careful and systematic rendering of vernacular discourse, Hurston showed that valid representations of particular communities and common humanity do not need to speak in a "universal" voice. And following Hurston, generations of literary and rhetorical scholars, writers, artists, and activists have articulated their visions of race and racism in the United States. People of color in the United States are not silent on issues of race; they are, more generally, not *heard* by mass (white) audiences, just as *Mules and Men* was acknowledged, but not meaningfully understood, within dominant discourse in the 1930s. It is possible to trace this paradoxical consequence of "universal" and "invisible" whiteness—that is, the apparent "invisibility" of those who fall outside of the white norm—along with the discursive emergence of unarticulated whiteness, itself. The rhetorical mechanisms that undergird discursive whiteness and the consequences of this discursive formation can be traced through examinations of rhetorical form and subsequent interpretive articulations. Continuing to study these rhetorical processes can shed light on not only the historical emergence of these dysfunctional dynamics, but also potential rhetorical correctives. In other words, a historicized study of the discourse of unarticulated whiteness can help to reveal "what happened," so that rhetorical scholars can set the stage for the next important step: "what we can do about it." This dissertation provides the tools and materials for just such an analysis.

Toward an interdisciplinary rhetorical history

This project has demonstrated the value of Jasinski's constitutive approach to rhetorical historiography in tracing the rhetorical underpinnings of changing conceptualizations of race in the early decades of the twentieth century. By relying on Jasinski's "modification" of "Leff's intentional and extensional distinction" to assert the "constitutive potential" of both "concrete textual forms" and the interpretive activities that result from its circulation (74-5), I have highlighted the importance and the limitations of finding evidence of historical change in discrete rhetorical forms. A text unto itself has the potential to transform broader concepts, but readers (who are also rhetors) must "release" that "constitutive potential" (to borrow Jasinksi's words), weaving the text into the emerging discourse through their articulated interpretive activities. The readers of *The Epic of America* showed the potential of idealized rhetorical figures to transcend the biological logic of scientific racism in order to constitute a universal national self. The readers of *The Good Earth* demonstrated that narrative dialogism can give that universal self the authority to represent, and even to imaginatively become, the racial other. In contrast, the failure of readers to justly incorporate *Mules and Men* into a "universal" vision highlights the limitations and consequences of the ongoing discursive transformation; voices that do not conform to "universal" norms are not perceived by, and are certainly not granted rhetorical agency within, the public sphere. These texts and their reviews provided opportunities to examine rhetorical forms and the interactions they invited in the broader discourse. Using

these texts, I was able to identify distinct rhetorical mechanisms that were part of a larger conceptual transformation in discourse related to race in this historical moment.

Because the discursive change that is at the heart of this study is immense, multi-faceted, and too extensive for one project to address, I chose to focus on only three texts. Within these texts and the rhetorical interactions they sparked, I identified specific rhetorical mechanisms that helped to change the overall discourse related to race in public discourse; the third case study, especially, highlighted the limits of the emerging conceptual change. Future study could illuminate the rhetorical mechanisms and limitations I identified in this project in other texts and perhaps discover many additional rhetorical mechanisms and processes at work. As these discourses are mapped, the particular means through which explicit forms of racism receded and discursive universality and whiteness emerged might be more clearly described and distinguished. The social and political transformations that followed and relied on the emerging discursive norms—an immense and important terrain that was outside of the scope of this project—could also be explored. The changing understanding of race in the interwar years, and the incipient emergence of unarticulated whiteness during this time, deserve extensive further study by rhetorical scholars. This project served as a starting point for the textual analysis of this rhetorical transformation, demonstrated the utility of particular critical tools, and identified several texts that played an important (though not an exclusive) part in a discursive transformation that is significant because it continues to shape the world in which we live. As I observe the overtly racist discourse of the past from a contemporary context, in which what Imani Perry calls the "practices of

inequality" are veiled in relentlessly "race-neutral" language, I can now see a rhetorical method for tracing how we got "here" from "there."

By placing "readers" at the center of rhetorical analysis, this study has also demonstrated the value of crossing the disciplinary boundaries of rhetorical studies from Communication to English and even Media Studies. The critical tools I used to trace conceptual change in historical discourse belong to the discipline of communication studies; the texts that I chose and the interpretive activity I placed in the foreground (i.e., reading) sit more comfortably within the disciplinary territory of English. My intention was to use all available tools to identify and understand specific rhetorical processes working within the turbulent discourse related to race and national identity during this historical moment. Ultimately, I propose that the popularity and the intimacy of reading, along with the interpretive articulations left by a corps of book reviewers, make it a fertile ground for a constitutive study of rhetorical history.

I am, of course, not alone in my disciplinary border crossing. As I embrace the interpretive activities of English to trace the historical emergence of discursive whiteness, I encounter a literary studies scholar crossing the same disciplinary boundary, championing the interpretive activity of speech communication for a similar purpose. Krista Ratcliffe's investigation of gender and whiteness leads her to define and advocate for the concept of "rhetorical listening" within rhetoric and composition studies. Ratcliffe defines "rhetorical listening" in part as "a trope for interpretive invention" that "signifies a stance of openness that a person may assume in relation to *any* person, text or culture" (17). She goes on to state that rhetorical listening "proceeds from an accountability logic"

that acknowledges the implications of history in the present moment, while avoiding a logic of "guilt" or "blame" (32). In her words:

> A logic of accountability invites us to consider how all of us are, at present, culturally implicated in effects of the past (via our resulting privileges and/or their lack) and, thus, accountable for what we do about situations now, even if we are not responsible for their origins. (32)

By framing "rhetorical listening" as both an act of "interpretive invention" and a "code of cross-cultural conduct" (17), Ratcliffe enlists the full range of concepts available to rhetorical scholars in order to propose a way out of the contemporary quandary that I seek to trace the origins of. In this dissertation, I posited the interpretive activity of "reading" as an important missing piece in the historical study of the incipient emergence of discursive whiteness. As this historical discourse is understood more fully, the understanding of "origins" could be incorporated into the context of our present actions. Ratcliffe identifies "listening" as a way toward the contemporary alleviation of that historical discourse's consequences. This intersection shows that the "disciplinary borders" within rhetorical studies are, indeed, fertile ground for understanding the historical origins of contemporary rhetorical problems, and for imagining productive solutions.

Works Cited

"1932 Bestsellers in Nation Listed." *The New York Times* 17 Jan. 1933: 17. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 7 April 2010.

Adams, Donald. "A Sequel to the Good Earth: Pearl Buck's 'Sons' is a Vivid Chronicle of Revolutionary China." Review of *Sons*, by Pearl S. Buck. *New York Times* 25 Sept. 1932: BR1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 23 May 2012.

Adams, James Truslow. "Abounding Zest." *The New York Times* 17 Jan. 1932: SM1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 31 Jan. 2010.

---. "America Faces 1933's Realities." *New York Times* 1 Jan. 1933: SM1+. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 10 May 2010.

---. *The Epic of America*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1931. Print.

---. "Our Heritage from Washington." *Woman's Home Companion* Feb. 1932: 13-15. Print.

Bacon, Jacqueline. "Acting As Freemen: Rhetoric, Race, and Reform in The Debate Over Colonization In Freedom's Journal, 1827-1828." Quarterly Journal Of Speech 93.1 (2007): 58-83. Communication & Mass Media Complete. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

---. "'Do You Understand Your Own Language?' Revolutionary Topoi in The Rhetoric Of African-American Abolitionists." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 28.2 (1998): 55-75. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

Baker, Houston A., Jr. *Blues, Ideology, and African American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984. Print.

---. "Workings of the Spirit: Conjure and the Space of Black Women's Creativity." *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. Print. Amistad Literary Series.

Baker, Lee. *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Print.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Print.

Barrett, James R. and David Roediger. "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16.3 (1997): 3-44. *JStor*. Web. 25 April 2013.

Barry, Betsy. "'It's Hard Fuh Me to Understand What You Mean, de Way You Tell It': Representing Language in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Language and Literature* 10.2 (2001): 171-186. *Sage Journals*. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. Print.

Bartow, Charles L. "Just Now: Aimee Semple McPherson's Performance and Preaching of Jesus." *Journal of Communication & Religion* 20.1 (April, 1997): 71-79. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 May 2010.

Becker, Carl. Rev. of *The Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams. The *American Historical Review* 37.3 (April 1932): 558-561. Web. *JSTor*. 18 Dec. 2012.

Benchley, Robert. "The Chinese Situation." *Harper's Bazaar* Nov. 1932: 49. Print.

Black, Edwin. “The Second Persona.” *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*. Ed. Carl R. Burgchardt. State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2005. 87-96. Print.

Boeckmann, Cathy. *A Question of Character: Scientific Racism and the Genres of American Fiction, 1892-1912*. Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 2000. Print.

“Book Notes.” *New York Times* 5 Dec. 1932: 15. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 May 2010.

“Books of the Month Offer Sharp Contrast.” Rev. of *The Good Earth*, by Pearl S. Buck. *Los Angeles Times* 8 Mar. 1931: 26. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 23 May 2012.

“Books: Where Farmers are Chinamen.” Rev. of *The Good Earth*, by Pearl S. Buck. *Time* 16 Mar. 1931: n. pag. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

Boxwell, D. A. “ ‘Sis Cat’ as Ethnographer: Self-Presentation and Self-Inscription in Zora Neale Hurston's Mules and Men.” *African American Review* 26.4 (1992): 605-617. *JStor*. Web. 19 Sept. 2012.

Brock, H.I. “The Full, True Flavor of Life in a Negro Community.” Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *New York Times* 10 Nov. 1935: BR4. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Brown, Stephen J. *The World of Imagery: Metaphor and Kindred Imagery*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co., 1927. Print.

Brown, Sterling A. “Old Time Tales.” Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *The New Masses* 25 Feb. 1936: 24-25. *UNZ.org*. Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Buck, Pearl S. “Beautiful Ladies.” *Colliers* 1 Sept. 1934: 18+. Print.

---. “Early Chinese Novel.” *Saturday Review of Literature* 6 June 1931: 873-874. Print.

---. "Frill." *Woman's Home Companion* March 1933: 7+. Print.

---. *The Good Earth*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2009. Print.

---. “Is there a Case for Foreign Missions?” *Harper's* Jan. 1933: 143-155. Web. 12 July 2011.

---. *Is there a Case for Foreign Missions?* New York: The John Day Co., 1932. Print.

---. “Quarrel.” *Ladies' Home Journal* Nov. 1932: 6+. Print.

---. “Shanghai Scene.” *Asia* 34 (Feb. 1934): 74-75. Print.

---. “Two Women.” *Woman's Home Companion* Nov. 1933: 7+. Print.

---. “A Letter from Abroad.” *Opportunity* Mar. 1934: 70-71. Print.

---. “As Man Thinketh, So Is He.” *Opportunity* Dec. 1934: 361. Print.

---. “Mrs. Buck Replies to her Chinese Critic.” *New York Times* 15 Jan. 1933: BR2+. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 May 2010.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. Print.

Butcher, Fanny. “Newest Adams Book Confined to Bare Facts.” Rev. of *The March of Democracy*, by James Truslow Adams. *Chicago Daily Tribune* 6 Oct. 1932: 17. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 11 July 2010.

Butsch, Richard. *The Citizen Audience: Crowds, Publics, and Individuals*. Routledge: New York and London, 2008. Print.

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2.1 (2005): 1-19. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.

Casey, Michael and Aimee Rowe. " 'Driving Out the Money Changers': Radio Priest Charles E. Coughlin's Rhetorical Vision." *Journal of Communication & Religion* 19.1 (1996): 37-47. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 May 2010.

Cevasco, George A. "Pearl Buck and the Chinese Novel." *Asian Studies* 5 (1967): 437-450. Print.

Chubb, Thomas Caldecot. Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *The North American Review* 241.1 (1936): 181-183. *JStor*. Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Conn, Peter J. *Pearl S. Buck : A Cultural Biography*. New York; Cambridge, England; New York: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print.

---. "Introduction: Rediscovering Pearl S. Buck." *The Several Worlds of Pearl S. Buck: Essays Presented at a Centennial Symposium, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, March 26-28, 1992*. Ed. Elizabeth J. Lipscomb, Frances E. Webb, and Peter Conn. Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994. Print. Contributions in Women's Studies 144.

Counts, George S. "Vision of a New Age Urged in Education." *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1932: E7. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 May 2010.

"Creative Reading Enriches Mind, Speaker Tells Club." *New York Times* 24 Dec. 1933: A4. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 8 Apr. 2010.

Daniels, Jonathan. “Black Magic and Dark Laughter.” Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *Saturday Review* 19 Oct. 1935: 12. *UNZ.org.* Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Decker, Jeffrey Louis. *Made in America : Self-Styled Success from Horatio Alger to Oprah Winfrey*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print.

Degler, Carl. *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

Dewey, John. “Dewey Discusses Goal of Education.” *New York Times* 1 Nov. 1931: E7. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 May 2010.

Dodd, William E. “How Go-Getters Rock U.S. Ideals Out of Cradle.” Rev. of *The Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams. *Chicago Daily Tribune* 30 Sept. 1931: 15. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 18 Dec. 2012.

Eberly, Rosa A. *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*. Urbana and Chicago, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2000. Print.

Engar, Ann W. “Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973).” *American Women Writers, 1900-1945: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Laurie Champion. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000. 55-60. Print.

Rev. of *Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams. *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 16.4 (1932): 317-318. *JStor*. Web. 18 Dec. 2012.

Rev. of *Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams. *World Affairs* 95.2 (1932): 131. *JStor*. Web. 18 Dec. 2012.

Fahnestock, Jeanne. *Rhetorical Style: The Uses of Language in Persuasion*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.

Farmer, Frank, ed. *Landmark Essays on Bakhtin, Rhetoric, and Writing*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998. Print. Landmark Essays.

"Folk Lore and Voodoo." Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *The New York Amsterdam News* 14 Dec. 1935: 6. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Ford, Lillian C. "Idealist Interprets Past." Rev. of *The Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams. *Los Angeles Times* 11 Oct. 1931: B7+. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 11 July 2010.

Frederickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. Print.

Frydman, Jason. "Zora Neale Hurston, Biographical Criticism, and African Diasporic Vernacular Culture." *MELUS* 34.4 (2009): 99-118. *JStor*. Web. 29 Apr. 2013.

Gannett, Lewis. Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *The New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* 11 Oct. 1935. Rpt. in Gates and Appiah 11-13.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "Afterword: Zora Neale Hurston: 'A Negro Way of Saying.'" *Mules and Men*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.

---. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. Print.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and K.A. Appiah, eds. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993. Print. Amistad Literary Series.

Gerstle, Gary. *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001. Print.

Gibbs, Raymond W., Jr. *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Print.

Rev. of *The Good Earth*, by Pearl S. Buck. *Advocate of Peace through Justice* 93.4 (1931): 253. *JStor*. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

"The Good Earth and Other Recent Works of Fiction." Rev. of *The Good Earth,* by Pearl S. Buck. *New York Times* 15 Mar. 1931: BR6. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 23 May 2012.

Goodwin, Mary. "Homes Away From Home: The Intimate Geographies of Pearl Buck and Gertrude Stein." *NTU Studies in Language and Literature* 19 (2008): 117-154. Print.

Gray, William S. and Ruth Munroe. *The Reading Interests and Habits of Adults*. New York: Macmillan company, 1929. Print.

Greene, Suzanne Ellery. *Books for Pleasure: Popular Fiction, 1914-1945*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1974. Print.

Haller, John. *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. Print.

Harker, Jaime. *America the Middlebrow: Women's Novels, Progressivism, and Middlebrow Authorship between the War.* Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007. Print. Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book.

Hartnett, Stephen J. *Democratic Dissent & the Cultural Fictions of Antebellum America*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2002. Print.

---. "Fanny Fern's 1855 Ruth Hall, the Cheerful Brutality of Capitalism, and the Irony of Sentimental Rhetoric." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88.1 (2002): 1-18. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

Hazen, David W. Rev. of *Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams. *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 33.1 (1932): 84-85. *JStor*. Web. 18 Dec. 2012.

Hemenway, Robert E. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980. Print.

Herskovits, Melville J. "To the Editor of *Folklore*." *Folklore* 48.2 (1937): 219-221. *JStor*. Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Hill, Edwin Conger. *The American Scene*. New York: Witmark Educational Publications, Dept. of M. Witmark & Sons, 1933. Print.

Hoover, Herbert. "President Hoover's Speech at Yorktown." *New York Times* 20 Oct. 1931: 12. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 May 2010.

Houck, Davis W. *FDR and Fear itself: The First Inaugural Address*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002. Print.

---. "Killing Emmett." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8.2 (2005): 225-262. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

---. *Rhetoric as Currency: Hoover, Roosevelt, and the Great Depression*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001. Print.

Hurston, Zora Neale. “Characteristics of Negro Expression.” *Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings.* Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. New York: The Library of America, 1995. 830-845. Print.

---. “How it Feels to be Colored Me.” *Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings.* Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. New York: The Library of America, 1995. Print.

---. *Mules and Men*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.

Jackson, John P., Jr. “Whatever Happened to the Cephalic Index? The Reality of Race and the Burden of Proof.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40.5 (2010): 438-458. *Taylor and Francis*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

Jasinski, James. “A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography: Toward an Understanding of the Discursive (Re)constitution of ‘Constitution’ in *The Federalist Papers*.” *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*. Ed. Kathleen J. Turner. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1998. Print.

Johnson, Barbara. “Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *Black Literature & Literary Theory*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York and London: Methuen, 1984. 205-220. Print.

---. “Thresholds of Difference: Structures of Address in Zora Neale Hurston.” *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. Print. Amistad Literary Series.

Jones, Gayl. “Breaking Out of the Conventions of Dialect.” *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 141-153. Print. Amistad Literary Series.

Kang, Younghill. “China is Different.” Rev. of *The Good Earth,* by Pearl S. Buck and *The Tragedy of Ah Qui, and other modern Chinese Stories,* trans. by Kyn Yn Yu and E. H. F. Mills. *The New Republic* 1 July 1931: 185-6. Web. 8 Apr. 2013.

Kaplan, Richard L. “From Partisanship to Professionalism: The Transformation of the Daily Press.” *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940.* Eds. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. 116-139. Print. A History of the Book in America 4.

Kiang Kang-Hu. “A Chinese Scholar's View of Mrs. Buck's Novels.” *New York Times* 15 Jan. 1933: BR2. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers.* Web. 23 May 2012.

Kiewe, Amos. *FDR's First Fireside Chat : Public Confidence and the Banking Crisis*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007. Print.

Kroeber, A.L. “Inheritance by Magic.” *American Anthropologist* 18.1 (1916): 19-40. *JStor*. Web. 25 Jan. 2012.

Lee, Erika. *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era: 1882-1943*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003. Print.

Lee, Michael J. “The Conservative Canon and Its Uses.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 15.1 (2012): 1-39. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 21 Apr. 2013.

Lee, Michael James. “Creating Conservatism: Postwar Words that made a Movement.” Diss. University of Minnesota, 2008. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Apr. 2013.

Leff, Michael. "Hermeneutical Rhetoric." *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in our Time*. Ed. Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. 196-214. Print.

Leong, Karen J. *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005. Print.

Lucaites, John Louis, and Celeste Michelle Condit. "Reconstructing <Equality>: Culturetypal And Counter-Cultural Rhetorics in the Martyred Black Vision." *Communication Monographs* 57.1 (1990): 5-24. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

Lye, Colleen. *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005. Print.

Maddux, Kristy. "The Feminized Gospel: Aimee Semple Mcpherson and the Gendered Performance of Christianity." *Women's Studies in Communication* 35.1 (2012): 42-67. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

---. "The Foursquare Gospel of Aimee Semple Mcpherson." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14.2 (2011): 291-326. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

Mailloux, Steven. *Rhetorical Power*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989. Print.

---. “Places in Time: The Inns and Outhouses of Rhetoric.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92.1 (2006): 53-68. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

Malik, Kenan. *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society*. New York: New York University Press, 1996. Print.

Marsh, Sabrina. “‘The Odds and Ends of Things’: Dorothy Day’s 1930s Catholic Worker Columns and the Prudent Translation of Catholic Social Teachings.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42.4: 330-352. Print.

McGee, Michael Calvin. “Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture.” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (Summer 1990), 274-289. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

McNeill, B. C. Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *The Journal of Negro History* 21.2 (1936): 223-225. *JStor*. Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Meisenhelder, Susan. “Conflict and Resistance in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men*.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 19.433 (1996): 267-288. *JStor*. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.

Moon, Henry Lee. “Big Old Lies.” Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *New Republic* 11 Dec. 1935. Rpt. in Gates and Appiah 10.

Murphy, John M. “Mikhail Bakhtin And The Rhetorical Tradition.” *Quarterly Journal Of Speech* 87.3 (2001): 259. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 27 May 2013.

Nakayama, Thomas K., and Robert L. Krizek. "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric." *Quarterly Journal Of Speech* 81.3 (1995): 291. Communication & Mass Media Complete. Web. 7 Feb. 2012.

Needham, Wilbur. "Store-Porch Stories." Rev. of *Mules and Men,* by Zora Neale Hurston. *Los Angeles Times*. 08 Dec 1935. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Nevins, Allan. *James Truslow Adams: Historian of the American Dream*. Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1968. Print.

Ogles, Robert M., and Herbert H. Howard. "Father Coughlin in the Periodical Press, 1931-1942." *Journalism Quarterly* 61.2 (1984): 280-363. *Communication and Mass Media Complete.* Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

Ono, Kent A. and John M. Sloop. "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse." *Communication Monographs* 62 (March, 1995): 19-46. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.

Pahler, Stephanie. "Zora Neale Hurston '28: Paradoxical Genius of the South." Barnard College. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

Parker, Maegan. "Desiring Citizenship: A Rhetorical Analysis Of The Wells/Willard Controversy." *Women's Studies in Communication* 31.1 (2008): 56-78. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

---. "Ironic Openings: The Interpretive Challenge of the 'Black Manifesto'." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94.3 (2008): 320-342. *Communication & Mass Media Complete.* Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

"Pearl Buck Speaks." *The Chicago Defender* 21 Jan. 1933, national ed.: 14. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 7 Apr. 2010.

Perry, Imani. *More Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the U.S.* New York: New York University Press, 2011. Print.

Putnam, Aric. " 'Modern Slaves': The Liberian Labor Crisis and the Politics of Race and Class." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9.2 (2006): 235-256. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

---. "Ethiopia is Now: J. A. Rogers and the Rhetoric of Black Anticolonialism during the Great Depression." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10.3 (2007): 419-444. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

Quinn, Arthur. *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1982. Print.

Rabb, Jane. "Who's Afraid of Pearl S. Buck?" *The Several Worlds of Pearl S. Buck: Essays Presented at a Centennial Symposium, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, March 26-28, 1992*. Eds. Elizabeth J. Lipscomb, Frances E. Webb, and Peter Conn. Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994. 103-110. Print. Contributions in Women's Studies 144.

Radway, Janice A. *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Print.

Radway, Janice A. and Carl F. Kaestle. "Introduction to 'Part B: Reading in Situ'." *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States*. Ed.

Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway. 471. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Print. A History of the Book in America 4.

Rampersand, Arnold. Foreword. *Mules and Men*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008. Print.

Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006. Print.

Rippy, J.Fred. Rev. of *The Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams, and *The Soul of America*, by Arthur Hobson Quinn. *American Literature* 4.3 (1932): 330-332. *EBSCO*. Web. 3 Jan. 2010.

Roediger, David. *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*. New York: Basic Books, 2005. Print.

Rogers, Will. "Will Rogers Remarks." *Los Angeles Times* 7 Mar 1932: 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 23 May 2012.

Rubin, Joan Shelley. *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. Print.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979. Print.

Schneider, Isidor. "The Novels of Mrs. Buck." Rev. of *Sons*, by Pearl S. Buck. *Nation* 16 Nov 1932: 481-482. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 23 May 2012.

So, Richard Jean. "Fictions of Natural Democracy: Pearl Buck, *The Good Earth*, and the Asian American Subject." *Representations* 112.1 (2010): 87-111. *JStor*. Web. 2 Oct. 2011.

Spencer, Stephen. “The Discourse of Whiteness: Chinese-American History, Pearl S. Buck, and *The Good Earth*.” *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture* 1.1 (2002): n. pag. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

---. “Popular Culture and the Rural Dream: Cultural Contexts and the Literary History of *The Good Earth*.” *Atenea* 20.2 (2000): 125-137. Print.

Squires, Catherine R. “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres.” *Communication Theory* 12.4 (2002): 446-468. *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.

Stocking, George W. *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968. Print.

Suoqiao, Qian. “Pearl S. Buck: A Cosmopolitan Critic.” *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 3.2 (2005): 153-172. *Ingenta Connect*. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

“Symposium on China.” *Los Angeles Times* 7 May 1932: II.1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 29 Apr. 2013.

Thomas, David Y. Rev. of *The Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams. *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 18.4 (1932): 549-550. *JStor*. Web. 18 Dec. 2012.

Thomson, James C., Jr. “Keynote Address: Pearl S. Buck and the American Quest for China.” *The Several Worlds of Pearl S. Buck: Essays Presented at a Centennial Symposium, Randolph-Macon Woman’s College, March 26-28, 1992*. Eds. Elizabeth J. Lipscomb, Frances E. Webb, and Peter Conn. Westport, CT and

London: Greenwood Press, 1994. 7-16. Print. Contributions in Women's Studies 144.

"Three Somewhat Similar Maps." *Democratic Underground*. 10 Nov. 2012. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*. Trans. Gerald E. Bevan. Intro. Isaac Kramnick. London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

Tompkins, Jane. "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism." *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Ed. Jane Tompkins. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. Print.

Venezky, Richard L. and Carl F. Kaestle. "From McGuffey to Dick and Jane: Reading Textbooks." *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*. Eds. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. 415-430. Print. A History of the Book in America 4.

"Vernacular." *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Ed. Angus Stevenson. Oxford Reference Online, 2010. Web. 12 Sept. 2012.

Walker, Alice. "Foreward: Zora Neale Hurston—A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View." *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. By Robert Hemenway. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980. Print.

Wall, Cheryl A. "Zora Neale Hurston: Changing Her Own Words." *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. Print. Amistad Literary Series.

Walters, Keith. "'He Can Read My Writing but He sho' Can't Read My Mind': Zora Neale Hurston's Revenge in *Mules and Men*." *The Journal of American Folklore* 112.445 (1999): 343-371. *JStor*. Web. 18 Sept. 2012.

Walton, Eda Lou. "Another Epic Of The Soil." Rev. of *The Good Earth*, by Pearl S. Buck. *Nation* 13 May 1931: 534. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 23 May 2012.

Watts, Eric King. "African American Ethos And Hermeneutical Rhetoric: An Exploration Of Alain Locke's The New Negro." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88.1 (2002): 19-32. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

---. "Cultivating A Black Public Voice: W. E. B. Du Bois and the 'Criteria of Negro Art.'" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4.2 (2001): 181-201. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

Welky, David. *Everything was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008. Print.

Will, Allen Sinclair. "America, Nation of Dreamers." Rev. of *The Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams. *New York Times* 4 Oct. 1931: BR1+. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 10 May 2010.

Williams, Joseph J. Rev. of *Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston. *Folklore* 47.3 (1936): 329-334. *JStor*. Web. 20 Oct. 2012.

Williams, Vernon J. *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries*. Lexington, Ky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996. Print.

Willis, Susan. "Wandering: Hurston's Search for Self and Method." *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. Print. Amistad Literary Series.

Wilson, Kirt H. "The Contested Space of Prudence in the 1847-1875 Civil Rights Debate." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84.2 (1998): 131-149. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

---. "Interpreting The Discursive Field Of The Montgomery Bus Boycott: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Holt Street Address." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8.2 (2005): 299-326. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

---. "The Racial Politics of Imitation in the Nineteenth Century." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89.2 (2003): 89-108. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

---. "Towards a Discursive Theory of Racial Identity: The Souls of Black Folk as a Response to Nineteenth-Century Biological Determinism." *Western Journal Of Communication* 63.2 (1999): 193-215. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.

Wong, K. Scott and Sucheng Chan, eds. *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. Print.

"Writer Receives Honorable Mention from Literary Club." *Chicago Defender* 6 Mar. 1937, national ed.: 6. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 2012 Oct. 20.

Zen, Sophia Chen. Rev. of *The Good Earth*, by Pearl S. Buck. *Pacific Affairs* 4.10 (1931): 914-915. *JStor*. Web. 29 Apr. 2013.