

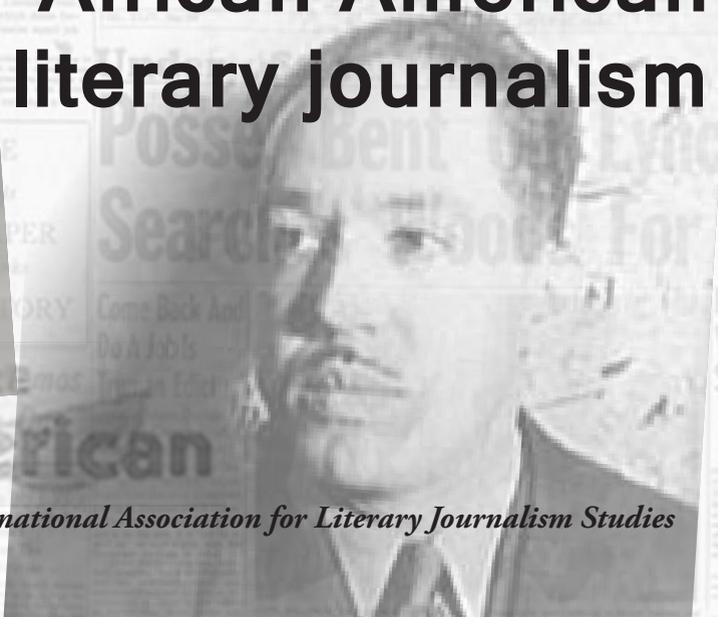
IJLS Literary Journalism Studies

Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall 2013



EBONY

Special issue: African American literary journalism



The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

On the Cover

Our cover reflects the five African American literary journalists we explore in this issue. Clockwise, starting upper left, is Richard Wright, Isabel Wilkerson, Langston Hughes, Ollie Stewart, and, center, Sylvester Monroe.

Literary Journalism Studies

The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

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SUBMISSION INFORMATION

LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES invites submission of original scholarly articles on literary journalism, which is also known as narrative journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, New Journalism, and the nonfiction novel, as well as literary and narrative nonfiction that emphasizes cultural revelation. The journal has an international focus and seeks submissions on the theory, history, and pedagogy of literary journalism throughout the world. All disciplinary approaches are welcome. Submissions should be informed with an awareness of the existing scholarship and should be between 3,000 and 8,000 words in length, including notes. To encourage international dialogue, the journal is open to publishing on occasion short examples or excerpts of previously published literary journalism accompanied by a scholarly gloss about or an interview with the writer who is not widely known outside his or her country. The example or excerpt must be translated into English. The scholarly gloss or interview should generally be between 1,500 and 2,500 words long and indicate why the example is important in the context of its national culture. Together, both the text and the gloss generally should not exceed 8,000 words in length. The contributor is responsible for obtaining all copyright permissions, including from the publisher, author and translator as necessary. The journal is also willing to consider publication of exclusive excerpts of narrative literary journalism accepted for publication by major publishers.

Email submission (as a Microsoft Word attachment) is mandatory. A cover page indicating the title of the paper, the author's name, institutional affiliation, and contact information, along with an abstract (50–100 words), should accompany all submissions. The cover page should be sent as a separate attachment from the abstract and submission to facilitate distribution to readers. No identification should appear linking the author to the submission or abstract. All submissions must be in English Microsoft Word and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* (Humanities endnote style) <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html>. All submissions will be blind reviewed. Send submissions to the editor at <literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com>.

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BOOK REVIEWS are invited. They should be 1,000–2,000 words and focus on the scholarship of literary journalism and recent original works of literary journalism that deserve greater recognition among scholars. Book reviews are not blind reviewed but selected by the book review editor based on merit. Reviewers may suggest book review prospects or write the book review editor for suggestions. Usually reviewers will be responsible for obtaining their respective books. Book reviews and/or related queries should be sent to Nancy L. Roberts at <nroberts@albany.edu>

Note from the Editor...

In this special issue we turn to the subject of African American literary journalism. The African American presence in literary journalism is one that has not been studied nearly enough. But it is no surprise that the African American community has engaged in its own literary journalism because literary journalism has as its focus those who too often were consigned as the cultural other. In this issue we see how African Americans spoke for their community. Some will be more familiar, such as Richard Wright and Langston Hughes. But Ollie Stewart was known for the most only in the African American community when he wrote for the *Baltimore Afro American*.



Meanwhile, changes are afoot at *LJS*. I will be stepping down as editor after next spring's issue. It will have been five-some years since a group of us started the journal (and eight since its planning began), and it is time for me to move on. But the journal will be in good hands. Bill Reynolds from the School of Journalism at Ryerson University in Toronto, who is the outgoing president of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, the parent organization of the journal, will be "stepping up" to the journal as the new editor (I consider it a promotion from being president). Last year, a search committee put out a call for nominations. And I'm pleased to say that Bill was the unanimous choice. He has been a member of the association since our first conference in Nancy, France, in 2006, and his efforts reflect the selfless dedication so many members have contributed to make this organization such a success.



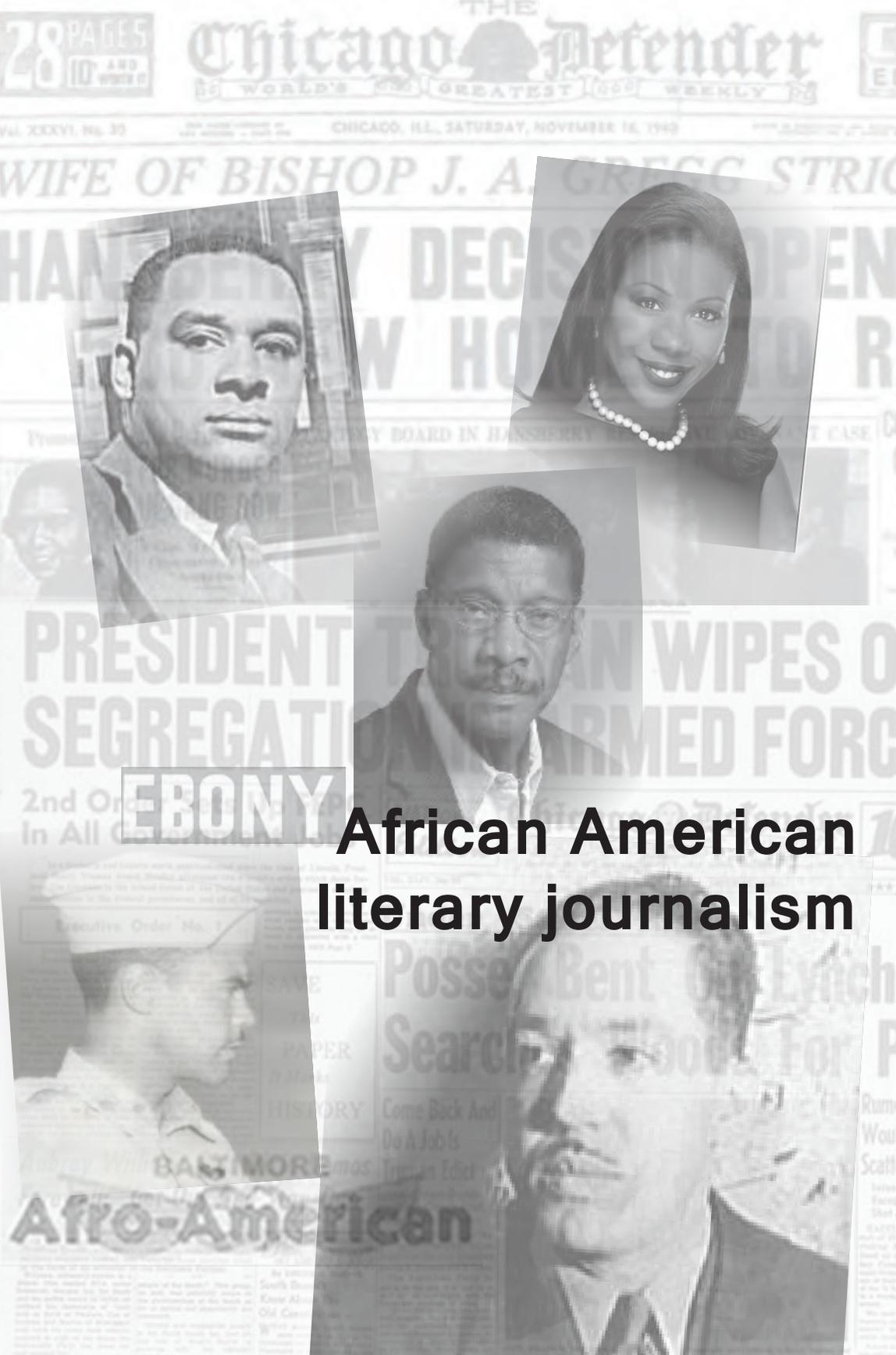
Lynn Cunningham

Finally, I would like to welcome our newest associate editor, Lynn Cunningham, also of Ryerson University. Lynn brings much needed professional skills to the journal as our chief copyeditor. Lynn is an associate professor at Ryerson's School of Journalism. Prior to joining the faculty she spent twenty years as a book and magazine editor. At Ryerson she has been closely associated with the multi-award-winning *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, produced by graduating-year students.

Lynn is now our arbitrator of style, a position I happily cede to her. One cannot express enough just how important this function is. And perhaps I was getting just a little too old fashioned. I have really found it difficult to accept that the abbreviation for the U.S. in Chicago Humanities style is now US. I suppose that was driven by the trend to abbreviate the United Kingdom as UK. But somehow I am uncomfortable with "us" and "uk." That is why I am happy that I won't have to arbitrate over the style issues. Thank you, Lynn, for delivering *us* and *uk* from Babel.

And now to our special issue on African American literary journalism.

John C. Hartsock



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EBONY

African American literary journalism

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Executive Order No. 1

SAVE... PAPER... HISTORY...
Come Back And Do A Job's
Trojan Effect

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Special Issue

African American Literary Journalism: Extensions and Elaborations

Roberta S. Maguire

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, United States

Roberta S. Maguire is professor and chair of the Department of English at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, where she teaches courses on African American literature and culture and literary theory. She has published on the narrative nonfiction of Albert Murray, Alice Childress, and Anna Julia Cooper, and has a forthcoming article in Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination (Volume 2) about African American literary journalism in the 1950s. She is also the editor of Conversations with Albert Murray (University Press of Mississippi, 1997). Her current research focuses on the history of literary journalism in the US black community.





Albert Lee Murray

This special issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* is dedicated to Albert Lee Murray, who died on August 18, 2013, at the age of ninety-seven and whose ideas animate the selections in this issue. A formidable twentieth-century public intellectual who championed jazz and promoted a literary aesthetic and life philosophy tied to the blues—that quintessential American music—Murray published twelve books that celebrated the hybridization of American culture. Another major achievement in his later years was helping to found Jazz at Lincoln Center, whose executive director today is Wynton Marsalis. While Murray was once described as “the mind of the mind of Wynton Marsalis,” his influence has in fact been widespread—evident in the work of collage artist Romare Bearden, playwright August Wilson, newspaper columnist and Charlie Parker biographer Stanley Crouch, plus countless scholars and students, me among them.

It was Murray’s second book, *South to a Very Old Place*, that provided my own way into the study of literary journalism and prompted my particular interest in African American contributions to the genre. In that book, which had defied categorization, Murray created a kind of “anti-journalism,” to borrow Ronald Weber’s term for much of Ernest Hemingway’s writing, through which Murray critiqued the procedures and conclusions not only of mainstream journalism, but also and especially of the Tom Wolfe-Norman Mailer brand of New Journalism. Both, he found, presented distorted images of African Americans while denying the black community agency and black writing authority, which he sought to restore through the dynamic blues-based counternarrative of his book. So it is only fitting that this issue, with its mix of sustained analyses and interviews—the first publication to offer the

Photo of Albert Lee Murray
by Miles Maguire

opportunity to begin considering both the scope of the work that African American literary journalists have produced and the markers that their texts share—should be dedicated to Albert Murray.

That African American literary journalism has not up to this point received extensive attention is not surprising, given both the relative newness of literary journalism as a recognized scholarly field and the different histories of what we might call “conventional” journalism in the dominant culture versus African American communities. While more or less mainstream journalism began in what would become the United States in the late seventeenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century—1827—that the African American community had its first newspaper. And while both mainstream and African American early journalism were undeniably partisan in that they were aligned with particular political positions, the mainstream press, as the twentieth century unfolded, increasingly prized objectivity, whereas the African American press, which began as an enterprise in advocacy, did not. The earliest black papers, up through the Civil War, were primarily focused on the abolition of slavery; a related secondary mission was general racial uplift. And if the mainstream press took sides in political arguments so that papers challenged each other, the black press was much more concerned with presenting a united front against slavery, a common foe imposed from without.

Since slavery was replaced not with equality but rather segregation and discrimination, the black press’s advocacy on behalf of African Americans continued unabated into the twentieth century. But with the end of slavery, as African Americans embraced freedom despite the barriers of segregation and prejudice, and black communities grew and often thrived, the role of the black press as the vehicle by which African Americans could learn about what was happening in their own neighborhoods—who was marrying, giving birth, winning scholarships, establishing businesses, et cetera—solidified, since the mainstream press saw no reason to include such news in its pages. But unlike the mainstream press, black newspapers rarely published daily. Most came out weekly; many appeared monthly. This meant the papers were not geared to reporting breaking news.

That publication cycle, combined with the advocacy role of the press, I think helps account for some stylistic differences between mainstream journalism and the black press, which became pronounced in the twentieth century as the mainstream press embraced objectivity. African American journalistic prose historically has been emotion-filled, expressing outrage, indignation, anger, urgency—appropriate to its activist role in protesting slavery, then segregation, then lynching and other racial violence, on through a host of discriminatory practices. But with a weekly or even monthly, rather

than daily, publication schedule, the mix of material in a black newspaper has often paralleled that of magazines more than mainstream dailies, with fiction and first-person accounts, historical reflections and opinion pieces sharing pages—often the front page—with news stories. In other words, black newspapers long accommodated a range of writing styles, with a common feature of that writing being subjectivity.

And because the black press attended to the African American community—from highlighting the impact of world, national, or state news on black lives to offering news about African Americans that the mainstream press eschewed—it regularly covered what would become the province of mainstream literary journalism: the overlooked, “forgotten” stories of ordinary people. But whereas such stories as literary journalism in the mainstream may function to help explain what John Hartsock has described as the “social or cultural Other” (22) to a publication’s readership, the black press has itself occupied a position as an “other” in relation to the mainstream, seeking to engage the very community of “others” of which it was a part.

Hence the challenge to delineate what distinguishes African American writing as literary journalism, for the very subjectivity and emphasis on the ordinary or marginalized of the dominant culture, which have been recognized as important markers of mainstream literary journalism in the United States largely because they signal a departure from conventional reporting, have longstandingly characterized the “conventional” US black press. And it is, I think, a wonderful challenge, for my own ongoing research indicates that African Americans have since the late nineteenth century up to the contemporary moment produced a great deal of literary journalism—which, defined very broadly here, is factual writing of contemporary relevance that employs a range of literary techniques—but whose function differs from that produced by mainstream US writers. Investigating that function and its shifting over time I expect will allow us to expand and complicate in profound ways our understanding of the tradition and trajectory of literary journalism in the United States over the genre’s nearly 150-year history.

This issue is a first step in the effort to explore the nature and function of selected examples of African American literary journalism. The five pieces appearing here were selected from those that were submitted in response to a call for papers advertising the special issue. Each takes as a primary focus a single writer. Three are analyses of that writer’s work, one is a combined analysis and interview with the writer, and one is entirely an interview. What is especially useful, I think, is the range of historical moments the articles cover in terms of when the literary journalism discussed was published: We begin with Langton Hughes in the 1930s and go all the way up to Isabel Wilkerson

in the 2010s, a range that points to the abiding engagement of black writers with literary journalism.

The first two articles show how the *Baltimore Afro-American*, a prominent black newsweekly, played a significant role in fostering a specific kind of literary journalism in the black community tied to war reporting. Joshua Roiland, in “‘Just People’ Are *Just* People: Langston Hughes and the Populist Power of African American Literary Journalism,” takes as his subject Hughes’s reporting from fall 1937 into early 1938 on Spain’s civil war, which US blacks understood as a war about race and racism, an understanding that Hughes’s reporting reinforced. An established poet and fiction writer by then, but in need of money due to the Great Depression and related collapse of the Harlem Renaissance, which had propelled him to fame among the black community’s Talented Tenth, Hughes welcomed the *Afro*’s offer to send him overseas to try his hand at war reporting. The thirteen stories he posted during his four-month assignment, Roiland shows, focused on ordinary people—black soldiers, Spanish Moors—in the extraordinary environment of the war. By telling the stories of ordinary people in such circumstances, using the same techniques that characterized his poetry and fiction—allegory, hyperbole, flashbacks—Hughes, Roiland argues, was able to connect American racism with international fascism, thereby heightening the relevance of the conflict for black readers at home. While adhering to the black press’s role as advocate on behalf of persons of color, Hughes’s dispatches from Spain should also be seen as an important transitional moment between W. E. B. Du Bois’s call for US blacks during World War I to put aside their grievances and fight for democracy overseas and the more militant *Pittsburgh Courier*’s Double V campaign during World War II that exhorted African Americans to extend that fight to the United States as well.

Picking up on the theme of the Double V campaign, Antero Pietila and Stacy Spaulding in “The *Afro-American*’s World War II Correspondents: Feuilletonism as Social Action”—which won the 2013 IALJS Greenberg Research Prize for Literary Journalism—look closely at the stories reporter Ollie Stewart sent home and find that classifying them as “feuilletonism” offers a way to understand the role they played in the weekly newspaper. Much like Hughes in his Spanish Civil War reporting, Stewart celebrated the achievements and heroism of black soldiers through a style that recalls the feuilleton, popular in European journalism since the early nineteenth century and which, Pietila and Spaulding explain, is a “chatty, opinionated, and impressionistic” genre. Appearing alongside more militant articles in the *Afro* that depicted and commented on racial and civil unrest in the United States, Stewart’s dispatches allowed the newspaper both to critique the racial situation at home

and to celebrate black achievement—and in this double move aligned with the Double V call for equal rights for African Americans.

William Dow, in “Unreading Modernism: Richard Wright’s Literary Journalism,” moves us into the 1950s while offering a sustained look at the work of one of many black writers who, disturbed and stifled by US racism and segregation, left the United States for Europe during the middle of the twentieth century to develop their talents in what they believed was a less racialized environment. Dow looks at Wright’s expatriate writing of the 1950s—*Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, and *Pagan Spain*—as an outgrowth of his 1940 book *12 Million Black Voices*, a photo-essay with strong resemblances to lyric poetry. Arguing that the expat books of the 1950s especially have been miscategorized as travel writing and rather are best read as literary journalism for their conjoining of literary and journalistic technique, Dow suggests further that in them Wright achieves a “transnational modernism.” This style, which Dow points out cannot be separated from Wright’s social activism, is a collage of genres and techniques—sermonizing, jeremiads, film, photojournalism, fiction—that create an alternative vision to the racialized and racist modern world.

While Wright fled the United States—and in particular Chicago—for Europe, Sylvester Monroe, the subject of Isabelle Meuret’s “In Their Own Voices: Celebrating *Brothers: Black and Poor—A True Story of Courage and Survival*,” has made his career in the United States, as a journalist and editor, working for *Newsweek*, *Time*, and more recently *Marketplace*, the *Root* and *Ebony*. *Brothers: Black and Poor*, Meuret tells us, when it first appeared in 1987 in *Newsweek* and then in book form, was highly innovative in terms of both methodology and style. It was a collaborative project—the work of five reporters, including Monroe, a photographer, and a senior editor, the only team member who was white—that emphasized the voices of the project’s subjects: black men, the “brothers,” who were living in the Robert Taylor Homes, public housing on Chicago’s south side. Monroe’s role was crucial: having grown up in the Taylor Homes, he provided access to the men and legitimized the interview process while playing a role himself in the story. Meuret proposes that by foregrounding the men’s voices and including Monroe as a subject the piece should be viewed as a kind of “communicative action,” following Jürgen Habermas. Her discussion is followed by an interview with Monroe, in which he speaks to his own belief that literary journalism has the power to effect social change.

The final selection, Kathy Roberts Forde’s interview with Isabel Wilkerson (“Writing Literary History: An Interview with Isabel Wilkerson”), whose

2012 book *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* has won numerous prizes, including the Pulitzer, brings us to the contemporary moment in African American literary journalism. The book traces the fortunes of three African Americans who participated in the Great Migration out of the American South to Chicago, New York, and California seeking lives less circumscribed by racial prejudice. A journalist by training, Wilkerson acknowledges being stretched by this project, which required not only extensive archival research, but a tremendous dedication of time simply living with her subjects and other sources. The interview reveals much about her creative process and primary goal—to bring her readers into the stories so that they would see as her subjects saw, feel as her subjects felt. By concentrating on the personal dimension of a fundamental era in African American history, Wilkerson's work recalls the historic role of black journalism: advocating for a full understanding of circumstances that have shaped the black community. It is also clearly literary journalism, employing a range of narrative techniques to allow readers, no matter their background, to identify with the quiet heroism and profound sorrows and joys of three African Americans as they rebuilt their lives far from where they had been born. And as Albert Murray, the consummate omni-American, would say, making possible that kind of identification should be the aim of all great writing.

“Just People” are Just People: Langston Hughes and the Populist Power of African American Literary Journalism

Joshua M. Roiland
University of Notre Dame, United States

In the summer of 1937, the Baltimore Afro-American sent a letter to poet and playwright Langston Hughes asking him to travel to Spain and report on black Americans serving in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Hughes produced thirteen stories for the paper, all of which focused on the everyday experiences of the soldiers. These stories are important to the field of literary journalism studies not only because they broaden the US canon that heretofore has consisted predominantly of white writers, but also because Hughes's stories illustrate the political significance of a journalistic dedication to the ordinary. Hughes's reporting for the Baltimore Afro-American is historically significant because it is an unexplored link between two important pieces of African American wartime journalism: W. E. B. Du Bois's controversial 1918 "Close Ranks" editorial in The Crisis during World War I and the Pittsburgh Courier's popular "Double V" campaign during World War II.

“The poem, the picture, the song is only water drawn from the well of the people and given back to them in a cup of beauty so that they may drink—and in drinking, understand themselves.”

—Langston Hughes, radio address
“The Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals, Madrid”¹

On June 22, 1937, Joe Louis fought James J. Braddock in Chicago's Comiskey Park for the heavyweight-boxing championship of the world. In the days leading up to the fight, airlines and railroads added flights and trains between New York and Chicago to accommodate fans wanting to make the journey.² Sixty thousand spectators filled the baseball park and watched the twenty-three-year-old Louis knock out the reigning champ Braddock in the eighth round to become only the second African American heavyweight boxing champion of the world.³ Afterward, celebrations erupted from Chicago to Cleveland to New York.⁴ The fight propelled Louis into the national spotlight, where his celebrity status surpassed even that of popular Olympian Jesse Owens and transcended racial boundaries, making him “the first African American to achieve lasting fame and popularity in the twentieth century.”⁵

One month later, in Louis's native state of Alabama, another historic decision was reached. Multiple juries under the jurisdiction of Judge W. W. Callahan rendered guilty verdicts in the remaining three cases of the Scottsboro Boys; meanwhile, the state of Alabama dropped rape charges against the other five defendants, bringing a legal end to one of the most racist set of trials in American jurisprudence.⁶ The Scottsboro saga began six years earlier, when nine black teenagers were arrested and accused of raping two white women on a Southern Railroad freight train traveling west from Chattanooga to Memphis. Within two weeks of their arrest eight of the nine boys, all lacking adequate counsel, were tried, convicted, and sentenced to death by all-white juries.⁷ Their executions—scheduled to take place only seventy-four days after the completion of the last trial—were stayed while the Alabama Supreme Court heard their appeals, which were denied. The International Labor Defense, the legal arm of the Communist Party in the United States, then took over as lead counsel, and during the next six years, dozens of trials, convictions, reversals, and retrials ensued. Throughout these proceedings, judges and juries ignored eyewitness evidence from the train conductor, medical evidence from the doctor who examined the women shortly after the train was stopped, testimony that suggested the women were prostitutes, and the fact that one of the women recanted her story and repeatedly testified for the defense. The three final convictions in July 1937 overshadowed the release of the other defendants, and the case's conclusion brought little solace, as the poet and playwright Langston Hughes wrote at the time:

That Justice is a blind goddess
Is a thing to which we black are wise.
Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once perhaps were eyes.⁸

In that same summer of such historic black achievement and recurrent racial injustice, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, a weekly black newspaper with thirteen regional editions that circulated widely along the East Coast, sent a letter to Hughes asking him to go to Spain to report on its civil war. In need of money and happy to collect on the four-month commission, Hughes accepted the paper's offer. He left Cleveland the day after the Louis fight, his voice hoarse from hours of celebratory shouting as he rode around the city with friends cheering the championship.⁹ On June 30, 1937, he set sail from New York City aboard the *Aquitania*, and after a two-week stay in Paris, Hughes arrived in Barcelona on July 24. He divided his first month in the country between the Catalonian capital and Valencia, before heading to Madrid—and the front lines of the war—for the remaining twelve weeks of his assignment.¹⁰

His first story appeared in the *Afro-American* on October 23, 1937, under a banner headline, above the paper's masthead, that proclaimed: "Hughes Bombed in Spain." Twelve more stories would follow. His dispatches from Spain mirrored the US news narratives of transcendent racial acceptance and continued racial discrimination embodied by the stories of Joe Louis and the Scottsboro case. They celebrated African American war heroes and noted the acceptance of people of color in Spain while decrying Fascist imperialism and Franco's forced conscription of Moors to fight on behalf of the Nationalists.

Hughes's stories range from first-person accounts of air raids, to travelogues chronicling the racial attitudes of the Spanish people, to heroic profiles of soldiers. Most of the articles are brief sketches and contain many of the characteristics that scholars would later ascribe to literary journalism.¹¹ During his four-month stay, Hughes immersed himself in reporting the war and observing Spanish culture, interviewing soldiers, nurses, performers, and peasants. In writing these reports he employed a range of literary devices from symbolism to allegory, flashbacks to hyperbole. These elements are highlighted when one reads the compressed literary journalism of his newspaper articles against his fuller retelling of the same events in his 1956 autobiography *I Wonder as I Wander*, where the stories have a much flatter affect.

THE CONTEXT FOR HUGHES'S WAR STORIES

Hughes's reporting for the *Baltimore Afro-American* is historically significant because it is an unexplored link between two important pieces of African American wartime journalism: W. E. B. Du Bois's controversial 1918 "Close Ranks" editorial in *The Crisis* during World War I and the *Pittsburgh Courier's* popular "Double V" campaign during World War II. Both Du Bois

and the *Courier* called on African Americans not only to support, but also to fight in each respective war as a way to further demonstrate their equality and garner full-rights citizenship. Hughes bridges these movements with his own explicit endorsement of military involvement as a path to democratic acceptance.

These articles are equally important to the field of literary journalism studies not only because they broaden the US canon that heretofore has consisted predominantly of white writers, but also because Hughes's stories illustrate the political significance of a journalistic dedication to the ordinary. These consequences are twofold. In the African American press, the ordinary *is* newsworthy because black news has been historically excluded from the mainstream press. In majority publications, however, a focus on the everyday has the power to elevate the familiarity, and emphasize the humanity, of marginalized publics. For African American readers, the black press's attention to the accustomed affirms their sense of humanity, while that same focus in conventional newspapers creates a sense of empathy in privileged publics—a quality largely absent in the mainstream press, but one that scholars of twentieth-century American literary journalism would increasingly identify as significant.

Throughout its history, scholars and practitioners of American literary journalism have acknowledged that the genre's democratic impulse to capture the quotidian is one of the main differences from conventional journalism's conception of news as timely information about people and events of consequence. For instance, as an editor, the famed muckraker Lincoln Steffens encouraged his writers to "get the news so completely and to report it so humanly that the reader will see himself in the other fellow's place."¹² Several decades later, in what is widely considered the first academic treatise on literary journalism, Edwin Ford noted that the writers collected in his bibliography showed "people in the midst of life."¹³ As the staid styles of post-war journalism were eclipsed by the ostentation of New Journalism, various observers hailed the form as "literature for the majority"¹⁴ and declared that it "allowed the reader[s] to see and feel ordinary people in unusual situations," thus giving them a chance to engage in the story and not just respond to the facts.¹⁵ Tom Wolfe, of course, had his say. In an introductory jeremiad to *The New Journalism* he shouted: "Come here! Look! This is the way people live these days! These are the things they do!"¹⁶ And contemporary scholarship has followed his imperative. In his first book, *The Literary Journalists*, Norman Sims highlighted this feature of *feuilletonism*, saying, "through their eyes we watch ordinary people in crucial contexts."¹⁷ Thomas B. Connery followed suit, drawing strong connections between a reportorial populism

and a stylistic realism, which together “capture people as they really are.”¹⁸ In fact, all of the foundational texts in literary journalism studies make mention of the democratic impulse of the genre, yet scholars have not sufficiently explored the civic significance of this characteristic.¹⁹

Broadly speaking, a focus on daily life and common people creates a discursive space for readers to enter the story and see themselves as subjects rather than as “spectator[s] and ratifier[s].”²⁰ Stylistic and substantive egalitarianism generates empathy because readers recognize themselves in the stories of others. Moreover, by giving voice to the voiceless and engaging citizens in stories that might not otherwise be told, writers contribute to a fuller conception of an imagined community. Benedict Anderson’s influential work on nationalism and the social construction of publics offers a useful frame of reference for understanding the power of Hughes’s work. Anderson argues that through “print-capitalism”—the late-eighteenth-century entrepreneurial enterprise of disseminating information in a popular rather than high style in order to appeal to a broad public—classical languages like Latin, Greek, and Hebrew “were forced to mingle on equal ontological footing with a motley plebeian crowd of vernacular rivals.”²¹ This democratization of language allowed various reading publics an opportunity to understand and imagine themselves and their neighbors. The literary journalism of Langston Hughes afforded *Baltimore Afro-American* readers a similar opportunity. His commitment to capturing the lives of otherwise anonymous African Americans fighting in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigades allowed him to highlight the extraordinary experiences embedded within ordinary occurrences.

The political power of a populist approach has special significance when considering African American journalism. Scholars often differentiate between conventional journalism and its literary counterpart by noting that the former selects its topics as exceptions to ordinary life, while the latter draws strength, in part, from its focus on the overlooked aspects of day-to-day existence; however, for marginalized publics, be they classified by race, gender, class, sexuality, or otherwise, both the newsworthy *and* the commonplace get little coverage in the mainstream press “not because they lack validity or interest, but because they lack official sponsorship.”²² For example, between the official start of the Spanish Civil War on July 17, 1936, until its resolution on April 1, 1939, the *New York Times* published nearly 3,000 articles chronicling the battles and bombings between the Nationalists and Loyalists. Of those, fewer than 300 focused on the contributions of the International Brigades, and fewer than two dozen mentioned the Abraham Lincoln Battalion (and, further proving Schudson’s point, the “Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Bri-

gade” society provided most of the information for those stories). The African American press, like all minority presses, developed in response to this type of marginalization. Historian Charles Simmons has shown that the “basic editorial philosophy” of the black press has remained relatively unchanged since the publication of the first issue of *Freedom’s Journal* in 1827. The journalistic mission has been “to cover items that were ignored in the mainstream press, primarily the news, activities, and achievements” of African Americans.²³ The black press made ordinary African Americans visible to African American readers. As pioneering journalist Vernon Jarrett has said, it was in these papers “we did get married, they showed us our babies being born, showed us graduating, they showed our Ph.D.s.”²⁴ This literary populism also helped black readers connect local concerns with issues affecting national and global communities.

More than half of Hughes’s stories for the *Baltimore Afro-American* are profiles of everyday soldiers who he feels have made a meaningful difference while volunteering for service in Spain. Each story’s headline connects individual efforts in the Castilian countryside with the brigade member’s hometown. They read: “New York Nurse Weds Irish Fighter in Spain’s War,” “Fighters from Other Lands Look to Ohio Man for Food,” “St. Louis Man’s Spanish Helped Him Cheat Death,” “Pittsburgh Soldier Hero, but Too Bashful to Talk,” “Howard Man Fighting as Spanish Loyalist,” and “Harlem Ballplayer Now Captain in Spain.” Hughes reinforces this spirit of local pride by explicitly commenting in each article on how these men will return to the United States and serve their race well. Hughes uses the profiles not only to update the black community, but also to editorialize. A wedding announcement turns into an epistle on interracial harmony. A soldiering college student is an opportunity to discuss the need for more international awareness on campuses. These profiles have a folk quality about them that regionalizes the characters and places them in their neighborhoods, which is significant because it helps readers, no matter where they live, imagine a network of solidarity across the United States. In separate articles, Hughes introduces readers to Abraham Lewis of Cleveland, Ralph Thornton of Pittsburgh, Walter Cobb of St. Louis, and Basilio Cueria of New York. These profiles also have their roots in *The Crisis*—the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded by W.E.B. Du Bois and first published in 1910—which, early on, ran regular features entitled “Men of the Month” that highlighted African Americans who demonstrated qualities of racial uplift. For example, a March 1918 profile introduced *The Crisis* readers to a then-unknown collegian named Paul Robeson who “has maintained a high scholastic record. He has won the class oratorical prize for two years,

a feat never before accomplished in the school. He is varsity debater, plays guard in basketball, throws weights in track, catches in baseball, and is a baritone soloist.”²⁵ Robeson, of course, went on to become a famous singer, actor, and political activist, taking a vocal stance against the Spanish Civil War, among numerous other causes. Hughes ends nearly all his profiles by stating that these men will return to America to help the cause of equality. Much like the men featured in *The Crisis*, Hughes’s profiles celebrate the achievements of African Americans and offer the black community models for racial uplift.

FLÂNEUR-OF-THE-FRONTLINE

When editors at the *Afro-American* wrote to Hughes in the spring of 1937 about covering the escalating civil war, they asked him to focus on “the conflict’s significance for American blacks.”²⁶ The heroic profile was one way Hughes accomplished this mandate, but he also employed a flâneur-of-the-frontline approach whereby he observed devastated urban landscapes “in terms of color and race.”²⁷ When his first story ran on October 23, 1937, the *Afro-American* boldly advertised his method (and its scoop). Under the aforementioned banner headline “Hughes Bombed In Spain,” the paper then included this subhead: “Exclusive!!! From war-torn Spain, Langston Hughes, celebrated American novelist and poet, brings exclusively to *Afro-American* readers a vivid and accurate portrait of the bitter struggle that is now going on. This interesting series and accompanying photos will appear only in the *Afro-American*.” Another subheading below that tantalized: “Tells of Terror of Fascist Raid” and “Women, Children Huddled in Fear as Bombs Explode.”²⁸ Despite these sensational promotions, Hughes’s first article in the *Afro-American* is less “news” than an introduction to the war and his relationship to it. He arrived in Barcelona on July 24, one day after the city suffered its then-worst bombing campaign of the war. Fascist planes killed more than one hundred civilians along La Rambla, and newspaper headlines greeted Hughes, shouting, “AIR RAID OVER BARCELONA!” In his introductory article he bemoaned missing the exclusive—“‘Last night!’ I thought,”—adding, “Well, tonight I’ll be there.”²⁹ Although such lamentations privilege the story over the deaths of innocents, they do reveal Hughes, who traveled extensively but had never previously worked as a reporter, to have a sense of journalistic derring-do.³⁰

In his second article for the *Afro-American*, Hughes explains his journalistic motivations by asking rhetorically, “Why had I come to Spain?” and then answering, “To write for the colored press.”³¹ This purpose is significant because the *Afro-American*, like most black newspapers, centered its mission on advocacy. The paper’s prospectus stated its mission was “to present to the

world that side of the Afro-American that can be had in no other way, and in the second place to as far as possible assist in the great uplift of the people it represents.”³² Therefore, unlike George Orwell, who remarked wryly in another piece of literary journalism from Spain, *Homage to Catalonia*, “When I joined the militia I had promised myself to kill one Fascist—after all, if each of us killed one they would soon be extinct,” Hughes pursued a different objective: “In the Civil War in Spain, I am a writer, not a fighter. But that is what I want to be, a writer, recording what I see, commenting on it, and distilling from my own emotions a personal interpretation.”³³ Hughes’s statement is a precise job description of the literary journalist; not only did he “record and report”—he “interpreted as well.”³⁴ What is significant about his interpretation is the complex conception of a global community that connects Scottsboro to Seville, Atlanta to Addis Ababa.

In October 1935, Mussolini’s army invaded Ethiopia, which, at the time, was the only independent black nation in Africa, thus launching the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. During the intervening years between World War I and World War II, this incident became “the international issue which most concerned black Americans” who saw the invasion through the lens of racist imperialism.³⁵ Many African Americans interpreted the U.S. government’s refusal to support Haile Selassie and his people as indifference by whites to come to the aid of blacks. The Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia waged a “Hands Off Ethiopia” campaign in an effort to raise awareness, generate aid, and mobilize African Americans to fight on behalf of Ethiopia, but many of these attempts were stymied. Potential army recruits were warned by the U.S. Justice Department that they would be in violation of an 1818 federal statute that prevented U.S. citizens from enlisting in a foreign army. The Red Cross refused to send personnel to the war-torn country. Despite the lack of action, however, the consciousness of African Americans had been raised. Historian Robin D.G. Kelley argues that “the defense of Ethiopia did more than any other event in the 1930s to internationalize the struggles of black people in the United States.”³⁶

Shortly after the Italian invasion, Hughes penned a poem called “The Ballad of Ethiopia,” which appeared in the *Afro-American*.³⁷ In verse Hughes exclaims: “All you colored peoples / Be a man at last / Say to Mussolini / No! You shall not pass.”³⁸ The adjective “all” here is important. In using it, Hughes expands the responsibility for stopping Mussolini beyond just Ethiopians. He implicates all readers of color, including those reading the Baltimore newspaper. Moreover, Mussolini is portrayed as both a literal threat in Ethiopia and a symbolic representation of fascism and oppression. Finally, Hughes’s challenge to “be a man at last” links the struggle for freedom with masculin-

ity—an ongoing trope in African American history as black men struggled to fight against stock representations in white consciousness. Hughes’s poetic call to arms prefigures his response to the war in Spain and the conscription of the Moors.

The Spanish Civil War began when army generals Francisco Franco and Emilio Mola launched a coup against the democratically elected Popular Front. Franco’s military received support from Germany, Italy, and Portugal, while many western capitalist nations abandoned the Republic. To fill the void, the Communist International called for volunteers to assist in the fight and received offers from more than 35,000 people across fifty different nations and colonies. These volunteers would make up the International Brigades. For African Americans, Franco’s attempt at wresting the country from the people was seen as an adjunct to Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia. Just like the response to the Italian aggression, a campaign was waged to stop Spanish imperialism. And just like the previous campaign, there were impediments. Once again the US Justice Department threatened prosecution for any citizen fighting on behalf of another nation. It even went so far as to stamp passports with the dictate “NOT VALID FOR TRAVEL IN SPAIN.” Still, approximately eighty black men and one woman answered the call to fight and made their way across the Atlantic to France, where they crossed the Pyrenees into Spain.

Unlike many other front-page stories in the *Afro-American*, Hughes’s pieces were not salacious or sensationalistic. They were, however, hyperbolic in terms of his statements on racial equality. In his first story he noted that there was no color line in Spain, and in a later piece he says, “All the colored people of whatever nationality to whom I’ve talked in Spain agree that there is not the slightest trace of color prejudice to be found.”³⁹ Kelley offers a clearer explanation for the judicious treatment Hughes and other African Americans received in Spain: they were treated well because they were fighting for Spain’s freedom from fascism. The Spanish Moors, conscripted by Franco and fighting against the Loyalists, were as hated by the peasants and workers as Hughes and other black Americans were loved.⁴⁰

Hughes takes up the issue of the Moors in this second article, entitled “Hughes Finds Moors Being Used as Pawns by Fascists.” He once again uses first-person narration as a device to usher the reader along with him on his journey. The story is ostensibly a travel narrative, recounting his roundabout trip from Barcelona to Madrid, providing Hughes an opportunity to discuss the country’s geographic history. He says, “Spain once belonged to the Moors, a colored people ranging from light to dark,” but now the Moors are “cannon fodder for Franco.”⁴¹ Hughes admits he is “naturally interested in the

Moors” and wants to find out “what effect, if any, this bringing of dark troops to Europe had had on the Spanish people in regard to their racial feelings.” Ultimately, Hughes concludes, the Moors offer a cautionary tale about “colored troops in the service of white imperialists.” Although the oppression of the Moors would surely resonate, at least symbolically, with African American readers, Hughes often makes that connection explicit, linking “American racism with international Fascism and forcefully consociat[ing] international left politics and racial equality.”⁴²

Hughes reinforces this point of racial equality by juxtaposing the treatment of the Moors with the treatment of other people of color. He expresses this dual purpose early in the second story: “I want to write about both the Moors and colored people.”⁴³ Hughes is always careful to point out the difference between Franco’s treatment of people of color and the treatment they received from everyday Spaniards. An example of this difference comes from C. G. Carter, a fifty-two-year-old Utah man who traveled to Spain to serve as an ambulance driver with the Ninth Medical Unit of the American Medical Bureau (AMB). Just as Hughes focuses on common people he met on the streets of Barcelona, his concentration on Carter illustrates the grassroots effort of those working to free Spain from Fascist control. At one point Carter asks Hughes, “Who wants to be a slave to Mussolini?” His question illustrates the extent to which black soldiers in Spain saw the conflict as an extension of the Italo-Ethiopian war. Hughes uses Carter’s question to make the point that “within the last year, colored people from many different countries have sent men, money, and sympathy to Spain in her fight against the forces that have raped Ethiopia, and that clearly hold no good for any poor defenseless people anywhere.”⁴⁴ Hughes’s position was in accord with the majority of African American newspapers whose editors “saw Spain as a continuation of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict that so enraged the African American community.”⁴⁵ Hughes connects that rage with the conflict by offering a voice to ordinary soldiers like Carter.

Hughes rides with Carter’s Ninth Medical Unit and notes that the AMB, “in their selection of doctors, nurses, and assistants, [has] not drawn the color line.”⁴⁶ Once again he overestimates the degree of racial tolerance in the country, but this statement does offer insight into a question he asked earlier. The conscription of the Moors and their presence in Spain had not had an overall adverse effect on other people of color. Despite this fact, Hughes ends his second story by illustrating the inextricable link between the people of color fighting in Spain and the racially similar Moors whom they are fighting against. The Moors have been duped. Fascist imperialism is spreading. And so Hughes sees his role as a journalist and documenter of the resistance as an act

of counter-hegemony: "To help this People's Army, and to fight fascism before it makes any further gains in the world, men came to Spain from all over the earth. They formed the International Brigades. In these brigades there are many colored people. To learn about them, I came to Spain."⁴⁷ Although they were anonymous before the war and would largely remain anonymous after the war, Hughes portrays them as heroic examples of racial pride. In the long tradition of the African American press, Hughes presents these soldiers as models for others to follow.

Hughes's third dispatch from Spain draws the most direct connection between African Americans in the United States and people of color living and fighting in Spain. The title "Organ Grinder's Swing' Heard Above Gunfire in Spain" refers to the popular 1936 jazz standard by Will Hudson, Mitchell Parish, and Irving Wells made famous by the African American band leader Jimmie Lunceford. Hughes's use of the song title in his story immediately signifies to African American readers a common bond with the people of Spain. He builds upon that bond by noting throughout the article the many ways in which he and many other people of color are accepted by Spaniards.⁴⁸

Hughes begins his story with the declarative statement: "Colored people are not strange to Spain, nor do they attract an undue amount of attention."⁴⁹ He then goes on to list all of the different ethnic groups he has thus far encountered in Spain before concluding that "all the colored people of whatever nationality to whom I've talked . . . agree that there is not the slightest trace of color prejudice." His conclusion is a familiar variation on a theme, which he also brought up in his first two articles. But in this piece, Hughes locates the cause of this tolerance of the darker complexion of most Spaniards in "traces of Moorish blood [that] still remain."⁵⁰ This reasoning is specious at best, but it is consistent with Hughes's objective, outlined in his reporting for the *Afro-American* and the partisan periodical *Volunteer for Liberty*, of presenting Spain as fundamentally a tolerant and accepting society, thus necessitating the need to drive Franco out.

Hughes spends his entire third article chronicling various examples of African American popular culture that are well liked in Spain. He says that the favorite theatrical star in Madrid is the Cuban vaudeville performer El Negro Aquilino. He follows this observation by noting that jazz in Spain is played more and received better than in other places in Europe. He states that the records of Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington sell especially well.⁵¹ As evidence of the music's popularity, he tells an anecdote that led to the story's headline: "In fact, during one of the heavy shellings of Madrid a few nights ago a shell from one of Franco's cannons fell crashing into the street at our corner just as our radio in the dining room began to play Jimmie Lunceford's version of

‘Organ Grinder’s Swing.’”⁵² The symbolism of this scene illustrates that black culture perseveres in the midst of all the terror.

Hughes also mentions the affection Madrilenos have for the singer, actor, and activist Paul Robeson. And he adds that in Spain “tap dancing is quite popular, and whenever colored dancers are seen in the movies, Spanish youngsters try their best to imitate the steps.”⁵³ In addition to song and dance, Hughes finds that black sports heroes are also widely admired in Spain. He says the Spanish still talk about the exploits of the track star Jesse Owens and boxer Jack Johnson. These positive representations of black culture further illustrate Hughes’s claim about the inclusiveness of Spanish society.

Hughes, however, is not enamored with all aspects of black representation in Spain. He takes especial exception to popular books, noting that “the least representative of the books on colored people seem to be the only ones translated into Spanish.”⁵⁴ He cites two books in particular that focus on the exoticism of black people, William Seabrook’s account of Haitian voodoo in *Magic Island* and Julie Peterkin’s Pulitzer Prize-winning account of African Americans living in the South Carolina Low Country, *Scarlet Sister Mary*. What troubles Hughes most, however, is that there is “nothing by colored writers themselves.” And to correct for that he recommends Walter White’s *Fire in the Flint*, an account of a young black doctor who returns to his southern roots to help battle segregation and racism, and James Weldon Johnson’s autobiography *Along This Way*.

Hughes spends the entire article chronicling all the various forms of African American popular culture that are consumed in Spain. Although these lists are significant in that they reveal an acceptance of black culture, they are also a red herring. Hughes uses these arts and sports references to set up his final point, which is that “in Spain, the most interesting colored people one meets . . . are not prizefighters, or writers, or performers in theaters. They’re men with uniforms on.”⁵⁵ And it is here that Hughes most explicitly lays out his populist agenda. He notes the diverse geographic representation of the soldiers: St. Louis, Chicago, Harlem, Panama City, and Havana. He then concludes:

Those you never read of in any book. (But you will, in due time, no doubt.) They’re in the International Brigade. . . . And they’re just people from various corners of the world who’ve come to help the “just people” of Spain in their fight with the folks with big names.⁵⁶

By juxtaposing these “no name” volunteers with the celebrities in African American arts and sports, and then saying the volunteers are “the most interesting,” Hughes elevates the social and political status of the common man and demonstrates his strongly held belief—and his journalistic conviction—

that those who will do the most good will be those who are the least known.

ADVOCACY AND THE COMMONPLACE

As Hughes pointed out in many of his articles, the fight for freedom in Spain was symbolic for many African Americans of the struggle for freedom and equality in the United States. This was clear to most of his readers in the United States because as they were reading his reports from Madrid and Barcelona, they were also following the case of the Scottsboro Boys as it entered its sixth year; the debate and ultimate failure of the Costian-Wagner Anti-Lynching Law that was drafted but failed to receive support from President Roosevelt; and the ascension of Hugo Black—a one-time member of the Ku Klux Klan who while a US senator had filibustered and effectively killed an anti-lynching bill—to the Supreme Court.⁵⁷ All of these stories made front-page news in the *Baltimore Afro-American*.⁵⁸

The paper also had an internationalist outlook and often hired stringers to report on events across the globe. Langston Hughes was perhaps their most famous part-time hire. Although his journalism fits in with a long tradition of first-person, subjective narration in the black press, Hughes's reportage during the Spanish Civil War differed from the work of other African Americans at the paper in the same way the work of his white counterparts in Spain—George Orwell, Martha Gellhorn, and Ernest Hemingway, among others—differed from the conventional coverage in the mainstream press: the immersive, even participatory nature of the reporting combined with the employment of literary devices in the storytelling. His focus on the everyday experiences of average African Americans serving in Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War is significant for what it tells us about the relationship between ordinariness and empathy, how the commonplace has the power to engage our subjectivities and expand our conceptions of community. In that sense, his work aligns with other authors of early American literary journalism from Stephen Crane to James Agee to Joseph Mitchell. However, Hughes's work diverges from theirs in that it occurs under the editorial aegis of advocacy.

Advocacy is a foundational part of the black press, whose historical *raison d'être* has been to deliver “messages in unity to [its] readers, deliver them with passion and emotion, and let white editors and citizens know that black citizens were humans who were being treated unfairly.”⁵⁹ The activist angle that Hughes promotes in his articles is not the characteristic that makes his work literary journalism.⁶⁰ Equally, the connection to advocacy should not *preclude* his stories, or stories from other African American writers, from being considered literary journalism. Scholars have debated the acceptance of advocacy in

the genre, and they must consider Hughes's promotion of African American civil rights and his declarations against fascism abroad and racism at home in their historical and cultural context the same way that the composite characters created in the 1940s by John Hersey ("Joe Is Home Now"), Joseph Mitchell ("Old Mr. Flood"), and A.J. Liebling ("Colonel Stingo") are accepted in the canon of literary journalism because the sin of syntheses had not yet been codified in the professional practice of magazine journalism.⁶¹ Hughes's reportage from the Spanish Civil War certainly demonstrates a point of view, but then again, so does Orwell's and Gellhorn's. What's important to note is that Hughes is transparent about his perspective, which makes his subjectivity much less pernicious than that of other journalists, literary or otherwise, who feign being a "candid observer" and use a guise of neutrality to appeal "to people whose pride is their no-nonsense connoisseurship of fact."⁶²

THE MILTON HERNDON STORY

Hughes's most powerful piece of literary journalism comes in a later story that depicts the death of Lincoln Battalion member Milton Herndon who was killed in an attack on Saragossa on Saturday, October 16, 1937. Milton Herndon was the brother of the African American political activist Angelo Herndon, who was arrested in 1932 for leading a hunger strike on the steps of an Atlanta courthouse. Angelo Herndon wanted to draw attention to the plight of unemployed blacks in the South; instead, he was held for eleven days without charges before "prosecutors dusted off a Reconstruction law providing the death penalty for 'any attempt . . . to induce others to join in any combined resistance to the lawful authority of the State.' In all its 66 years no one had ever been convicted under that statute." An all-white jury convicted him of violating the anti-insurrection law, citing the Communist pamphlets found in his possession. He was sentenced to serve between eighteen and twenty years on a Georgia chain gang. A five-year appeals battle ensued, culminating with a Supreme Court decision overturning Herndon's conviction and ruling the Georgia statute unconstitutional because it violated "guarantees of liberty embodied in the 14th Amendment."⁶³

Angelo Herndon's trial was a *cause célèbre* in labor and Communist circles during the mid-1930s. His brother Milton was not as publicly active as his brother. He was a Works Progress Administration worker before enlisting in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. And when he was killed, his death was seen as significant only in relation to his brother's public court battle. It garnered three paragraphs on page sixteen of the *New York Times*. Under the headline "Milton Herndon Dies in Loyalist Attack" the subhead read "Brother of Angelo, Freed from Georgia Chain Gang, Is One of Nine Americans Slain." The

first paragraph of the staff report gave word of his death—once again, via the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade—and then noted his relationship to Angelo, who received as many sentences as his slain brother. The second paragraph noted Milton's battle history in Spain and then listed his surviving family members. The final paragraph was devoted to listing the names and hometowns of the other eight Americans killed in Saragossa.

By comparison, Hughes's story "Milt Herndon Died Trying to Rescue Wounded Pal," published in the *Afro-American* on January 1, 1938, gives a personal and humanizing account of Milton, not Angelo. A sense of familiarity is first established with the headline where Milton is shortened to "Milt" and the object of his heroism is presented as "Pal." Like his earlier stories from Barcelona, Hughes begins the piece with a suspense-filled narrative lede: "It was quiet on the front. No action. Our attack was over. Silence in the blanket of a rainy night in a valley where perhaps twenty-thousand men lie."⁶⁴ Here his realistic portrayal of waiting in the rain connects readers with the misery of those "twenty-thousand" other soldiers. Hughes admits that he was initially interested in this story because he was a friend of Angelo, and then confesses, "I never knew Milton." Yet the story of Herndon's death becomes significant for Hughes not because of his friendship with Angelo, but because it illustrates the unifying power of shared ideals. In death, Milt Herndon becomes a symbol of racial unity, someone who retained his black identity while bridging the races to fight a common enemy.

Hughes structures the story around his mission to find the two men who were with Herndon when he died. His quest, however, is perpetually delayed by the heavy rain and booming artillery in the distance. Finally a truck pulls up and the soldiers Hughes is looking for appear. They are Aaron Johnson, a black man from Los Angeles, and Hjalmar Sankari, a Scandinavian-American residing in New York City. At first they are hesitant and resist opening up to Hughes, who confesses "it was a rather halting interview." When he finally gains the trust of the two soldiers, they open up completely, and Hughes hears harmony:

"Milt Herndon! He died like this," they said. Sometimes one talked, sometimes the other. One answered a question, another added a phrase. Two voices in the night, a colored voice and a white voice. Two American voices telling me how Milton Herndon died.⁶⁵

Through these otherwise unheralded men, Hughes is able to construct a resonant scene about the possibilities of racial hope. It is a moment when America, not Spain, embodies a place of racial harmony.

Before the men are trucked back to the front, Sankari tells Hughes, "The

men liked him. He had both Americans and English under him, and we all liked him.” Johnson then adds that he and Herndon were the only two African Americans in the company and that despite this minority, Herndon convinced the unit to name the machine gun company after Frederick Douglass. Johnson recalls that Herndon had told the company about Douglass and then says, “Yesterday Ethiopia. Today, Spain. Tomorrow, maybe America. Fascism won’t stop anywhere—until we stop it.”⁶⁶ Here Milt Herndon’s story takes on a larger significance. He is not only a brave opponent of fascism, but he is a model for African Americans to connect their history to the present. Hughes concludes his story by pulling the reader aside and saying, “You see, he understood the connection between the enemy at home and the enemy in Spain: They are the same enemy.”⁶⁷ In making this explicit connection, Hughes speaks directly to black readers in America, instructing them to understand that the racism they experience at home is part of a global nexus of prejudice. Hughes does not mention any international efforts on behalf of the United States and Europe to come to the aid of Spain; instead, he shows the death and destruction wrought by Franco and emphasizes the volunteers coming to stop it, thus tacitly condemning nations for not providing a systematic response. Milt Herndon is a martyr to this ideal.

For many African Americans, the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and the Civil War in Spain were as personally and politically significant as the two world wars that bookended them. Hughes’s advocacy of military intervention during the Loyalist-Nationalist conflict provides a bridge between Du Bois’s “Close Ranks” editorial in *The Crisis* at the beginning of US involvement in World War I and the *Pittsburgh Courier*’s popular “Double V” campaign that advocated American victory over fascism abroad and African American victory over racism at home during and after World War II. Du Bois’s 1918 editorial, which some critics regarded as insufficiently critical of Jim Crow, announced that “We of the colored world have no ordinary interest in the outcome” of the war with Germany; therefore, “let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Hughes advocated—even celebrated—the military involvement of people of color from not only the United States but also Cuba, the Caribbean, and North Africa. His story “Soldiers from Many Lands United in Spanish Fight” is his most explicit celebration of the multinational, multiethnic International Brigades. He notes that many of the soldiers could not understand each other but were “united only in their antifascist ideal.”⁶⁹ After interviewing its many members, Hughes concludes that they were “a different kind of soldier and a different kind of man.”⁷⁰ And a different kind of soldier

was necessary because if “Fascism creeps across Spain, across Europe, and then across the world, there will be no place left for intelligent young Negroes at all. In fact, no decent place for any Negroes because Fascism preaches the creed of Nordic supremacy and a world for whites alone.”⁷¹ Although Hughes paid tribute to the service of the soldiers in the International Brigades, he was under no illusions about the sad irony of Franco’s employment of the Moors who, Hughes believed, were “shooting the wrong way.”⁷²

The duality of integration and oppression is the defining characteristic of Hughes’s literary journalism from Spain, as well as a significant feature in the *Courier’s* “Double V” campaign four years later. In fact, it is not hard to hear an echo of Hughes (and Du Bois) in the famed letter that James G. Thompson, a Cessna Aircraft Corporation worker from Wichita, Kansas, wrote to the editors at the *Pittsburgh Courier* at the outset of World War II: “I suggest that while we keep defense and victory in the forefront that we don’t lose sight of our fight for true democracy at home. . . . If this V sign means that to those now engaged in this great conflict, then let we colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory. The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second victory over our enemies from within.”⁷³ The *Courier* adopted the slogan and created what was known as the Double V campaign that produced a series of stories and rallied more than 200,000 readers to create memberships pledging support for “a two-pronged attack against our enslavers at home and those abroad who would enslave us.”⁷⁴

The *Afro-American* also vigorously campaigned for United States intervention against Hitler because the editors believed that many blacks would enlist and work toward curbing the Fascist threat, which in turn would aid in equality at home.⁷⁵ Like most black newspapers, the *Afro-American* “believed that equality in the nation’s armed forces was a prerequisite for black civilian freedom and equality.”⁷⁶ Hughes’s articles embody that philosophy. He crafted his stories from Spain with an eye toward narrative and an emphasis on the symbolic significances of the country’s civil war for African Americans. His stories demonstrate the democratic effect of journalistic advocacy. Although this idea sounds like a paradox, it is not. In fact, Hughes operates within this historical tradition of the black press, and by promoting the soldiers’ volunteerism and bravery, he effectively elevates the efforts of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to that of other members of the International Brigades and, several years later, to those serving during World War II.

Still, Hughes’s dispatches ultimately leave the reader somewhere between hope and hopelessness. Throughout the air raids and explosions that rocked Barcelona and Madrid during the three months that Hughes lived there, he cultivated a sense of optimistic realism. He continually asserted that the Loy-

alists would—like Joe Louis—prevail, that political and economic democracy would take root, for racial democracy already had. Still, readers in America knew all too well that for as uplifting as the story of Joe Louis—and Walter Cobb, Ralph Thornton, and Basilio Cuerdo—was, it was always paired and understood within the context of the Scottsboro case, Jim Crow, and the forced conscription of the Moors. This duality is perhaps best illustrated by two of Hughes's most well-known poems, "I, Too" and "A Dream Deferred." The first offers a redemptive story of a man banished to eat in a segregated kitchen after the company comes, but returns after growing strong to deliver a comeuppance to his oppressors: "Besides, / They'll see how beautiful I am / And be ashamed— / I, too, am America." But the latter presents a more ominous future for the long-delayed dream of equality, which sags under the weight of its own heavy history. It ends with that last, desperate question, recalling the air raids of Barcelona: "Or does it explode?"

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NOTES

1. Langston Hughes, "The Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 152.
2. "Extra Planes, Trains Needed on All Lines," *New York Times*, June 22, 1937, A28.
3. "Louis Knocks Out Braddock in 8th, Wins World Title," *New York Times*, June 23, 1937, A1.
4. "Festive Harlems Celebrate Victory," *New York Times*, June 23, 1937, A30.
5. Larry Schwartz, "'Brown Bomber' Was Hero to All," last modified July 2, 2009, <http://espn.go.com/sportscentury/features/00016109.html>.

6. Ozie Powell is occasionally not linked with the four other defendants who had their charges dropped because although his rape charge was dismissed he pled guilty to slashing the throat of sheriff's deputy Edgar Blalock while in custody, and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

7. The ninth boy, Roy Wright, was found guilty but a mistrial was declared after the jury split on whether to impose the death penalty on a twelve-year-old boy.

8. Langston Hughes, "Justice," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 1, *The Poems: 1921–1940*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 133.

9. Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 14, *Autobiography: I Wonder as I Wander*, ed. Joseph McLaren (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 308.

10. Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 1, *1902–1941: I, Too, Sing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 337–338.

11. Specifically, the characteristics outlined in the introductions to *The Literary Journalists: The New Art of Personal Reportage* and *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*, both edited by Norman Sims; *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*, edited by Thomas B. Connery, and two histories, John C. Hartsock's *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* and Sims's *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*.

12. Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1931), 317.

13. Edwin H. Ford, *A Bibliography of Literary Journalism in America* (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1937), 1.

14. Ronald Weber, quoting Seymour Krim. Ronald Weber, "Some Sort of Artistic Excitement." *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Random House, 1974), 25.

15. Norman Denzin, "The New Journalism," in *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1997), 134.

16. Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism*, eds. Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson (London: Picador, 1974), 33.

17. Norman Sims, *The Literary Journalists: The New Art of Personal Reportage* (New York: Ballantine, 1984), 6.

18. Thomas B. Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992), 8.

19. In his historiography of the genre, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*, John Hartsock traces literary journalism's long democratic tradition. And Kathy Roberts Forde has both noted the effects of and advocated for a multi-vocal press in her book *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment*.

20. James Carey, "The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse: On the Edge of the Postmodern," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, eds. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine Warren (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 229.

21. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 70.
22. Michael Schudson, *The Sociology of News*, 2nd ed., (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 34.
23. Aurora Wallace, "The Black Press Goes to War," in *Newspapers and the Making of Modern America: A History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005), 53.
24. Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 123.
25. "Men of the Month," *The Crisis*, March 1918, 230.
26. Michael Thurston, "Bombed in Spain": Langston Hughes, the Black Press, and the Spanish Civil War," in *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Todd Vogel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 140.
27. Joseph McLaren, Introduction, *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 1, *Autobiography: I Wonder as I Wander*, ed. Joseph McLaren (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 2.
28. Langston Hughes, "Hughes Finds Moors," 162.
29. Langston Hughes, "Hughes Bombed in Spain," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 158.
30. Arnold Rampersad, "Chronology," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), xii–xiii. Hughes did publish pieces on Haiti in the Communist magazine *New Masses* in 1931, but they are more aligned with his experiential travel writing than with the reporting and interviewing he undertakes six years later in Spain.
31. Hughes, "Hughes Finds Moors," 164.
32. Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American: 1892–1950* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998), xii.
33. George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), 70.
34. Rampersad, Vol. 1, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, 344.
35. Thomas B. Connery, "A Third Way to Tell the Story: American Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Century," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008; 1990), 6.
36. Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 162.
37. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 28.
38. The paper had a reputation for publishing young and then-unknown black artists, including Hughes, Claude McKay and Countee Cullen, all of whom went on to distinguished careers in the arts. Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 14.
39. Langston Hughes, "The Ballad of Ethiopia," in *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: "This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do,"* ed. Danny Duncan Collum (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992), 109.
40. Langston Hughes, "'Organ Grinder's Swing' Heard Above Gunfire in Spain," in *The Collected*

- Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 166.
40. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 131.
 41. Hughes, "Hughes Finds Moors," 161.
 42. Thurston, "Bombed in Spain," 149.
 43. Hughes, "Hughes Finds Moors," 162.
 44. Hughes, "Hughes Finds Moors," 161.
 45. Thurston, "Bombed in Spain," 152.
 46. Hughes, "Hughes Finds Moors," 161.
 47. *Ibid.*, 162.
 48. Hughes, "Organ Grinder's Swing," 165.
 49. *Ibid.*, 165.
 50. *Ibid.*, 166.
 51. *Ibid.*, 166.
 52. *Ibid.*, 167.
 53. *Ibid.*, 168.
 54. *Ibid.*, 167.
 55. *Ibid.*, 168.
 56. *Ibid.*, 169.
 57. While serving on the Supreme Court, Justice Black supported *Brown v. Kansas Board of Education* and later apologized for his membership in the Klan saying, "I would have joined any group in order to get more votes."
 58. Thurston, "Bombed in Spain," 149.
 59. Charles Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage During National Crises* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 5.
 60. It is literary journalism because he combines deeply reported and observed material with literary techniques like symbolism, metaphor, narrative, and allegory.
 61. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 177.
 62. Hugh Kenner, "The Politics of Plain Style," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 187.
 63. "Red Black and Georgia," *Time*, May 3, 1937, accessed February 1, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,745014,00.html>.
 64. Langston Hughes, "Milt Herndon Died Trying to Rescue Wounded Pal," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 182.
 65. *Ibid.*, 183.
 66. *Ibid.*, 184.
 67. *Ibid.*, 185.
 68. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Close Ranks," *The Crisis* 16, no. 3 (July 1918), 505.
 69. Langston Hughes, "Soldiers from Many Lands United in Spanish Fight," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and*

World Affairs, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 180.

70. *Ibid.*, 181.

71. Langston Hughes, "Negroes in Spain," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Vol. 1, *The Poems: 1921-1940*, ed., Arnold Rampersad (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 157.

72. Hughes, "Soldiers from Many Lands," 181.

73. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 143.

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75. Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 165.

76. *Ibid.*, 157.

The *Afro-American's* World War II Correspondents: Feuilletonism as Social Action

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This study examines the World War II correspondence published by the Baltimore Afro-American, concentrating principally on Ollie Stewart. We argue these wartime dispatches constitute a style of social action and narrative journalism best understood through the lens of feuilletonism. These works featured the correspondent as the reader's "tour guide" of the war, wandering about and reporting what he saw and heard from black troops of their wartime experiences. Within the context of the Double V campaign, this body of work provided evidence for the Afro's argument that blacks were loyal and heroic citizens who deserved equal rights in the postwar world. Published alongside provocatively worded articles on racial and civil unrest in the United States, these works provided an undemanding style of reading that depicted soldiers as fulfilling—and exceeding—the expectations of a country dependent on their support to win the war.

By 1945, when the *Afro-American* published a book-length compilation of its World War II reporting, the Baltimore newspaper had sent seven black correspondents overseas to cover the experiences of black soldiers. The first of these was Ollie Stewart, who covered Rommel's retreat from North Africa in 1942 and the invasions of Sicily and Normandy in 1944. Stewart and the six other correspondents sponsored by the *Afro-American* are evidence of the growth of the paper's circulation, profitability, and influence during the 1930s and 1940s—unprecedented growth, given that the *Afro* sent no

correspondents abroad during World War I.¹ Launched on the foundation of a church newspaper in 1892, the paper went national during the 1930s, publishing two Baltimore editions, a national edition that many Pullman porters carried on trains to faraway cities, and several local editions, including the Philadelphia *Afro-American*, the Washington *Afro-American*, the Newark *Afro-American*, and the Richmond *Afro-American and Planet*.² The *Afro* continued to expand its reach during the war years, when circulation increased 124 percent and gross income grew from over \$430,000 to \$1.1 million.³

Such growth was true of the black press in general. Circulation rose from 1.3 million in 1940 to 2.1 million in 1947, with the majority of that number accounted for by just four papers: the *Pittsburgh Courier* (277,900), the *Afro-American* (235,600), the *Chicago Defender* (193,900), and the *New York Amsterdam News* (105,300).⁴ Yet despite the reach and influence of these papers, there has been relatively little scholarship on African American World War II correspondents.⁵

This essay draws on the pages of the *Afro* and the book-length compilation of its World War II reporting, *This Is Our War*, to describe the work of the *Afro*'s overseas war dispatches. Ollie Stewart's papers, a meager collection at Howard University, were also consulted. Though we concentrate on Stewart, we argue this body of work constitutes a style of social action and narrative journalism best understood through the lens of early feuilletonism. Exemplified in the United States by the *New Yorker*'s "Talk of the Town" column, feuilletonism has been called "an unruly genre of writing,"⁶ one that "would offer a slice of urban culture: a collage of everything that has occurred in the area and that deserved mention, however passing."⁷ Similarly, the *Afro*'s war reporting offered a jumble of events, observations, and stories collected by each correspondent. Across this body of work, however, there are constants: a concern with how "our soldiers are faring overseas, what they're thinking and, as far as censorship allows, what the places are like where they are staying,"⁸ along with the publication of long lists of the black soldiers encountered abroad and their greetings to loved ones back home. Furthermore, these works exhibit many of the themes that have been identified as markers of narrative journalism. Correspondents endeavored to produce a "journalism of everyday life."⁹ Through the use of first-person subjectivity and a conversational tone, these works functioned to "narrow the distance between subjectivity and the object."¹⁰ In the desire to defeat a common enemy, these works symbolically aligned writer, subject, and audience as allies with a white Other who discarded racist practices abroad while working side-by-side, often for the first time, with blacks. This rhetorical effect is heightened by the social context framing these works: the black press's "Double V" campaign to

fight both the enemy abroad and racism at home.

This essay not only contributes to the little-studied subject of the black press, but also advances John J. Pauly's call to clarify literary journalism's role in civic life¹¹ and Nancy Roberts's invitation to scrutinize overlooked sources.¹² We begin first by outlining a brief history of feuilletonism before describing the work of the *Afro's* overseas correspondents, ending with a discussion of the context of their work.

FEUILLETONISM AS NARRATIVE REPORTAGE

The stories reprinted in *This Is Our War* create a fragmented portrait, a fact noted in the introduction by editor and publisher Carl Murphy. "In reprinting these war-time dispatches no effort is made to tell a connected story," Murphy wrote. "This book represents a series of pictures of what war correspondents met in their travels and interpretations of the reactions of GI Joe to new environments."¹³ This mix and the centrality of the subjective reporter are defining characteristics of feuilletonism, a chatty, opinionated, and impressionistic journalistic genre common in European countries. Since 1800, when the editors of the French *Journal des Debats* invented the term *feuilleton* ("a leaf," referring to supplements in which such writings initially appeared), feuilletonists have been a journalistic force. Early feuilletonists "wandered about the city and relayed what they saw and heard in the street,"¹⁴ becoming the reader's "expert tour guide and a friendly companion."¹⁵

The role of feuilletons on the Continent has been so fundamental that opinionated writing, instead of newsgathering aimed at objectivity, gave rise to the impression that much of the European press consisted of *view*s papers, as opposed to America's *newspapers*.¹⁶ In Saint Petersburg and Moscow, for example, scholars have traced feuilletonism's influence on both public opinion¹⁷ and literature.¹⁸ There the form became immensely popular during the 1860s, when improvements in technology and an easing of censorship facilitated a dramatic expansion of the press.¹⁹ Replacing the heavier editorials and reviews published in previous journals, the "accessible"²⁰ and "undemanding"²¹ feuilleton functioned as a subjective first-person guidebook to popular urban culture:

The writer of the feuilleton presented himself as a man on the street and simulated easy conversation with the reader about common concerns. Often written in the first person, the feuilleton featured intimate details of the author's life. The familiarity of colloquial style and the emphasis on material of local interest made feuilletonistic speech easy to consume. The writer rambled between diverse issues of the day as a *flâneur* might meander through a variety of metropolitan locales. Purporting to inform city dwellers about the life of different municipal districts, the feuilletonist offered stories and accounts of local rumor and gossip.²²

Arguably, the genre reached the height of its influence during the turbulent and culturally exciting period in Germany from World War I to Hitler's ascension to power in 1934.²³ One feuilletonist with a lasting impact was the Austrian-born Joseph Roth, whose 1920s and early 1930s writings for the *Berliner Zeitung*, *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, and *Frankfurter Zeitung* are prized for their insights and literary qualities.²⁴ Roth's novels also became popular, particularly *Radetzky March* and *The Wandering Jews*.²⁵

By contrast, aside from the *New Yorker's* Talk of the Town, the U.S. popular press has not fostered a mainstream feuilletonist tradition.²⁶ Arguably, certain narrative journalists and columnists—an American invention—could be regarded as coming close to the early feuilletonists. Hutchins Hapgood described his work at the New York *Commercial Advertiser* as “something like the feuilleton.”²⁷ But as a well-known member of New York City's Bohemian community, Hapgood's connection to the form is perhaps more indicative of the influence of urban European culture on American bohemianism than of the influence of feuilletonism on US journalism.²⁸ A more important influence was likely the black press itself, long the only outlet for black literary talent and intellectual thought, and an unabashed agent of advocacy and protest.²⁹ The tradition nurtured the feuilletonist style Ollie Stewart developed in prewar reporting trips for the *Afro*, a style that would later characterize his work along war fronts.

OLLIE STEWART'S PREWAR REPORTING

As the United States entered World War II, Washington faced a thorny problem: how to win support for the war effort among African Americans on the home front. It was a hard sell. Blacks were no less patriotic than whites, but many resented government regulations that restricted the numbers of black soldiers who could enlist and limited their participation to mostly supply, mess, and maintenance duties, underscoring their second-class status in the segregated armed forces. Yet, unless the black population's loyalty could be secured, the possibility loomed that African Americans might sympathize with Japan, or so the government feared.

The dilemma was not new. More than two decades earlier, in World War I, the federal authorities had similarly viewed African Americans as a disgruntled group that the enemy could exploit. Officials saw any criticism of the prevailing “separate-but-equal” regime as suspicious and dangerous, particularly if it was expressed in the black press.

During World War I, federal authorities had the black press under close surveillance.³⁰ J. Edgar Hoover, at the time a young G-man,³¹ played a key role in these efforts. By the time the United States lurched toward World

War II, he had risen to the top of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, where he again aggressively tried to gauge the dangers posed by the black press. As early as 1940, one of Hoover's targets was the Afro-American Company of Baltimore.³² Its papers' tone was set by the editor and publisher, Carl Murphy, a Harvard graduate who received his PhD in German philology and had studied at the famed University of Jena, where the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and the poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller once taught.³³

At the *Afro*, as the papers were commonly and collectively known, Murphy favored a mix of serious headlines and titillating stories about gruesome killings, divorces, and salacious exposés about love triangles involving clergymen and doctors.³⁴ As war clouds gathered in 1940, Murphy came up with an idea that further increased the popularity of the various editions of the *Afro* and gained national prominence: he assigned a writer, Ollie Stewart, to tour armed forces camps that trained blacks. Stewart, who had been the paper's sportswriter, filed a series of twenty-three articles over the course of a year, describing segregated conditions and interviewing soldiers, naming them and their hometowns. Stewart saw the training of what became the first "Red Tails" of the Tuskegee Airmen. He saw a desert camp in Arizona and a number of bases from the Deep South to the Canadian border. All were strictly segregated. If he encountered black officers at all, they were likely to be chaplains. The New York Public Library deemed his reporting so exceptional that it included Ollie Stewart in its 1942 honor roll of race relations.³⁵

Hoover monitored the *Afro* with concern. He didn't like Stewart's stories or the headlines that editors in Baltimore put on them, such as "White Faces Making Lee Soldiers Sick."³⁶ Indeed, the headline was both incendiary and a stretch, since Stewart, in complaining about the absence of black officers in the segregated units, wrote:

The truth of the matter is, these white officers at Camp Lee don't understand their men at all. They mean well—but they just don't know. They live in a different world, and it is my honest opinion that they will never get as fine response and results from their units as colored officers would.³⁷

In general, *Afro* headlines tended to be catchier than the stories themselves. "Georgia Whites Would Prefer Axis Victory to Racial Equality in the United States," declared one.³⁸ It was based on this Ollie Stewart lede:

FORT BENNING, GA.—On the train to Columbus I heard a white in the smoker say: "I'd rather lose this goddam war than see these black sons of b----- get out of their place. Wearing an officer's uniform has already got some of 'em thinking they are as good as a white man."³⁹

Equally provocative was “Here’s Stewart’s Riot Prediction/Powder Keg at Two Army Camps”:

I was here on a Saturday night, not long after pay day. I was to return on a bus, operated by a civilian driver. Colored soldiers entering the bus were not entering fast enough to suit the white driver.

Said the driver: “Come on, step up there, shines!”

This was repeated at least three times until one soldier, coming up the steps remonstrated, “These men are no shines. They are soldiers!”

The driver reached down beside the seat and came up with a short-handled ax. He laid it in his lap and sat there. The soldiers were standing up in the bus. Nobody spoke. Trouble was so imminent you could smell it. And why hell didn’t break loose is more than I’ll ever understand.⁴⁰

Ollie Stewart was born May 18, 1906, in Louisiana, the son of a pastor who was the dean of Coleman College, a Baptist institution created in 1890 to educate the children of freed slaves. After the death of his father in 1929, Stewart went to live with an uncle, a dentist in East Orange, NJ, but he returned to Louisiana for high school and college.

This middle-class background gave Stewart ambitions that others may not have had, and he grabbed opportunities to realize them. He was in his early thirties in 1939 when he scored coups that thrust him to the front ranks of rising black journalists: he sold two articles to the *Reader’s Digest*, then at the peak of its popularity. “A Negro Looks at the South” produced controversy because of his optimistic long-term assessment.⁴¹ “Harlem God in His Heaven” became much talked about because it was about Father Divine, the charismatic Harlem spiritual leader whose message was “Accentuate the Positive, Eliminate the Negative,” which the white songwriter Johnny Mercer later turned into an early crossover hit that appealed to listeners regardless of race.⁴²

Flush with cash from his *Reader’s Digest* articles, Stewart talked Murphy into sending him to Brazil. He voyaged through the Caribbean for twelve days on the way out and spent another two weeks on a ship coming back. Everywhere he stopped, he wrote about his impressions of racial conditions. He also included other items of interest to readers. In the Dominican Republic, he wrote about eager youngsters hoping to catch the eye of US baseball recruiters; in Trinidad about how hot the temperature was. However, it is the series of Brazil articles, based on his twenty-six days in that country, that best demonstrates the kind of journalist Ollie Stewart was and would be in World War II. Stewart was not really a reporter in the mainstream tradition; rather,

he was a feuilletonist. In his *Afro* coverage, he used feuilletonist techniques by mixing presumably factual observations—often from unidentified locals—to buttress his impressions. His journalistic forte was writing, not newsgathering.⁴³

As a feuilletonist in Brazil, Stewart often gave short shrift to sourceable facts and instead quoted unnamed persons he met, including taxi drivers or waiters. He made sweeping statements about race relations on the basis of what he saw. In one long front-page article, “Brazilian Tragedy Is Short Hair,” he analyzed race relations through hair:

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL—If it isn’t a sin against the Holy Ghost, it is at least the height of bad judgment to be born black.

That is the conclusion I have come to after getting acquainted with Rio—one of the most beautiful places in the world, and the city I have tried harder to like than any place I’ve been.

Brazil has a hell of a color line. And it seems to be drawn according to the kind of hair you’ve got. The Portuguese and Indians come pretty dark sometimes, but they have straight hair. So they go anywhere and do anything. The mulatto, mixed African and Indian, or Portuguese and African, has long curly hair. So he too gets by.

But the plain colored man with short hair catches the devil!

Oh, they are very nice about giving colored people the runaround. All smiles and we’re-all-brothers-you-can-depend-on that—but you find yourself outside looking in, just the same, if you ain’t got that hair.⁴⁴

In an article headlined “Brazil 100 Years Behind the United States,” he wrote about what he perceived as social class immobility:

Opportunity doesn’t come aknocking here as it does in the States. Poor boys in Sao Paulo don’t work their way through college, study law, become president of a college or marry the boss’s daughter. If you start out in life here by selling bananas or lottery tickets, you usually end up doing the same thing. . . . This applies to Portuguese, Indian and African. You play the cards dealt you. There is no second deal.⁴⁵

The *Afro* published letters praising Stewart’s articles from readers who found them exotic. But James W. Ivy, a cultural anthropologist who later became editor of the *Crisis*, criticized Stewart as a “wide-eyed countryboy from Louisiana”⁴⁶ who lacked the background and language to interpret Brazil’s racial and caste complexities.⁴⁷ None of this worried Murphy, the *Afro* editor. People were talking—and buying the paper. And Stewart’s impressions had a lasting impact; his conclusions continued to be cited as authentic observations, partially because so few American blacks had seen Brazil.⁴⁸

Just as he had in Brazil, Stewart reported what he heard as he surveyed the situation of black troops at US encampments. If he made any effort to seek official comment, he made no mention of it. In a story headlined “Draft Has Already Hit Dixie, Ollie Stewart Finds,” he wrote:

In Louisiana, I heard stories of colored men already conscripted, already feeding and taking care of mules, already hustled into camps and taught how to cook and make beds—so that they will be good orderlies.

“But,” [I] objected to my informant, “the conscription bill has not yet been passed, and may not be passed until January—or at least until after the election.”

“Don’t need to pass no bill, if the white folks decide to come after you,” the man replied. “And if’n I was you, I wouldn’t be talking about elections and things. That’s white folks’ business—and somebody might hear you. Better button up your lips.”⁴⁹

Stewart was not the only one who challenged prevailing mainstream ideas. Soon after Pearl Harbor, in December 1941, the *Afro*’s unnamed “Inquiring Reporter” printed comments from five Richmond residents about the possibility that Japan might win the war. “The colored races as a whole would benefit,” William A. Pride, a printer, was quoted as saying. “This would be the first step in the darker races coming back into their own.” A salesman, James R. Orrange [sic], said: “If Japan should win the war, the colored people would have a greater advance. Today under white America’s rule, we do not have much opportunity to show our worth.”⁵⁰

Hoover hit the roof. He had collected a stack of provocative remarks from the *Afro*—including Ollie Stewart’s stories—and asked the Justice Department whether they were prosecutable for sedition. The answer was no. But Wendell Berge, head of the Justice Department’s criminal division, encouraged an investigation of the *Afro*’s ownership as well as the “character and pertinent activities” of its editors to see if they were linked with “hostile or subversive sources.”⁵¹ Hoover was not the only one who was fearful. After Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed the imposition of a voluntary censorship of black papers as the first step toward instituting official censorship. His administration also mulled over censoring all newspapers, white and black.⁵² Gradually, the Roosevelt administration’s thinking evolved. The censorship idea soon was shelved and the cooperation of newspapers catering to all races secured through persuasion. Even as the FBI director wanted to act against the *Afro* and other black papers, wider considerations about winning over the African American community trumped his concerns.

An early turning point in this evolution may have come at a two-day

conference sponsored by the War Department that began the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Nearly 20 key figures in African American journalism⁵³ traveled to Washington, DC, where they were told by Colonel E. R. Householder, of the adjutant general's office, that any relaxation of segregation was a nonstarter. "The army is not a sociological laboratory," he declared.⁵⁴

Ollie Stewart was one of two *Afro* representatives at the conference.⁵⁵ Within months of the meeting, he convinced Murphy to seek accreditation for the *Afro*. Surprisingly, authorities, after considering the application for six months, approved Stewart despite such indiscretions as urging, tongue-in-cheek, that readers reject President Roosevelt's 1940 reelection and vote for Communists instead.⁵⁶ Stewart also overcame another serious hang-up: at one point officials investigating his background confused him with a bank robber of the same name.⁵⁷ But when Stewart finally shipped to Europe in 1942, he became the *Afro*'s first war correspondent and a journalistic novelty to be promoted on its pages.

OLLIE STEWART AND THE *AFRO* GO TO WAR

Some 30 accredited war correspondents represented the black press on fronts from Europe to the Pacific, Alaska, China-Burma-India, the Mediterranean, North Africa, and Italy.⁵⁸ The *Afro* sent seven overseas. But as the paper's first, Stewart was treated as a celebrity. Instead of waiting to send him by troop ship at government expense with the "next colored contingent," the company acquired bragging rights by paying \$656 to fly him on a Pan American Airways Clipper to Europe. "The same trip before the war would have cost \$359," readers were told.⁵⁹ A picture showed the writer in an army trench coat and an officer's cap, since correspondents enjoyed the equivalent rank of major. He held a briefcase; a green armband marked with "C" identified him as a correspondent. In an article accompanying the picture, not a single detail was spared, from the number of inoculations he received to the cost of each piece of clothing in his wardrobe.⁶⁰

After Stewart arrived in wartime England in September 1942, he continued his feuilletonist style, writing as if he were sending letters home. In one of his maiden reports, he related how he woke up to a rat in his London hotel room eating his bar of chocolate until Stewart got up and ate it himself; the rat remained.⁶¹ He also described life in the warring country in terms that his readers living back in the States could readily relate to:

In America you get big, bulky Sunday papers. Here you get eight pages. In America you buy all the clothes you can pay for. Here you hoard coupons until you must have a shirt. In Baltimore you can have bacon and eggs every morning, with butter and plenty of sugar. Here you wait for a month for your egg, and wonder how to prepare it when you get it.⁶²

On the night of November 9, 1942, shortly after the first Allied landings in North Africa had been announced, he was included in a star-studded group of correspondents headed for Morocco in a convoy of ships. A. J. Liebling described the departure in the *New Yorker*:

Our party . . . left London late in the evening from a spur railroad station used only for troop movements, in an atmosphere thick with fog and mystery. It included Ernie Pyle, of Scripps-Howard, Bill Lang of *Time*, *Life*, etc., Red Mueller of *Newsweek*, Gault MacGowan of the *New York Sun*, Ollie Stewart of the *Baltimore Afro-American*, and Sergeant, now First Lieutenant, Bob Neville, whom I had known when he was on the *Herald Tribune* and *PM* and who was now going to Africa as a correspondent of the army magazine, *Yank*. I recognized a kindred spirit in Ollie the moment I saw him. "Where do you hope we land at?" he asked me. "Someplace where resistance has ceased," I told him. That established a perfect rapport.⁶³

Since these correspondents traveled on a British merchant ship that had been converted into military use, none of the US segregation rules were in force. Ernie Pyle wrote:

We were officially assigned together, and we stuck together throughout the trip. Ollie Stewart was a Negro, the only American Negro correspondent then accredited to the European theater. He was well-educated, conducted himself well, and had traveled quite a bit in foreign countries. We all grew to like him very much on the trip. He lived in one of the two cabins with us, ate with us, played handball on the deck with officers, everybody was friendly to him, and there was no "problem."⁶⁴

Once the group landed in Morocco, the correspondents went where the action was. Because the War Department barred blacks from combat, Stewart was constantly on the lookout for black supply, maintenance, and engineering units. To his editors he explained: "Finding colored units, or any unit, while under fire, is almost impossible. Nobody gives away such vital information, not even to correspondents—so when I do find colored boys in the forward areas, it is usually by accident."⁶⁵

Soon after arriving in Morocco, Stewart found himself bivouacked in the La Mamounia hotel, a former palace within the gates of the old imperial city of Marrakesh. A waiter there tipped him to the presence of a mysterious woman "just like you," a black American. He wasted no time in knocking on her door and found Josephine Baker, the Paris nightlife icon who had been widely reported as having died.⁶⁶ Stewart may have been the first to interview Baker during her convalescence from a serious operation. "There has been a slight exaggeration," Baker told Stewart, "with a gay smile and a French accent. 'I am much too busy to die.'"⁶⁷

His first experience reporting live combat came soon after along the Tunisian front: "This is a story I have wanted to write since I left America . . . now that I have seen our lads in action on the Tunisian front, I am both proud and humble," Stewart wrote. "I am proud because they covered themselves with glory as well as with mud—and humble because I cannot tell the story as it should be told."⁶⁸ Stewart described traveling many miles to reach the front and then putting cloth in his ears to watch the exchange of gunfire. He reported that officers told him of the "marvelous job"⁶⁹ black artillerymen performed, and described trying to find the regiments the next day only to discover they had already evacuated. In the absence of interviews with soldiers, Stewart wrote of the equality of all troops under fire:

I must emphasize that every unit near the front is a combat unit. All our quartermasters, engineers and truck drivers are subject to encounters with the enemy day and night, and all are prepared to fight their way out of a crack.

You can be sure that every man in Tunisia whose name I write in stories is really helping push the Germans out of North Africa.

Unshaven and looking like bearded Arabs, living in caves, dirty and tough as leather, our boys are helping every time the Allies gain mileage in this push, which we all hope will last in this theatre of operations.⁷⁰

Everything that Stewart wrote had to be passed by military censors. While he occasionally mailed material that was not time-sensitive, he cabled most of his articles, a somewhat costly proposition that may have stunted his style because it required economy in expression. In writing, he used cablese, merging words, taking shortcuts. Instead of shot down, he would write downshot. "Downshot is one word and saves money; but if not understood on other end can cause confusion," he explained to his editors in Baltimore. "In the future I will cut out or transpose all words that will effect a saving—and you have to pad the messages. Put in 's,' 'the' and such; watch for words like uncan, meaning can't; unpassed meaning passed up, etc."⁷¹

From North Africa, Stewart followed invading troops to Sicily, then Rome. He was an eyewitness to the Allied landing at Normandy in 1945 and the push through the countryside. Stewart wrote that everywhere he went he was told about the heroics black troops had performed,⁷² from field artillery⁷³ and barrage balloon operators⁷⁴ to the first black officers managing motor transport companies.⁷⁵ Regarding these officers, a colonel told Stewart: "They're on trial . . . to prove what they can do as compared to white officers. I don't think mixing the officers is a good thing. Either all white or all colored."⁷⁶ In a parenthetical aside, Stewart expressed regret on the subject:

(Apology to readers, if any: If I keep mentioning colors and races in this and other articles, I'm sorry. But everywhere I go it pops up. I'm sick of the subject, and wish I never heard of it again, but the army functions on racial lines.

(Officers talk race, not ability; the men discuss it all the time—so a correspondent has to include it, no matter how distasteful the subject may be.)⁷⁷

Stewart's own skin color attracted attention in Brussels, where Belgians were relieved to learn he was American, not African, and wanted to discuss relations with the Congo.⁷⁸ In London, Stewart was pleased that the city did not show "even a hint of the color prejudice that some people have said exists. All classes seem united for victory. The spirit of true democracy fills the air and the streets are colorful with uniforms of united nations."⁷⁹ Yet, he encountered racism from time to time in his interactions with American troops, and described one such moment during his first haircut in London: "A friend with hair like mine sent me to his barber, a Greek; and as soon as I sat down a Texas drawl came in and took the seat next to mine," Stewart wrote. "One look and the drawl, in an American uniform, started to get up and leave. It stayed, however, and nobody understood the byplay but us two."⁸⁰

In 1943, at the conclusion of his first year abroad as a war correspondent, Stewart was optimistic that American racial divides were being erased by "common danger, the common foe and hardships of battle."⁸¹ Stewart wrote about his hopefulness at length:

There are no color lines in foxholes or when a landing barge is being shelled; when an air field is strafed or when a convoy is dive bombed. I have seen colored and white who glared at each other before a bombing get quite chummy after death whistled by in big hunks of shrapnel. . . .

Opinion here is growing stronger that the American army cannot fight two wars at the same time—one against the axis and the other between its own white and colored soldiers. . . .

Many lives will be lost before the final victory is achieved, but already our men are looking ahead toward their part in the post-war world. While statesmen study maps in anticipation of global control, these boys lie on the ground and swat flies and sweat on docks to make this control possible, and all they want to know is will they be allowed to enjoy what they have fought for?⁸²

The war was the peak of Stewart's career. Returning to the United States, he found racial conditions intolerable. He settled in Paris, trying to eke out a living by freelancing. But over the next decade, as the focus of racial politics

shifted from the war to desegregation in the United States, he found himself in a wrong place at a wrong time. Young Ollie Stewarts among the new generation of black journalists were covering desegregation, some of them able to hit the big time by working for prominent white newspapers, radio stations, and television, which was emerging as a major media outlet. Stewart struggled on. Perhaps because of pride, he insisted on staying in Paris, barely able to make a living. His 1968 income was \$425. In ill health, he ended up doing occasional pieces for whomever paid, including the pulp magazines *Argosy* and *True*.⁸³ He died in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1977.⁸⁴

While Stewart is today largely forgotten, his coverage of the war—combined with that of the correspondents who followed him—stands today as an example of feuilletonism as social action.

FEUILLETONISM AS SOCIAL ACTION

Stewart was the first of the *Afro*'s seven war correspondents. With some variation, each correspondent who followed continued to provide a mix of war news similar to Stewart's mix. These correspondents included Art Carter, who traveled to Italy in 1943 and reported the heroics of the Tuskegee airmen of the Ninety-ninth Fighter Squadron after pilots returned to base "like football players bursting into a dining room after a triumph in the season's classic."⁸⁵ Max Johnson reported the invasion of southern France in 1944, while Vincent Tubbs and Francis Yancey covered General Douglas MacArthur's campaigns in the southwest Pacific in 1943 and 1944. Tubbs was perhaps the most "literary" of the reporters to succeed Stewart, demonstrating a gift for depicting mundane, yet poignant moments pregnant with detail.⁸⁶ Herbert Frisby traveled to the far north during two summer trips in 1943 and 1944, reaching the Aleutians and the Arctic Circle in Alaska, and writing lengthy travelogues describing the Eskimo people and customs he encountered on his way to visit black armed forces.⁸⁷ Finally, Elizabeth Phillips, Carl Murphy's daughter, became the first African American female war correspondent when she traveled to London in 1944. Though her plans to travel to the European theater were canceled after she was hospitalized with neuralgia,⁸⁸ she reported from her hospital bed the names of black soldiers she met and her experiences adjusting to air raids and counting English pounds.⁸⁹

This body of work, like the correspondence featured generally in the black press, was principally concerned with highlighting black soldiers' contributions to the war effort on behalf of a country that denied them civil rights.⁹⁰ This coverage included war dispatches, exposés of racial injustice, and long lists of names of soldiers encountered abroad, since "editors knew that names made news."⁹¹ Personal experiences and narratives were a substantial part of

this work throughout the black press.⁹² Like the *Afro*, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* printed personal journalism and human-interest stories alongside war updates.⁹³ Yet scholars have characterized such narratives as second-tier reporting. Frank Bolden, writing for the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association, was said to have produced mostly “soft” stories because of strict censorship.⁹⁴ Herbert Frisby’s Alaskan travelogues have been described similarly: “[W]ith almost no real ‘news’ to report, Frisby sent back folksy features, sometimes padding them out with lists of black soldiers he had encountered along the way.”⁹⁵ And another reason human-interest stories dominated: black soldiers did not engage in combat until the last stages of the war.⁹⁶

However, Stewart’s prewar reporting suggests that his narrative war correspondence was a stylistic choice, not one forced upon him by censorship or lack of news. That Carl Murphy refused to release Stewart to become a general correspondent for the Associated Negro Press⁹⁷ also suggests that this was an intentional stylistic choice for the paper. But if so, what function might such narrative have served?

It has been said that narrative journalism is more than just a literary canon; it is social discourse as well.⁹⁸ After studying the work of the *Afro*’s correspondents, we believe these reports served a strategic function, and we propose understanding them as something akin to early feuilletonism—with a purpose. As in Russia and France during the previous century, this personal form of journalism appeared in a newspaper that, in the tradition of the black press, was committed to an advocacy that “interpreted events from a black viewpoint and were far less committed to ‘objectivity’ than the white papers claimed to be.”⁹⁹ These dispatches were also published during a time of immense growth for the *Afro*, when the newspaper could boast of both increased circulation and influence. Stewart’s work featured the correspondent as the reader’s “tour guide” of the war, wandering about and reporting what was seen and heard. Also, much of the time, this was not a coherent or chronological account of the war’s major campaigns. Though at times filled with news, this was also a fragmented mix of the correspondents’ personal experiences and observations, and a record of people encountered. As such, these works provided compelling reading that featured both the routine experiences and the heroic deeds of black soldiers abroad.

But we suspect this example of World War II feuilletonism also functioned on another level, given the FBI investigations of the *Afro*. Though the Justice Department refused Hoover’s 1942 request to prosecute the *Afro* for sedition, the FBI director continued to demand extensive investigation of the paper throughout the war.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the *Afro* continued to publish incendiary accounts of racial unrest. For instance, when a brief account by Ol-

lie Stewart of Tuskegee fliers dropping bombs on Italy appeared on the front page of the *Afro's* June 26, 1943, edition, it was surrounded by stories describing race riots in Detroit and Texas. Declared one lede: "A week end of terror, worse than anything visited upon the Jews by Nazi fanatics at the height of their pogroms, was experienced by the colored population of this swollen war industry town last week." The side-by-side appearance of such stories with Stewart's feuilletonist dispatches fulfilled the *Afro's* "Double V" mission—to encourage readers to support victory against shared enemies abroad and victory over racial injustice at home.¹⁰¹

The Double V campaign was launched first in the pages of the *Pittsburgh Courier* in February 1942,¹⁰² and then in the *Chicago Defender* and the *Afro*.¹⁰³ For three months, the *Afro* ran an image of a flag (for loyalty) on one side of its masthead and a closed fist (for unity) on the other before explaining their meanings to readers: "[P]atriotism can function effectively only if all citizens, like all fingers of the hand, work together as partners."¹⁰⁴ This was a homage to Booker T. Washington's attempt at compromise and conciliation between North and South, black and white. In an 1895 speech in Atlanta, Georgia, Washington stated, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."¹⁰⁵ Critics of this approach included W. E. B. Du Bois, who wrote that Washington's accommodationist approach was viewed as one of "an old attitude of adjustment and submission"¹⁰⁶ that had resulted in a loss of political power, civil rights, and opportunities for higher education. The *Afro's* reference to all citizens as members of the same hand could be interpreted as a call to unity—a homage to Washington, but one that embraced a more active civil rights agenda. This was a fine distinction the *Afro* had carved out during much of the contentious debate between Washington and Du Bois in the early years of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷

Just two months after the *Afro* published its explanation of its fist and flag imagery, Ollie Stewart departed for London. In the context of the Double V campaign, Stewart's dispatches may have leavened criticism—from both blacks and whites—who saw the paper as too militant. Reproaches of the black press's militancy came from prominent blacks such as Warren H. Brown, director of Negro relations for the Council for Democracy,¹⁰⁸ and Southern white and nationally known journalists Mark Ethridge and Virginius Dabney, as well as Westbrook Pegler.¹⁰⁹ Such critics opined that black newspapers were "stirring up interracial hate"¹¹⁰ and would encourage violence among extremists. Even the *Courier* toned down its Double V campaign dramatically in late 1942, just months after it was introduced, likely because it did not want to endanger the wartime gains made by middle-class blacks in the armed forc-

es and defense industries.¹¹¹ The *Courier* replaced Double V agitation with positive news stories and photo layouts that frequently took up a full page.¹¹² Similarly, increased cooperation with the military led to an “endless stream” of positive coverage, especially in the pages of the *Afro*, since it had sent so many correspondents overseas.¹¹³ (Of the national black newspapers, only the *Pittsburgh Courier* sent as many reporters to the fronts.¹¹⁴) Thus, while the *Afro*’s war correspondence not only fulfilled the mission of the Double V campaign by highlighting servicemen’s contributions to the war effort, it also demonstrated the paper’s own loyalty and patriotism—and its willingness to provide a positive response when its demands were met.

NARRATIVE JOURNALISM AND CIVIC LIFE

What role does literary journalism play in civic life? This question was posed by John J. Pauly in his keynote address at the 2011 meeting of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies. In examining the weaknesses of literary journalism as compared to conventional news forms, Pauly noted that literary work is often seen as a “needlessly wordy version of the feature writing and depth reporting that the best reporters already do,”¹¹⁵ and that such work may “over-theorize the individual and under-theorize the group.”¹¹⁶ Pauly asked: “Is it possible for literary journalism to describe a social field, in which individuals are not the entire focus but moments in a larger social process?”¹¹⁷

We think this body of war correspondence provides one example. The context of this work implies that this instance of narrative journalism was deployed strategically. When considered in context, this body of work exemplifies the collaborative use of both literary journalism and domestic news and exposés to give “voice to the drama of civic life.”¹¹⁸ Murphy used Stewart’s narratives alongside provocative domestic stories not only to demonstrate the legitimacy of the paper’s civil rights claims, but also the paper’s loyalty and patriotism to the war effort. This feuilletonist style provided a counterbalance to critics who protested the *Afro*’s militant insistence on racial injustice and discrimination. And, in showing that “there are no color lines in foxholes,” Stewart’s narrative symbolically united writer, subject, and audience as allies with a white Other who discarded racist practices abroad while working side-by-side, often for the first time, with blacks. This rhetorical effect was heightened by the social context of the Double V campaign and domestic criticism of the black press, underlining the *Afro*’s argument that its readers were not only loyal citizens, but heroic as well, and deserving of equal rights in a postwar world.

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NOTES

1. *This Is Our War* (Baltimore: Afro-American Company, 1945), 7.
2. Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American, 1892–1950* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1998), 17.
3. *Ibid.*, 19.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Jinx Coleman Broussard and John Maxwell Hamilton, “Covering a Two-Front War: Three African American Correspondents During World War II,” *American Journalism* 22, no. 3 (2005): 34.
6. Katia Dianina, “The Feuilleton: An Everyday Guide to Public Culture in the Age of the Great Reforms,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 47, no. 2 (2003): 188.
7. *Ibid.*, 187.
8. *This Is Our War*, 207.
9. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 287.
10. John C. Hartsock, *A History of Literary Journalism: The Emergence of Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 132.
11. John J. Pauly, “Literary Journalism and the Drama of Civic Life” (key-note address, IALJS, Brussels, May 13, 2011), *Literary Journalism Studies* 3, no. 2 (2011): 74.
12. Nancy L. Roberts, “Firing the Canon: The Historical Search for Literary Journalism’s Missing Links,” *Literary Journalism Studies* 4, no. 2 (2012).
13. *This Is Our War*, 8.
14. Konstantine Klioutchkine, “The Rise of *Crime and Punishment* from the Air of the Media,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 102.
15. Dianina, “The Feuilleton,” 194.
16. Louise Zabel, “Politiken—Fra Newspaper til Viewspaper” (master’s thesis, Roskilde University, 2007). Also: Dianina, “Feuilleton”; Andrew Marr, “Unleashing Humphrys or Paxo Is a Democratic Service,” *British Journalism Review* 16, no. 1 (2005).

17. For example, Dianina, "The Feuilleton."

18. For example, Katia Dianina, "Passage to Europe: Dostoevskii in the St. Petersburg Arcade," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 2 (2003); Melissa Frazier, "Turgenev and a Proliferating French Press: The Feuilleton and Feuilletonistic in 'A Nest of the Gentry,'" *Slavic Review* 69, no. 4 (2010); Klioutchkine, "Rise of *Crime and Punishment*"; Maria Kisel, "Feuilletons Don't Burn: Bulgakov's 'The Master and Margarita' and the Imagined 'Soviet Reader,'" *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009).

19. Dianina, "Feuilleton," 188.

20. Klioutchkine, "Rise of Crime and Punishment," 92.

21. Dianina, "Feuilleton," 193.

22. Klioutchkine, "Rise of Crime and Punishment," 92–93.

23. See Almut Todorow, *Das Feuilleton der "Frankfurter Zeitung" in der Weimarer Republik: zur Grundlegung einer rhetorischen Medienforschung* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1996).

24. Collections of his Berlin and Paris coverage have been translated into English and are in print, such as, Joseph Roth, Michael Hofmann, and Michael Bienert, *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin, 1920–1933* (New York: Norton, 2003); Joseph Roth, Michael Hofmann, and Katharina Ochse, *Report from a Parisian Paradise: Essays from France, 1925–1939* (New York: Norton, 2004).

25. Why is the peak of feuilletonism centered on Weimar Germany rather than on France, where the form originated? One theory: German feuilletonists wrote about matters and developments that are easier for us to understand—and often still matter—unlike many French journalists, who did topical pieces on fleetingly parochial matters and persons so inconsequential we may not even find their names in encyclopedias.

26. Erica Jill Scheinberg, "Music and the Technological Imagination in the Weimar Republic: Media, Machines and the New Objectivity" (PhD diss., University of California, 2007), 32, f 15.

27. Hutchins Hapgood, *A Victorian in the Modern World* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), 138. Quoted in: Thomas B. Connery, "A Third Way to Tell the Story: American Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Century," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 15.

28. Christine Stansell and Paul Avrich Collection (Library of Congress), *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 25, 345.

29. Farrar, *Baltimore Afro-American, 1892–1950*, xi–xii.

30. See Theodore Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). In particular, a coordinated campaign was undertaken to silence the *Chicago Defender*, "the most dangerous of all Negro journals," on grounds of sedition because it harshly attacked societal discrimination and segregation of the armed forces. In an effort to restrict the circulation of offending papers, the federal government considered denying mailing privileges. See also: Patrick Scott Washburn, *A Question of Sedition:*

The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press during World War II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

31. American slang for "government man," a term used to describe special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
32. Patrick S. Washburn, "J. Edgar Hoover and the Black Press in World War II," *Journalism History* 13, no. 1 (1986): 27.
33. Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 183.
34. Antero Pietila, "Baltimore Afro-American: Starving on a Black Plantation," *Buncombe: A Review of Baltimore Journalism*, September/October, 1972.
35. "Negro History Week Attended by Honor Roll Announcement," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 7, 1942.
36. Ollie Stewart, "White Faces Making Lee Soldiers Sick," *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 29, 1941.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Ollie Stewart, "Georgia Whites Would Prefer Axis Victory to Racial Equality in the United States," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 28, 1942.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Ollie Stewart, "Here's Stewart's Riot Prediction Powder Keg at Two Army Camps," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 22, 1941.
41. Ollie Stewart, "A Negro Looks at the South," *Reader's Digest*, January 1939.
42. Ollie Stewart, "Harlem God in His Heaven," *Reader's Digest*, June 1940.
43. Although he never became a successful fiction writer, it was not for the lack of trying. Between his road trips, he filled pages in the *Afro* with short stories and more ambitious efforts that the paper serialized. He tried to sell them to other outlets, but found few takers. Thinking that he would have a better chance of getting published in New York City, he moved to Harlem, where he hobnobbed with members of what the novelist Wallace Thurman—in a play on the popular term *literati*—called the "Niggerati," a group of young artists and writers at the heart of the Harlem Renaissance. After Stewart left the staff, he continued freelancing as a "special correspondent" for the *Afro*. Anna Pochmara, *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 109–41.
44. Ollie Stewart, "Brazilian Tragedy Is Short Hair," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 6, 1940.
45. Ollie Stewart, "Brazil 100 Years Behind the United States," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 20, 1940.
46. James W. Ivy, "Thinks Afro Writer Naïve; Caste Lines Are Mistaken for U.S. Color Bar," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 17, 1940.
47. Ivy said that travelers like Stewart "are Americans whose vision has been so warped by color they are prone to explain their personal difficulties as well as those of the natives solely in terms of race."
48. See David J. Hellwig, "A New Frontier in a Racial Paradise: Robert S. Abbott's Brazilian Dream," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 25, no. 1 (1988).

49. Ollie Stewart, "Draft Has Already Hit Dixie, Ollie Stewart Finds," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 31, 1940.

50. "Inquiring Reporter," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 20, 1941.

51. Washburn, "J. Edgar Hoover and the Black Press," 27.

52. *Ibid.*, 41–42.

53. Among them were the estimable Dr. Emmett J. Scott of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, who had been an adviser to President Woodrow Wilson and had authored a 1919 history of blacks in World War I; A.C. McNeil, managing editor of the *Chicago Defender*; and Roy Wilkins, editor of the NAACP journal the *Crisis*. They clashed over the military's racial policies with Gen. George C. Marshall, the chief of staff, and top Roosevelt civilian aides such as William S. Hastie, the first black federal judge.

54. "Newsmen Score War Department Policy Extension of Segregation Is Disclosed," *Chicago Defender*, December 13, 1941.

55. *Ibid.*

56. His tongue-in-cheek front-page article argued that if Earl Browder, the Communist presidential candidate, "should get himself elected and go to jail for four years—we'd have a colored president for James W. Ford is his running mate." Ollie Stewart, "Whom Not to Vote for on Nov. 5; Ollie Stewart Sizes Up Candidates on Eve of Presidential Election," *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 2, 1940.

57. Ollie Stewart, "Military Correspondent," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 4, 1942.

58. Edward B. Toles, "They Covered the War," *Chicago Defender*, August 4, 1945.

59. "Stewart off to War Front in Europe; Afro Correspondent Makes Trip Via Clipper," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 5, 1942.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Ollie Stewart, "Ollie Stewart Scared by London Air Raid Alert; Stays Inside," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 19, 1942.

62. *Ibid.*

63. A. J. Liebling, *World War II Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2008), 217.

64. Ernie Pyle and Orr Kelly, *Here Is Your War: Story of G.I. Joe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 8. This was not the last time Stewart and Pyle found themselves together. Stewart described sharing a tent with Pyle and other correspondents and watching Pyle struggle to make breakfast: "The water for coffee boiled over and put out the fire and Ernie, the homespun writer, cursed fluently the cat that he couldn't get 'any so-and-so co-operation.' Everybody else was lying in bed, giving lip service and moral support. I felt sorry for Ernie. He's a top-flight writer, but this cruel world always seems too damn much for his frail body." *This Is Our War*, 20. Apparently, Stewart was not much for the camaraderie of other black correspondents, who were now on the scene in numbers, for Roi Ottley of New York's *PM* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* observed, "Ollie Stewart was pretty much a lone wolf, hunting down cognac and French whores." Roi Ottley and Mark A.

Huddle, *Roi Ottley's World War II: The Lost Diary of an African American Journalist* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 67.

65. Ollie Stewart, "A Letter from Ollie Stewart," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 23, 1943.

66. Langston Hughes had eulogized her: "Josephine Baker, a child of charm, dusky Cinderella girl, ambadress of beauty from Negro America to the world, buried now on the foreign soil—as much a victim of Hitler as the soldiers who fall today in Africa fighting his armies." Langston Hughes, "Here to Yonder," *Chicago Defender*, December 5, 1942. Embarrassingly, the Hughes paean appeared on the very same day that AP reported that the St. Louis-born singer and dancer had been discovered alive in Morocco. "Josephine Baker, Who Fled Germans, Lives Alone in Casablanca," *Chicago Tribune*, December 5, 1942.

67. Ollie Stewart, "'Too Busy to Die,' Jo Baker Tells Afro," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 23, 1943.

68. *This Is Our War*, 135.

69. *Ibid.*, 136.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Stewart, "Letter from Ollie Stewart."

72. *This Is Our War*, 13.

73. *Ibid.*, 15–16.

74. *Ibid.*, 28.

75. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*, 17.

79. *Ibid.*, 124.

80. *Ibid.*, 127–28.

81. *Ibid.*, 159–60.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Zora Felton, "Ollie Stewart Papers Scope Note" (Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University). This seems incomplete to me.

84. Elizabeth M. Oliver, "So Long, Ollie Stewart," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 7, 1977.

85. *This Is Our War*, 74.

86. See *This Is Our War*, 40–73.

87. *This Is Our War*, 162–204. This was the beginning of a lifelong preoccupation for Frisby. He devoted much of his life to having black Marylander Matthew Henson recognized as a codiscoverer of the North Pole in 1919, alongside Admiral Robert Peary.

88. *This Is Our War*, 7–8.

89. *This Is Our War*, 205–12.

90. Jinx Coleman Broussard, *African American Foreign Correspondents: A History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 107.

91. John D. Stevens, *From the Back of the Foxhole: Black Correspondents in*

World War II, Journalism Monographs, no. 27 (Austin, TX: Association for Education in Journalism, 1973), 16.

92. Broussard, *African American Foreign Correspondents*, Kindle location 2507.

93. Broussard and Hamilton, "Covering a Two-Front War," 42.

94. John D. Stevens, "Black Correspondents of World War II Cover the Supply Routes," *Journal of Negro History* 57, no. 4 (1972): 397.

95. *Ibid.*, 405.

96. Broussard, *African American Foreign Correspondents*, Kindle locations 2522–26.

97. *Ibid.*, 108.

98. John J. Pauly, "The Politics of the New Journalism," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 116.

99. Stevens, *From the Back of the Foxhole*, 1.

100. Washburn, "J. Edgar Hoover and the Black Press," 27, 29, 30; Farrar, *Baltimore Afro-American, 1892–1950*, 168–70.

101. Farrar, *Baltimore Afro-American, 1892–1950*, 168.

102. Patrick S. Washburn, "The Pittsburgh Courier's Double V Campaign in 1942," *American Journalism* 3, no. 2 (1986): 75.

103. Earnest L. Perry, Jr., "A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association's Fight for Equality during World War II," *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (2002): 33–34.

104. "What the Afro's Closed Fist Means," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 18, 1942.

105. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2008), 37.

106. *Ibid.*, 41.

107. Farrar, *Baltimore Afro-American, 1892–1950*, 141–45.

108. Perry, "Common Purpose," 36.

109. Washburn, "Pittsburgh Courier's Double V Campaign," 80.

110. Farrar, *Baltimore Afro-American, 1892–1950*, 169.

111. Washburn, "Pittsburgh Courier's Double V Campaign," 82.

112. *Ibid.*

113. Farrar, *Baltimore Afro-American, 1892–1950*, 171.

114. Stevens, *From the Back of the Foxhole*, 10.

115. Pauly, "Literary Journalism and the Drama of Civic Life," 76.

116. *Ibid.*, 79.

117. *Ibid.*

118. *Ibid.*, 75.

Unreading Modernism: Richard Wright's Literary Journalism

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Richard Wright's journalism has been largely unexamined by Wright scholars. He has never been studied as a literary journalist nor placed in an African American tradition of journalism or literary journalism. And yet his journalism is infused with qualities that put him firmly in line with other African Americans who are remembered today primarily as writers of fiction, poetry, or plays but who nevertheless wrote literary journalism. Like most of those writers, Wright produced a kind of African American literary journalism that has as its primary objective a change of social policy or order while it also clearly demonstrates new expressive and stylistic forms. This essay focuses on works that best reveal Wright as a heretofore unrecognized literary journalist: 12 Million Black Voices (1940) and a selection of his exile writings: Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos, (1954), The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference (1956), and Pagan Spain (1957). It demonstrates the usefulness of literary journalistic forms to Wright as an African American writer and global humanitarian and also shows how Wright, while advancing his aesthetic aims, repurposed traditional journalism through what I'm calling his "transnational modernism" in order to promote a political solidarity with oppressed people around the world.

Richard Wright's journalism has been largely unexamined by Wright scholars. He has never been studied—in my view, mistakenly—as a literary journalist nor placed in an African American tradition of journalism or literary journalism.¹ And yet his journalism is infused with qualities that put him firmly in line with other African Americans who are remembered today primarily as writers of fiction or poetry or plays but who nevertheless wrote literary journalism.² Some of these include Langston Hughes, Alice Childress, Zora Neale Hurston, Melvin Tolson, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Nella Larsen, and Jessie Fauset. Like most of these writers, Wright produced a kind of African American literary journalism that has as its primary objective a change of social policy or order, while it also clearly demonstrates new expressive and stylistic forms. In what follows, I will concentrate on works that I think best reveal Wright as a heretofore unrecognized literary journalist: *12 Million Black Voices* (1940) and a selection of his exile writings: *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*, (1954), *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (1956), and *Pagan Spain* (1957). My objective will be to demonstrate the usefulness of literary journalistic forms to Wright as an African American writer and global humanitarian. Along the way, I want to show how Wright, while advancing his aesthetic aims, repurposed traditional journalism through what I'm calling his "transnational modernism" in order to promote a political solidarity with oppressed people around the world.³

Wright's transnational modernism is inseparable from his social objectives. He envisioned a future in which race would be central to the aspirations of his modernism and cosmopolitanism might come to be reconceived as something solid, meaning more than simply being detached from one's country. His vision anticipated the current revisionist scholarship on modernisms by such critics as Stephen Eric Bronner (*Modernism at the Barricades*, 2012), Joseph B. Entin (*Sensational Modernism*, 2007), Sara Blair (*Harlem Crossroads*, 2007), Michael Thurston (*Making Something Happen: American Political Poetry between the Wars*, 2001), Edward M. Pavlic, (*Crossroads Modernism: Descent and Emergence in African-American Literary Culture*, 2002), and George Hutchinson (*The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 1995). Wright's position is echoed in Michelle Stephens's view on what is embedded in "African-American Modernisms": "[an] awareness of the text and the artwork as inextricably intertwined within, and in dialogue with, a modern racialized social reality."⁴ African American modernists built from social realism a "black modernity which could be perceived and performed in multiple modes, genres, and registers."⁵

Yet this position can only be understood in relation to how Wright anticipated "a modernism that knows we have never been modern."⁶ For Wright,

we have never been modern most crucially in a social and racial sense that would equate being modern with having mastered a new humanitarianism. Wright realized that the only acceptable modernism to which to aspire was one fully cognizant of social equity and justice. Indeed, Wright's modernism uncovers the "crime[s] of modernity": the inexorable pursuit of pecuniary power as well as the failure to find and identify any kind of sustainable social equality. Wright's modernism reveals a world image—a modernity overflowing with racism and violence, a kind of repository of "that which fundamentally determines subjectivity."⁸ This modernism would follow the implications of W. E. B. Du Bois's call to heed the struggles of all repressed peoples: "[B]efore the Negroes of the Western World can play any effective part they must first acquaint themselves with what is taking place in that larger world whose millions are in motion. . . . If our problem here is really part of a great world-wide problem, we must make our attempts to solve our part link up with the attempts being made elsewhere to solve other parts."⁹ Especially in his exile writings, Wright made Du Bois's advice visible.

Adding to this, Wright's cultural definitions of a modern identity highlight the importance of poverty—an additional uncovering—not only as a "critical category,"¹⁰ but also as a literary frame and literary-journalistic frame for organizing and analyzing race and culture. Wright's fictional and autobiographical engagements with poverty, running from Mississippi to Chicago, from (present-day) Ghana to Jakarta, especially when combined with race, unsettle literary-historical and literary-journalistic categories. Wright encompasses a modernism in which the majority of his characters exist outside the structures of ownership and where families cannot be depended on as a source of stability. He embraced a modernism that positions itself against the very forces it reveals.

Wright's transnational modernism—especially in its literary journalistic forms—needs to be given critical attention. Although Wright's major achievement as a writer was in fiction, his entire career was enlivened by his journalism and various forms of literary journalism. One of the first journals to publish Wright's work was Jack Conroy's *The Anvil* (1933–35), a journal of proletarian fiction and essays. Although Wright published only two poems ("Strength" and "Child of Dead and Forgotten Gods," March/April 1934 issue) and one short story ("Post Office Nights," July/August 1934 issue), the *Anvil's* proletarian focus encouraged Wright's leftist view and radical polemical forms. The research he did (much of it sociologically oriented) and the journalistic forms that he learned as a writer and editor of the *Daily Worker*,¹¹ the official newspaper of the Communist Party in the 1930s and 1940s, underlie his most effective literary journalism and were instrumental in develop-

ing the successful autobiographical prose for which he is most remembered. His work for the *Daily Worker* deepened his understanding of race relations and urban racial problems and helped prepare him for the writing of his later essayistic and politically infused fiction (*Black Boy*, 1945; *Native Son*, 1940) and literary journalism discussed below.

Beneath the array of topics that he covered for the *Daily Worker*, which ranged from lynchings, rent strikes, and the Joe Louis–Max Schemling fight to the Scottsboro case, peace parades, and black theater, he sought to do more than merely chronicle events or apprise his readers of the most recent racial injustices. He wished to change American culture by redefining social class, reconfiguring race and nationhood, and resetting the terms of public conversation in writings that would convince as much by their style and form as by their content. His pieces for the *Partisan Review* (“Between the World and Me,” 1934), the *New Challenge* (“Blueprint for Negro Writing,” 1937), the *Atlantic Monthly* (“I Bite the Hand That Feeds Me,” 1940; “I Tried to be a Communist,” 1944), the *New Masses* (“Not My People’s War,” 1941), *Harp-er’s Magazine* (“What You Know Won’t Hurt You,” 1942), *Présence Africaine* (“Bright and Morning Star,” 1946), and *Ebony* (“The Shame of Chicago,” 1951) provided homes for his combinations of literary, nonfiction, and autobiographical writing, all of which would reappear in various blended forms in his longer works. As such, Wright’s fiction and journalism, engaging in a dynamic dialogue within and among communities (e.g., Memphis, Chicago, New York, Paris, Jakarta, Spain), debated the major racial, philosophical, and social issues of the early- and mid-twentieth century while questioning conventionally accepted definitions of modernism and modernity.

12 MILLION BLACK VOICES (1941)

Wright’s first long work adopting literary-journalistic techniques is the photo essay *12 Million Black Voices*.¹² Accompanied by the photographs that Edward Rosskam had selected from the files of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) during the Depression, *Black Voices* presents itself as a “true-life” story based on the techniques of Horace J. Cayton and the “Chicago School” of sociology that chronicled social patterns of urbanization, juvenile delinquency, and ethnic groups during the 1930s and 1940s.¹³ In this work, Wright is a “sociological informant”¹⁴ and, as demonstrated in *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, a believer in viewing the individual as representative of a group. Congruently, it was *Black Voices* that, with “its investments in the Chicago School of Urban Sociology and the deterministic slant of its theories,”¹⁵ would prove to be a starting point for Wright’s later forays into what most critics have called his travel writings of the 1950s: *Black Power* (1954), *The*

Color Curtain (1956), *White Man Listen!* (1957), and *Pagan Spain* (1957).¹⁶ *Black Voices* signals Wright's experiment to develop a stylistics that would mark his purchase on the social data he wanted to transform into fiction, the result of which is, in broad terms, literary journalism. It also shows his alliance with a kind of lyric poetry that would take his literary career full circle and dominate, in the form of haiku, the last years of his writing life.

Wright's association with the most advanced sociological thought of his time not only provided greater insight into social reality, but also led him to innovative narrative devices and experiments that were more conducive to his experiences and thoughts than the forms of either straightforward fictional or nonfictional narratives. By the late 1930s, Wright was one of the decade's writers Michael Thurston has characterized as "writ[ing] not only out of a sense of political mission but also out of an aesthetic sense independent of political orthodoxies."¹⁷ Attacks on the cultural politics of the American Communist Party coming from such directions as the *Partisan Review* of William Phillips and Phillip Rahv during the mid- and late 1930s championed a "[l]iterature that seeks to express 'truth' rather than the political program of a specific party." This is so because such a literature "is inherently more revolutionary than the supposedly revolutionary writing of those who toe the party line more closely."¹⁸ Conducive to his politics of the late 1930s, Wright's literary journalism makes us aware of the ways that this form creates particular storytelling parameters while emphasizing its importance as a culturally recognized category.¹⁹

Documentary fiction is the standard term used for classifying *Black Voices*, but I prefer the term literary journalism—despite its hazards—to documentary fiction or documentary expression. Indeed the practice of literary journalism in *Black Voices* can best explain Wright's narrative strategy, epistemological position, and shifting from factual to fictional discourses, or combining such discourses. According to William Stott, "Documentary is the presentation or representation of actual fact that makes it credible and vivid to people at the time. Since all emphasis is on the fact, its validity must be [as] unquestionable as possible."²⁰ As a literary-journalistic text, however, *Black Voices* makes no such claim to pure nonfictiveness and "fact," for it openly flaunts its fictionality and figuralizations, and openly presents itself as a textuality of modernity—literary, poetic, visual—while exposing the oppression experienced by African Americans and the "paternalistic code"²¹ employed by whites toward them. The effect of this literary-journalistic text not only puts the reader in the position of struggling African American migrants and various urban populations, but forces a distinctly modernist self-consciousness upon them.

Black Voices marks the beginning of Wright's trajectory to develop a transnational modernism based on a dynamic combination of modernist and literary journalistic techniques. As it registers itself through a narrative of phenomenological consciousness, this modernity calls for a freeing from logical causality and relationship as it parts from Wright's well-known naturalistic trajectory. Wright created and cultivated a very different kind of modernism. As Wright explained in a 1941 interview on *Black Voices*, "The main thing [is] to show the movement from folk life to urbanization. . . . I want to show the inner complexities and scars that take place when a people are torn away from one culture and are forced to adjust themselves to another."²² Wright was concerned less with historically verifiable fact than with the emotional patterns and spiritual developments of African Americans migrating from rural areas to cities; he was especially interested, as a participant himself, in the Great Migration.

WRIGHT'S LITERARY JOURNALISTIC INFLECTIONS OF THE
"WE" AND "YOU" IN *BLACK VOICES*

By countering traditional documentary accounts of the American 1930s in which "the heart of documentary is not form or style or medium, but always content"²³, *Black Voices* is, in Wright's words, an alternative to "[c]urrent American thought" that "is so fastened upon trying to make what is *presently* real the only and right reality, that it has quite forgotten the reality of the passion and hunger of millions of exploited workers and dissatisfied minorities."²⁴ Simultaneously expanding and contravening the attitudes and positions of the Farm Security Administration (FSA)-rooted documentary enabled Wright to produce a self-consciously modernist experiment that reflects his aesthetic and social commitments.²⁵ *Black Voices*, therefore, is at once a literary journalistic text that cross-examines documentary conventions and, in its modernist guises, compels attention to the world beyond representation.²⁶

Wright takes us most effectively into this world through his impassioned use of the "we" in *Black Voices*.²⁷ Coming largely out of his literary and journalistic training, this creation of we, even though infusing "ordinary people with divine speech"²⁸ and serving as the text's "literary voice," largely relies on sociological data to build a collective story. But Wright takes such data and transposes it, as Jeff Allred notes, into "the classical epic's encompassing range of space and time and its ambition to speak to a wide audience about an unprecedented emergence."²⁹ And yet, this epic form is countered by Wright's topical materialistic infusions: photographs from the files of the FSA, veiled accounts of his own experience as a participant in the Great Migration, statistics from public records, and his personal intellectual accounts

of black history. These infusions make the epic qualities of *Black Voices* not only progressive and ongoing, as opposed to closed and final, but elicit reader involvement with the characters in the work—the black maid, the black industrial worker, the black stevedore, the black dancer, the black waiter, the black sharecropper—and the historical forces they face. The epic dimensions of Wright’s “we” aim to encourage readers to criticize, rather than passively accept, the social and racial conditions *Black Voices* enumerates. At the same time, this use of “we” reflects many of the strategies found in the high modernist arsenal:³⁰ “fragmentation, the primacy of form, the integration of non-poetic material, and the sense of a culture in crisis”³¹, but with a crucial difference—Wright foregrounds the social realities of class and race in his history of African Americans.

Furthermore, Wright’s “we” engages in a conversational dialogue with the reader whom, from the opening pages of *Black Voices*, Wright assumes does not know “us” for “we are not what we seem.”³² The narrator appears to imagine the reader—much as Rebecca Harding Davis imagines her readers in *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861)—as bourgeois and misinformed about the rural “folk” and immigrant laborers. Because the narrator does not allow for verbally and semantically autonomous characters and does not permit a character’s speech to possess its own belief system, there is, in Bakhtin’s sense, no “second language.”³³ The narrator’s voice becomes the “situation monitor”³⁴ for each particular exchange or observation and the controlling authority of African American subjectivity. The narrating “we” gives itself the principal task of revealing the “uneasily tied knot of pain and hope whose snarled strands converge from many points of time and space.”³⁵

Wright employs the “we” narration in a nonrealistic antimimetic way through transgressing fundamental cognitive and rhetorical categories. The literariness of *Black Voices* is based on the narrator becoming, in a standard literary-journalistic mode of the American and French 1930s and 1940s (that employed, for example, by Joseph Kessel, Blaise Cendrars, Dorothy Day, Meridel le Sueur, Jessie Fauset, James Agee), a persona in his/her own story. Never withholding its power of omniscience and locating itself at the center of its racial history, the collective “we” persona in *Black Voices* shows how race is a determinant for social mobility, citizenship, protection under the law, employment, privilege, and marginalization. But, to be sure, it does so in relation to Wright’s modernism devoted to a cultural politics of race and its global implications.

Wright’s most effective narrative devices are not purely expository, modernist (in a high modernist sense), or sociological per se, but those used in combination with his literary or literary-journalistic techniques. To gain such

an effect in *Black Voices*, Wright employs a kind of emotionally evocative direct address to implore the reader to enter into a specific situation of distress:

Each day when *you* see us black folk upon the dusty land of the farms or upon the hard pavement of the city streets, *you* usually take us for granted and think *you* know us, but our history is far stranger than *you* suspect. . . . We had our own civilization in Africa before we were captured and carried off to this land. *You* may smile when we call the way of life we live in Africa “civilization,” but in numerous respects the culture of many of our tribes was equal to that of the lands from which they come.³⁶ (my emphasis)

Wright’s use of direct address is self-analytical, closely associated with a discovery of the “we” and a placing of the reader on the same plane of reality—or irreality—he occupies. Wright hopes to make the bridge between the “we” and “you” a most conscious relationship, wishing to inspire actual readers with the “you” in the text.³⁷ The dismay and doubts the narrator expresses are an acknowledgment that his vision is subjective but grounded in actual historical fact. By placing his reader in a variety of identifications and positions of reception (through his use of “we” and “you”), the narrator bends his story to strategies of social and racial interdependence. Wright’s literary-journalistic use of the first-person plural and direct address in *Black Voices* complicates the dichotomy that Carla Cappetti argues for in her discussion of the relationship between literature and sociology: “[The sociological theory] articulate[s] and evolve[s] the [literary text] into a set of concepts and categories, the [literary text] dramatizes [the sociological theory] and demonstrat[es] its functioning in the concrete details of a life-story.”³⁸ Wright has it both ways. Indeed, it can even be said that *Black Voices*, as a literary-journalistic and modernist text, serves *several* functions at the same time: it is self-reflective and objective, literary and reportorial, detached and engaged.

WRIGHT’S LITERARY-JOURNALISTIC USE OF ANALOGY

Exposing a dominant critical line on the form of the documentary book—that is, “brand[ing] texts with a collectivist orientation as propagandistic and as insufficiently complex and modernist”³⁹—Wright metamorphoses the dominant white plantation and land owners in the American South into the “Lords of the Land” and the white industrial elite of the North into the “Bosses of Buildings.” For Wright, these two analogic forces are the “operatives” of “the New World”:

The opinion of the nation divided into two opposing constellations: a world of mechanics and a world of slaves. Two groups of leaders sprang up: the Bosses of the Buildings and the Lords of the Land.⁴⁰

Mimicking such sociological definitions as Drake and Cayton’s “Native

White,” “Foreign Born-White and Other Races,” “older Immigrant groups,”⁴¹ Wright creates his own definitions and categories, using the sociological to suggest its significance in organizing conceptions of literary identity. Wright places on the grid of abstract and objective 1930s sociological postulations and theories *individuated* examples of the black maid,⁴² the black industrial worker, the black stevedore, the black dancer,⁴³ and the black sharecropper as narrative markers for the photographs that represent these professions. As an insider who feels personally identified with the material in his narrative, he speaks for and to his subjects, but with enough objective distance to discern, for example, in reference to the plantation system, “patterns of psychological reaction, welding us together into a separate unity with common characteristics of our own.”⁴⁴ In deploying such analogical devices, the narrator is the chronicler who individuates but doesn’t dwell on any one close-up (in photographic or narrative descriptive form) for too long because he doesn’t want to take the reader away from the implications of individual lives in broader social contexts.

Similar to his intermedial mixings involving the “we” narrative and his use of direct address, Wright links archival artefacts and the raw data of sociological fieldwork to conventions of fictional narrative. Here Wright baldly combines his symbolic literary and analogic appellations (“Bosses of the Buildings,” “Lords of the Land”), placing them in a quasi-epic context, with historical statistics, which harkens back to Drake and St. Clair’s use of charts, facts, and numbers in *Black Metropolis*:

The Bosses of the Buildings feed upon the Lords of the Land, and the Lords of the Land feed upon the 5,000,000 landless poor whites and upon us, throwing to the poor whites the scant solace of filching from us 4,000,000 landless blacks what the poor whites themselves are cheated of in this elaborate game.⁴⁵

Wright’s analogic deployments carefully locate the Bosses of the Buildings and the Lords of the Land in historical and racial contexts. At the same time, these deployments contribute to dislocating the analogies from the specific historical contexts of the first half of the twentieth century. This division contributes to the impressionistic and modernistic structure of the text. And this kind of shape shifting—glossing historical fact or interpretation with literary vision—allows Wright to construct his own role as a black writer as he exposes the complicity of racial segregation and capitalism. Wright’s forms of literary journalism and modernism open up a space for him to address more explicitly than he did in his other work the formation of collective racial consciousness.

Such an exposure is best revealed by *Black Voices*’s relationship to main-

stream Anglo-American modernism. Wright's modernism contested existing modernistic forms that could not supply the formal meanings required to renovate conventional middle-class values and prejudices. Thus *Black Voices* focuses not on the "so-called talented tenth" but on "that vast and tragic school [of blacks] that swims below in the depths, against the current, silently and heavily, struggling against the waves of vicissitudes that spell a common fate."⁴⁶ As staked out in *Black Voices*, Wright's social and racial representations within American modernism parallel Anne Petry's view that a necessary function of the novel is "social criticism,"⁴⁷ ideally resulting in interpretations that might explain the United States to itself at a particular historical moment. As such, *Black Voices*, through its emphasis on the relationship of poverty to race and class, is based on a collective narrative voice that defies the era's characteristic (Rooseveltian) call to collective identity.⁴⁸ The strongest weapon he uses to convey this modernism arguably comes from his literary journalism.

BLACK POWER (1954)

Travel writing is the conventional label given to Wright's *Black Power*, *The Color Curtain*, and *Pagan Spain*, but this attribution is more problematic than it may seem.⁴⁹ A typical definition of travel writing can be found in Judith Hamera and Alfred Bendixen's introduction to the recent *Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* (2009):

[T]ravel writing [is] a non-fiction genre based, at least in theory, on the real experiences of actual travelers rooted in the specific details of both history and geography. . . . American travel writing also exposes cultural and genre fault lines. It exists betwixt and between the factual report and the fictional account, personal memoir and ethnography, science and romance.⁵⁰

The authors go on to argue that the "boundary between travel writing and fiction can be especially murky and that travel writing is much like autobiography" in that "fact and fiction . . . intermingle in individual works as well."⁵¹ Although incorporating some traits of Hamera and Bendixen's definition, Wright's exile writings come into sharper focus if seen through the critical constructs and theories of literary journalism in at least four ways: 1. Wright's literary journalism can offer more comprehensive and convincing narrative explanations with regard to the relations between "fact" and "fiction" than those presently seen in (American) travel writing criticism (e.g., *Black Power* is *not* a strictly "non-fiction genre"); 2. Wright's exile writings deliberately ask hard questions in reference to race, class, and gender, as well as to national belonging, and to an international struggle for human rights that in their polemical intentions and priorities go beyond most definitions of travel literature; 3. Decidedly sociologically discursive (reminiscent of *Black*

Voices), Wright's exile writings enter the ongoing reinvention of the United States in the twentieth century in the context of Wright's struggles with colonial legacies and new geopolitical arrangements that stray from the prerogatives of most travel literature (and Wright does not in any of these works define himself as a "traveler"); 4. Wright represents an important literary-journalistic beginning of integrating a fact-laden narrative into a modern narrative art form, a form that shifts the narrative away from any kind of realistic travel account.

It is no surprise, then, that "[Wright's] publishers, agents, and critics in the 1950s and through the 1980s did not consider [these exile writings] travel books."⁵² They simply didn't know what to call them or how to classify them because Wright had produced works—objective and subjective—that were years ahead of their time. In effect, Wright's "travel books" might be productively inserted into the discourse of an African American literary journalistic tradition so that these works can receive their due merit as a crucial genre of expression used by Wright and other African American writers.

Congruently, it must be recognized that *Black Power*, *The Color Curtain*, and *Pagan Spain* mark crucial steps in Wright's formulation of a transnational modernism. Wright ultimately pursued transnational spaces that allowed him to reconfigure narrative as unbound to national literary forms and social relations. These works, all coming from the 1950s and concerning themselves with diasporic and global revolutionary movements, can be placed according to their sense of African American expressive culture and subjectivity, which, in Wright's case, expands the form as well as the content of Anglo-American modernism. Formalistically, these three works respond to a modernist style in that they resort to narrative discontinuities and deferrals and move toward a pluralism or fusion of narrative forms.

Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos was Wright's first extended examination of an African country, Ghana, called the Gold Coast in 1953. Through the intervention of George Padmore, the Trinidadian author of *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* (1956), Wright was invited by the Gold Coast Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah "to do some research into the social and historical aspects of the country."⁵³ "This volume," Wright explains, "is a first-person, subjective narrative on the life and conditions of the Colony and Ashanti areas of the Gold Coast, an area comprising perhaps the most highly socially evolved native life of present-day Africa."⁵⁴ Consequently, Wright toured Ghana, Sierra Leone, and other African countries—creating in 1954, out of this experience, *Black Power*. Spending nearly the entire period from June to September 1953 in the British colony, Wright attended a session of the legislative council in which Nkrumah proposed constitutional changes

that would lead to the Gold Coast's eventual independence and self-government. For Wright, though, these measures, however adequate for an eventual independence from Britain, weren't enough.

Directly addressing Nkrumah—in the form of a ten-page open letter—he ends *Black Power* with a strident plea that the Gold Coast should “militarize” itself:

I'm speaking simply of a militarization of the daily, social lives of the people; I'm speaking of giving form, organization, direction, meaning, and a sense of justification to those lives. . . . I'm speaking of a temporary discipline that will unite the nation, sweep out the tribal cobwebs, and place the feet of the masses upon a basis of reality.⁵⁵

Wright's militarization would be based on “[a] military form of African society” created through a compulsory draft that “will atomize the fetish-ridden past [and] abolish the mystical and nonsensical family relations that freeze the African in his static degradation.”⁵⁶ The inhabitants of the Gold Coast, Wright argues, must enter the modern industrialized world but cannot do so by ignoring world capitalism and Soviet communism:

Above all, Africans must be regimentalized for the “long pull,” for what will happen in Africa will spread itself out over decades of time and a continent of space. . . . You know as well as I that what has happened in the Gold Coast is just the beginning; and there will be much marching to and fro; there will be many Sunderings and amalgamations of people; there will be many shiftings and changes of aims, perspectives, and ideologies—there will be much confusion before the final redemption of Africa is accomplished.⁵⁷

Here we have part of a hard-edged polemic, dominating the last several pages of *Black Power* and accompanied by the same kind of sociological discourse that Wright relied on in *Black Voices*. Countering what Eric Schocket has called “the assimilative dictates of literary discourse,”⁵⁸ this kind of journalistic editorializing evokes Wright's impulses to write about the broad processes informing the relationship of race to exploitation and suffering under global capitalism. In this way, he makes his didactic points known in a rather traditional way.

Despite, however, the book's very real-life concern with the Gold Coast freeing itself from its British colonizers, *Black Power* is not a straightforward journalistic narrative. Because Wright felt alienated and estranged from the Africa he was discovering, he responded to it through constant descriptions of (highly subjective) anxiety and fear. For example, upon seeing the mud huts outside of Takoradi, Wright comments: “I was gazing upon a world whose laws I did not know, upon faces whose reactions were riddles to me. There was nothing here that I could predict, anticipate, or rely upon and, in spite

of myself, a mild sense of anxiety began to fill me . . . I was prey to a vague sense of mild panic, an oppressed burden of alertness which I could not shake off.”⁵⁹ As Sara Blair notes, “The collective ‘we’ used in *Twelve Million Black Voices* is decisively dropped as Wright explores Africa’s alterity and his own lack of feeling of racial connection,”⁶⁰ which is compounded by his uncertainty about his own identity and place. Replacing the “we” are Wright’s inability to connect with Africans, his predisposition to remain “rational” and “areligious,” and his clinging to “Western sensibilities.”⁶¹ By his own appraisal, he was *not* a spiritual descendant of Africa.

And yet, *Black Power* is a factual, progressive narrative, regularly infiltrated by the narrative techniques that Wright had mastered in his fiction. Like his fiction, *Black Power* makes use of a clarifying narrator, a persona of Wright, obliged to explain or justify himself/herself to others, be those others readers, or other characters, or some imagined or real community. “[I]f I become polemic,” Wright stated in a 1960 interview, “it is because I am trying to tell the reader something and I am afraid he does not understand.”⁶² In *Black Power* and *Black Voices*, there seems to be the assumption that this other will not be able to understand without such explanations—or, in one of Wright’s favorite terms, without “revelation”:

I have always taken the writing of literature very seriously and I’ve looked upon fiction and writing in general as a means of revealing the truth of life and experience rather than purely as a means of entertaining people. . . . [L]iterature ought to be a sharp instrument to reveal something important about mankind, about living, about life whether among whites or blacks.⁶³

By creating a social consciousness that would elucidate a collective sense of black life in Africa, America, and elsewhere, Wright’s autobiographical literary-journalistic prose—bolstered by his transnational modernistic forms—is the dominant narrative mode of *Black Power* and his other exile writing. Through this mode, Wright attempted to depart from all previous forms of African American writing. He not only portrayed “his liberal-radicalness, his blackness, his maleness, his Americanness,”⁶⁴ but offered a new global perspective and humanitarian vision, which included a look backward at the injustices, hunger, and despair of his earlier life.

Black Power is more a novel than a travel narrative and more a literary-journalistic account—inflected by Wright’s experimental approach to non-fiction—than a novel.⁶⁵ An early critic was baffled by its form, calling it “a curious mixture of history, biographical sketches, exposition of social customs and political chicanery.”⁶⁶ Wright’s black archetypes (e.g., 79), profuse dialogue (e.g., 67), his use of a first-person persona who explores unknown territory and is bewildered by it, and his extensive turns to symbolism (e.g.,

399) and imagery (e.g., 75)—all these techniques cast *Black Power* as more “literary” than nonfictional. But perhaps even more importantly, Wright’s account in *Black Power* can be most clearly seen as his struggle to find an effective critical language for his impressions, fears, and disappointments in his encounters with the Gold Coast. Despite his problematic stance toward African culture, his anger and distrust over African customs and mores, and his schematizing of such concepts as “non-Western” or “pre-industrial,” his 1953 visit to the Gold Coast marks the point at which he attempts to locate the nature of black modernity through a transnational lens. *Black Power* is “a subjective narrative” in which Wright offers his own experiences as a template for contemporary history and his “political and psychological rebellion”⁶⁷ as a conception of reality that attempts to resist the chaos and repression of his American experience. Deploying literary-journalistic forms, Wright’s modernism results from the radical nature of his political and social necessities, fuelled by his untiring energy for experimentation.

THE COLOR CURTAIN (1956)

Wright envisioned *The Color Curtain* as a companion piece to *Black Power*.⁶⁸ Both works are dominated by Wright’s hybridic prose as well as his quest for understanding the relationship between racism in the United States and the global realities of colonialism and capitalism in Africa and Asia.⁶⁹ In the spring of 1955, Wright attended the Bandung Asian–African conference held in Bandung, Indonesia. Gathering participants from twenty-nine independent and “non-aligned” nations—including China, Indonesia, Burma, Turkey, Egypt, the Philippines, and Ethiopia—the conference debated problems of special interest to Asian and African peoples (e.g., “national sovereignty . . . racialism and colonialism,” advancing “the promotion of world peace and cooperation,”⁷⁰ and setting an agenda of social and economic solidarity for these countries’ impoverished populations).

The Bandung conference provided Wright with another lens through which to view the dehumanization of modernity and with subject material for “using the forms that seemed to [him] the most suitable for what [he] had to say, for what [he] felt had to be said.”⁷¹ Near the beginning of the work, Wright criticizes the Western media’s account of the conference:

These men . . . representing some of the world’s biggest and most powerful news gathering agencies, knew less, perhaps, than even I about what was going on . . . I soon realized that American newsmen had at least two grave disabilities in trying to grasp what was happening: one, they had no philosophy of history with which to understand Bandung; two, they were trying to understand actions initiated by someone else and they could not quite grasp the nature of the terms in which those actions were being projected.⁷²

He then goes on to present excerpted samples from the mainstream newspaper, magazine, and radio-television reports that covered the event—the *Delhi Times* of India, the *Globe and Mail* of Toronto, *Newsweek*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Paris Herald Tribune*, the *New York Times*, and the Manchester *Guardian*—and expresses opinions on several of the passages. For example, he glosses an excerpt from a speech given by the American secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, regarding Dulles's description of the conference:

The words that cut short and hurt the Asian-African delegates most came from no less than the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. In a radio-television address in Washington on the 8th of March, 1955, he referred to the conference as follows: "Three of the Asian parties to the Pacific Charter, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand, may shortly be meeting with other Asian countries at a so-called Afro-Asian conference." (The single phrase, "so-called Afro-Asian conference," echoed and re-echoed at Bandung as proof of American contempt; and the people who called attention to it were not Communists.)⁷³

The commentary of these journals—variously condescending, supportive, critical, guardedly optimistic, and patronizing—not only set "the atmosphere, brooding, bitter, apprehensive, which greeted the conference,"⁷⁴ but also created a narrative paradigm to which the narrative experiments of *Color Curtain* respond. To Wright these press accounts seem inconclusive and partial because they ignore the deeper issues of psychology, emotion, and spirituality needed "to penetrate the color curtain"—which is a Western-created kind of "buffer between [the Occidental countries] and the illiterate yellow and brown and black masses."⁷⁵ Wright wished to offer a psychological and sociological critique on the relationship between race and geopolitical space and thus felt compelled to create narrative forms equal to this task: namely, those conjoining his literary journalism and his transnational modernism.

The Color Curtain is Wright's alternative to conventional journalistic reporting. Although he dutifully treats the major speakers of the conference (e.g., Wright interviewed Mohammed Nastir and Sultan Sjahrir; he transcribed the speeches of Nehru, Nasser, and Sir John Kotelawala) and describes its principal themes (e.g., "the struggle against colonialism"), his real interest could be described as "literary." That is to say, he's more concerned with the creation of character, psychological portrayals (including his own), and dramatic constructions of "race consciousness"⁷⁶—as opposed, for example, to proposing geopolitical solutions or suggestions for North-South negotiations. To his wife, before he departs for Jakarta, Wright revealingly justifies his participation in Bandung:

[M]y life has given me some keys to what they would say or do. I'm an American Negro; as such, I've had a burden of race consciousness. So have these people. I worked in my youth as a common laborer, and I've a class consciousness. So have these people. I grew up in a Methodist and Seventh Day Adventist churches and I saw and observed religion in my childhood; and these people are religious. I was a member of the Communist Party for twelve years and I know something of the politics and psychology of rebellion. These people have had as their daily existence such politics. These emotions are my instruments. They are emotions, but I'm conscious of them as emotions. I want to use these emotions to try to find out what these people think and feel and why.⁷⁷

As in *Black Voices* and *Black Power*, Wright insists on an emotional expressiveness alongside his use of social fact in composing such narratives: "I try to float these facts," Wright contends, "on a sea of emotion, to drive them home with some degree of artistic power, as much as humanly possible, to the level of seriousness which characterizes science."⁷⁸

Wright amplifies these ideas in *The Color Curtain* by providing extensive documented evidence alongside his assembled dramatic dialogues, personal meditations, and descriptions of everyday Indonesian life. As in *Black Voices* and *Black Power*, his is the central consciousness of the text, carefully controlling the on-site conference speeches, the recreated dialogue, and the interviews in which his interviewees are denoted by their representativeness (e.g., the Indonesian-born European, 454; the Roman Catholic Singaporean journalist, 455; the Eurasian, 464; the imperialistic Dutch, 577, etc.) and described without any kind of "unique voice"⁷⁹ or distinctive tone or inflection. This carefully controlled narrative restrictiveness echoes Wright's technique in *Black Voices*, in which the narrator prohibits the existence of a verbally and semantically autonomous character and does not allow a character's speech to dominate the formulation of a belief system.

For example, in *The Color Curtain*, Wright's interview with the anonymous "Eurasian," Mr. X, is dominated by the narrator's response to the Eurasian's "psychological reaction[s]" and his summary of the interviewee's personal history and positions on Asian culture and politics: "He is married, fifty years of age, has six children. . . . He feels that the state should not have anything actively to do with religion. . . . He feels that the overrunning of the continents of Asia and Africa by the white Western nations was a mixture of good and bad. . . . He attends many international conferences but feels that the Asian-African Conference is but a political gesture to bolster the local political regime in Indonesia."⁸⁰ The narrator's summaries and confirmations about Mr. X almost seem to precede Mr. X's stated positions, as opposed to

coming after them. In the process, the narrator's interpretive prose buries the reported speech. Typically, the narrator concludes the interview in the form of summary statements and personal evaluations, and once again, as in *Black Voices* and *Black Power*, highlights a consciously created persona that exudes an image of self-absorption and introspection:

There was no doubt, in my mind, that my Indonesian educator was correct on the plane of abstract logic, but logic cannot solve problems whose solutions come not by thinking but by living. His approach implied a denial of collective thought processes, of mass organic experiences embedded in the very lives and social conditions about him. . . .Regrettably, one could safely assume that his influence upon Asian reality would be nil.⁸¹

By this approach, Wright could be accused of trying to have it both ways: His concentration on social fact (e.g., the scientific field worker using the same questionnaire for all the people he interviews) fuses with his subjective interpretations that foreground the “artistic power” of his emotional and spiritual inclusions. Wright presents this persona as “a super intellectual and visionary acutely perceptive of world affairs and Western threats more than anyone else,”⁸² which echoes his own attempts—from the beginning of his exile period (1946) until his death (1960)—to seek a new role in the world as a public intellectual and activist.⁸³ Thus, as in his fiction, Wright's literary journalism employs ethnographic and scholarly research for polemical purposes in order to change existing social beliefs and perceptions.

These purposes go hand in hand with the views and techniques of his transnational modernism. Besides linking literary forms to traditional techniques of news reporting, Wright also links such forms in *The Color Curtain* to the fields of ethnography, history, anthropology, and psychology. *The Color Curtain* is especially concerned with adding the psychological (a traditional high modernist mainstay) to Wright's modes of assessment. Thus, throughout *The Color Curtain*, he focuses on a variety of what he implies are psychological pressures:

[Asian and African] countries feel that if they do not become quickly modern, if they do not measure up to the West almost overnight, they will be swallowed up again in what they feel to be slavery.⁸⁴

Asian and African populations had been subjugated on the assumption that they were in some way biologically inferior and unfit to govern themselves, and the white Western World that had shackled them had either given them a Christian religion or else had made them agonizingly conscious of their old, traditional religions to which they had had to cling under conditions of imperial rule.⁸⁵

A central question he poses in the text, crucial as well to the interviews he conducts—“What, psychologically, did the politics of the whites do to the people of Asia and Africa?”⁸⁶—underlies his study of Asian and African subjects. Wright combines psychological “reports” with personal narrative to produce an alternative to contemporary psychoanalytic analyses. As Dorothy Stringer argues in her study on *Black Power*:

[W]here the mainstream psychoanalytic theory of Wright’s day avoided historical questions, passed over racial difference without comment, and evinced a strong Eurocentric, individualist and bourgeois bias, [Wright’s work, like] African American literature [in general] emphasizes the collective traumas of the slave regime, insists on the persistence of racial injustice, and explores present-day, psychic responses to historical disaster.⁸⁷

The Color Curtain is Wright’s critical effort to produce a productive tension between the cultures he describes and psychoanalytic theory. As Stringer notes, “Wright’s re-thinking emphasizes an aspect of modern experience wholly unanticipated by metropolitan psychological theories, including that intrinsic to African American literature.”⁸⁸ I would add, however, that it is Wright’s blend of the psychological and political that gives the narratively unorthodox *Color Curtain* its response, as a transmodernist text, to journalism at large and to conventional narrative forms in general.

The overall point here is that Wright’s literary journalism in *Black Voices*, *Black Power*, and *The Color Curtain* relies on a cohesively distinct cultural (and cross-cultural) role in its narrative intentions. It follows, then, that specific theories and concepts of literary journalism are required to account for this role. In functional terms, Wright wants his narratives to matter; he always *presumes* a cultural and racial relevance. In formal and aesthetic terms, he wants to explore new rhetorical ground, centering, most importantly, on the power and effect of a modernist fictionality. At the same time, the rhetorical distinctiveness of Wright’s literary journalism is always concerned with a communicative alignment and coherence between fictional and nonfictional discourses. For Wright, fictionality (especially in its modernistic forms) is a rhetorical source integral to the direct and pragmatic use of language within a real-world (Depression-era America, independence-movement Africa, a financially repressed Indonesia) urgency and context.⁸⁹

Finally, it’s important to note that his literary journalism, in the mid- and late 1950s, flowed naturally from his increasing status as a humanist “citizen of the world” and from his stated goals as a writer: “to create new life by intensifying the sensibilities and to work toward world understanding by improving living conditions.”⁹⁰ Especially during his exile period, Wright could only adhere to a form of writing based on a response to dominant (clas-

sical, high) modernist modes and founded on personal perception—a crucial feature of literary journalism: “[T]he artist must bow to the monitor of his own imagination: must be led by the sovereignty of his own impressions and perceptions; must be guided by the tyranny of what troubles and concerns him personally.”⁹¹

PAGAN SPAIN (1957)

Published in 1957, *Pagan Spain* is Wright’s only literary-journalistic book about a European country, and one of his few works not outwardly about race. Wright’s primary thesis is that Spain, an apparently Catholic country, was actually more pagan than Christian, that Spaniards were trapped under the cruel dictates of censorship and dictatorship, and that Spain, sexually repressed, was an isolationist culture fixated on the past. Based on trips Wright took to Spain in 1954 and 1955, *Pagan Spain* is his chronicle against an unconscious irrationality that he believes had “feudalized” the country.

Like Wright’s other exile works that are not straightforward fictions, *Pagan Spain* is difficult to categorize. Simultaneously anthropologist, ethnographer, historian, “writer,” tourist, Wright contravenes the genre of travel literature (the standard label given to *Pagan Spain*) by making the work “a highly poetic social and political dialectic”⁹²—traits not traditionally associated with travel literature. Upon its release in 1957, Herbert Matthews, in a review for the *New York Times*, called *Pagan Spain* “a provocative, disturbing, and, at times, sensational book.”⁹³ Another early reviewer, Richard Strout, argued, “There are so many ways of misunderstanding this vivid book of travel-journalism that it is likely to kick up a controversy—a Negro writing about whites, a man of Protestant background appalled by the degradation of a quasi Church-state, an expatriate drawing upon his native land for occasional comparisons, an ex-radical describing Franco’s Falange.”⁹⁴ Characterizing *Pagan Spain*’s method, the back cover blurb of the Harper Perennial edition (1995) perhaps comes closest to the mark by baldly asserting that Wright “brilliantly expanded his literary horizons with *Pagan Spain*.”⁹⁵ It can be argued that this is (at least partially) the case because, as with *Black Voices*, *Black Power*, and *The Color Curtain*, *Pagan Spain* relies on techniques traditionally belonging to fiction while expounding Wright’s particular notion of a transnational modernity, a sort of exceptional modernism.

At the beginning of *Pagan Spain*, Wright recalls his response to the Spanish Civil War when he was a reporter for the *Daily Worker* and presents his reasons for writing the work:

During the Spanish Civil War I had published, in no less than the New York Daily Worker, some harsh judgments concerning Franco; and the

dive bombers and tanks of Hitler and Mussolini had brutally justified those judgments. The fate of Spain had hurt me, had haunted me; I had never been able to stifle a hunger to understand what had happened there and why.⁹⁶

Here Wright, echoing his similar justification for going to the Gold Coast in *Black Power* and for traveling to Indonesia in *The Color Curtain*, establishes his narrative authority, conjoining it with his self-identification as a narrator:

God knows, totalitarian governments and ways of life were no mysteries to me. I had been born under an absolutistic racist regime in Mississippi; I had lived and worked for twelve years under the political dictatorship of the communist party of the United States; and I had spent a year of my life under the police terror of Peron in Buenos Aires.⁹⁷

Part and parcel of this identification, Wright offers his philosophy on religion in the opening pages of the book:

I have no religion in the formal sense of the word . . . I have no race except that which is forced upon me. I have no country except that to which I'm obliged to belong. I have no traditions. I'm free. I have only the future.⁹⁸

As suggested by these passages, *Pagan Spain* can be seen to be more about Wright than about Spain. Above all, it is a personal report that describes a country still suffering from the Spanish Civil War and the fascist Falangist party. Paralleling this (politicized) self-reflexivity, it portrays a narrator who (in seeing the Moorish ruins of Granada) clearly realizes his own modernity: "My twentieth-century hunger could not be sated here. These moss-covered ruins were far less interesting to me than those landscapes of subjective ruins that strew our world today—ruins that were harder to detect and much more difficult to appreciate."⁹⁹ This subjectively styled modernism, whose concerns were constructing "more self-aware and complex collectivities,"¹⁰⁰ dominated Wright's output in the 1950s.

Arguably the most novelistic of Wright's literary-journalistic books, *Pagan Spain*, in approach and technique, is a compendium of first-person narration, participant-observer witnessing, character sketches, eyewitness reporting, and dramatic monologues and dialogues. Reminiscent of his recently published novel *The Outsider* (1953), Wright incorporated his interest in pulp fiction and the crime novel into several of his descriptions in *Pagan Spain*. In his first confrontation with the Spanish Civil Guard, for example, he fearfully comments: "I blinked, understanding nothing; I was in a police state and I thought: This is it. . . ."¹⁰¹ In another encounter with the Civil Guard—this one on the coastal road to Barcelona, Wright recounts:

I drove over the bridge and rolled on, uncertain, feeling a naked vulnerability creeping down the skin of my back. I was not accustomed to armed strangers of unknown motives standing in my rear and I waited to hear a raatatatatat and feel hot slugs of steel crashing into my car and into my flesh.¹⁰²

Wright also resorts to such techniques as detecting and interpreting the thoughts of others (a conventional fictional device), as he does in this Barcelona scene when two young men he has met help him find a “pension”:

It was beginning to make sense; I was a heathen and these devout boys were graciously coming to my rescue. In their spontaneous embrace of me they were acting out a role that had been implanted in them since childhood. I was not only a stranger, but a “lost” one in dire need of being saved. Yet there was no condescension in their manner; they acted with the quiet assurance of men who knew that they had the truth in existence and they were offering it to me.¹⁰³

Wright’s interest in religion as a social phenomenon (e.g., 12–15), his ethnographic interpretation of the social expectations of Spanish sexual behavior (e.g., 177–181), his fascination with the plight of Protestants (e.g., 162), his interest in the psychological and everyday Spanish life (e.g., 156), his debunking of Catholic ritual (e.g., 280–283)—all of these subjects are filtered through his fictional techniques. Thus *Pagan Spain*, in its style of representation (i.e., the panoply of subjects, discourse, and disciplines), is hybridic, working toward what Wright conceived of as a cosmopolitan “genre”—what I’m terming a transnational modernism—simultaneously expository, ethnographic, and literary journalistic.¹⁰⁴

One narrative result of this genre in *Pagan Spain* can be seen in Wright’s depiction of women. Often criticized for his problematic portrayals of women, particularly in his fiction,¹⁰⁵ Wright focuses on the suffering and fortitude of Spanish women in *Pagan Spain*:

The daily striving and suffering of Spanish women make what little structure there is to Spanish society, knitting together in a web of care and love what would otherwise be a landscape of senseless anarchy.¹⁰⁶

The mighty maternal instinct of the Spanish woman is the anchor of responsibility that holds the ship of Spanish life steady while the Spanish man babbles abstract nonsense in the countless smoky coffee houses.¹⁰⁷

As Dennis F. Evans has noted, “[I]n *Pagan Spain*, Wright’s report on the treatment of Spanish women—their social, political, and religious indoctrination and subjugation, and their stigmatized, yet unavoidable participation in prostitution and white slavery—is uncharacteristically empathetic and gives a view of Wright that is unavailable in any of his other works, both travel and fictional.”¹⁰⁸

But I would add that Wright's sympathetic portrayal of women must be placed both in a social or gendered sense and in the broader context of religion. As the narrator argues, "*All was religion in Spain*,"¹⁰⁹ and for Wright, women are the first to suffer from this fact: "[G]iven the conditions, the moral attitude of the Church toward sex, the poverty, the ignorance, this was bound to be. It was all socially determined."¹¹⁰ When describing the plight of Spanish women, Wright abandons his usual sociological and ethnographic discourse and rarely relies on social statistics. Instead, he focuses on the larger force of Catholicism, specifically the rigid expectation that a Spanish woman must be a virgin when she marries, a cultural fact contrasting to the massive problem of female prostitution in Spain.¹¹¹ Although indeed victims of cultural forces stemming from "the Spanish religion and its effects,"¹¹² women are portrayed most powerfully as images representing the present condition of Spain. Under this method, it is no surprise that the dominant typology for women is their association with the Virgin Mary:

women who plow the fields; who wash clothes in country streams; who drive the oxen-drawn carts; who satisfy their men and nurse their babies; and who, at the beginning and the end of the day, creep forward and kneel humbly before the weeping and jeweled Virgins in the dim and drafty cathedrals.¹¹³

Women are also, as Wright makes clear, the material and psychological symbols of Spain. From his 1955 trip to Spain, he describes this scene in Hendaye at the Franco-Spanish border:

The women's dresses clung to their misshapen bodies; the men's ragged shirts bagged about their shoulders and hips. Then came that immemorial symbol of Spain: an old woman whose head was covered with a dirty cloth hobbled alongside her heaped and donkey-drawn cart.¹¹⁴

As evidenced here and throughout *Pagan Spain*, Wright requires us to read referentially and figuratively/fictionally at once; these elements serve as a basic framework on which to build an interpretation, comprehend his anti-essentialist concept of race, and enter into his vision of modernism.

Similar to his portrayal of Spanish women, Wright adopts a generally symbolic stance in examining the pervasive force of poverty in Spain. Recalling *Black Voices* and *Black Power*, the symbolic significance of poverty becomes the foundation for several of Wright's literary-journalistic representations:

Next morning I boarded a bus for Seville and arrived during the sultry afternoon. I was in the capital of Andalusia, the city whose cathedral held the body of Christopher Columbus. Though rich in oranges, sugar beets, olives, wheat, rice, the impression of poverty was so all-pervading, touching so many levels of life that, after an hour, poverty seemed to be the normal

lot of man; I had to make an effort to remember that people lived better lives elsewhere.¹¹⁵

In Grenada, Wright depicts Senora Flamenco's apartment as "proclaiming pride and poverty" in its every detail,¹¹⁶ a descriptor that applies, more generally, to all "the people of Spain [who] are suffering."¹¹⁷ (*Pagan*, 200). Poverty stands in contrast, Wright asserts, to the precious and luxurious shrines and cathedrals that dot the Spanish landscape, including the Loyola shrine:

If one accepted the premise that this was a gateway to eternal bliss, one had to endorse the manner in which the rich beauty of this shrine contrasted with the squalor and misery that lay about it.¹¹⁸

Poverty degrades human relationships, subverts relational norms, and fuels class divisions, but it also drives its victims toward a powerful, passionate force—the Catholic Church (however delusional and misguided this force is, in Wright's view): "Spanish Catholicism was one of the odd fatalities of the world."¹¹⁹ Wright comments,

Back of the indigenous poverty and supporting it is a naively pagan attitude toward life that is the opposite of the practical: a love of ritual and ceremony; a delight in color and movement and sound and harmony; an extolling of sheer emotion as the veritable end of human striving; a deification of tradition that lifts them out of the world that is shared by most of Western mankind . . . all of which finds its ultimate sanction and justification in the practices and canons of Spanish Catholicism.¹²⁰

Wright connects poverty to other kinds of images as well; for example, it easily elides into his landscape descriptions:

Scrubby trees struggled to grow on gruesome mountaintops. It was a melancholy world with a spell of sadness haunting it.

Each little village of squat, clay-colored houses was different from the last, yet somehow they were all alike, clinging precariously to the slopes of bleak and crumbly mountains.¹²¹

Poverty is a distinct mindset in *Pagan Spain*, exposing an essential structure and ethical viewpoint that Wright constantly returns to in his interpretations of Spain's "paganism" and "feudalism." Wright's environmental and circumstantial explanations of poverty hinge on what he sees as the stories of Spain's ruined (and anachronistic) spiritual world.

CONCLUSION

Wright's biographer Hazel Rowley argues that "*Pagan Spain* contains absorbing stories, interesting characters, first-rate dialogue. More than simply a travel essay, it is personal, subjective, and controversial." She

additionally asserts, “Wright’s narrative voice—personal, honest, wry, humorous, and occasionally self-mocking—in many ways resembles the voice of ‘New Journalism’ in the mid-1960s.”¹²² Although *Pagan Spain* does carry such 1960s New Journalistic features as scene-by-scene construction, a full record of dialogue, manifold incidental details to develop character, et cetera—and in a certain way is a kind of “fact reporting”¹²³—the work is too literary, too socially polemical, and too hybridic to fit well into this category. *Pagan Spain*, at its heart, is one of Wright’s efforts to mourn the damage inflicted by modern capitalism in its conjunction with traditional religion. That *Pagan Spain*’s narrator “had not been prepared for what he encountered”¹²⁴ is reflected in the discontinuous, multi-disciplinary, and appropriately modernist form of the work.

The variety of Wright’s techniques renders his work interdisciplinary, even multidisciplinary, which takes the reader far beyond a New Journalism, documentary, or travel literature genre or register. The dynamic language and contradictory politics of Wright’s journalism contribute to the rhetorical sophistication of his fiction and give it the potential power to question and redefine narrative forms of the mid-twentieth century. Wright is a disturbingly unrecognized player in this redirection: his contributions to an African American journalistic and literary journalistic tradition have been unfairly neglected. At the same time, analyses of his most successful fiction, with their safer narrative boundaries, continue to dominate the criticism.

There is hope, however, in the persistence of literary-journalistic representation itself. In his long-form literary journalism, beginning with *12 Million Black Voices*, and continuing with *Black Power*, *The Color Curtain*, and *Pagan Spain*, Wright undertook a transposition of conventional narrative forms that eventually converted journalism into a vehicle for a theory of contemporary reality. This conversion incorporated sermonizing traditions, jeremiads, personifications, documentary film, photojournalistic techniques, and fiction to create a certain alternate racial history, vision, and humanism. Wright’s literary journalism introduces a disruption or disequilibrium into a storyteller’s and interpreter’s mental model of the world evoked by a world that is presented as actual. His use, then, of this narrative form should be seen not only as a crucial part of his intellectual and artistic growth but also as his distinct claim to a transnational modernism.

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NOTES

1. Although offering a helpful overview of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century black press, *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Todd Vogel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), is representative of the scant coverage given to Wright's journalism. Vogel's critical collection devotes only four pages to Wright, focusing on his 1951 piece for *Ebony*, "The Shame of Chicago." Surprisingly, there have been no individual or collective studies on the substantial journalism/literary journalism that Wright wrote for the *Daily Worker*, the *New Masses*, *Harper's Magazine*, and other important journals and magazines of the American 1930s and 1940s.

2. Much work still needs to be done in defining "literary journalism" as a multifarious, multigeneric, and multimedia field of study that can only be comprehensively addressed within international coordinates. I prefer the term literary journalism over nonfiction and other narrative classifications because the works by Wright I assign to this literary form are not merely editorials, essays, autobiographies, memoirs or travel narratives, as conventionally defined. What I am calling literary journalism in relation to Wright involves artistic practices that are used to investigate social, racial, cultural or political circumstances. I am most interested in writers who have first established themselves as fictionalists or have highly developed literary sensibilities, yet have written some of the most powerful polemical forms of literary journalism. Wright easily fits into this category.

3. In what follows, some of my ideas on Wright's "modernism" and exile writings draw on the arguments I presented in the introduction, chapter prefaces, and afterword of *Richard Wright: New Readings in the 21st Century*, eds. Alice Mikal Craven and William Dow (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–8; 9–10; 69–70; 101–103; 167–170; 267–271; and in the chapter "Richard Wright," in *The Cambridge Companion to the American Novel*, ed. Timothy Parrish (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 156–167.

4. Michelle Stephens, "African-American Modernism," in *A Companion to the*

Modern American Novel, ed. John T. Matthews (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 307.

5. *Ibid.*, 318. One of Wright's preferred lifelong genres, as this essay argues, is literary journalism.

6. Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 187.

7. *Ibid.*, 184.

8. Paula Rabinowitz, "Savage Holiday: Documentary Noir and True Crime in *12 Million Black Voices*," in *Richard Wright: New Readings in the 21st Century*, eds. Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 107.

9. Hubert Henry Harrison, "Our International Consciousness," in *When Africa Awakes* (1920; repr., Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1997), 100–101, 103.

10. Gavin Jones, *American Hungers: The Problems of Poverty in U.S. Literature, 1840–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 148.

11. It should be noted that in 1938 the *Daily Worker* was the only white newspaper in the U.S. to employ black writers on its staff and to give regular space in its pages to black social issues.

12. Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, foreword by Noel Ignatiev, introduction by David Bradley (New York: Basic Books, 1941), 18. Published just months after the publication of his landmark novel, *Native Son* (1940), *Black Voices* (1941) marks Wright's distinctive shift from a fiction inflected by a sociological sensibility (*Native Son*) to a sociological discourse trading off with fictional forms (*Black Voices*)—resulting, as I will argue, in one of the most undervalued literary-journalistic texts of the American 1940s.

13. Brian Dolinar, "The Illinois Writers' Project Essays: Introduction," *Southern Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 85.

14. Carla Cappetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 182.

15. Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2004), 1401.

16. As Virginia Whatley Smith has noted, "[Wright] was writing in the late 1930s and early 1940s when documentary expressions—photographic texts, newspapers, periodicals, fiction and nonfiction et cetera—were intrinsic tools of proletarian writers, and Wright was no exception in integrating his training in journalism with his literature." The product of much of this integration, I will contend, is foremost literary-journalistic in nature. *Richard Wright's Travel Writings* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 82.

17. Michael Thurston, *Making Something Happen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 8.

18. *Ibid.*, 8. See Alan Wald's "Revolutionary Intellectuals: *Partisan Review* in the 1930s," in *Literature at the Barricades: The American Writer in the 1930s*, eds. Ralph F. Bogardus and Fred Hobson (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 187–203.

19. This point can be made clearer in a comparative context. As Hazel Rowley

argues, “*12 Million Black Voices*, like all Wright’s writing, was driven by a passionate desire to bring about change. This was an important difference between him and the Chicago sociologists, who held the view that the good sociologist must be detached and apolitical.” *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 250.

20. William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 14.

21. Wright, *Black Voices*, 18.

22. Kenneth Kinnamon and Michel Fabre, eds., *Conversations with Richard Wright* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 45.

23. Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 14.

24. Richard Wright, introduction to *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, by St. Clair Drake and Horace C. Cayton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xxiii.

25. See Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 76.

26. Wright was not alone in doing so. See, for example, James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), Agnes Smedley’s *Daughter of Earth* (1929), and Meridel LeSueur’s *Salute to Spring* (1940). On at least one level, I see *12 Million Black Voices* as a continuation and variation of Agee’s prefatory pronouncements in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in which he begins with the famous quotation from the Marx and Engels *Communist Manifesto* (1848): “Workers of the world, unite and fight. You have nothing to lose but your chains, and a world to win.” But then Agee relegates these words to a “second theme” and raises “the poetry facing them” to the first. See James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, A Death in the Family, Shorter Fiction* (New York: Library of America, 2005), 13.

27. It must be noted that Wright’s “we” in the text is multireferential and heavily gendered, at times referring to slaves (31), sharecroppers (31), migrants (35), cotton workers (38, 49); at others referring to those blacks who fear being lynched (46), homeowners (47), tenant farmers (56), churchgoers (73), city dwellers under Jim Crow law (99), and manual laborers (117).

28. Jeff Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 138

29. *Ibid.*, 138.

30. The literary influences inherent in *Black Voices* reflect Wright’s consideration that “Eliot, Stein, Joyce, Proust, Hemingway; and Anderson; Gorky, Barbusse, Nexo, and Jack London no less than the folklore of the Negro himself should form the heritage of the Negro Writer.” “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Henry Louis Gates and Nellie McKay, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2004), 1407.

31. Michael Coyle, ed., *Ezra Pound and African American Modernism* (Orano, ME: American Poetry Foundation, 2001), 86.

32. Wright, *Black Voices*, 10.

33. Terence Patrick Murphy, “The Uncertainties of Conversational Exchange:

Dialogue Monitoring as a Function of the Narrative Voice," *Style* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 398.

34. *Ibid.*, 399.

35. Wright, *Black Voices*, 11.

36. *Ibid.*, 10, 13.

37. Examinations of the discursive formations of the "we" and "you" in African American literature and African American literary journalism are oddly lacking in the criticism on narrative address and in African American studies in general. Although this is not the place for such a study, Wright's use of the we and direct address in *Black Voices* is certainly part of a narrative tradition beginning with the authors of slave narratives (Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass), abolitionist writing (George W. Clark), and antislavery publications (William Wells Brown) and extending to such fiction and nonfiction writers as Du Bois, Jean Toomer, Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset, and James Baldwin. Toomer's *Cane* (1923) is an especially interesting case of how a narrator wishes to inspire actual readers with the "you" in the text. *Cane's* narrator, by directly addressing a witnessing community, prepares a participation that not only intensifies his voice in the community, but also allows him to become the community's spokesperson and storyteller.

38. Carla Cappetti, "Sociology of an Existence: Richard Wright and the Chicago School," *MELUS* 12, no. 2, (Summer 1985): 28.

39. Jeff Allred, "From Eye to We: Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*, Documentary, and Pedagogy,"

American Literature 78, no. 2 (September 2006): 551.

40. Wright, *Black Voices*, 26.

41. St. Clair Drake and Horace C. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 8, 17.

42. Wright, *Black Voices*, 18.

43. *Ibid.*, 21.

44. *Ibid.*, 41.

45. *Ibid.*, 35.

46. *Ibid.*, xx.

47. Ann Petry, "The Novel as Social Criticism," in *The Writer's Book*, ed. Helen Hull (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1956), 37.

48. See Allred, "From Eye to We," 550.

49. For instance, see Virginia Whatley Smith, ed., *Richard Wright's Travel Writings: New Reflections* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), xi–xv.

50. Judith Hamera and Alfred Bendixen, eds., and introduction, *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3, 2.

51. *Ibid.*, 3.

52. Whatley Smith, *Richard Wright's Travel Writings*, xii.

53. Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*, in *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; and White Man, Listen!* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 3.

54. Ibid., 13.
55. Ibid., 415.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., 415–16.
58. Eric Schocket, *Vanishing Moments: Class and American Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 255.
59. Wright, *Black Power*, 56, 59.
60. Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 104.
61. Wright, *Black Voices*, 72.
62. Kinnamon and Fabre, *Conversations*, 240.
63. Yoshinobu Hakutani, *Richard Wright and Racial Discourse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 117.
64. Jack B. Moore, “A Personal Appreciation of Richard Wright’s Universality,” *The Mississippi Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (Spring 1997). Web. 25 August 2012.
65. For an examination of *Black Power* as a “novel,” see Jack B. Moore, “The Art of *Black Power*: Novelistic or Documentary,” *Revue Française d’Etudes Américaines* 31 (February 1987): 79–91.
66. Fred R. Conkling, “Wright Sees West Africa in Turmoil,” *Fort Wayne News Sentinel*, October 9, 1954.
67. Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain*, in *Black Power: Three Books from Exile*, 441.
68. See Amritjit Singh, afterword, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile*, 615.
69. For various discussions of this relationship, see the introduction and chapter prefaces of *Richard Wright: New Readings in the 21st Century*, eds. Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
70. Kinnamon and Fabre, *Conversations*, 439.
71. Ibid., 189.
72. Wright, *Color Curtain*, 493.
73. Ibid., 498.
74. Ibid., 503.
75. Ibid., 586.
76. Ibid., 440.
77. Ibid., 440–41.
78. Horace Cayton, “Discriminations—America: Frightened Children of Frightened Parents,” *Twice-a-Year* 12–13 (1945), 263.
79. John Reilly, “Richard Wright and the Art of Non-Fiction: Stepping Out on the Stage of the World,” *Callaloo* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 512.
80. Wright, *Color Curtain*, 464–65.
81. Ibid., 471.
82. Virginia Whatley Smith, ed., “Richard Wright’s Passage to Indonesia,” in *Richard Wright’s Travel Writings: New Reflections* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 99.
83. About this role, see John Lowe, “Richard Wright and the CircumCarib-

bean,” in *Richard Wright: New Readings in the 21st Century*, eds. Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 249–66.

84. Wright, *Color Curtain*, 568.

85. *Ibid.*, 542.

86. *Ibid.*, 551.

87. Dorothy Stringer, “Psychology and Black Liberation in Richard Wright’s *Black Power* (1954),” *Journal of Modern Literature* 32, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 106.

88. *Ibid.*, 106.

89. I am indebted here to Richard Walsh’s conception of fictional discourse and narrative pragmatics. See Richard Walsh, “The Pragmatics of Narrative Fiction” in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, eds. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2008), 150–64.

90. Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (New York: William Morrow, 1973), 203.

91. Michel Fabre, *The World of Richard Wright* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 67.

92. Dennis F. Evans, “The Good Women, Bad Women, Prostitutes and Slaves of *Pagan Spain*,” in *Richard Wright’s Travel Writings: New Reflections*, ed. Virginia Whatley Smith (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 166.

93. Ellen Ann Fentress, “Journalism: *Pagan Spain* by Richard Wright,” *Oxford American: The Southern Magazine of Good Writing* (August 27, 2012). Web. 14 Sept. 2012.

94. Richard Strout, “Richard Wright’s Spanish Excursion,” *The New Republic* 136 (February 18, 1957), 18.

95. Richard Wright, *Pagan Spain* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), back cover text.

96. Wright, *Pagan Spain*, 4.

97. *Ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, 21.

99. *Ibid.*, 192.

100. Jeff Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 135.

101. Wright, *Pagan Spain*, 5.

102. *Ibid.*, 8.

103. *Ibid.*, 12.

104. After the publication of *The Outsider* (1953), Wright was experimenting with various nonfiction genres conducive to what he wished to express internationally. Based on his belief in the primacy of personal perception, he made this statement in 1954: “I’m inclined to feel that I ought not to work right now on a novel. This does not mean that I’m giving up writing fiction, but, really, there are so many more exciting and interesting things happening now in the world that I feel sort of dodging them if I don’t say something about them.” John Lowe, “Richard Wright as Traveler/Ethnographer,” in *Richard Wright’s Travel Writings: New Reflections*, 119.

105. See, for example, Mary K. Moore, “Bitches, Whores, and Women Haters:

Archetypes and Typologies in the Art of Richard Wright,” in *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays*, eds. Richard Macksey and Frank E. Moorer (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984), 117–27; and Nagueyalti Warren, “Black Girls and Native Sons: Female Images in Selected Works by Richard Wright,” in *Richard Wright: Myths and Realities*, ed. C. James Trotman (New York: Garland, 1988), 59–77.

106. Wright, *Pagan Spain*, 220.

107. *Ibid.*, 220–221.

108. Dennis F. Evans, “The Good Women, Bad Women, Prostitutes and Slaves of *Pagan Spain*,” in *Richard Wright’s Travel Writings: New Reflections*, ed. Virginia Whatley Smith (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 167. Wright has many moments of sympathetically portraying black women in *Black Voices*, *The Long Dream* (1958), and “Long Black Song” (1938). For a reassessment of Wright’s views on gender, see Barbara Foley’s “A Dramatic Picture . . . of Women from Feudalism to Fascism”: Richard Wright’s *Black Hope*,” in *Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary*, eds. Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow (New York: Continuum, forthcoming 2014).

109. Wright, *Pagan Spain*, 229.

110. *Ibid.*, 218.

111. *Ibid.*, 177.

112. *Ibid.*, 231.

113. *Ibid.*, 221.

114. *Ibid.*, 233.

115. *Ibid.*, 209.

116. *Ibid.*, 199.

117. *Ibid.*, 200.

118. *Ibid.*, 234.

119. *Ibid.*, 274.

120. *Ibid.*, 178.

121. *Ibid.*, 136.

122. Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 476.

123. Gay Talese, et al., “The New Journalism,” *Writer’s Digest* (January 1970), 34.

124. Wright, *Pagan Spain*, 227.

In Their Own Voices

Celebrating *Brothers: Black and Poor— A True Story of Courage and Survival*, 25 Years Later

Including an interview with author Sylvester Monroe

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The following paper examines Brothers: Black and Poor—A True Story of Courage and Survival (1988), the extended version of a cover story published in the March 23, 1987, issue of Newsweek, 25 years after its publication. This piece of collaborative journalism was innovative at the time because the stories were firsthand accounts by poor African Americans from the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, collected by a team of black reporters and woven together by former editor Peter Goldman. The reportage is first contextualized and evaluated in terms of its literary and narrative qualities; its potential for communicative action and performative effects is then explored and appraised. The linguistic authenticity and polyvocality of Brothers make it a good example of literary journalism, while its immediacy and sense of agency reinforce the reader's understanding of the life-world of black residents living in dire conditions. As a former resident of the housing project and as one of the few who made it out of the ghetto, Monroe posits himself as a "conduit" that helped reporters get insider stories. With regard to his career as an African American journalist, Monroe shows that self-definitional counternarratives constitute discursive and social actions aimed at connecting subjects, reporters, and readers in and out of the black public spheres. The text is followed by an interview with Sylvester Monroe.

In August 2012, established journalist Sylvester Monroe published a moving story on *Marketplace*,¹ an account of his visit to a now-defunct housing project on the south side of Chicago, the Robert Taylor Homes,² where he spent most of his childhood and adolescence. The multimedia piece narrated by Monroe and enhanced with the voices and pictures of residents of the area, some of whom shared the author's hardship, is a nostalgic and painful reminder of what the place used to be, back in the 1960s: nostalgic because the place was his home in Chicago, but also painful, because today's residents have not yet found a way out of poverty; some are even worse off than their parents had been. Monroe singles out two main reasons for this degradation: the lack of job opportunities, and a deteriorated public educational system. He recalls having had excellent teachers in the 1960s who held their students to high standards and strongly believed in their ability to improve their circumstances.³

Yet the 2012 visit was not Monroe's first return to his home place. Back in 1987, while working as a correspondent for *Newsweek*, he went back to the tenements to write "Brothers," an unusual piece of collaborative journalism. Nicknamed "Brainiac" and later "Big-Time Vest Monroe,"⁴ he was one of the very few who "made it" out of the ghetto by getting a solid K-12 education and then continuing his education at no less than Harvard University. But Monroe still had a deep connection to his brothers who had stayed at "Trey-nine."⁵ Most of them had either blown their chances or never gotten any. The changes of the 1960s heralded a brighter future for African Americans, but "the doors" that had opened eventually "slammed."⁶ Inadequate urban planning turned the deceptively romanticized Taylor project into a black ghetto where fathers were conspicuous by their absence. Drugs and crime became the residents' daily fare.

As a primary source and a journalist for *Newsweek*, Monroe was accompanied by four reporters and a photographer to carry out his assignment. Those who recorded the interviews and collected the stories with Monroe were Vern E. Smith, chief of the magazine's Atlanta bureau; Terry E. Johnson, a national affairs specialist from New York; Monroe Anderson, a correspondent from the Chicago bureau; and photographer Jacques Chenet. The reporters were all African American, except Peter Goldman, coauthor of the series and the book, former senior editor, and team leader of special projects. The only white on the team, Goldman was charged with weaving their stories together into a coherent piece of narrative journalism.

"Brothers" first came out as a cover story in the March 23, 1987, issue of *Newsweek* and garnered great critical attention. The book is its extended version, which is three to four times longer than the original piece.⁷ The twenty-fifth anniversary of its publication is a timely opportunity to reexamine the

background to the story, to discuss its literariness and narrative process, and to evaluate its potential for “communicative action” and possible performative effects,⁸ to use Jürgen Habermas’s terminology. The most probing question that underpins *Brothers* is to what extent a counterpublic discourse can be subversive when exposed in mainstream media. Put another way, the question inevitably arises whether the discourse of marginalized groups disseminated in the dominant public sphere is conducive to unintentional collusion between those relegated to the sidelines and a major media corporation.

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

Monroe’s family was part of what is called the Great Migration. His Mother took the Illinois Central train line from the Mississippi delta all the way to Chicago after World War II. Chicago was a huge urban city with “one of the largest concentrations of high-rise apartment buildings. Twenty-seven thousand people were living there.” The Robert Taylor Homes was one of them, and although the idea behind the project was fair, Monroe concedes, there was “a sinister side to it,” as all the poor blacks were “circumscribed by race, economic poverty, and geographical isolation.”⁹ Houston Baker contends that in the aftermath of Jim Crow, the newly gained “creative agency” of blacks gave them access to public housing. But inadequate urban planning turned the Taylor project into a ghetto with the attendant negatives that term suggests, including a lack of fathers and father-figures. The Civil Rights movement had paved the way for “the active working of the imagination of a subaltern, black American counterpublic.” As a result, Baker finds that King’s efforts to develop a “black imagination” failed to create the “dignified labor” so dear to W. E. B. Du Bois.¹⁰

The *Newsweek* reporters spent four months at the Robert Taylor Homes—“a city within a city, poor, black, insular, dependent, and dangerous”¹¹—to offer readers a “slice of life,”¹² that is, an idea of what it meant to be living in highly segregated Chicago, in isolated and fatherless tenements surrounded by drug dealers, outlaws, hustlers, and pimps, where gang-driven violence and poverty were rampant. Admittedly, it must have taken a lot of determination, self-confidence, and resistance to adversity to emerge from the ghetto unscathed, and with tenacity. Although in dire straits, these men had dreams, Monroe insists, but circumstances “checkmated” their hopes, and they were faced with the “inescapable fact of [their] blackness.”¹³ The imagined black public sphere was a fertile terrain for mobilization and organization, not for labor.

Mainstream US newspapers and sociological studies in the 1960s pointed to facts and figures, but they regularly failed to represent African Americans as they really were. Although it may be argued that the media sketch

“imagined communities,”¹⁴ sociology leads to abstraction. This point raised by Roberta S. Maguire in her discussion of Albert Murray’s “anti-journalism” is the exact starting point of “Brothers.” Murray denounced the overreliance of journalists on survey data in his polemical *Omni-Americans* (1970), arguing that it led to representations of African Americans as “overly generalized and overwhelmingly negative, rendering blacks as culturally deprived ghetto inhabitants with abnormal family structures.”¹⁵

This view is shared by Monroe, who does not deny the important role of sociology, but who sees narrative journalism as the missing link to fully grasp the subjects under examination. The University of Chicago boasted a sociology department¹⁶ that carried out in-the-field research and interviews, but sociology studies ran the risk of either romanticizing or pathologizing the ghetto. Likewise, Carlo Rotella notes that “[t]he field observers at the Chicago School practiced a kind of theoretically informed anecdotal reportage making for a markedly journalistic and even novelistic brand of social science.”¹⁷ Therefore, we may be misled to believe that sociologists who spread gloom and doom about public housing were right to posit a “permanent” black underclass for whom geography was destiny. In the final analysis, *Honk or Half-Man*, some of the characters in *Brothers*, certainly approximate what it means to grow up as men-children in inner cities, but behind the façade there exist subtle personalities that challenge sociological generalizations.

Maguire recalls that *Newsweek* “pioneered social science methodology with their cover story “The Negro in America,”¹⁸ released two decades before “Brothers.” Then-editor Osborn Elliott was behind the twenty-three-page reportage and twelve-point program for the advancement of blacks.¹⁹ This special issue was a continuation of another cover story published in 1963, researched by forty reporters who conducted 1,250 interviews.²⁰ The 1967 story was also Peter Goldman’s breakthrough, Monroe explains. The magazine was a trailblazer in its poignant advocacy of black people’s rights²¹ and in its hiring of African American journalists. “Brothers,” as published in the March 23, 1987, issue, participated in that effort to address racial injustices, twenty years later. It was innovative in inviting black people from the ghetto to tell their stories in their own voices, instead of alienating them as third persons. The report was poised for a voyage beyond figures: it aimed at making readers “see [the subjects] whole, as men, not statistics, with all the strengths, weaknesses, hopes and vanities that are part of the human condition.”²² The choice of a direct approach to subjects was predicated upon a willingness to collect insiders’ accounts of specific urban realities.

Hence this quite remarkable collection of personal narratives. By refraining from any abusive authorial intrusion in the text, Monroe—and Gold-

man, for that matter—took their cue from Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, the following quotation from which served as the epigraph to *Brothers*: "When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me."²³ In giving voice and substance to real-life subjects, the authors granted them more than a presence and a visibility: they engaged in communicative action. Ideally, speech acts should lead to transformative politics, a point I shall come back to later. "The Black public sphere puts engagement, competition and exchange in the place of resistance, and uses performativity to capture audiences, Black and White, for things fashioned through Black experience," write Arjun Appadurai et al.²⁴ In this instance, *Newsweek* offered a powerful forum. Albeit a part of the mainstream media with massively white audiences, the now-defunct print magazine had a long history of black advocacy and worked hard to promote change.

LITERARINESS AND NARRATIVE PROCESS

As Barbara Foley, in her discussion of the "centrality of the documentary mode" to black literature, stipulates, "One significant tradition . . . predates the contemporary nonfiction novel, but it has not yet been duly acknowledged as a legitimate forebear—namely, that body of literature which focuses on Afro-American experience."²⁵ Foley accordingly asserts that the lack of consideration of these texts is a glaring omission; they are essential in fuelling theoretical debates in the discipline of literary journalism and should therefore be designated as seminal texts. Nonfiction, Foley further argues, has always been a staple in black literature, precisely because historical veracity has constantly been challenged and questioned. *Brothers* not only fits in this long tradition of nonfiction and the documentary mode; it is also a remarkable breakthrough to inform primarily white audiences not just about black realities but, more importantly, about social realities from a black perspective. In other words, the text offers a self-definitional counternarrative to discourses on the ghetto and attempts to define the Chicago projects "from the inside out," in a manner reminiscent of Gwendolyn Brooks's *In the Mecca* (1968), although in a journalistic fashion.²⁶ *Brothers* continues a tradition that fosters "investigation into the language of social identity and citizenship"²⁷ and thereby contributes to historicizing black experiences through reportage.

With *Brothers*, Monroe, Goldman, and their reporting team innovated by producing a collaborative work of narrative journalism that conferred a sense of agency and immediacy to their subjects. "The form of the book is ours; the content, and the language, are theirs,"²⁸ the authors explained. Their outlook entailed an enormous challenge: their subjects would have to trust them, and in return, they would have to "honor that trust."²⁹ The overall re-

porting, which mingled observation and participation, spanned four months, with repeated visits and calls. Each reporter was assigned various tasks and worked on a number of files. They repeatedly asked the men how they felt about some issues, or what they did in given circumstances. Jacques Chenet, the photographer, spent considerable time with the brothers before taking pictures, the “product of patient photojournalism.”³⁰

The subjects agreed to take part in the story mainly because nobody had ever cared about what they thought, or even bothered to ask. Confidence progressively built up, resulting in their telling stories rather than answering questions.³¹ Therein lay the key to this subtle weaving of yarns into a coherent narrative: by asking them how they felt in particular situations, the journalists insured that the project would become a powerful story in which the authenticity of the language was kept intact. “Because so much of what they are saying is conveyed in the language,” Monroe adds, the *Newsweek* team was concerned “not to lose the lyricism of that language.”³² The same goes for the subjects’ sense of humor and self-mockery, in spite of the dark circumstances.

The *Newsweek* team eschewed the pitfall of overreliance on sources, thanks to Monroe’s presence. As an insider he was able to approach his brothers, to spell out the conditions and the framework of the reportage by making clear that interviews would eventually constitute the raw material of the final text. What did not exist in the interviews would not be part of the story, Monroe explained. He called himself “the conduit,” the “thread” that led to the subjects, the “benchmark” from which the main protagonists “started to build up and down, sideways,” to reveal the stories.³³

Monroe confesses that he chose not to write the story of one man, Roy Johnson, because he knew him too well. Concerned about the necessity to keep some distance in such an undertaking, he focused on other subjects, other brothers, with whom he had not been so close.³⁴ Subjectivity was a dilemma for Monroe, who questioned his own involvement in these accounts. But the paradox was that without the foregrounded presence of Monroe—Vest, in the story—the reportage could not have materialized. At the same time, some of the staff at *Newsweek* believed that African American reporters could not be regarded as objective agents if they covered black people. As Monroe recalls it, “[T]he catch-22 was that it [was] because we were black that we could go,”³⁵ a contradiction that reinforces the argument that subjectivity—in this case, Monroe’s personal commitment to his subject—brings the reader closer to the truth of inner-city black reality.

My contention is that *Brothers* is a significant example of African American literary journalism.³⁶ Multiple points of view, unfiltered voices, social status details, scene-by-scene constructions, and vernacular dialogue mark it as

literary journalism. In addition, the photos add visual and humanistic value to the story. “Literary journalists recognize the need for a consciousness on the page through which the objects in view are filtered,”³⁷ Norman Sims has observed. That is exactly what *Brothers* purported to do: to have readers get a sense of what it was like to live in the Robert Taylor Homes.

As David Lionel Smith observed, the text “offer[ed] a corrective to negative accounts about black men” at the time and also provide[d] personal accounts and evaluations of their living conditions. However, he lamented the fact that too many intermediaries encumbered the writing process and jeopardized this alleged “first-person testimony.”³⁸ Admittedly, the collective agency of the book rested on *Newsweek’s* authority, but inferring that the story rested on a diluted false objectivity deprives *Brothers* of due recognition. On the contrary, the juxtaposition of points of view and the combination of voices—including that of *Newsweek’s* reporters and editor—nullified the argument that the African American population was a sociological problem best kept at bay. Limiting such subjects to the black press then would have meant missing an opportunity to join the national, or even global, conversation—as such limiting would today.

COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND PERFORMATIVE EFFECT

*B*rothers thus pioneered a new type of collaborative journalism that would not only raise people’s awareness, but also provide the wherewithal to conflate intimate and public spheres, and hence to promote social action. Presenting readers with a corrective to the negative representation of blacks and sensitizing readers to the irrational segregation and overcrowding of individuals denied opportunity because of race is one thing. Galvanizing them into action is another matter. By “giving a voice” to the main protagonists, by taking the readers “inside” the story, the text becomes an antidote to indifference. Monroe emphasizes the “transformative” power of *Brothers*, not only for the readers, but also for the journalists who spent four months embedded at the Robert Taylor Homes. Prejudice and biases dissolve as soon as one becomes part of the story, be it as a subject, as a reporter, or as a reader.

By presenting a collective account that was the result of collaborative work between journalists and subjects, *Brothers* broke through some of the barriers that separated the observers from the participants, not just poor blacks from mainstream reporters, but also readers. Such a joint venture among a major publication with a mainstream white audience, a team of primarily black reporters, and urban black dwellers of housing projects provides a plurality of views of African American existence and experiences from within the black public sphere. *Brothers* is testimony from a community that took the brunt

of Reaganism.³⁹ The significance of these polyvocal micro-stories resides in their everyday quality and the venue in which they appeared. As such, these stories rarely made the headlines of mainstream newspapers. The black press extensively documented racial injustices and the trials and tribulations of ordinary folks.⁴⁰ In this particular instance *Newsweek* also devoted its columns to minor characters striving to survive in their hostile environments.

Monroe's role was instrumental in getting the stories from Trey-nine. He benefited from a twofold agency: as a *Newsweek* reporter and a former resident of the Robert Taylor Homes, he acted as a linchpin between two worlds and thereby endowed the project with a double legitimacy. The access to the projects that Monroe provided to a major magazine allowed for a rare insider view. The story was thus mediated by a former resident who eventually made his way out of the ghetto. Monroe's dual identity indicates that understanding the ghetto's lifeworld is only possible as an insider. Similarly, it suggests that participation in the discursive activities of the public sphere at large, that is, via *Newsweek*, is essential to produce creative ideas and engage in provocative debates.

What Monroe is effectively saying when he refers to his role as a "conduit" recalls Catherine R. Squires's discussion of the difficulties shaping a black public sphere, that is, a "marginal," "historically oppressed" group of African Americans, which she equates with Nancy Fraser's "subaltern counterpublics."⁴¹ The mediated voices from the Taylor projects made an interesting foray into the dominant media sphere: vernacular voices were not totally substituted for established journalese; rather, they coexisted with this corporate language. The success of such a writing project, albeit relative, is measured by the "ties . . . to political actors in the state and dominant sphere, and the ability to construct effective vehicles of publicity."⁴² The fashioning of the ghetto residents' experiences into an intelligible text personifying their ordeals was a worthwhile endeavor.

The reception of *Brothers* was excellent, according to Monroe. Sadly enough, this collective journalism that *Newsweek* initiated in the 1960s is hardly possible today. The magazine gave Monroe and his fellow reporters time to investigate their topic and know their subjects. Very few magazines and papers can still afford to dispatch reporters for fairly long periods of time. Monroe cites a few venues hospitable to long pieces of journalism in the African American press: the *Root* (<http://www.theroot.com>), the *Amsterdam News*, the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the regrettably defunct *Emerge* and *Chicago Defender*. *Black Scholar* and *Black Enterprise* are also relevant sources, as well as *Ebony*, *Heart and Soul*, and *Essence*, which mainly target women.⁴³

Monroe was asked to provide a sequel to *Brothers*. He does have such a project in the pipeline, but it is not about his childhood. His forthcoming book, *The Class of 73: The Price of Success*, deals with his experience as a Harvard student, and with “this constant dull pain” of “isolation” inherent in blackness. Monroe explains that in the wake of Martin Luther King’s assassination, the doors were opened to black students in colleges and universities across the country. When he joined Harvard in 1969, “127 students out of 1,500 were black,” the highest number ever (compared to seventy the year before). This watershed moment marked “the beginning expansion of the black educated middle class outside of black campuses.” Monroe’s *Class of 73* will reveal the obstacles he and his black classmates had to overcome on their path to a successful career.⁴⁴

Although Monroe laments that “[t]oo much melanin always seemed to spoil the stew”⁴⁵ in the American melting pot, he also recognizes that his blackness granted him his big breaks in his journalism career. He followed Jesse Jackson when he was a little-known civil rights activist. When Jackson started campaigning in the 1983 presidential primaries and, hence, became a magnet for the media, Monroe instantly became a national political reporter. He does not support the proprietary idea of a “black press” solely for African Americans, but he is positive that a black perspective on current events is necessary.

Monroe is adamant that (literary) journalism can bring about change, to wit, some of the positive repercussions of the Rodney King story. This terrible incident led to substantial reforms in the Los Angeles police and improved relationships with the local communities. Telling people stories can thus bring catharsis and get people to act for the well-being of society. The purpose of *Brothers*, however, was to bring into contact individuals from two different public spheres for a fruitful collaboration. Such a communicative act likely yielded some new discursive practices. But the concrete effects on the black spatial sphere, which should have derived from the performative nature of the Taylor projects’ residents’ testimonies, were almost nonexistent. Monroe’s reluctance to write a follow-up to *Brothers*, and his 2012 article in the *Root*—“Economic Mobility in Chicago’s Projects,” which is a testament that poverty and violence are still rampant—bespeak the ineffectiveness of political reforms and even the continued absence of opportunities. On the other hand, Monroe contributed “Vital Signs: The Black Male” to another volume combining words and images, *Songs of My People* (1992). In displaying extremely positive—textual and photographic—representations of members of the black community, the aim of this volume was to protest the continued unfair treatment of African Americans.⁴⁶

As Squires astutely remarks, one should bear in mind that two types of action—discursive and political—traverse the public sphere. *Brothers* caused a stir in 1987, but this participant journalism did not yield a true revolutionary racial advancement on the social and economic fronts. Nevertheless, talking about a failure of the US black public sphere at large would be erroneous, as there are many subgroups and fields in which huge progress has been made, such as in politics with the election of President Barack Obama. Besides, Squires is right to point to the diversity and complexity of the black public sphere, which should not be considered a homogeneous entity, hence her proposal to refer to “multiple Black publics.”⁴⁷

The very last line of *Brothers*, though, ironically points to the sentiment of failure and abandonment: “But he [Monroe] lived in a larger world. Trey-nine was not so much where he belonged as where he was from.”⁴⁸ This final sentence conflates a strong connection to his brothers and a distance from his former community. But more importantly, Monroe himself, a spokesman for one of these many “Black publics,” is still an active journalist totally committed to his cause. As such, he was and still is an agent of change, pointing to the difficult existence of those who made headway, sometimes fell off the social ladder, revised their aspirations downward, or relativized their American dreams. The very existence of *Brothers*, first as a story in *Newsweek* and later in book format, shows that Monroe may indeed be living in “a larger world” than the one he initially belonged to. More significantly, though, it is evidence that the African American journalist has adopted a trajectory aimed at blurring the boundaries between different public spheres. Monroe’s “strategic essentialism,”⁴⁹ to borrow Spivak’s household term, that is, his taking on various subaltern positions—as an African American journalist working for the black and the mainstream press, as a child in a Chicago ghetto and as a student at Harvard University—is a powerful incentive to renegotiate the limits of our public spheres and evaluate the space available for empowering the black community.

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An Interview with Sylvester Monroe

by Isabelle Meuret

Award-winning journalist Sylvester Monroe is a senior editor for *Marketplace*, a US Public Media radio show. He also contributes to a great number of papers and magazines including the *Root* (the-root.com) and *Ebony*, where he became a senior editor in 2006. His career began at *Newsweek* in 1973, as a correspondent in Boston, then Chicago, where he was deputy bureau chief. In Washington, Monroe was a national and White House correspondent. He joined *Time* magazine in 1989 as a Los Angeles correspondent. He graduated from Harvard University in 1973 and was on a professional journalism fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities at Stanford University in 1979–80. His career highlights in journalism are



Brothers: Black and Poor—A True Story of Courage and Survival, coauthored with Peter Goldman (1988), which is the extended version of a story published in 1987 in *Newsweek*, as well as reporting on Jesse Jackson, Rodney King, the LA riots, Louis Farrakhan, and President Barack Obama. Among other things, he is currently working on a sequel to *Brothers*, entitled *The Class of 73: The Price of Success*.

The interview that follows was conducted by Isabelle Meuret with Sylvester Monroe while he was in Atlanta and she was in Brussels. He agreed to have the conversation following their email exchanges on October 3, 2012.

THE CASE OF *BROTHERS*: AN INTERVIEW

Isabelle Meuret: I tremendously enjoyed your moving multimedia story for *Marketplace* (August 17, 2012), in which you provide an account of your visit to your childhood home in Chicago, the now-defunct housing project called the Robert Taylor Homes, which was central to *Brothers*. This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of its publication, first in *Newsweek*, and then in book format. You must have had mixed feelings when getting back there: the joy of returning to a place called home, the sadness to see that the “high hopes of a new urban generation” never materialized.

Sylvester Monroe: Indeed, I returned with mixed emotions. In fact, I have been asked many times to update the story of the “Brothers.” But, increasingly it is not a happy story. But it remains an important one that still resonates today in how so little has changed for the better among so many people who live in public housing.

Meuret: This web documentary is a good opportunity to reexamine the genesis of your project and evaluate the reception of *Brothers*. The story was written in 1987: How was it received by *Newsweek* readers at the time? Was it an eye-opener?

Monroe: In 1987, *Brothers* offered a rare, unfiltered glimpse into the lives of a microcosmic group of young black Americans *Newsweek* readers almost never got to see or hear from firsthand. It was extremely well received, one of the best-selling issues of that year, which was recognized by many other media outlets, including the *Today Show*, Oprah Winfrey, Phil Donahue, and National Public Radio, to name just a few.

Meuret: *Brothers* is a *collaborative* piece of *documentary* work. How did you come up with that idea of producing a collective reportage? Apart from the fact that you wanted to give a voice to those who were silenced and invisible, was the choice of this format—that is, a collective account mediated by a former resident of the Robert Taylor Homes and *Newsweek* journalist—particularly innovative in 1987? What were the main obstacles in the creative process?

Monroe: It was cutting edge at the time, particularly for mainstream journalism. Collaborative, or “group,” journalism was the very definition of what we practiced back in the 1980s. The idea was to bring a lot of resources from around the country to focus—sometimes as in *Brothers*—on a particular place, event, or issue as a way of telling a larger story that resonated beyond the particular focus of the story. What was innovative was trying to tell the guys’ stories in their own voices without filtering them through a sociological or spokesperson’s prism. The biggest obstacle was convincing the top editors of *Newsweek* that it would sell. But our best argument for it was past history, and the fact that our editor and chief scribe was *Newsweek*’s principal cover writer, Peter Goldman.

Peter was head of the *Newsweek* special projects team, which had pioneered the groundbreaking approach of in-depth reporting that was so detailed it could produce fiction-like narrative journalism. The special projects team had done two other such projects before *Brothers*. One was called *Charlie Company: What Vietnam Did to Us*. The other was an in-depth retrospective look at a Middle American city in Ohio called Springfield. The cover story marked *Newsweek*’s fiftieth anniversary. Several major newspapers adopted this approach after the success of *Brothers* elevated it to a new level.

Meuret: What do you have to say to David L. Smith, who reviewed the book and objected to 1) the fact that the protagonists do not really express themselves, but rather were spoken for, and hence, remained representations; and 2) the fact that there were too many intermediaries, with *Brothers* then reflecting “the ‘authority’ of the corporation” (*Newsweek*), rather than the “integrity of a writer”?⁵¹

Monroe: *Brothers* was exactly the opposite of what he describes. In fact, *Brothers* was so groundbreaking in this regard that shortly after it was published, the new Washington bureau chief of *Newsweek*, a traditional news-magazine journalist who came from *Time*, remarked to me that he thought *Brothers* was a “good read” but that “it had no point.” He said if he had edited it, he would have opened the package with a six-column preface explaining “what those black guys were talking about.” I told him that *Brothers* was so successful precisely because we had not followed the normal news-magazine template and done that. *Brothers* is essentially long-form journalism that uses detailed, in-depth reporting to create a fiction-like, but completely factual narrative.

Meuret: It is my contention that the book is a good candidate for what

we call literary journalism, because it aims at bringing together the subjectivity of the readers closer to that of the “characters.” Also, it combines aesthetic and ethical qualities. Literary journalism has the advantage of making you “look” at facts, but also “feel” the facts. Is that the objective you hoped to reach?

Monroe: Exactly. We didn’t want to just *tell* readers what it was like to live in the Robert Taylor Homes. We wanted them to *hear, feel, see, touch, taste* and *smell* it firsthand from the people who lived there.

Meuret: How are facts and fiction intertwined in *Brothers*? Is fiction totally absent, or are there some imagined elements? For instance, are there composite characters, or did they all exist as such? Were colloquial language and pictures essential elements to make the stories “real”?

Monroe: *Brothers* is entirely a work of nonfiction. There are no fictional or composite characters. The voices are real. We did not edit them to make them any more or less “colloquial” than they are. And the photos taken by the late *Newsweek* staff photographer Jacques Chenet enhanced the realism.

Meuret: Would you say that multimedia is also going in that direction? Can literary or magazine journalism go online without running the risk of losing some of the “literariness,” or literary quality of texts? Does the combination of sound (interview, music), photography, and words bring an added value inasmuch as they bring a sense of immediacy unattainable via print only?

Monroe: I believe that digital media offer great opportunities for literary journalism. There is also the tremendous potential for producing shallow material with an eye more on quantity than quality.

Meuret: Do you believe in the power of (literary) journalism to bring about social change? The *Voices of Witness* series, which you may be familiar with, is very popular. But how can these documents galvanize people into action? It takes time to move from attention to action. Do you believe in the power of literature—or literary journalism—to change mentalities?

Monroe: I most definitely do. It’s why I became a journalist. People connect with people through the stories we tell about them. The more powerful and touching the stories, the better we are able to move and change. Through *Brothers*, people who had never been to the Taylor Homes, or never even

thought much about them, looked at the lives of the people who lived there much differently than they did before reading their stories. The fact that you are talking to me about this twenty-five years after the book was published is proof in itself of the power of literary journalism.

Meuret: Objectivity is a lure; journalism is inevitably subjective. Yet it is not what is being taught in journalism schools. The subjective voice and multiple points of view are characteristics of literary journalism, as are full dialogues and status details (features that are found in *Brothers*). Was it a dilemma for you to be an active participant in the story?

Monroe: Yes, I was torn about just how much I should be in the story. Peter Goldman convinced me that beyond my first-person introduction, I could and should be the binding thread connecting the individual “Brothers” to the central theme of the book. He was right, and it worked beautifully. He interviewed me for the italicized precedes in my voice at the beginning of each chapter.

SYLVESTER MONROE’S CAREER IN JOURNALISM

Meuret: You have an impressive career as a journalist, and have contributed to many different papers and magazines, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Ebony*, the *Root* and now *Marketplace*, a national public radio show (to name just a few). Was the move from *Time* and *Newsweek* to *Ebony* and the *Root* a way for you to reaffirm your black identity and give more visibility to African American journalism?

Monroe: As journalism continues to evolve, my movements have been more a means of reinventing myself as a journalist to meet the changing demands of the times than any affirmation or reaffirmation of black identity. I have never wanted to be the “black reporter” or tried to promote “African American journalism.” Rather, I have tried to bring an African American perspective to mainstream American journalism and have that perspective viewed as just as American as any other.

Meuret: You covered stories that were “historical,” like the LA riots, the trials of Rodney King, the portrait of Louis Farrakhan, and of course Obama’s election. Did you have to insist to be offered these opportunities, or are you “typecast” as the person who can talk about black issues and people?

Monroe: Like many African American journalists of my era, much of the opportunity I have had has come from being in the right place at the right time and filling a need. And yes, part of it has been and continues to be that we are perceived as being able to go places and speak to people nonblack reporters cannot.

Meuret: With some hindsight on your career, would you say that African Americans are now, at long last, offered more visibility and positive representations? Were there key moments in that evolution? Or is the road ahead still very long? Knowing that by 2050, the so-called minorities will be the new majority, which changes do you expect to see happen?

Monroe: I would definitely say that we have come a long way from the days when the only place to read anything positive about African Americans in the news media was in the black press. But that said, it is still very much a work in progress. Stories about poor black people and poverty in general are not as prevalent in some media as they once were. The new “hot” minority is now Hispanics. That is reflected not just in story selection but also in the racial makeup of news organization staffs. There were about a half-dozen black correspondents at *Newsweek* when I started in 1973. Today, there are none. Same for *Time*. Black journalists are also leaving the business in alarming numbers. So, I am not at all certain what 2050 is likely to look like.

Meuret: Are the *Root* and *Ebony* read exclusively by African Americans? What can be done to sensitize other readers to the important issues presented in these venues?

Monroe: The *Root* and *Ebony* and most other African American publications still have predominantly black audiences. However, I have believed for a long time that in order to survive they must begin to position themselves as sources of stories and ideas from African American perspectives that are of interest to all Americans and people outside the US as well.

ON RACE AND THE NEW JIM CROW LAWS

Meuret: Your story published in the *Root*, about Los Angeles and the possibility that riots could still happen—maybe not in LA, but elsewhere—is supported by some sad evidence, such as the case of Trayvon Martin, a young victim of a racially charged assault. You conclude that “what has not changed in two decades is continued excessive force against black males (and females)

by law enforcement officers.” Could you elaborate on this? Will there be a backlash?

Monroe: I cannot predict how people will react to the verdict in the Trayvon Martin case. But I can say that there is great ongoing concern about the underlying issues of the case, including excessive use of police force against young black males.

Meuret: The election in 2008 of President Obama showed that America had come a long way. The whole world watched in awe and was really impressed to see the first African American president take his oath in Washington. Hope and change were in the air. Have things changed dramatically when it comes to racial prejudice?

Monroe: The short answer is yes and no. The election of the first African American president of the United States is a huge step forward for this country. But make no mistake. It should in no way be taken as evidence that we have entered a postracial era in this country. Race remains as much a part of the American psyche as it did in the days when Alex de Tocqueville predicted it would be the most intractable problem this country would ever face. It remains so. Just look at the 2012 presidential election. The choice is as much about race as political ideology and economics.

Meuret: Michelle Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010) highlights that discrimination is still rampant, to wit, the number of blacks in jails. She denounces the overrepresentation of African Americans under correctional control, a number that is higher than that of the slaves in 1850. In *Brothers*, the absence of fathers struck me as an ineffable void. Is the color line still very present in American society, or is it maybe even worse because it is now invisible and behind the closed doors of prisons?

Monroe: You are correct. Much of the “racism” African Americans experience today is now structural or embedded in the way we experience many of our basic institutions. In reality, it is not black people who hold on to race or racialism. We would be the first in line to let it go when it is no longer used against us.

NOTES

1. Sylvester Monroe, "Economic Mobility in Chicago's Projects," *Marketplace*, August 17, 2012. <http://www.marketplace.org/topics/wealth-poverty/economic-mobility-chicagos-projects>.

2. Nicholas Lemann has written about the Robert Taylor Homes and other housing projects in his book *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Vintage, 1991). On Lemann, see also Norman Sims, "Writing Literary History . . . *The Promised Land*, and *The Big Test*, an interview with author Nicholas Lemann," *Literary Journalism Studies* 3, no.1 (Spring 2011): 9–31.

3. Sylvester Monroe, Skype interview by Isabelle Meuret, October 3, 2012.

4. Sylvester Monroe and Peter Goldman, *Brothers: Black and Poor—A True Story of Courage and Survival*, 3rd ed. (1988; New York: Ballantine, 1990), 145. The material was first published as a series in the March 23, 1987, issue of *Newsweek* and then expanded for the book.

5. "Trey-nine was shorthand for 3919 South Federal Street, the northernmost in a two-mile Stonehenge of red-and-cream brick high rises called the Robert Taylor Homes in memory of the first black director of the Chicago Housing Authority." Monroe and Goldman, *Brothers*, 21.

6. *Ibid.*, 197.

7. Goldman, foreword, *Brothers*, xii.

8. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1985).

9. Monroe, Skype interview.

10. Houston Baker, "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 3 (1994): 13.

11. Monroe and Goldman, *Brothers*, 23.

12. Goldman, foreword, *Brothers*, xii. The "slice of life" expression was first used by Stephen Crane in *Stephen Crane, Letters*, eds. R. W. Stallman and Lillian B. Guilkes (New York: New York University Press, 1960), quoted in Thomas Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992), 7.

13. Monroe and Goldman, *Brothers*, x, 197.

14. I am here referring to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983; London: Verso, 2006), in which he argues that the press contributes to creating the idea of nationalism. People are led to believe that they belong to a community because they consume the same cultural products. The development of the press contributed to that process.

15. Roberta S. Maguire, "Riffing on Hemingway and Burke, Responding to Mailer and Wolfe: Albert Murray's 'Anti-Journalism,'" *Literary Journalism Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 11.

16. Lemann mentions William Julius Wilson, a prominent sociologist working at the University of Chicago from 1972 to 1996. See Norman Sims, "Writing Literary History," 26.

17. Carlo Rotella, *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 51.
18. Maguire, "Riffing on Hemingway and Burke," 11. The *Newsweek* piece, published in 1967, had a subtitle: "The Negro in America: What Must Be Done."
19. Michael Kaufmann, "Osborn Elliott, Father of *Newsweek's* Rebirth, Dies at 83," *New York Times*, September 29, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/29/business/media/29elliott.html?pagewanted=print>.
20. Owen Matthews, "Who Killed *Newsweek*?" *The Spectator*, December 29, 2012. <http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/8802851/who-killed-newsweek/>.
21. Monroe, Skype interview.
22. Monroe and Goldman, *Brothers*, xii.
23. Peter Goldman, foreword, *Brothers*, ix.
24. Arjun Appadurai et al., "Editorial Comment: On Thinking the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 7 (1997): xii.
25. Barbara Foley, "History, Fiction, and the Ground Between: The Uses of Documentary Mode in Black Literature," *PMLA* 95, no. 3 (May 1980): 390.
26. Carole K. Doreski, *Writing America Black: Race Rhetoric in the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xxii. For a thorough discussion of Gwendolyn Brooks's *In the Mecca*, see chapter 5, "Reportage as Redemption," 119–44.
27. Doreski, *Writing America Black*, xiv.
28. Monroe and Goldman, *Brothers*, xi–xii.
29. *Ibid.*, xi.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Monroe, Skype interview.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Kerrane and Yagoda included Monroe in their anthology of literary journalism. See Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, eds., *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (1997; New York: Touchstone, 1998), 204–11.
37. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*, foreword Ted Conover (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 7.
38. David Lionel Smith, "Brothers: Black and Poor: A True Story of Courage and Survival by Sylvester Monroe; Peter Goldman; Vern E. Smith; Terry E. Johnson; Monroe Anderson; Jacques Chenet," review, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1991), 125.
39. On poverty and racism under Ronald Reagan, see Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1982* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), in particular chapter 7: "Reaction: The Demise of the Second Reconstruction: 1976–1942," 168–69.
40. See, for instance, *Reporting Civil Rights* (Library of America, 2003).
41. Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (November 2002), 450.

42. Ibid., 457.

43. Monroe, Skype interview. For further reading on the black press in the Internet age, see Juan González and Joseph Torres, “Controlling the Means of Transmission: Old Media’s Fall and New Media’s Rise,” in *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media* (London: Verso, 2011), 343–78, and Anna Everett, “The Black Press in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Two Exemplars,” in *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Todd Vogel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 2001), 244–57.

44. Lemann also mentions that back in the 1970s the Harvard admissions officer, David Evans, was black. On that subject, he refers to *Choosing Elites* (New York: Basic, 1985) by Robert Klitgaard, which tackles the soaring numbers of African American students in the late 1960s and early 1970s at prestigious US universities such as Harvard and Stanford. Monroe arrived at Harvard in fall 1969; Lemann was admitted in fall 1972. See Norman Sims, “Writing Literary History,” 15.

45. Sylvester Monroe, “Vest: An Introduction by Sylvester Monroe,” in *Brothers*, 9.

46. Sylvester Monroe, “Vital Signs: The Black Male,” in *Songs of My People: African Americans: A Self-Portrait*, eds. Eric Easter, D. Michael Cheers and Dudley M. Brooks (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), 29–31.

47. Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere,” 453, 454.

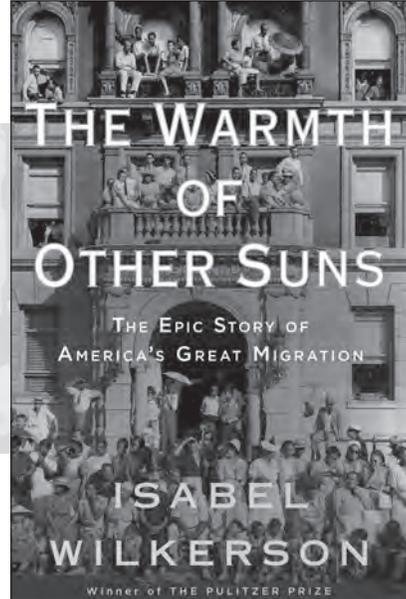
48. Monroe and Goldman, *Brothers*, 270.

49. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988).

50. The author wishes to thank François Heinderyckx, professor in journalism studies at the Université libre de Bruxelles and president 2013–2014 of the International Communication Association, as well as Christine Larrazet, associate professor at Université Bordeaux 2, for bringing Sylvester Monroe’s *Brothers* to her attention.

51. David Lionel Smith, review of *Brothers: Black and Poor—A True Story of Courage and Survival*, by Sylvester Monroe and Peter Goldman, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 124–26.

Writing Literary History . . .



An Interview with
Isabel Wilkerson

Author of the critically acclaimed
*The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story
of America's Great Migration*

Kathy Roberts Forde
University of South Carolina, Columbia, United States

Writing Literary History . . .



Isabel Wilkerson, the first African American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize in journalism, spent fifteen years researching and writing *The Warmth of Other Suns*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller and was named to more than thirty Best of the Year lists, including the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, the *Washington Post*, the *Economist*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Boston Globe*. *Warmth* won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction,

the Heartland Prize for Nonfiction, the Anisfield-Wolf Award for Nonfiction, the Lynton History Prize from Harvard and Columbia universities, and the Stephen Ambrose Oral History Prize, among others. It made national news when President Barack Obama chose the book for his vacation reading in 2011. In 2012, the *New York Times Magazine* named *The Warmth of Other Suns* to its list of the best nonfiction books of all time. Wilkerson won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing in 1994 as Chicago bureau chief of the *New York Times* and was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for her research into the Great Migration. She has taught at Princeton University, Emory University, and Boston University, and has spoken at more than one hundred colleges and universities in the United States and in Europe.

*Kathy Roberts Forde is an American media historian focusing on the twentieth century with research interests in free expression, the African American freedom struggle, literary journalism, and the history of the book. Her book *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment* won the Frank Luther Mott-KTA book award and the AEJMC History Division book award in 2009. She is an associate professor at the University of South Carolina, and will assume duties as chair of the Department of Journalism at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Fall 2014.*



When *The Warmth of Other Suns* appeared in 2010, it quickly became a bestseller in the United States. A spell-binding and deeply researched chronicle of the Great Migration—from World War I through the 1970s, more than six million African Americans left the South to settle in northern and western cities—the book introduced many readers to an important episode in American history they knew not at all, or only dimly.

A work of both literary history and literary journalism, *The Warmth of Other Suns* dramatizes this poorly understood history by telling the stories of three people who migrated from different parts of the South to different parts of the nation—Ida Mae Brandon Gladney, George Swanson Starling, and Robert Joseph Pershing Foster. Wilkerson takes the reader on each character's journey into the great unknown and, along the way, shows how these journeys represent millions more in the great swath of a migration that changed the country.

In this interview with historian Kathy Roberts Forde, Isabel Wilkerson discusses the research and writing of her award-winning book fifteen years in the making. Forde and Wilkerson first met in March 2011, when the author appeared as the keynote speaker at the Media & Civil Rights History Symposium, which Forde directs at the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina, Columbia (to learn more, visit jour.sc.edu/mcrhs). As part of that visit, Wilkerson held a standing-room-only book talk and signing at the Richland County Public Library in Columbia—an event she references in the following interview. At both her keynote lecture and public book reading, Wilkerson received standing ovations.

This interview was conducted by phone on May 3, 2011, as Isabel Wilkerson traveled by train from Boston to New York City to accept the Mark Lynton History Prize for her book at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. *The Warmth of Other Suns* has received many other awards, including the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction and the NAACP Image Award for Best Literary Debut. *K.R.F.*

Kathy Roberts Forde: Can you tell me about the literary and journalistic influences in your career and writing life?

Isabel Wilkerson: I view myself as a journalist, as an ethnographer, and I am inspired by sociology and anthropology and, of course, literature. So it's multidisciplinary; the influences are coming from all over. Ultimately, what animates me most are the people whom I find to tell stories about. I spend

time with them, try to understand their world, as an ethnographer would, and then try to distill and translate that for a larger audience. I know that may not be answering your question directly, but the entire process and the way that I think about these things require the involvement of the characters I'm ultimately writing about. I immerse myself in their worlds. I am deeply inspired by them and what they do and how they think and how they feel and how they look at the world and the things that they go through. And my goal is to try to help the reader feel what it's like to be in their place.

With this book the goal was to be with my characters as they're facing whatever they're facing before they make that decision to jump off a cliff into the unknown, to ask the question the book essentially asks: What would you do if you were in this situation? I wanted the reader to be on the train as my characters were about to board. I wanted the reader to be with my character in his Buick crossing the desert and the mountains, not knowing what he was in for. I wanted readers to feel whatever my characters were feeling.

So it's a deeply intimate endeavor in which I have to spend so much time with them, and it's not just interviewing. It's spending time with them in their world until they get to the point where they feel comfortable sharing things that, in this case, they had not even told their children. They might have shared some of it with their cohorts, with the friends who went through some of this with them. But for the most part they had not shared this story even with their own children, so there had to be a great deal of time and comfort built up before they would be willing to tell me these sometimes painful, heartbreaking things that they had experienced. It was my goal to make their experiences come alive. It's as if you're going into the woods and you are exposed to all of the sights and the senses and the stimulation of whatever is in the woods, and you emerge from the woods wanting to tell people, this is what it was like in the woods.

So the inspiration is coming from everywhere. I spent a great deal of time reading works of the era, of the time that this was going on. I wanted to understand how people thought at that time. I wanted to immerse myself in that world of the 1930s and the 1940s—you know, the ethnography of the era, the work of the anthropologists, the work of the economists of that era. I read the industry newsletters and journals of the citrus growers in Florida. All of these things were sources of inspiration and material that I drew upon.

As for the actual literary influences, I'm greatly influenced by Eudora Welty, whose work I admire because of its spare and understated understanding of class and caste in the South and the psychological tensions that occur among and between people. For this book I was quite inspired by John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* because the Great Migration occurred in part when the

dust bowl migration occurred. In fact, Ida Mae, one of the main characters in my book, left Mississippi around the same time that Steinbeck was researching and writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. In other words, she was leaving Mississippi at around the same time that the dust bowl migration was getting so much attention, and yet there were not people following her and people like her, to the same degree and intensity.

Forde: When reading your book, I was captivated by the thick description, the detail. It was such an engrossing read, and reviewers have commented on that particular strength of the book. That's what ethnographers do, as you mention. They are trying for this thick description. Did you run into any ethical issues as you were working in this immersion form of journalism, this ethnographic approach to journalism?

Wilkinson: I have done it enough times to be very cautious before even going into a setting that is unknown to me, and I have such a sense of gratitude for the willingness of people to share their stories with me. And I try to be a really great visitor and guest.

Forde: The guest/host relationship.

Wilkinson: Yes, exactly. Appreciating that it is a gift that any individual gives to us and to me as the journalist, as a writer, and then to the world, ultimately, of sharing their experience. And so I try to be a really good guest and visitor. And I take my cues from my subjects. Again, that's an ethnographic perspective, as opposed to going in with the notebook and the tape recorder from the moment they sit down and begin to tell me this and that. Because I was working under a different timeframe—it's not a press conference in any way. I'm taking my cues from what they feel comfortable discussing, and it's the slow unfurling of their lives as it comes naturally and organically during the process of my getting to know them and their getting to know me.

The great challenge of this book, of course, was that people were up in years when I met them, and I began working on the project with a great deal of urgency because I knew that, well, I was trying to get the oldest people that I might find who were independent, meaning they were not in nursing homes, not in assisted living. And they were quite fit and healthy at the time that I met them, but over time, and quite rapidly in the case of one, they took ill. Of course, you know the story about how I had to interview, or I should really say audition, 1,200 people in order to narrow it down to my three main characters, but once I had identified the three, it was a great deal of effort to

just go out to see them. They were spread out all over the country. I had to coordinate with their schedules. If they were going to a funeral or if they were doing something else, that had to be taken into consideration. Maybe I'd be able to go, maybe I wouldn't. I'd have to take my cue from them. But the main thing is that it got to the point where I might plan to go and everything is all set and instead of being able to see them in their home, I'd have to visit them in the hospital. And that was just the way that it was; that's the way it had to be. And there were times when I just would have to be there at the hospital waiting, because that's just what you do when you're doing this kind of work. I guess the ethical dilemma would be at that point: Do you begin to charge hard to make sure you get what you are seeking, because they are ill, or do you step back and allow them space as human beings?

Forde: In your acknowledgments in the book you mention that in the process of researching and writing you were transformed “out of necessity from journalist to unintended historian.” I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about this transformation, why and how it happened, and perhaps even how the transformation may have shaped your narrative.

Wilkerson: Well, the transformation occurred when my first character died, and that forced me to figure out whether I could go forward with him as a protagonist. At that point I clearly did not have the person I had depended upon in order to tell his singular story. I had to figure out how I was going to proceed, and that meant my project had changed from journalism to biography, from reporting to history. And I then had to turn to archives. I had to turn to the newspaper stories that might have mentioned him. There actually were quite a few in this case because he'd been married to someone prominent, a socialite, the daughter of a university president in Atlanta. I had to turn to his relatives and friends, who might have been initially reluctant, partly because they were grieving themselves, and partly because it was considered in some circles inappropriate to discuss someone who had so recently passed away. So that forced me to become a reluctant biographer and historian because I was then left with the things that only an historian might have access to.

And the work began anew in a different way. It took on a different shape and a different form, and it meant courting all these new people whom I had not had the opportunity or the need to meet at that point. That transformation meant that I ended up having to spend a great deal more time. That's one of the reasons why the book took so much time, because ultimately it's a full-blown biography of three different people, requiring all of the work that that

entails—the actual sitting down and spending time with them ethnographically, one might say journalistically, and making arrangements to go back to their original homes with them to recreate their journeys. Recreating Dr. Foster's drive took a lot of time. That was the journalist/ethnographic part.

But the historian's obligation was going through the archives, the local papers, for each of my main characters, for the many years from their childhood to the time of their departure. That's where the history came in. That's not something journalists really are called upon to do, and I had to do that. It got to the point where I actually began to enjoy, and in fact became obsessed with footnotes and endnotes from different books that I was reading because they were a treasure trove of material. All kinds of amazing things were tucked away in these endnotes, and one endnote would lead to a paper that I might have otherwise missed, and that would lead to a dissertation, which would lead to yet another source. I found that there were many, many, many dissertations, unpublished dissertations, particularly on the lesser-known migration stream going west. There were many WPA [Works Progress Administration] papers that were not widely known. Getting hold of those would be a moment of great joy and anticipation. I couldn't wait to rip them open to look at them. It was like being an archeologist making a discovery of things that maybe had gone unnoticed. That was one of the joys of the historian part of my work. I had no idea that that would actually be as rewarding and fulfilling as it was. Who would imagine that a journalist who spent most of her time talking to real people could get so excited about receiving a paper from 1883 written by an historian in England? He presented this paper at the Royal Historical Society, his name was E. G. Ravenstein, and the paper was titled "The Laws of Migration." His theories stand to this day as the seminal way to understand why people do what the people in my book did. And I just could not wait to get my hands on that.

One of the decisions I made that was crucial in getting this book done was talking with my subjects before working in the archives. One approach is to immerse yourself in the archives first so that you know what questions to ask the people when you do go out into the field. But what you risk in doing that is that you may not be able to get to certain people, especially when you're dealing with people of a certain age. And when do you know enough? When have you spent enough time in the archives to really be able to ask all the questions that might possibly be necessary to ask? The other option is to just throw, hurl yourself into the world of the people you're trying to write about and get to the archives later, and that's what I chose to do because I knew that the archives would always be there. In fact, the archives were continuing to grow as I was spending time talking with and getting to know the

people who became the main protagonists of the book. That decision became critical because I otherwise may not have even met Dr. Foster had I spent that first stage of the work buried in the archives. I tend to be the kind of journalist and writer who works from the ground up anyway. I mean, essentially I don't go in with a lot of preconceptions. I just wanted to make this experience of leaving the only place you've ever known for a place that you've never seen come alive for the reader. I wanted people to feel that for people of this Great Migration, given that it was a major tectonic shift in our culture and in American history in the twentieth century.

Forde: I think of your book as a work of both history and literary journalism, and I'm wondering whether you think of it in those terms. If you do, what do you think are the commonalities and differences between the two genres?

Wilkerson: I generally use the word narrative journalism or narrative nonfiction because of the emphasis on the structure of the work, the idea that you have protagonists who are following a certain path. There's a narrative arc, there's conflict and tension that have to be resolved somehow. You know, those touch points of narrative—I thought of my book in those terms. It is history by definition because it deals with something that happened in the past. History to me suggests a temporal thing. How you choose to present it is where you get into the literary or the narrative aspect of it. So I think that I agree with you that it's both, but the history part means that this history could be written in any number of ways. You know, history could be the letters of a famous or not-so-famous person through whom we learn and understand the past. I view this as a way to understand the past, but by using real people through whom we experience what they experience. I'm more concerned about the experience that the reader has than anything else.

In my book, you have these three protagonists who are characters unto themselves. If you were on a page with one, I wanted you to know with whom—Ida Mae or George or Robert. Each was distinctive enough in his or her own right. But their experiences, their journeys, only have meaning in the larger context, which is why there are these inter-chapters, which was a way to give meaning, weight, and context to their decisions and their journeys. Their decisions have greater meanings beyond themselves, even greater than my characters might have realized at the time. And those inter-chapters serve as a way to get at those meanings without intruding upon the narrative itself. So, in other words, it's a literary device for imparting the historical aspect or nature of what the protagonists were doing. It was a way to handle that material.

Forde: You teach narrative nonfiction at Boston University, where you're the director of the narrative nonfiction program. In *The Warmth of Other Suns*, in exploring the lives of your three protagonists, you use a limited third-person point of view that gives you this rich, deep access to the interior lives, perceptions, motivations of your characters. Some journalists who are used to writing in the third-person objective voice tend to be uncomfortable with that technique. And yet it's such an important device in narrative nonfiction and narrative journalism, especially in immersion works like yours. Did you have to put a lot of thought into the narrative perspective you chose to use in the book? Did it come naturally?

Wilkinson: That's a great question, and I really appreciate the discussion about the process of decision making about point of view because point of view is something that fiction writers think about more than we tend to. Thinking about point of view can help answer a lot of questions as the writer goes about doing the work. In other words, figuring out what the perspective will be guides the writer through the entire narrative so that she knows what to include and what not to include and when to include it.

At certain points, the reader knows only what the character knows. You don't know, during Dr. Foster's drive, what is going to happen to him. You know only what he knows. And yet you know a little bit more if I choose to share that with you, if it's relevant to helping prepare you for what comes next, but no more than that. The goal was to have the reader on the train seat with this person or in the car with this other person. I wish I could say that there was some great thought that I was giving to it. It just seemed very natural that if readers were going to be there with this character, they could know some things but they could not know everything. And that allows them to have the experience with the character. It deprives readers of knowing what it's like to be this person if they know too much at a certain point in the narrative. And yet they need to know enough to be able to experience the thrill of discovery as life unfurls for the character.

Forde: Do you find your students who have been trained as journalists and then attempt to write narrative nonfiction have a difficult time in shifting from the objective, third-person voice to this other way of storytelling?

Wilkinson: It's an adjustment. I think some people naturally are inclined to want to see the world this way, and they gravitate toward it. On some level, of course, it's a choice to take up narrative nonfiction, to take it as a course, for example, to choose to concentrate on that. So you're in some ways attract-

ing people who are naturally drawn to this kind of writing anyway. I think that it is an adjustment because it's a different way of seeing the world. It's a different way of connecting with the individual whom you're interviewing. It's a different way of imparting what you've learned to the audience. I think the adjustment begins with the reporting. A lot of times we talk about the writing, but it begins with the reporting. You have to have that rich detail, that knowledge.

You know, narrative actually comes from a word that means "to know." We use the term "narrative" so much. You might think it would mean to tell a beautiful story, and that's not what it means. The cognate is "to know," which means that in order to do this kind of nonfiction, you need to do the work to understand it first, and then all of it falls into place.

Forde: Your book includes an enlightening section in the back matter called "Notes on Methodology," which I appreciated a great deal. As an historian and someone who likes to read this type of narrative nonfiction, I find this kind of discussion of methodology so important.

Wilkerson: Thank you so much. Do you know how many people tell me they read that? I wrote it as a way of giving insight into what it took to write the book, but I had no idea how many people, people who are not in this industry or not in the field, would read it.

Forde: I think many readers are curious about how long works like yours, or even just a news article, get put together. In your "Notes on Methodology," you discuss the range of sources you used. I'm particularly interested in how you used other sources to verify your subjects' recollections when they were uncertain. And of course that's what historians do all the time. They triangulate sources, especially when they're using oral histories. I'm hoping you might comment a little bit more about your use of interviews, or oral histories, in researching and writing *The Warmth of Other Suns*.

Wilkerson: What's interesting about it is that the process meant doing the oral histories as an ethnographer might do them. And then because it's narrative nonfiction or literary nonfiction, the process requires taking it to the next step, which is where the synthesis of all that material comes. I mean, I could have written a series of blocks of text from the transcriptions, based upon a particular area or aspect of my characters' lives. That would have been one way to do it. But because my goal was to actually put the reader in that train seat with these characters or arriving with them in that big city for the very first time, it

was necessary for the reader to be able to experience it as scene, S-C-E-N-E. When people passed away, that meant that I had to interview other people. The way you characterize people classically is what the people say, what the people do, and what other people say about them. And so that's the bedrock of corroboration, triangulation, and characterization in general.

What was interesting about this process, and actually encouraging for anybody doing this kind of work, is that, believe it or not, every single one of these people, even though they were all ordinary people, left a record beyond the census. There was a newspaper article that mentioned them or was about them, that corroborated things about them. You think of someone like Ida Mae and her husband—they were sharecroppers from Mississippi. It's astounding that they actually made the newspaper. There were obituaries. There were references to Dr. Foster, of course; there were many, many references. There were newspaper stories that talked about his preparing for this drive to California. I mean, who would have thought that that would actually have made a newspaper? That was the *Atlanta Daily World*. Of course, his wedding was in the newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, for example, and the *Atlanta Daily World*. There were references to his father in the newspapers, so that that was a part of the journalist becoming historian, looking for that documentation.

Forde: That's fascinating.

Wilkinson: And actually encouraging for anybody embarking on this kind of work. There's more out there; there's more out there than you might think.

Forde: In accessing these newspapers, I imagine you had to work with the microfilm of local libraries.

Wilkinson: I did. You know, one of the things about this is that when I began the work, microfilm and microfiche were what you had—that was the technology. And over the course of working on the book, the technology caught up with my needs; the digitization of newspapers made a huge difference by the time the archival work had to shift into high gear. Suddenly there were newspapers being digitized and made available. So the decision to go with the people first and then the archives worked to my benefit.

Forde: Do you think of Nicholas Lemann's book *The Promised Land* and yours as complementary? They tackle a similar subject, the Great Migration, but they do it differently and tell different stories.

Wilkerson: I think that there cannot be enough written about this migration. I think it's stunning that there is not more written about it. One of my first book talks was at the University of Mississippi, Ole Miss, and I was honored and surprised and had a mix of emotions to be in one of the states that had been a sending state. One of the history professors there, upon hearing more about what this book was about, said there should be volumes upon volumes upon volumes about this migration. And that's sort of how I feel. There can't be enough written about it in my view.

Forde: I couldn't agree more. I've been astonished at how little my students, and many of them are southerners of various racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, know about the Great Migration. They are hungry for this information and have enjoyed learning about your book.

Wilkerson: Isn't that fascinating? I've been meaning to tell you I had a fabulous time there [in Columbia, South Carolina, as the keynote speaker at the Media & Civil Rights History Symposium at the University of South Carolina in March 2011]. A wonderful, wonderful time. That library response was just magnificent and so heart-warming. It was just so beautiful. The people were so deeply engaged in the meaning of this history, these stories.

The reception in the South has been absolutely overwhelming. I had the occasion to go to Eustis, Florida, where George Starling was from. They wanted me there, and that shows you how far we've come as a country. I was met at the airport by a daughter of one of the characters in the book and by the mayor of that town himself. They drove me the hour from Orlando to Eustis. The crowd was a beautifully mixed group of people, and many in the audience and ultimately in the signing line were actually relatives of people in the book. I was almost brought to tears. The response in the South has been overwhelming because it seems that they feel that this is an opportunity to connect with a piece of southern history that has not been explored. And it also is an opportunity for healing.

Forde: What fascinates me about the book, beyond the story and history it tells, is its role in furthering this public discussion of an important part of American history many people don't know much about. Your book is helping a lot of people from different social groups think hard about our history and also, as you said, heal.

Wilkerson: Something that connects people to this story, perhaps in an unexpected way, is the similarity between this experience and an immigrant's experience. I was speaking at a library on Long Island, and it was a miserable rainy night where you wonder if anyone will come out. And the room was actually packed, which was so encouraging and wonderful, but the first person in the signing line was a grandmotherly woman with three copies of the book in her arms. Her eyes were red, she was tearing up, and she said, "I can't talk about the book because if I start talking about the book I'm going to cry for sure." She said, "I can't talk about it because the book tells my story." And then she said, "I'm an immigrant from Greece." She was first in line, and we had our picture taken together. My book tells a universal human story of longing and a search for a better place to be. And I think that is part of the power of narrative.

Notes toward a Supreme Nonfiction: Teaching Literary Reportage in the Twenty-first Century

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*Keynote address, International Association for Literary Journalism Studies,
Tampere, Finland, May 2013*

Journalism education was born a bastard, and has spent most of its life trying to find a legitimate home. “This rough-hewn craft has never been very comfortable in the overstuffed chairs of the faculty commons upholstered for professors of the liberal arts and the traditional professions of theology, law and medicine,” the late, great media scholar James Carey wrote in 1996. He describes the contortions early journalism educators used “to graft journalism onto the university via history, ethics, and law. That is, they turned to the humanities, as they understood them, to ground the new educational enterprise.”

Doing so made sense at the time. If journalism were a profession, the thinking went, then it must have a history for journalism scholars to record. And if journalism were a discipline, the thinking continued, it should have a canon to be venerated and built upon by successive generations of scholars. In the end, “journalism educators fashioned themselves not only into teachers of students but tutors and shapers of the craft, dedicated to elevating journalism to an exalted station deserving a place in the university,” writes Carey. “The fit has always been a little uneasy,” he concludes.

Journalism’s uneasy fit with the university is precisely what drew me to it. I was an unhappy graduate student in the late 1980s, studying political

philosophy, after having majored in philosophy and religion (with a handful of poetry courses thrown in for substance)—a series of choices that terrified my parents. I was experiencing an “uneasy fit” of my own. Having adjusted from the shock of moving from a small, Quaker college to a large research university, I still believed in the power of ideas to alter perceptions, and perhaps even actions.

What I was having trouble getting used to was the professionalization process Carey describes so eloquently. The transformation of a practice (in my case, reading and writing about ideas) into a legitimate vocation. I wanted to *do* philosophy and political theory, whatever that meant, not become a second order (and, most likely, second rate) scholar of those disciplines.

My salvation came from Janet Malcolm. Like all New York pseudointellectuals, I had been reading the *New Yorker* magazine for most of my life. But it wasn't until I came across her two-part profile of Ingrid Sischy, then the editor of *Artforum* magazine, that I saw a form of journalism capable of bringing the ideas I loved to life. The piece opens in art critic Rosalind Krauss's gorgeous SoHo loft, which Malcolm quickly establishes as a character in the piece. “Its beauty has a dark, forceful, willful character. Each piece of furniture and every object of use or decoration has evidently had to pass a severe test before being admitted into this disdainfully interesting room—a long, mildly be-gloomed rectangle with tall windows at either end, a *sachlich* white kitchen area in the center, a study, and a sleeping balcony.” Malcolm takes the reader on a journey through New York's art world, using the history of a magazine as the backdrop for a reported meditation on the very idea of “art” itself.

What kind of writing *was* this, I wondered? It wasn't a “story” in a conventional way. It wasn't a straight profile, as Sischy is barely mentioned in the first ten pages. There was too much reporting for it to be an essay, and too many of Malcolm's reflections for it to be described simply as an article. A group portrait perhaps? I read it through several times, and even outlined sections on a legal pad. I'm not terribly interested in art criticism, but I was entranced by the way Malcolm summoned ideas from these miniature portraits and wove them into the kind of fabric I had never seen before. I knew then that, whatever this writing was, it was what I wanted to do, even if it meant abandoning my current trajectory.

Fast-forward twenty years. After a half dozen editorial jobs, a few dozen articles and one book, *The New New Journalism*, I found myself back in academia, running the magazine writing concentration at New York University's journalism department. After a decade of freelance writing, I was glad to have a base. I loved writing, but I'd missed being an editor, and enjoyed exercising

that part of my brain on student work. One of my only complaints was that my very best students didn't get around to producing their best work—rigorously reported, well written—until the final week of any given semester.

The problem, of course, was with the semester, not the students. After all, what were the chances that a well-conceived piece would fit neatly within the constraints of a fourteen-week period? I realized that the academic schedule was too, for lack of a better word, academic. To address this problem, my colleagues Brooke Kroeger, Jay Rosen, and I established the Portfolio program, a Knight Foundation-funded, spring-summer-fall seminar to teach students to build a body of work—profiles, reports, essays—around a proposed idea or subject. With ten months to work on project, they were able to take more chances and to report more creatively than they had in the fourteen-week semester system. They now had the luxury of failing, as well as trying to rescue a piece by reworking it in a different form. Each student was assigned a web page—a novelty in 2003—to showcase his/her work. We devised a credo—“Some reporters cover beats; we create them”—in order to encourage our students to come up with stories that other reporters wouldn't. We urged them to participate in their stories, and experiment with memoir. Thinking and reporting creatively made them feel more like they were *doing* literary journalism than studying it.

The Portfolio program was soon cited by some of our best applicants as the main reason they applied to NYU. Older students in particular were drawn to the opportunity to focus on a subject about which they'd grow passionate. We began to draw an entirely different kind of applicant: young reporters frustrated by the superficiality of daily journalism, law and medical school students who wanted to write about their profession. One student became fascinated with programs that claimed to help ex-convicts—mostly black, poor, and male—get jobs, find housing, and reenter mainstream society. Her dream was to trail several men who had served long prison terms (twenty-plus years) for murder. The result, *Among Murderers*, was published this spring by University of California Press. Another had been a local political reporter, and wanted to write a book about the intersection of sports, politics, real estate, and corruption on which Yankee Stadium was built. *The House That Ruth Built: Power, Politics and the Making of Yankee Stadium* will be published by Macmillan in 2016.

Less pleasing was the fact that we were losing some of our top students not so much to traditional journalism schools like Columbia and Berkeley, but to MFA programs in creative nonfiction, which offered them even more personal attention, as well as larger amounts of financial aid with which to live in less expensive cities than New York.

What those MFA programs didn't offer was any training in the basics of reporting and research. Rather, as MFA programs scrambled to take advantage of the popularity of memoir and so-called reported essays, they simply cloned their fiction and poetry writing options. Thus Readings in Fiction I and II became Readings in Nonfiction I and II. Poetry Workshop I and II became Nonfiction Workshop I and II. Some institutions threw in a stray research course, but not a single one offered anything having to do with reporting.

Those criticisms aside, there is a lot to be said in favor of the MFA approach. Its workshop model guarantees that one's work is read closely and consistently by one's colleagues and teachers. It encourages a kind of mentorship that sometimes gets lost in the standard academic setting. And it entails a self-selection process that separates those who simply love literature from those who want to learn how to write it. In order to be admitted to an MFA program in fiction, a student submits a sample of his or her work, whether that is a few stories or some poems. If an evaluator believes they show promise, you're in. If not, not. Most likely a better indication of success than standardized tests, grades, and a writing sample.

What if we were able to synthesize the best of traditional journalism education and the MFA? Require that applicants each propose a project, teach them the basics of reporting and research once they arrived at NYU, then workshop their pieces over the course of their last two semesters? What's more, what if we designed an advanced reporting course based on the ethnographic methods of anthropologists—something we were able to accomplish when Ted Conover joined the faculty.

Full of hope, we announced the Literary Reportage program in the spring of 2008—precisely the moment the global economy began to collapse. And even if we had known, I don't see anything we could have done differently. Even with such short notice, we drew thirty-plus applicants, accepted fourteen of them, and welcomed an entering class of twelve students to NYU to create a body of work, and perhaps even write a book.

Every fall I teach an Introduction to Literary Reportage course. The syllabus is not based on the "great books" of the journalistic tradition, although it includes works by George Orwell, Joseph Mitchell, Lillian Ross, Joan Didion, and other writers well known to the people in this room. It begins with works from seventeenth-century America, but is peppered with weeks devoted to various journalistic forms, and is not strictly chronological. Most important to me, the course questions the writer-centric focus that is the default mode of most journalism courses. Rather, it devotes half the semester to editors like the *New Yorker's* Harold Ross, the *Village Voice's* Dan Wolf, *Esquire's* Harold

Hayes, *Harper's* Willie Morris, and *New York's* Clay Felker. They and their magazines helped define twentieth-century American literary journalism. As every professional journalist knows, editors do at least as much to shape the literary landscape as writers.

When I greet the new group of Literary Reportage students, the first thing I do is welcome them to the house of journalism. It is a big house, I explain, with many differently shaped and designed rooms. The rooms have names like “blog post,” “feature,” “essay,” “foreign report,” and “book,” and the house seems to grow by a room or two every year. In order to have a long and enjoyable career, I continue, they must find one room they truly love, and decorate and design it so that it reflects their very best attributes. In addition, they need to find a few other rooms where they feel comfortable, since one can't live in a single room forever. Each of the rooms has a different function, and must be maintained in a way that makes sense for it. Sometimes we move to the living room, invite our friends over, and have a noisy party. Other times we want to be alone, so retire to the study to ponder a single subject in peace. And then there are times when we have a small dinner party, and then retire to the porch to continue a particularly intense conversation with a single interlocutor. The variations are, potentially, limitless.

My optimism has several sources. Empirically, I've noticed that, regardless of short-term macroeconomic circumstances, citizens of advanced industrial societies expect the tools they use to live their lives to improve, the faster the better. They want multifunction “smart” phones, cameras that produce clearer photographs and videos, lighter and more powerful computers, larger and thinner televisions, and, most recently, tablets and iPads. With the constant improvements in hardware with which to watch, listen, read, browse, and communicate, isn't it likely that people will want similarly high-quality material to watch, read, browse, and listen to?

Early evidence suggests that they do. Despite slightly slowed growth, e-books accounted for twenty-three percent of book publishers' revenue in 2012, helping to buoy all of trade publishing, which saw revenue rise by six percent to \$7.1 billion.

I'll close with a few tentative conclusions, derived from the corner of the digital journalistic universe I know best. Apple released the iPad exactly three years ago, in April 2010. The aggregator, Longform.org, went live that same month, followed by two digital publishers: Atavist in January 2011 and Byliner in June 2011.

Although Atavist and Byliner have slightly different business models and publishing formats (Atavist titles include video, audio, and photographs), they offer writers a similar deal: we'll pay you a \$5,000 fee for your piece,

and then pay you fifty percent of every copy, and all rights, sold. The pieces average between 10,000 to 20,000 words, and Atavist estimates that it sells anywhere between 4,000 to 55,000 copies of each title, with most selling in the 20,000 to 30,000 range.

Byliner's first release, Jon Krakauer's *Three Cups of Deceit*, famously sold over 200,000 copies, with the first 90,000 given away for free. William Langewiesche's *Finding the Devil* has been at the top of the Amazon Kindle Singles list since it appeared. And *Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek*, the first result of Byliner's collaboration with the *New York Times*, won a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing.

Byliner and Atavist are a small but important part of literary journalism's digital landscape. They are privately held and reluctant to share precise sales figures. Data from Longform are more indicative of the new editorial consumption habits. Founded by two young journalists on a lark, the website posts four 2,000-plus-word stories each day, drawing from thousands of magazines and websites. The website averages 400,000 unique visitors per month, and the mobile app has sold 35,000 copies, at \$2.99 per. They are releasing a free app this fall.

What Longform's metrics reveal about its readers is intriguing. Longform's demographic is the envy of any advertiser: young (fifty percent of the readers are under 34), mobile (thirty percent read primarily on phones or tablets), and well educated (forty-two percent have attended graduate school). Virtually every story posted receives at least a thousand reads, with the average being four thousand. These stories require commitment. They aren't the kinds of things you read while talking on the phone and pecking at your computer. Usage is heaviest between seven p.m. and two a.m., peaking at nine p.m. The number of visitors to Longform doubles during weekends. A full sixty-five percent of visitors complete every story they read.

What *kinds* of articles are people reading? Well, we're talking about young people on the internet, so stories having to do with sex are nine times as likely to end up among the year's fifty most read. Out of the eighteen stories about sex that Longform posted in the past two years, twelve made their way into the top fifty. In addition, articles that involve murders are three times more likely to be read than other crime stories. So, yes, sex and death still sell.

Perhaps most surprising is what readers *don't* care about: newness. This past April, the most read story on the site was Walter Kirn's "Lost in the Meritocracy," an *Atlantic* story first published in 2005. I guarantee that you won't find any other website where the most popular post is eight years old.

The best narrative nonfiction—unlike basically every other content type on the web—doesn't lose appeal as it ages. A 1993 murder story from *Texas*

Monthly was number nine on the 2012 list. George Orwell’s “Why I Write” (1946) was number twenty. A total of three dozen older stories made it into 2012’s top fifty list. In fact, Longform’s readers are ten percent *more* likely to read an older story than a new one. The publication date carries almost no weight. Readers care more about an article’s subject than whether it is new.

Finally, Longform’s metrics indicate that young readers may be more drawn by certain authors than the magazines that publish them. The top twenty publishers on Longform—magazines like the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ* and *Esquire*—account for fifty-two percent of its total archive. Yet those same twenty publishers are responsible for only fifty-five percent of the most-read stories, which is a negligible increase. A well-known publication name doesn’t move the needle much at all. That is, a *New Yorker* story is no more likely to get clicked than a piece from someone’s personal blog. In fact, unknown publications often do better than brand names because readers are intrigued to see something new.

However, an author’s reputation is a much better predictor. The eighty-seven writers who had at least five articles on Longform—Tom Junod, Jessica Lussenhop, Matt Taibbi, Michael Lewis, et cetera—are ten percent more likely to show up on one a top fifty lists. That is to say, readers appear to care much more about writers and their subjects than when, where, or in what medium a story has appeared.

While I don’t know whether projects like the ones I’ve mentioned can sustain the business of long-form nonfiction, I am optimistic. If nothing else, I’m certain that journalism’s sprawling house will continue to expand, and that my students will have a lot of renovating to do.

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At Home in the Many-roomed House of Misfits

Anthea Garman
Rhodes University, South Africa

An appreciation of Robert Boynton's keynote address, "Notes toward a Supreme Nonfiction," IALJS Conference, Tampere, Finland, 17 May 2013

As somewhat of a misfit in academia, I find myself drawn to people, who like myself, straddle two worlds, using each to talk to, critique and enhance the other, and who care a lot about making explicit in teaching just what is going on behind the scenes in both.

So I was drawn to and immediately interested in Robert Boynton's opening keynote gambit that journalism itself is not quite at home in the university, that it fits uneasily and that it continually seeks a space of its own. Somehow this seems fitting to me, that it should be a restless pursuit, that it should seek and seek and never quite find in this place in which it's been uncomfortably included. (But it's also fitting that we refuse to exit this space or agree with those who think us not quite intellectual or theoretical enough to be their peers.)

Even more, I like Boynton's commitment to teach in such a way that he creates a home of many rooms and that he invites students to roam them, explore them, find nooks and crannies in them, and even build on rooms of their own and decorate them with their own styles. I like the idea that a profession (as in what we "profess") as unrooted as this, can be as welcoming and embracing as that. What a lovely contradiction.

Boynton argues for multiple different uses in the different spaces of the house of journalism, and I find myself emphatically agreeing and applying this to the idea of "literary journalism": there cannot be one type, one norm, one definition. This must remain multiple, open, changing, reflexive, contextual. As a newcomer from the South to the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, it seems to me this is an important tension at the heart that this organization must hold almost with a sacred reverence.

To turn to Boynton's explanation of the Portfolio Program he has instituted at New York University with Jay Rosen, there is much here that excites a fellow teacher. I take from this a few seminal ideas:

The recognition of time's value and what it takes for someone to learn, experiment and grow—too seldom do we let the time it takes dictate the timetable, it's so often the semester, term or even week's availability that tells the student what she will do and subsequently how she will learn. It's brave to let the vastness of time intrude into the course outline.

And of course that leads directly to the pedagogical value of failure. Experimentation and failure are crucial in learning. Of course we must build this in; of course we must find the courage to teach this way.

The idea of “creating” beats—imagining new types of stories, new organizations of journalistic thinking and new routines of doing—as someone who also works with students in our local community newspaper, which has a 142-year history (of which the past was most glorious and the present a little tarnished), the most stultifying of our challenges is the entrenched beat system and its associated routines. In a conversation yesterday with Professor Jeanne Abbott of the Missouri School of Journalism (who is visiting us for a week) we re-imagined (based on the issues, ideas and desires of our local community) a whole range of new beats to help us talk better to and for our readers, and to put education at the heart of our enterprise. This is an exercise we should do regularly in journalism, every now and again when we suspect we're missing the point or fallen behind the curve.

Memoir and participation in stories: this gave me pause when re-reading Boynton's keynote, mainly because as I write we have begun the long-form journalism component of our writing and editing students' final course in our degree program. As happens every year, some of our students are drawn to exploring their own circumstances and psychologies. (The thought that they can get personal in journalism suddenly has powerful currency and they often take the opportunity with both hands.) Again this year we have students writing about their absent or distant fathers; we have investigations into what it is to be a young white Afrikaner in South Africa now; and we have students crossing the divide of our town into the townships where the poorest live to explore what it's like not to have running water, electricity and a job. We could become jaded as teachers and urge the next year's intake to avoid these topics. But if we're listening, we hear that these are crucial investigations for these young people, that they are deeply imbedded in their working out who they are as individuals, writers, journalists. And that this course opens and engages them as individuals and reporters in ways they don't find elsewhere in their journalism degree. And that this is necessary, important, to be taken note of and incorporated into their learning process when they do this course. There is much more going on than therapy by happenstance. This process teaches them powerful things about the difference between life and writing life, and as Boynton says, makes them feel like they're “doing literary journalism” rather than studying it.

Another interesting provocation I take from Boynton's explication of his teaching methods is that editors are as important to study as writers and that all our programs of teaching writing focus to exclusion on writers. His point that "editors do at least as much to shape the literary landscape as writers" is indisputable. This is an important challenge to pose and to engage. Why should the mobilizing energy of those who commission and shape great pieces of writing not find voice in our considerations of literary journalism; and why should our students not know the value in becoming just such a person in the media landscape? But to reorient a course and excavate the editors and make visible their hands and eyes is quite a challenge nevertheless. It could also be further fodder for Brian Gabriel's study into the literary journalism canon around the world!

And then to turn to Boynton's ending remarks about the online environment for literary journalism. While the decisive turn from print journalism to online in North America and Western Europe can't be considered the normative trajectory for the rest of the world (print is growing in places in Africa, for instance), it's gratifying to see two things asserting themselves: one, that reading (and reading long) is on the ascendancy; and two, that newness was never a communicable disease that journalists managed to get the general population to catch—which means work of value continues to have value and can be found and enjoyed on and on and on. Whew!

So to end with where Boynton began—dangling before us the idea of a "supreme" non-fiction—could it be that, in the words he quoted from James Carey, to attain this what we need to do is continue to fashion ourselves into "tutors and shapers (writers *and* editors) of the craft, dedicated to elevating (what we do) to an exalted station"?

I like that as a goal but I also, like Boynton, aim to continue being a misfit, building rooms on the house of journalism that hunkers down on the territory of the academy.

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Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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Medium-Type Friends

A Free Man: A True Story of Life and Death in Delhi

by Aman Sethi. New York: W.W. Norton, 2012. Hardcover, 240 pp., \$24.95.

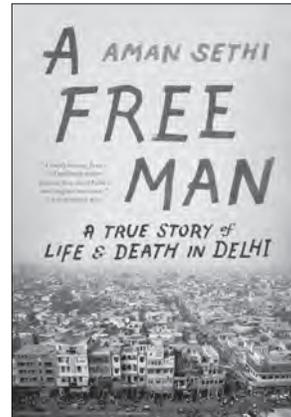
Reviewed by Jeff Sharlet, Dartmouth College, United States

Halfway through this subtle heartbreak of a book, Muhammad Ashraf, the “free man” of the title, phones Aman Sethi—author and co-protagonist, attentive ego to Ashraf’s titanic id—to tell Sethi that Satish is sick. Who is Satish? The one who is sick, of course. Why must you ask so many questions, Aman *bhai* (brother). And just like that, Sethi’s profile of Ashraf changes direction for thirty pages, becoming an account of sick Satish, whom Ashraf expects Sethi to look after. That’s the price of following Ashraf; sometimes Ashraf’s story is someone else’s story. Sometimes it’s Sethi’s.

A chronicle of the “*mazdoor ki zindagi*, or laborer’s life, in Delhi” (226), *A Free Man* will inevitably be compared to Katherine Boo’s third-person omniscient account of Mumbai poverty *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, winner of the National Book Award in 2012. But *A Free Man*—wittier, candid in its confusion, written in a style that might be called “first-person flummoxed”—is a far more intimate book, a romance of sorts. It earns its clichés: Ashraf and Sethi, subject and author, were made for each other; they complete one another. The book they made together is a love story, a document not just of “life and death in Delhi,” as the subtitle holds, but also of the power that inevitably flows back and forth between the narrator and the narrated—freely given and taken, sometimes resented, longed for when it disappears.

A homeless day laborer, Ashraf claims to have a “business-type” mind. But deep into a bottle of his spirit of choice, a rotgut aptly called *Everyday*, he sounds more like Joe Gould, the genius crank documented by Joseph Mitchell over two decades at *The New Yorker*. In *A Free Man*, Ashraf narrates his own oral history of the contemporary world, just as deceptive as Gould’s but seen from Bari Tooti Chowk, an intersection in a Delhi market that passes as Ashraf’s home. Sethi tries to write it all down. And Ashraf—unlike narcissistic Gould—tries to redirect him. “For you this is all research,” he scolds his biographer. “A boy tries to sell his kidney, you write it down in your notebook. A man goes crazy somewhere between Delhi and Bombay, you store it in your recorder. But for other people this is life” (114).

Like Gould, Ashraf can talk longer than Sethi can listen. Like Mitchell, Sethi sometimes dodges him. Fortunately, Ashraf has Sethi’s cell number. When he calls one night about Satish, Ashraf does not need to ask for help. Sethi’s obligation is implicit.



Aman *bhai* has become at least a “medium-type friend,” one who loans rather than gives aid. It is not a matter of stinginess but of mutual respect. “Get it?” Ashraf asks Aman *bhai*. “You’ll *lend* it,” help, that is, “and I’ll *return* it. So it’s contractual” (65). That way neither is ever forced to feel like a *chootiya*, a “pussy,” even if one is a “pavement dweller” and the other a *presswallah*, a journalist with a press card and a motorcycle.

But a motorcycle is no way to take the sick friend of a friend to the hospital. To get to Bara Hindu Rao, where Satish needs to go, you take a bus of the damned or, at least, severely distressed, their open wounds unbandaged, their skin fungus festering. “The driver plays his part in enforcing the no-talking rule; the person breathing down the back of his neck could be a pukka tuberculosis case” (134). That’s the problem here, “the two dark sails of Satish’s lungs” (141), revealed by X-ray to be afflicted by lesions. So it’s off by auto rickshaw to the tuberculosis hospital, an eighty-rupee ride. Extra for the risk of disease. How to win a bed once you arrive? Sethi assembles a chorus of nameless voices to answer: bring relatives, come alone, cry, don’t cry. It works! Satish is in.

Bhagwan Das, the barber, will shave him. His story begins with “the pipe, the pipe” (147), the one through which he had to piss for three years, installed by doctors after the minivan ran him over. A situation like that makes a man think, and while Bhagwan Das was laid up in bed, Ram Babu was there to help him. Who’s Ram Babu? A “virtuous man” (151). Perhaps a figment of Bhagwan Das’s imagination. But that’s not what’s important. Just like a *presswallah* to try to pin down the facts that don’t matter instead of the truths that do—such as Bhagwan Das’s divine calling as tuberculosis hospital barber. Ten rupees a customer for a shave and five minutes of friendship, eighty to 100 customers a day. Not a bad way to make a living, so long as you don’t catch tuberculosis and die. Satish does die. Poor Satish! We never really knew him. “Now there is only Singh Sahib in Bed 56.” Who’s Singh Sahib? Don’t ask. The sheets, meanwhile, “still bear unwashable traces of their many previous occupants. A man-sized sweat stain darkens the length of the bedsheet—a trailing after-image of countless coughing, sweating, retching bodies” (157).

I know; you see what I just did there. I aped the free-associating style of *A Free Man*. That’s usually a cheap trick in a book review, but here I mean it differently, or differently enough, I hope. Mimicry, in the practical rather than theoretical sense, has long been a strategy of particular importance to literary journalism, one of the means by which writers establish their own contractual relationship with readers. The writer-as-mimic proposes a kind of authenticity or, at least, fluency. The writer-as-mimic says, “Look how well I speak the local language. That means you can trust me.” At its worst, as in, say, Tom Wolfe’s “Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers,” it borders on minstrelsy. At its best, as in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men*, it becomes a form of crossing over into the world of the subject, still intact as one’s self and yet identified as a worthy student of another’s life, not as ethnographer but as a “creative” writer whose loyalty—to her own story—is made clear.

A Free Man belongs in this latter category. The book begins with Sethi sitting in while Ashraf shares a joint with his chief cronies, Lalloo and Rehaan. Sethi, de-

terminated to keep his wits about him, has imbibed heavily as cover for not taking a toke. Now his wits are gone and it's his turn. "This joint," he writes, "like everything else that follows, shall be for research purposes only" (5). It's a gonzo beginning, seemingly in the tradition of Hunter S. Thompson, but Sethi takes a hit and then veers outward to context. The background that in a more formulaic book would constitute the second chapter gets a page and a half here: Sethi had met Ashraf in 2005 while reporting for *The Hindu* on a proposed health insurance plan for construction workers. "Ashraf had been a terrible interview," Sethi writes (6). Instead of answering Sethi's questions, he told stories, spun theories, pronounced on the world. Sethi knew what to do: Get himself a fellowship and a book deal and return to Ashraf, this time to listen.

Sethi spent much of the next five years in the company of Ashraf and his friends. He gets high with them, yes, and drunk, and once almost arrested. He loans money and on one occasion borrows it. He confesses to dutifully asking "undeniably boring questions" (37) and revels in those moments when Ashraf rescues him from his shallow pop sociology with an implausible story. "I often toy with the idea of verifying Ashraf's stories," he writes toward the end, "but why should I? How would that change anything between us, except convince Ashraf that I mistrust him and that his story is more important to me than he is?" (195)

Of course, it is; we wouldn't have this book before us if Sethi had not ultimately given his loyalty first of all to *his* story, not Ashraf's, but the one Sethi tells about him. Sethi crosses over into Ashraf's world, but he never pretends to be Ashraf. He learns a great deal from Ashraf about telling stories through digression and distraction, but he mixes Ashraf's methods with his own and those of the literary journalists who come before him. Hunter Thompson, sure; and probably Joseph Mitchell. (Sethi spent a year in the midst of his research at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, over which Mitchell justly looms.) There are echoes of Ben Hecht's *1001 Afternoons in Chicago* here, too, in the way Sethi folds his stories-within-stories up into bittersweet fables that end abruptly. But perhaps that's Ashraf's influence: He is a master of the unresolved vignette. Sethi is his understudy.

Together, Ashraf and Sethi return many times to Ashraf's self-styled creation myth, his almost-life as a medical student. His mother, a widow, had taken work in the house of a Dr. Hussain. "Depending on which interview tape I consult, Ashraf came to Dr. Hussain's house when he was five/eight/ten," Sethi writes (24). *No*, the reader can imagine Ashraf saying as he peers over Sethi's shoulder, watching him type. *LISTEN, Aman bhai*. Aman *bhai* does. For a page he writes as if watching teenage Ashraf, sent to school by the good doctor, attend to his lessons. Then comes the book's only real villain, the doctor's tenant, a gangster named Taneja, who tries to steal the doctor's house from him and in so doing, Ashraf speculates, sets into motion the chain of events that led him to Bara Tooti Chowk.

"Of course," writes Sethi, finding the right rhythm for the story, a series of rapid-fire point-of-view shifts. "Ashraf knew all along that Taneja was not to be trusted. Because Ashraf knows everything. 'I told Dr. Hussain when they made out the lease: never trust Punjabis. But no one? listens to me.' Except for me, it seems" (27). First,

we are with young Ashraf; then, in the present, with all-knowing Ashraf, who is mildly mocked by Sethi. Ashraf speaks to Sethi; Sethi speaks in an aside to the reader. *A Free Man* spirals out to Bara Tooti Chowk and beyond in similar fashion, through the days and nights of Ashraf and his friends, some of them seemingly born to lose, others tragic heroes, none left with much of a chance.

Through their eyes—or rather, through the eyes of Sethi, sitting beside them, we see medicine, market, and law, Delhi from the bottom up. This is not how the other half lives, it's how these men live, no more, no less. Sethi writes not with the telescope of theory and social science or with the calm gaze of the journalist observing. His view is close-up and blinking. What he sees changes shape before his eyes. He attempts to construct a timeline of Ashraf's life, but not until he has known Ashraf for several years does Sethi realize that Ashraf had led a respectable life until his late twenties—until, that is, he was as old as Sethi is at the time of writing.

Could Sethi wind up like Ashraf? It seems a reasonable question. And if Sethi were a less-honest writer, or a more paternalistic one, he might let us wonder. But *A Free Man*—in ways that Boo's resolutely third-person *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* can never be—is a book about class. Not the underclass, but class as a current in every relationship, class as a press card, a book contract, a reluctance to taste Everyday liquor and the ability to see Satish through to the hospital. It is a matter of wit—how one tells a story, how one disassembles a building, how one tells another to go to hell—and, of course, resources. When Ashraf is robbed he must borrow two rupees from a friend to use a pay toilet; when a pickpocket steals Sethi's wallet, Ashraf spots him some tea money until he can connect with a family friend who loans him 6,000 rupees.

That we see these negotiations is what sets this book apart from Boo's magisterial narrative. That Sethi resists drawing conclusions about a "new India" is what sets *A Free Man* apart from much of the recent wave of big-picture Indian literary journalism—Siddhartha Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned*, Atash Kapur's *India Becoming*, Suketu Mehta's lyrical *Maximum City*. Fine books, all. But each is bound to its time as *A Free Man* is not. Even when Sethi gives voice to his anger in a passage on the geography of the Delhi of the poor—the name of each neighborhood followed by a drumbeat, "before it was demolished by the Municipal Corporation," "before it was demolished," "before it was demolished" (66)—it's not so much a sociological indictment as a roll call of the missing, neighborhoods razed, *chootiyas* gone.

In the end, only Ashraf survives. Maybe. One scheme after another collapses for Ashraf and we begin turning pages with the expectation of coming upon his dead body. Instead, thankfully, Sethi loses sight of him. His vanishing is a blessing; the entire book turns out to be a vignette without resolution. Sethi's American publisher has categorized the book as biography, but that slights its great achievement as a book made to honor a free man, Sethi. It is anti-biography, a book that feels closer to life itself than to the after-the-fact business *presswallahs* and critics like to call a story.

Exploring the Intersection of Literature and Journalism

Literature and Journalism: Inspirations, Intersections, and Inventions from Ben Franklin to Stephen Colbert.

by Mark Canada. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Hardcover, 246 pp., \$85.

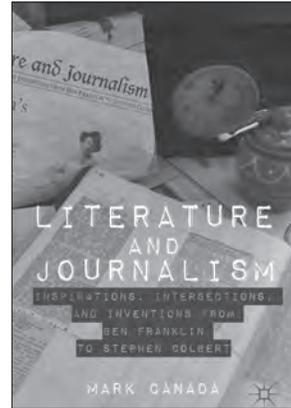
Reviewed by Thomas B. Connery, University of St. Thomas, United States

A book with the imposing title *Literature and Journalism* and that purports to range over almost 300 years implies a rather grand undertaking. But that's not the case with this relatively slim volume that consists of nine chapters by nine different contributors, plus an introduction by Mark Canada, author of *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America: Thoreau, Stowe, and Their Contemporaries Respond to the Rise of the Commercial Press* (2011).

But regardless of a book's page length, it still may be impressive in its design and intent, and because of the fresh insight its contributors together bring to its topic. That's not necessarily the case here, because the collection lacks coherence in purpose or theme and is pretty much a hodgepodge of perspectives, considerations, and subtopics. In other words, it doesn't hang together and provide an overarching meaning or perspective. This doesn't mean, however, that the individual entries aren't well researched or valuable or interesting. Each clearly can stand on its own in making a contribution to its individual topic. But I suspect that their value would be mainly found among those already interested in the specific topic of a chapter and a few may be of use to those interested in the U.S. roots of literary journalism.

Canada's introduction, "A Brief History of Literature and Journalism," provides a broad and, as he says, brief overview of the "intersections" of literature and journalism, which is the book's principal unifying element. He takes readers through "four kinds of intersections" in the four major eras he has identified: Colonial Co-existence, Antebellum Rivalry, Postbellum Apprenticeships, and Modern Hybrids, largely focusing on nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century journalistic influences on the writing of fiction and poetry (for example, Whitman), generally reflecting the subjects of his contributors.

Although he says the "blended" work of Stephen Crane, such as "An Experiment in Misery," anticipated Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Wolfe's "New Journalism," there is no mention or acknowledgment of the literary journalism discourse that has emerged over the past thirty or so years, other than in a bibliographical endnote that concludes



his introduction. In the Modern Hybrid period, Canada discusses several of the usual suspects of the New Journalism but makes no connection to writers over the past forty years. Instead, he leaps from the New Journalism to “the combined journalism and imaginative writing” of Jon Stewart (*The Daily Show*) and Stephen Colbert (*The Colbert Report*). That big jump was probably made because the final chapter in the book is “Stephen Colbert’s *Harvest of Shame*,” by Geoffrey Baym, a legitimate topic for exploration. But it just sits out there at the end, suggesting other potential multimedia areas of literature-journalism inquiry but only connecting to Murrow’s *Harvest of Shame* documentary and not the broader topic.

Each author is an accomplished scholar and is clearly a fine fit for the chapter’s subject. But readers of this book probably would be especially familiar with two of the contributors, Karen Roggenkamp and Doug Underwood, and perhaps with Andie Tucher, a journalism historian, as well.

Roggenkamp, author of the excellent study *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction* (2005), extends and builds on that work by pulling from the pages of the *New York World* the “True Stories of the News” articles by the largely forgotten Elizabeth Garver Jordan. The series of articles, says Roggenkamp, “magnifies the finely webbed intersections between journalism and literature at the turn of the twentieth century,” and she demonstrates that “Jordan’s story line, appearing first in a newspaper article and then in a short story, reflects the shifting—and shifty—nature of how ‘true stories’ could unfold in journalism and literature alike at the turn of the twentieth century.” (119, 120)

Underwood is another experienced and productive toiler in the field of journalism and literature (*Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000*, 2008, reviewed in *Literary Journalism Studies*, Fall 2009). In “Fame and the Fate of Celebrity: The Trauma of the Lionized Journalist-Literary Figure,” he begins with fame’s effect on Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*, and then dances rather quickly across several writers and several decades. He touches on or mentions an array of familiar writers, including Stephen Crane, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Richard Harding Davis, Jack London, Theodor Dreiser, James Agee, Hemingway, Dorothy Parker, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and George Plimpton, among others. It’s an enjoyable read that suggests several potential research paths. Of particular note is the last part of the chapter, “The Consequences of Celebrity throughout the Centuries.”

Anyone trying to understand the major shift in newspaper journalism in the United States that came with the penny papers has to read Andie Tucher’s 1994 book *Froth and Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America’s First Mass Medium*. The absolutely solid reporting and lively writing that gave us a fresh perspective on not only the journalism of *that* period but also the journalism that would follow are evident in her chapter here. “The True, the False, and the ‘Not Exactly Lying’: Making Fakes and Telling Stories in the Age of the Real Thing” introduces us to and digs deeply into “the age of the ‘fake,’” a time during “the high tide of America’s romance with facts that the word *fake* itself emerged from netherworlds that had

previously been its main habitat to become a part of the public discourse” (91–92). Ultimately, she concludes that “the efforts of the ‘fakers’ to invent and embellish their way to a more true-to-life portrayal of the real world went too far” (111).

Although Tucher doesn’t specifically connect the “fake” story type that burned briefly in the second half of the nineteenth century to the roots of what we call literary journalism, readers interested in the development of U.S. journalistic style and the fact-fiction discourse will find much to chew on and ponder in her chapter.

The book’s other chapters cover a variety of topics:

- The impact of Walt Whitman’s journalism on his poetry, particularly how the major themes in his poetry are found in his journalism, by David S. Reynolds.
 - A consideration of the use of poetry in Washington, DC, hospital newspapers during the Civil War, including how the poems, written by soldiers, doctors, nurses, wives, and children, “attempted to make sense of death, to heal the souls of soldiers as well as their bodies, and to translate what were often horrific scenes into less terrifying, if not always comforting, ones.” The author is Elizabeth Lorang.
 - An exploration of connections between American newspapers and fiction, with a chapter title that nicely summarizes its intent: “Where the Masses Met the Classes: Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century American Newspapers and Their Significance to Literary Scholars.” It’s a very practical overview of the topic by Charles Johanningmeier that includes research sources and suggestions for future research.
 - An investigation of “Ernest Hemingway in *Esquire*: Contextualizing Arnold Gingrich’s Posthumous Portrait(s) of Man and Artist, 1961–73” certainly is about Hemingway through his relationship with editor Gingrich and specifically Gingrich’s personal assessments of Hemingway, which created “multiple Hemingway likenesses,” according to the chapter’s author, John Fenstermaker.
 - The book’s first chapter, “Benjamin Franklin, Literary Journalism, and Finding a National Subject,” by Carla Mulford, is a bit puzzling. While its exploration of Franklin’s writing “as a political instrument” is certainly a worthy topic, literary journalism is never defined or fully explained and the writing under consideration bears little to no resemblance to what we now call “literary journalism.”
 - Although the range of writers and works under consideration is much narrower than suggested by this book’s title, and the parts are only held together by the slim thread of literature-journalism intersections, the book undoubtedly contains some particularly valuable insights for the right reader or scholar.
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What the Receptionist Knew about Joe Mitchell

The Receptionist: An Education at The New Yorker

by Janet Groth. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 2012. Hardcover, 230 pp., \$21.95.

Reviewed by Miles Maguire, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, United States

Anyone who knows anything about literary journalism knows about Joseph Mitchell, and anyone who knows anything about Joseph Mitchell knows about the way he spent the final thirty-two years of his career at *The New Yorker*, coming to the office on a regular basis but unable to publish anything more in the magazine. As Roger Angell described it in an often-quoted remembrance published in the magazine June 10, 1996, a few weeks after Mitchell's death:

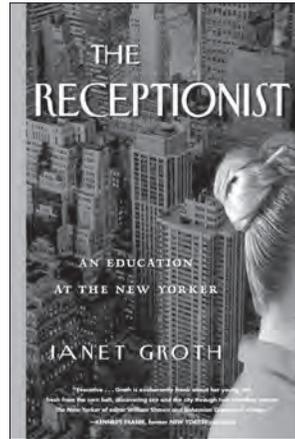
Each morning, he stepped out of the elevator with a preoccupied air, nodded wordlessly if you were just coming down the hall, and closed himself in his office. He emerged at lunchtime, always wearing his natty brown fedora (in summer, a straw one) and a tan raincoat; an hour and a half later, he reversed the process, again closing the door. Not much typing was heard from within, and people who called on Joe reported that his desktop was empty of everything but paper and pencils. When the end of the day came, he went home. Sometimes, in the evening elevator, I heard him emit a small sigh, but he never complained, never explained.

Somehow the phrase “writer’s block” seems inadequate to describe whatever it was that was holding Mitchell back. Writer’s block is what you have when you sit down in the morning at your computer keyboard and nothing comes, or when you have a piece framed out but can’t quite find the words to start filling it in.

But over the course of more than three decades, Mitchell’s condition seems to have been something else, something much more. But what?

In that same issue of *The New Yorker* where Angell’s recollections appeared, Calvin Trillin offered his own remembrances, including a theory he had heard that Mitchell’s writing was going along just fine “until some professor called him the greatest living master of the English declarative sentence and stopped him cold.”

Janet Malcolm had a different take. She was sure that Mitchell was simply rising to greater heights, taking on greater challenges and therefore taking longer to finish. “Joe himself progressively risked more and more,” she wrote. “As his pieces got more complex and profound, they took longer to write.” The fact that he hadn’t



published in the magazine for more than thirty years was “not remarkable,” at least to his friends, she added.

The last piece that Mitchell published in *The New Yorker* was “Joe Gould’s Secret,” about the nine-million-word oral history that turned out to be a fantasy. As a result there have been psychological explanations that purported to show how master prose stylist Joe Mitchell ended up identifying so strongly with bohemian bamboozler Joe Gould that the former wound up like the latter, unable to commit to paper the words and ideas that were swirling around in his head.

Mitchell gave some credence to this idea after the publication of his collection *Up in the Old Hotel*. According to Mark Singer’s account in the February 22, 1999, issue of *The New Yorker*, Mitchell thanked William Zinsser for a “deeply understanding review” in which Mitchell’s extensive engagement with Gould was blamed for the ensuing literary drought. “Gould just plumb wore Mitchell out,” Zinsser had written in *The American Scholar*, Singer noted.

Other theories to explain Mitchell’s inability to write have also been put forward. They include the possibility that kicking his smoking habit impaired his ability to concentrate and that an old grudge about meager paychecks in the early days of the magazine made him want to even the score.

One reason why the mystery continued for so long is that Mitchell’s personal presence—a mix of Southern charm, unfeigned kindness, and deep empathy for the individuals he was with, and for humanity generally—made it difficult for colleagues and interlocutors to ask him plainly what was wrong. Philip Hamburger, who spent sixty-five years at *The New Yorker*, told Singer that inquiring about Mitchell’s writing life was like looking into his sex life, “not merely gauche but also ‘prurient.’”

Ben Yagoda, an English and journalism professor whose publication credits include a history of the magazine called *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made*, had his chance to ask “the question” during a lunch a few months before Mitchell’s death but decided to pass. “I sensed the subject was painful to this extremely gracious, courtly, and generous man, and I didn’t have the heart to bring it up,” Yagoda wrote on the website of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

In February *The New Yorker* published a previously unknown piece by Mitchell in its anniversary issue, and to mark the occasion devoted one of its monthly roundtable talks at Joe’s Pub in the East Village to the writer, his legacy, and the ongoing literary mystery of what he had been doing all those years.

The participants up on the stage were David Remnick, the magazine’s editor; two longtime staff writers who had known Mitchell, Singer and Ian Frazier; and Thomas Kunkel, who has published a biography of Harold Ross, the magazine’s founding editor, and who is close to finishing a biography of Mitchell. The four men talked for about half an hour and then opened the floor to questions. A video recording of the session is available on the magazine’s website, and it’s well worth watching. But it’s incomplete, because at least one of the questions that the panelists got has been edited out.

The person who asked that question told me earlier this year that it was “probably ill-advised” and that it drew a gasp from the audience. But it was a simple question, and it needed to be asked: “Why am I not up there?”

The person who wanted to know was Janet Groth, who spent twenty-one years as a receptionist at *The New Yorker* and in 2012 published her memoirs as *The Receptionist: An Education at The New Yorker*. It turns out that Groth, who came to New York to become a writer but was never given any serious consideration for such a role at the magazine, is apparently the one person who has first-hand knowledge of Mitchell's writer's block. For six years, from 1972 to 1978, the two of them had a standing date for a "literary lunch" on Friday afternoons, during which they discussed many things, including what he was working on and why it was so hard to bring the material under control.

Groth's chapter on their relationship provides a thoroughly convincing, at times painfully so, explanation of Mitchell's struggles on the page. It isn't the only reason to read Groth's memoir, but it is the reason why anyone who is serious about understanding Mitchell will want to have this book close at hand. Mitchell's newly discovered works, which *The New Yorker* plans to publish in two more installments, provide textual support for Groth's account.

Scholars of literary journalism or any other discipline will also want to give some thought to Groth's question at Joe's Pub: "Why am I not up there?"

When she arrived in New York, Groth was, in her own words, a babe—a shapely blond fresh out of the University of Minnesota. She went on to become a party girl, high spirited and high strung, who tried to commit suicide in the wake of a failed love affair. But make no mistake—she has become a person of substance, professor emeritus of English at SUNY Plattsburgh, whose doctoral dissertation at New York University was on the critic and *New Yorker* contributor Edmund Wilson, and who went on to publish four books on Wilson.

Groth was the one who knew Joe Mitchell's secret. She had the answer to the question that capable journalists were too uncomfortable to ask and that has lingered for these so many years. Her story should stand as a reminder to us all of the need to keep asking hard questions—and to keep looking for the right people to answer them.

Learning the Craft

You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Nonfiction from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between

By Lee Gutkind. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2012. Paperback, 270 pp., \$16.

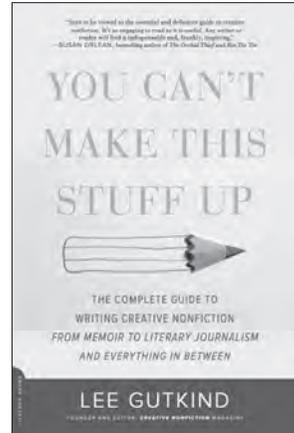
Reviewed by Nancy L. Roberts, University at Albany, SUNY, United States

In the sea of how-to-write tomes, this one is a gem. Each of the book's thirty-plus personal essays is itself a small work of art: fresh, informative, and inspiring. Together, they illuminate the genre of creative nonfiction, which Gutkind, the founder and editor of *Creative Nonfiction* magazine, calls "true stories well told." He explains that the adjective "creative" references the use of literary techniques implicit in the genre, while "nonfiction" refers to its factual basis. In other words, he seems to be talking here about literary nonfiction, which includes literary journalism.

In fact, the book is dedicated to Gay Talese, whose accomplishments as a literary journalist are well known. And another literary journalism heavy hitter, Susan Orlean, has contributed a jacket blurb. There is, as well, considerable emphasis on literary journalism in part one, which defines and discusses the broader genre of creative nonfiction through consideration of writers such as George Orwell, Talese, Sheehan, John McPhee, and Joan Didion, among others. Part one also addresses some of the genre's key ethical, legal, and moral issues. These include concerns about composites and about portraying characters fairly, with respect for their privacy, as well as concerns about the potential for libel and defamation.

In part two, Gutkind's plethora of examples, tips, and exercises forms a comprehensive how-to guide to writing and revising creative nonfiction. He starts off with a primer on how to read thoughtfully—one's own and others' writing—in order to become a better writer. The next step is in-depth examination of a half dozen pieces of creative nonfiction included here, such as Talese's classic "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" and an excerpt from Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Each piece is included to illustrate a particular aspect of writing, such as effective framing/structure and scene writing, deep characterization, evocative description and detail, and point of view.

Above all, "the first and most important lesson to learn is writing in scenes," counsels Gutkind. "Scenes are the building blocks of creative nonfiction, the foundation and anchoring elements of what we do. . . . The lazy, uninspired writer will tell the reader about a subject, place, or personality, but the creative nonfiction writer will show that subject, place, or personality vividly, memorably—and in action. In scenes."



The book is enriched throughout by practical exercises that engage and challenge. For instance, an early one directs the student to recreate a situation or scene from the past that led to a larger, more significant one—that could be grist for a broader conceptualization of an issue or problem.

Even nonwriters will likely find *You Can't Make This Stuff Up* compelling. For students who are new to the genre of literary journalism, this book is rich and deep enough to serve as a bible. Always informative, it's entertaining and often humorous. It would be an excellent choice for a writing-intensive course on literary journalism.

A Review Essay

The Fine Print: Uncovering the True Story of David Foster Wallace and the “Reality Boundary”

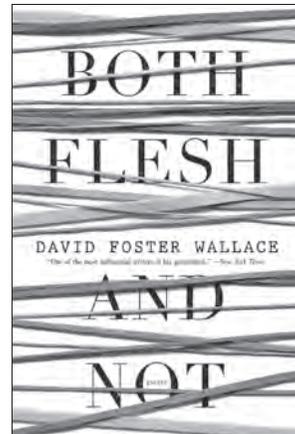
Both Flesh and Not: Essays

by David Foster Wallace. New York: Little, Brown, 2012. Hardcover, 327 pp., \$26.99.

Reviewed by Josh Roiland, University of Notre Dame, United States

Before he sat down with the best tennis player on the planet for a noonday interview in the middle of the 2006 Wimbledon fortnight, David Foster Wallace prepared a script. Atop a notebook page he wrote, “R. Federer Interview Qs.” and below he jotted in very fine print thirteen questions. After three innocuous ice breakers, Wallace turned his attention to perhaps the most prominent theme in all his writing: consciousness. Acknowledging the abnormal interview approach, Wallace prefaced these next nine inquires with a printed subhead: “Non-Journalist Questions.” Each interrogation is a paragraph long, filled with digressions, asides, and qualifications; several contain superscripted addendums. In short, they read like they’re written by David Foster Wallace. He asks Roger Federer if he’s aware of his own greatness, aware of the unceasing media microscope he operates under, aware of his uncommon elevation of athletics to the level of aesthetics, aware of how great his great shots really are. Wallace even wrote, “How aware are you of the ball-boys?” before crossing the question out.¹

Wallace choreographed social cues and professional reminders throughout the interview. The end of the Federer conversation comes with the caveat “Qs the Editors want me to ask [w/Apologies].” And a later discussion with Federer’s then-coach, Tony Roche, begins, “Honor to meet you,” with a reminder that Roche suffered from chronic tennis elbow and used Yonex rackets. Never comfortable in his role as a reporter, Wallace printed a preface to the Roche questions: “I’m not a journalist—I’m more like a novelist with a tennis background.” Wallace had a history of anti-credenti- aling himself both in person and in print, and while this reportorial and rhetorical maneuver may have disarmed sources, it also created a calculus for Wallace to write under.² He saw clear lines between journalists and novelists who write nonfiction, and he wrestled throughout his career with whether a different set of rules applied to the latter category.³



Initially, sources reported that Federer was flummoxed by the unconventional encounter, feeling that the “questions were inane, the dude weird, and the whole exercise a complete waste of his time.”⁴ But several years later when he was asked about the resultant story—“Roger Federer as Religious Experience,” which ran in *Play* magazine, a short-lived sports supplement to *New York Times Magazine*—Federer recalled the interaction more fondly, saying, “I had a funny feeling walking out of the interview. I wasn’t sure what was going to come out of it because I didn’t know exactly what direction he was going to go. The piece was obviously fantastic.”⁵

Recently during an Ask Me Anything session on the social media platform Reddit, he reiterated his admiration for the story: “The thing that struck me is that I only spent 20min with him in the ATP office at Wimbledon, and he was able to produce such a comprehensive piece.”⁶ Federer unknowingly hits on a significant aspect of Wallace’s literary journalism: his ability to imbue a story with larger significance beyond the ostensible subject. Several tangential topics emerge in the *Play* cover story beyond the standard profile of the Swiss phenom. Wallace addresses the physiology of the human body, the transcendence of athleticism to the sublime, the difference between live spectatorship and televised tennis, the engineering and effectiveness of modern tennis rackets, and the reconciliation of divine grace and mortality. When the story was published on August 20, 2006, “the acclaim that greeted the piece was nearly instantaneous. It was among the most discussed stories of the year in the journalism industry.”⁷

Last November, “Roger Federer as Religious Experience” was republished in *Both Flesh and Not*, a posthumous collection of Wallace nonfiction. The book’s fifteen pieces span nearly twenty years of his writing life, with the earliest essay, “Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young” published in 1988 (*Review of Contemporary Fiction*) and the latest ones written just a year before his suicide: “Deciderization 2007—A Special Report” (introduction to *Best American Essays 2007*) and “Just Asking” (*Atlantic*). Of the fifteen works of creative nonfiction, only two can rightfully be called literary journalism: the retitled “Federer: Both Flesh and Not” and “Democracy and Commerce at the US Open,” the longest piece in the book. Although it contains only two works of literary journalism—stories that have been reported and sourced and then told using a variety of literary devices—this book is useful for the ontological questions it raises about the nature of genre formation, literary categories, and “the reality boundary.”⁸ Moreover, the collection offers clues on Wallace’s thoughts about the genre and these attendant issues—a topic that has garnered modest attention since his death, with charges of embellishment and exaggeration made by his close friend Jonathan Franzen and repeated by his biographer D.T. Max.

Although there was a correction appended to the *Play* piece, it is hard to find any evidence of embellishment.⁹ Going through Wallace’s voluminous papers at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, it is unmistakable that he was meticulous to the point of compulsiveness about every aspect of this story, from pre-interview preparations to final layout. His research comprised printouts, including eBay listings, on the particulars of Ivan Lendl’s 1980s-era GTX Pro-T racket, including its dimensions, strung weight, balance, swing weight, and stiffness.¹⁰ Wallace also

collected several Federer features from publications across the globe, including “Spin Doctors,” by Tom Perotta, an account of how modern rackets have changed the game of tennis, which ran in the July/August 2006 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Wallace underlined and annotated much of Perotta’s piece, and used information from the article to augment his own aside on how the true revolution in racket engineering was not merely increased pace on of? the ball, but rather the degree and depth of topspin it engendered, especially during the service return. Other bits of research included a printout of the Wikipedia entry for “proprioception,” which he used for a riff on an athlete’s “kinesthetic sense,” and a Q&A transcript between Federer and a Wimbledon moderator after Federer’s straight set victory over Mario Ancic in the quarterfinals (the day before Wallace conducted his rare mid-tournament one-on-one with Federer).¹¹

Wallace begins the story with a brief anecdote about experiencing “Federer Moments” before reversing course and proclaiming there’s nothing newsworthy about his subject: “Journalistically speaking, there is no hot news to offer you about Roger Federer.”¹² Wallace proves this point by listing the blandest of biographical details—age, family, personality, achievements: the bedrock of every banal sports feature—and concluding the paragraph dismissively: “[I]t’s all just a Google search away. Knock yourself out.”¹³ Similar to his anti-credentialing, Wallace often approximated this type of journalistic indifference, and this particular example echoes a line from his story “Consider the Lobster” (*Gourmet*, 2004). Early in that piece Wallace acknowledges, “For practical purposes, everyone knows what a lobster is. As usual, though, there’s much more to know than most of us care about—it’s all a matter of what your interests are.”¹⁴ Wallace used that story, set amid the 2004 Maine Lobster Festival, to explore the murky relationship between consciousness and what it means to be a gourmet. Similarly, he uses the Federer piece, with Wimbledon as his backdrop, as a vehicle to raise questions about grace and the grotesque, and the reconciliation of the two in both mind and body.

He juxtaposes Roger Federer, “a creature whose body is both flesh and, somehow, light” with William Caines, a seven-year-old from Kent, stricken with liver cancer at age two and serving as the honorary coin-tosser for the 2006 Wimbledon final.¹⁵ For Wallace, the corporeal realities of these two bodies in such close proximity have “a tip-of-the-tongue-type quality that remains elusive for at least the first two sets.”¹⁶ Wallace structures the story around that delayed epiphany by mapping the Federer/Caines dialectic onto the championship match between Federer and Rafael Nadal, where, in the course of dissecting both men’s games (“Federer’s forehand is a great liquid whip”¹⁷), he also discusses media attention, racket technology, the horizontal plane of live spectatorship compared to the vertical angle seen on TV (“and the truth is that TV tennis is to live tennis pretty much as video porn is to the felt reality of human love”¹⁸)—the shape of the story follows closely the contours of the questions he scripted back at the All England Lawn and Tennis Club. The consociation of Federer’s elegance and Caine’s illness does not predominate, but it is, ultimately, what animates the story and gives it lasting significance.

Near the end of the narrative, in the match's third set, Wallace experiences what a cab driver had earlier promised: "a bloody near-religious experience."¹⁹ But it does not result from Federer's beauty alone; rather, when Wallace contrasts that sublimity with Caines's fragility, he experiences "literally, for an instant ecstatically" a sensation that is "hard to describe" and "like a thought that's also a feeling."²⁰ The physicality of these two bodies, though not in equipoise, is nonetheless connected, causing a sort of transcendence in Wallace, as he concludes: "But the truth is that whatever deity, entity, energy, or random genetic flux produces sick children also produced Roger Federer, and just look at him down there. Look at that."²¹ This double imperative underscores a genuine sense of wonderment, and yet, as he did in "Consider the Lobster," Wallace buries this conclusion in the second paragraph of a late footnote.²² What initially seems like an unorthodox finish to the feature actually sets up a larger conclusion in the main text. Wallace counters conventional wisdom about modern tennis by saying that the "speed and strength of today's pro game are merely its skeleton, not its flesh."²³ The game's grace—for Wallace, its flesh—has been "re-embodied" by Federer, and it is with this understanding of Federer's seeming otherworldliness—"on the sacred grass of Wimbledon,"²⁴ no less—that Wallace ends the main text, telling readers, "Genius is not replicable. Inspiration, though, is contagious, and multiform—and even just to see, close up, power and aggression made vulnerable to beauty is to feel inspired and (in a fleeting, mortal way) reconciled."²⁵ What is restored in this moment at the end of the story is nothing short of faith. The reconciliation of sacred and profane causes Wallace to come to terms with his own powerlessness and existential insignificance.²⁶ He feels redeemed, and this is the religious experience promised by the cab driver and offered as the initial title of the piece.

The collection's other work of literary journalism is also tennis-themed (Wallace once said that tennis "was the one sport I know enough about to be truly beautiful to me"²⁷). "Democracy and Commerce at the US Open" was originally published under the same name in *Tennis* magazine in 1995. Wallace explores the relationship between the two titular topics over the Labor Day weekend in Queens, New York City. The story is significant for being one of Wallace's earliest pieces of his journalism to employ footnotes. The article, however, is more directionless than the other "floating eyeball" journalism of this era (for example, "Getting Away from Already Being Pretty Much Away from It All" and "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again"), and his thesis is more overt. He juxtaposes the democratic spirit of the Open with the aristocratic reality of the attendees, noting, "In sum, the socioeconomic aura here for the day's headline match is one of management rather than labor."²⁸ The labor, as it turns out, is working on the day set aside for their *fête*, and Wallace spends a good amount of time surveying the sad irony of the vendors and their patrons. The event's eponymous egalitarianism is supplanted by crass commercialism; moreover, it is lacking the sense of *noblesse oblige* tradition that at least pervaded Wimbledon. The Open is closed to many, and the spirit of democracy, so prominent in its advertising, only exists to sell products. Wallace's conclusions on capitalism are rather obvious, and the attendant tennis analysis is not nearly as strong as in the Federer piece or his 1995 profile of Michael Joyce.

More interesting than its cultural commentary is what *Both Flesh and Not* reveals about Wallace's complex relationship with genre classification and the fact/fiction divide. It contains his 2001 review of the anthology *The Best of the Prose Poem: An International Journal* for the literary journal *Rain Taxi*. The publication limited him to 1,000 words, which Wallace elided by transgressing the traditional review format. He composed the entire piece as a series of bullet points, each beginning with a dependent clause followed by a colon (which functions as a verb)²⁹ and then a predicate. His rhetorical reasoning was both innovative and ironic: "Tactical reason for review form: The words preceding each item's colon technically constitute neither subjective complement nor appositive nor really any recognized grammatical unit at all; hence none of these antecolonial words should count against *R. T.*'s rigid 1000-word limit."³⁰ He called this "new, transgeneric critical form: the Indexical Book Review."³¹ Wallace's grammatical formula may have emancipated him for the strictures of a word limit, but there is more to this maneuver than his usual solipsism and smartassery. He was mimicking the genre-bending proclivities of the prose poems he was reviewing and calling attention to the benefits of genre subversiveness. His review highlights the motivations and guidelines not just for the prose poem but for all alternative literary forms, including the "[o]ther, better-known and/or currently fashionable transgeneric literary forms: the Nonfiction Novel, the Prose Poem, the Lyric Essay, etc."³² Literary journalism can surely be mapped onto that list, which then allows critics to understand how conflicted Wallace was about genre classifications and how contradictory his thoughts and actions were at times.³³ It is important to understand these angles at which Wallace approached his journalism because he has been attacked to some degree since his death about his less-than-fervent fidelity to facts.

During a public conversation at the 2011 New Yorker Festival, Wallace's close friend and literary competitor, Jonathan Franzen, told David Remnick that he and Wallace disagreed about whether embellishment was an acceptable journalistic trait. Unsolicited, Franzen tells Remnick, "David and I disagreed on that." Surprised, Remnick then randomly picks Wallace's 1996 story "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again" and asks Franzen, "He said it was okay to make up dialogue on a cruise ship?" To which Franzen replies, "For instance, yeah." Franzen, who regularly contributes to Remnick's magazine, then posits that one reason Wallace never published any nonfiction in the *New Yorker* was because of its historically rigorous fact-checking process. Remnick admitted Wallace tried, but he never says why the proposals were turned down.³⁴

D.T. Max, himself a *New Yorker* staff writer, picked up this fabulist thread in his 2012 biography of Wallace, *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story*. Max uncovers problems of various degrees in selected pieces of Wallace's journalism, especially the early work. For example, he points out that Wallace misrepresents his hometown in the 1990 *Harper's* essay "Tennis, Trigonometry, Tornadoes."³⁵ In the story, Wallace says he grew up in the small town of Philo, IL, when in fact he was raised ten miles northwest of there in Urbana-Champaign.³⁶ Max also provides evidence of Wallace's most egregious error, which occurred in his 1994 *Harper's* story "Ticket to the Fair."³⁷ In that story Wallace returns home to his native Illinois, after a decade on the East Coast, to

investigate its state fair. One day he brings the “shrewd counsel of a colorful local” whom he dubs “Native Companion.”³⁸ Wallace describes his guide as someone who used to detassel “summer corn with me in high school” and a “native Midwestern, from my hometown. My prom date a dozen years ago.”³⁹ The problem, as Max points out, is that “Native C.” never attended Urbana-Champaign High nor was she really much of a companion. Her name was Kymberly Harris, a woman Wallace had recently begun dating but whom “he barely knew.” And her salty-tongued country twang—the perfect foil for Wallace’s neurotic East Coast persona—wasn’t even the voice of Kymberly Harris, but rather that of poet, memoirist, and former Wallace love interest Mary Karr. Max says Wallace’s editor at *Harper’s*, Colin Harrison, “was aware that Wallace sometimes embellished” and admitted he “drank the Kool Aid” in service to Wallace’s comic vision.⁴⁰

Another problematic situation occurred in 1998, when *Premiere* assigned Wallace to cover the Adult Video News Awards. The magazine enlisted Evan Wright of *Hustler* to coreport the piece with Wallace. Max notes how Wallace—with Wright’s permission—excerpted material from an earlier article Wright authored and incorporated it, with embellishments, into his *Premiere* piece. However, when “Neither Adult nor Entertainment” was published in the September 1998 issue, the article did carry a double byline (though both were pseudonyms).⁴¹ The double byline is not enough to excuse the embellishment, but it does complicate the overall understanding of the situation. Much like Tom Junod satirically fabricating parts of “Michael Stipe Has Great Hair” (*Esquire*, 2001) as an intentional send-up of the celebrity profile genre, the Wallace/Wright (né Willem R. deGroot and Matt Rundlet) report offers itself as a surreal study of a Las Vegas porn expo (not unlike another hallowed piece of hallucinatory literary journalism set in Sin City).⁴²

Although Max does provide damnable evidence of wrongdoing in these two stories, he carelessly projects their offenses onto several other articles, thus raising suspicion about Wallace’s overall relationship to the truth in his nonfiction. The wariness is warranted, but suspicion alone is insufficient. Max fails to back up much of his speculation with concrete evidence of wrongdoing. Instead, he breezes through Wallace’s nonfiction and flags everything that *sounds* fishy. Without offering any physical proof, he dismisses details that “improved on reality” and says that one scene “was likely Wallace’s invention” and another story “was likely made up” while another “one suspects. . . was invented.”⁴³ Max especially overreaches when he makes much ado about Wallace eating two lobsters while reporting from the Maine Lobster Festival. He intimates that this is, once again, evidence of Wallace’s duplicity. But as I’ve pointed out elsewhere, Wallace never said he was averse to the delicacy, and the story “Consider the Lobster” is about the complexity of consciousness, not animal rights. The fact that Wallace consumed crustaceans while reporting further solidifies his point near the story’s end, in the second paragraph of footnote 20: “[I]t all seems to come down to individual conscience, going with (no pun) your gut.”⁴⁴

Max’s objective in writing a biography is to provide a story of Wallace’s life, and that telling often involves softening edges and smoothing the corners of complication. Unlike in an academic appraisal, he does not dwell on Wallace’s ambivalence

about genre guidelines. But what is maddening about the biography is that despite dismissing large chunks of Wallace's journalism as "fanciful" and not his "real work," Max nonetheless mines these stories for primary source material that he then uses in his own biographical retelling. If certain facts are buffered by a "layer of myth," as Max asserts, then doesn't he undermine his own credibility by relying on those same stories for diaristic details?⁴⁵

Another problem with Max's treatment of Wallace's nonfiction isn't just that he makes broad generalizations regarding Wallace's fidelity to facts; it's that Max, himself, gets some of his facts wrong. For several semesters in the late 1990s, Wallace team-taught a class called "Creative Nonfiction" with Doug Hesse while a member of the English department faculty at Illinois State University. The course was a workshop devoted to the practice of writing what the syllabus defined as "a somewhat problematic term for a broad category of prose works such as personal essays and memoirs, profiles, nature and travel writings of a certain quality, essays of ideas, new journalism and so on." It then goes on to define the two components of the course: *creative* and *nonfiction*. An explanation of "nonfiction" emphasizes: "[I]f an event is claimed as having happened, it must happen." But its adjective's definition hedges: "And yet, the 'creative' half of the title suggests an impulse other than Enlightenment perspicuity motivates the writer and shapes the writing."⁴⁶ Max, ever dubious of Wallace's commitment to accuracy, surmises in a chapter seven endnote: "But in the classroom Wallace was known to be the less dogmatic of the two teachers when it came to literal accuracy, and one senses his hand in a later sentence on the syllabus."⁴⁷ Here is an instance where Max's speculation is identifiably false. He interviewed Hesse extensively for the biography, but Hesse, who is now the director of writing at the University of Denver, told me, "[Max] got that part wrong. [He] never asked who did what. Dave did write the 'rules' for workshopping, though, and we both chose readings." But otherwise, Hesse said, he was responsible for the syllabus.⁴⁸ Hesse also said that Wallace was "pretty invested in nonfiction" during the semesters they taught together and that, at the time, Wallace was "tired of teaching fiction." Although this error is literally a note appended to the back of the book, the Hesse inaccuracy illustrates the danger of speculation and calls into question the legitimacy of Max's other suspicions.

Max's mistake does not excuse Wallace for exaggerating certain details in selected works of literary journalism, but Max does a disservice to his, and Wallace's, readers by painting the fabulist charges with such a broad brush. He gives inadequate attention to Wallace's own remarks on the subject, both embedded in his work and offered during interviews. For instance, in "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again," Wallace confesses how betrayed he felt upon learning that his favorite memoirist, Frank Conroy, deceived readers by essentially writing an advertisement for the cruise ship company.⁴⁹ Nor does Max consider the reply letters that Wallace wrote to students in Anne Fadiman's advanced nonfiction writing classes at Yale University, where he told one student—Daniel Fromson, who is now, in a brilliant bit of irony, a copyeditor and web producer at that bastion for all that is true and accurate, the *New Yorker*—"the root challenge here is to form and honor a fairly rigorous contract with the reader. . . [s]o that the reader gets the overall impression that here's a narra-

tor who's primarily engaged in trying to Tell the Truth."⁵⁰ Neither does Max consider Wallace's answer to a WBUR listener who called into an interview between himself and Michael Goldfarb to ask about his maturation as a nonfiction writer, to which Wallace replied, "I know I don't do as much nonfiction as I used to as a writer, and I think part of it is that I don't have the heart or stomach to say even truthful things that might hurt somebody's feelings."⁵¹ These examples illustrate a writer committed to capturing the truth ("You know, in a weird way, there's really only one basic problem in all writing—how to get some empathy with the reader"⁵²) but who was at times unsure—despite a compulsion to constantly consider these categories—about what was allowed in telling it. Admittedly, during an 1998 interview with Tom Scocca for the *Boston Phoenix*, Wallace answered the question: "How do you handle being responsible for facts—after writing fiction, coming to a genre where the things you say have to be on some level verifiably true?" by saying:

The thing is, really, between you and me and the *Boston Phoenix's* understanding readers, you hire a fiction writer to do nonfiction, there's going to be the occasional bit of embellishment. Not to mention the fact that when people tell you stuff, very often it comes out real stilted, if you just write down exactly what they said. You sort of have to rewrite it so it sounds more out loud, which I think means putting in some likes or taking out punctuation that the person might originally have said. And I don't really make any apologies for that.⁵³

But, he also told a French interviewer in 2005, "For me, there is only one difference between fiction and what you call 'journalism.' But it's a big difference. In nonfiction, everything has to be true, and it also has to be documented, because magazines have fact checkers and lawyers who are very thorough."⁵⁴ The takeaway seems to be that Wallace believed, at times, in the porousness of certain borders when it came to genre formation, which is incongruent with contemporary literary journalism's dogmatic allegiance to facticity. This paradox plays out in two other essays from *Both Flesh and Not*: "The Best of the Prose Poem" and "Deciderization 2007—A Special Report."

In "The Best of the Prose Poem," Wallace states that the reason alternate literary forms exist is to "comment on, complicate, subvert, defamiliarize, transgress against, or otherwise fuck with received ideas of genre, category, and (especially) formal conventions/constraints."⁵⁵ And it is not a stretch to argue that Wallace, with his continual assertions that he was not a journalist and that there was, in fact, a special category for fiction writers who crossed over into the realm of reportage, felt buoyed by his ability to recognize—and theoretically justify⁵⁶—the possibilities inherent in his journalistic transgressions, if they were in the name of creating reader empathy. But Wallace also understood that such subversiveness was rooted in a mainstream understanding of categories with well-defined boundaries: "[T]hese putatively 'transgressive' forms depend heavily on received ideas of genre, category, and formal conventions, since without such an established context there's nothing much to transgress against. Transgeneric forms are therefore most viable—most interesting, least fatuous—during eras when literary genres themselves are relatively stable and their conventions well established and codified and no one seems much disposed to fuck

with them.”⁵⁷ With the right kind of ears it is not hard to hear this statement as an echo of John Hartsock’s claim that each distinct period of literary journalism history arose because of an epistemological crisis within the profession with regard to the ability to cover a rapidly changing phenomenal world.⁵⁸

In one of the book’s final essays—and one of the last pieces of nonfiction that Wallace wrote—he trades in his job as a “professional writer” for a new designation, “professional reader,” while serving as guest editor for *Best American Essays 2007*. The article’s title “Deciderization 2007—A Special Report” is a pun on then-President George W. Bush’s penchant for verbal mishaps. Despite being commander-in-chief of the anthology’s selections, Wallace admits he “isn’t sure what an essay even is” and says he would enjoy the collection’s first story (“Werner,” by Jo Ann Beard) regardless of categorization: “It’s a narrative essay, I think the subgenre’s called, although the truth is that I don’t believe I would have loved the piece any less or differently if it had been classed as a short story, which is to say not an essay at all but fiction.”⁵⁹ These examples would seem to illustrate Wallace’s utter ambivalence regarding genre variance (he later says he’s “not really even all that confident or concerned about the differences between nonfiction and fiction, with ‘differences’ here meaning formal or definitive”⁶⁰), yet a few pages later he says, “There are, as it happens, intergenre differences that I know and care about as a writer, though these differences are hard to talk about in a way that people who don’t write both fiction and nonfiction will understand.”⁶¹ But then despite indicating an interest in these differences he sweeps aside such classifications several pages later: “Personally, I find taxonomic arguments like this dull and irrelevant.”⁶² Tedious as it may be to parse these disparate and contradictory threads, they illustrate that Wallace’s thinking about genre was complex, multifaceted, and that it evolved during his writing life.

In an interview with the *Atlantic*, Max offers a more subtle take on Wallace’s transgressions than he provides in his biography: “But I don’t think Wallace’s very last pieces have very much embellishment. . . .As he got older, I think he begins to play it a lot more straight-forward.”⁶³ He then shared an excerpt from a letter Wallace wrote in 2007 to another former Illinois Street colleague, Becky Bradway. The letter is revealing for Wallace’s sober reevaluation of the enhancement of facts. Max included part of it in *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story*: “We all knew, and know, that any embellishment is dangerous, and that a writer’s justifying embellishments via claiming that it actually enhances overall ‘truth’ is *exceedingly* dangerous, since the claim is structurally identical to all Ends Justify Means rationalizations.”⁶⁴ Unfortunately, Max tucks this revelation into the book’s 169th and very last endnote on page 325. A more prominent placement would have offered a more complete picture of Wallace and his relationship with nonfiction.

The best critique of Max and his biography may come from Wallace himself. A final essay from *Both Flesh and Not* helps readers understand what Wallace may have thought of *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story* and provides contextualization for future Wallace criticism. “Borges on the Couch” is a scathing review of Edwin Williamson’s literary biography *Borges: A Life*, wherein Wallace accuses the author of employing the intentional fallacy throughout the work: “It is in these claims about personal stuff

encoded in the writer's art that the book's real defect lies."⁶⁵ Wallace goes on to say that the text "is at its very worst when Williamson is discussing specific pieces in light of Borges's personal life."⁶⁶ Furthermore, Wallace argued that most biographical projects "are shallow, forced, and distorted—as indeed they must be if the biographer's project is to be justified."⁶⁷ For as much as Max marginalized Wallace's nonfiction, he just as readily read his fiction as nearly mimetic of Wallace's life. The review "Borges on the Couch" reveals just how much Wallace would have disliked that treatment.

After "Borges on the Couch" reappeared for public debate upon the publication of *Both Flesh and Not*, Max composed a blog post on the *New Yorker* website that sought to defend his biography and neutralize critics from employing this kind of attack. He correctly noted that in addition to his hypercritical review, Wallace also published a glowing tribute to Joseph Frank's biography of Dostoyevsky in *Consider the Lobster*. Max admitted that "biography explains a lot but it does not explain everything, indeed it may not explain the most important things" before concluding "So, in the end, what you think of a biography, to paraphrase D.F.W., may depend less on what's in the biographer's heart than what's in yours."⁶⁸ If there are any problems to be found in *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story*, no matter how small, Max is essentially saying: "It's not me, it's you." Nonetheless, the recursive battles fought out in Wallace's name are evidence that his literary legacy continues to grow each year after his death.

Writing about David Foster Wallace reanimates his spirit and momentarily suspends the reality that there will be no more words from him. Perhaps such a selfish sentiment helps explain why there have been so many words written—both formally in books and magazines and informally on countless blogs—since his death in 2008. In the five years since his suicide, more than ten books have been published that either posthumously carry his name as author or place him at the center of critical study.⁶⁹ Nearly all of the critical works focus exclusively on Wallace's fiction. The first collection to come out, *Consider David Foster Wallace* (Sideshow Media Group, 2010), grew out of a July 2009 conference at the University of Liverpool. Although the pieces tread heavily in literary theory and have an oralish, conference-paper quality to them, the collection's editor, David Hering, is to be commended for spearheading the project and starting the sustained conversation on Wallace's literary legacy. The second collection, *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace* (University of Iowa Press, 2012), offers a blend of academic appraisals (including my own) and personal tributes from writers and friends like Don DeLillo, George Saunders, and Jonathan Franzen. The scholarship/remembrance bifurcation takes some getting used to, but the memorials are achingly raw and personal, and the articles' arguments, perhaps owing to more distance between Wallace's death and the book's publication, feel more developed. The most recent collection, *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) continues that maturation process with a thoughtful, dense collection that spans the entire oeuvre of Wallace's fiction. In fact, besides my own article, "Getting Away from It All: The Literary Journalism of David Foster Wallace and Nietzsche's Concept of Oblivion," the only other collected essay dedicated to Wallace's nonfiction is Christoph Ribbat's "Seething Static: Notes on Wallace and Journalism" in *Consider David Foster Wallace*. Ribbat seeks to situate Wallace in an

American journalistic tradition; however, his history is incomplete, only extending back to the New Journalism era of the 1960s and Tom Wolfe's famous formulations. Moreover, his article examines a too-small sample of Wallace's work (mostly stories collected in *Consider the Lobster*) and insufficiently concludes that his reportage is of a type Robert Boynton (problematically) dubbed "the new, new journalism."

The most acute assessment of Wallace's journalism comes, perhaps unsurprisingly, from a journalist. When Wallace's unfinished novel *The Pale King* was published in 2011, John Jeremiah Sullivan reviewed it for *GQ* magazine. Sullivan's appraisal begins with a consideration of Wallace's nonfiction, including a humorous backstory about how *Play* magazine had actually asked him to do the Federer story—after Wallace had initially turned them down. At one point seemingly stunned, Sullivan says, "Here's a thing that is hard to imagine: being so inventive a writer that when you die, the language is impoverished. That's what Wallace's suicide did, two and a half years ago. It wasn't just a sad thing, it was a blow."⁷⁰ And perhaps that's the difficult, lasting takeaway of *Both Flesh and Not*: the knowledge that that's it. The reader must reconcile the vitality of the words on the page with the mortality of their author.

NOTES

1. David Foster Wallace, "R. Federer Interview Qs," container 27.10, David Foster Wallace Archive, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

2. I've written before about Wallace's penchant for distancing himself from being called a *journalist*. See pages 38–39 of "Getting Away from It All: The Literary Journalism of David Foster Wallace and Nietzsche's Concept of Oblivion," in *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*, eds. Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 25–52.

3. In a 2005 interview, Wallace said: "Nobody here is quite sure how to classify the writing that results when novelists and poets write nonfiction for magazines." Didier Jacobs, "Interview with David Foster Wallace," in *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, ed. Stephen J. Burn (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 153–154.

4. David Higdon, "Strokes of Genius," *ESPN The Magazine*, September 19, 2008, <http://sports.espn.go.com/espnmag/story?id=3596140>.

5. Matt Bucher, "D.F. Wallace Both Flesh and Not," *Simple Ranger* (blog), November 16, 2012, <http://www.simpleranger.net/d-f-wallace-both-flesh-and-not/>.

6. Roger Federer, "I'm Roger Federer, a Professional Tennis Player from Switzerland. AMA!," Reddit, May 24, 2013, http://www.reddit.com/r/IAMa/comments/1ezaf/im_roger_federer_a_professional_tennis_player/.

7. Michael MacCambridge, "Director's Cut: Federer as Religious Experience," *Grantland.com*, September 9, 2011.

8. In the inaugural issue of *Literary Journalism Studies*, Norman Sims identified "the reality boundary" as one of four key issues facing future scholars in this field. Norman Sims, "The Problem and Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," *Literary Journalism Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 7–15.

9. The correction, which appeared on August 27, 2006, concerned Wallace's intricate description of a point played out between Federer and Andre Agassi. Copping an almost *New*

Yorkerish tone, the correction said, in part, that the writer had “incorrectly described Agassi’s position on the final shot of the point. There was an exchange of groundstrokes in the middle of the point that was not described. And Agassi remained at the baseline on Federer’s winning shot; he did not go to the net.”

10. It was at this time when Kevlar and graphite composites started to supplant wood as the racket’s raw material. Wallace pegs Lendl as the forerunner in the game’s transition to power baseline play.

11. Proprioception: “The unconscious perception of movement and spatial orientation arising from stimuli within the body itself.”

12. Federer Moments: “These are times, watching the young Swiss at play, when the jaw drops and eyes protrude and sounds are made that bring spouses in from other rooms to see if you’re OK.” David Foster Wallace, “Federer Both Flesh and Not,” in *Both Flesh and Not: Essays* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012), 5, 7.

13. *Ibid.*, 7.

14. David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster,” in *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 236–237.

15. Wallace, “Federer Both Flesh and Not,” 20.

16. *Ibid.*, 13.

17. *Ibid.*, 14.

18. *Ibid.*, 7.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 8.

21. *Ibid.*, 32.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 7.

25. *Ibid.*, 33.

26. The idea of the “sacred and profane” in religious studies originates with French sociologist Emile Durkheim and saw its clearest articulation in the work of Mircea Eliade.

27. David Foster Wallace, “David Foster Wallace,” interview with Laura Miller, *Salon.com*, March 8, 1996, http://www.salon.com/1996/03/09/wallace_5/.

28. David Foster Wallace, “Democracy and Commerce at the US Open,” in *Both Flesh and Not: Essays* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012), 131.

29. In a similar way Ezra Pound uses the semicolon in his modernist masterpiece “In the Station of the Metro.”

30. David Foster Wallace, “The Best of the Prose Poem,” in *Both Flesh and Not: Essays* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012), 243.

31. *Ibid.* .

32. *Ibid.*

33. Wallace told a Wisconsin Public Radio program: “These various classifications are important for critics, right? You have to form different things into groups or you have to talk about a trillion different particulars.” Steve Paulson, “To the Best of Our Knowledge: David Foster Wallace Interview,” in *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, ed. Stephen J. Burn (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 149.

34. Michelle Dean, “A Supposedly True Thing Jonathan Franzen Said About David Foster Wallace,” *TheAwl.com*, October 11, 2011, <http://www.theawl.com/2011/10/a-supposedly-true-thing-jonathan-franzen-said-about-david-foster-wallace>.

35. Reprinted as “Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley,” in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (New York: Little, Brown, 1997), 3–20.

36. D.T. Max, *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace* (New York: Viking, 2012), 319.
37. Reprinted as “Getting Away from Already Being Pretty Much Away from It All,” in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again* (New York: Little, Brown 1997), 83–137.
38. *Ibid.*, 90.
39. *Ibid.*, 92, 100.
40. Max, *Every Love Story*, 186.
41. *Ibid.*, 245. Reprinted as “Big Red Son,” in *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 3–50. In the fine print of the book’s colophon Wallace explains that “the article appeared bipseudonymously and now for odd and hard-to-explain reasons doesn’t quite work if the ‘we’ and ‘your correspondents’ thing gets singularized.”
42. Wallace, it should be noted, disliked Hunter S. Thompson’s gonzo style of journalism, calling it “naïve and narcissistic,” though he acknowledged *Hell’s Angels* was an exception that he enjoyed. He was also not a fan of Tom Wolfe. He did, however, admire the nonfiction of James Baldwin, Joan Didion, John McPhee, Annie Dillard, Cynthia Ozick, and others. Jacob, “Interview with David Foster Wallace” in *Conversations*, 155.
43. Max, *Every Love Story*, 319, 320, 186, 320.
44. Wallace, “Consider the Lobster,” 252.
45. Max, *Every Love Story*, 185.
46. Syllabus, “English 447.02: Creative Nonfiction, Professors David Wallace and Doug Hesse,” container 32.6, David Foster Wallace Archive, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin..
47. Max, *Every Love Story*, 322.
48. Doug Hesse, e-mail message to author, March 3, 2013. It should be noted that when Wallace taught the course at Pomona College in the early 2000s, he adopted Hesse’s course description on his own syllabus.
49. David Foster Wallace, “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again,” in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (New York: Little, Brown, 1997), 287.
50. David Foster Wallace, “It All Gets Quite Tricky,” *Harper’s*, November 2008, 32.
51. Michael Goldfarb, “The Connection: David Foster Wallace,” in *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, ed. Stephen J. Burn (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press), 149.
52. Caleb Crain, “Approaching Infinity,” in *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, ed. Stephen J. Burn (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press), 124.
53. Tom Scocca, “David Foster Wallace,” in *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012): 85.
54. Jacob, “Interview with David Foster Wallace,” 154.
55. Wallace, “The Best of the Prose Poem,” 244.
56. In a back-and-forth volley with his editor, Michael Pietsch, over suggested cuts to his mammoth novel *Infinite Jest*, Wallace returned a Pietsch suggestion about a change on page 785 by saying, “I can give you 5,000 words of theoretico-structural arguments for this, but let’s spare one another, shall we?” David Foster Wallace, “Always Another Word,” *Harper’s*, January 2009, 26.
57. Wallace, “The Best of the Prose Poem,” 244.
58. John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 15.
59. David Foster Wallace, “Deciderization 2007—An Special Report,” in *Both Flesh and Not: Essays* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012), 300.
60. *Ibid.*, 301–302.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid, 311.

63. Eric Been, "David Foster Wallace: Genius, Fabulist, Would-Be Murderer," *Atlantic*, September 6, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/09/david-foster-wallace-genius-fabulist-would-be-murderer/261997/>.

64. Max, *Every Love Story*, 325.

65. David Foster Wallace, "Borges on the Couch," in *Both Flesh and Not: Essays* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012), 287.

66. Ibid., 288–289.

67. Ibid., 289.

68. D.T. Max, "D.F.W.: The Biographical Enterprise W/R/T Fiction," "Page-Turner," *New Yorker* online, December 20, 2012, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2012/12/dfw-the-biographical-enterprise-wrt-fiction.html>.

69. In chronological order: David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, About Living a Compassionate Life* (Little, Brown, 2009); *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*, ed. David Hering (SSMG Press, 2010); David Lipsky, *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Roadtrip with David Foster Wallace* (Broadway Books, 2010); David Foster Wallace, *Everything and More: A Compact History of Infinity*, reissue (W.W. Norton, 2010); David Foster Wallace, *Fate, Time, and Language: An Essay on Free Will*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and Maureen Eckert (Columbia University Press, 2011); David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King* (Little, Brown, 2011); Stephen J. Burn, *David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest: A Reader's Guide*, 2nd ed. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012); *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, ed. Stephen J. Burn (University of Mississippi Press, 2012); *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*, eds. Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou (University of Iowa Press, 2012); D.T. Max, *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story* (Viking, 2012); David Foster Wallace, *Both Flesh and Not* (Little, Brown, 2012); *David Foster Wallace: The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Melville House, 2012); *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, eds. Stephen J. Burn and Marshall Boswell (Palgrave Macmillan 2013); Karen Green, *Bough Down* (Siglio 2013); David Foster Wallace and Mark Costello, *Signifying Rappers*, reissue (Back Bay Books 1990; Little, Brown, 2013).

70. John Jeremiah Sullivan, "Too Much Information," *GQ*, May 2011, <http://www.gq.com/entertainment/books/201105/david-foster-wallace-the-pale-king-john-jeremiah-sullivan>.

MISSION STATEMENT
Literary Journalism Studies

Literary Journalism Studies is an international, interdisciplinary blind-reviewed journal that invites scholarly examinations of literary journalism, a genre also known by different names around the world, such as literary reportage, narrative journalism, the New Journalism, *nuevo periodismo*, reportage literature, literary nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, and creative nonfiction that focuses on cultural revelation. Published in English but directed at an international audience, the journal welcomes contributions from different cultural, disciplinary, and critical perspectives. To help establish comparative studies of the genre, the journal is especially interested in examinations of the works of authors and traditions from different national literatures not generally known outside their countries.

There is no single definition of the genre, but the following descriptions help to establish a meeting ground for its critical study:

- “The art and craft of reportage—journalism marked by vivid description, a novelist’s eye to form, and eyewitness reporting that reveals hidden truths about people and events that have shaped the world we know.” —*Granta*
- “Reportage Literature is an engagement with reality with a novelist’s eye but with a journalist’s discipline.” —Pedro Rosa Mendes, Portugal
- “I think one of the first things for literary reportage should be to go into the field and to try to get the other side of the story. —Anne Nivat, France
- “A good reportage must not necessarily be linked with topical or political events which are taking place around us. I think the miracle of things lies not in showing the extraordinary but in showing ordinary things in which the extraordinary is hidden.” —Nirmal Verma, India
- Literary journalism is a “journalism that would read like a novel . . . or short story.” —Tom Wolfe, United States

Such definitions are not comprehensive and may at times conflict, but they should help to establish an understanding of this fundamentally narrative genre, which is located at the intersection of literature and journalism.

At the critical center of the genre lies cultural revelation in narrative form. Implicit to the enterprise are two precepts: (a) that there is an external reality apart from human consciousness, whatever the inherent problems of language and ideology that may exist in comprehending that reality; and (b) that there are consequences in the phenomenal world, whether triggered by human or natural agency, that result in the need to tell journalistically-based narratives empowered by literary technique and aesthetic sensibility. Ultimately, the emphasis is on the aesthetics of experience.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES

The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies is a multidisciplinary learned society whose essential purpose is the encouragement and improvement of scholarly research and education in literary journalism (or literary reportage). For the purposes of scholarly delineation, our definition of literary journalism is “journalism as literature” rather than “journalism about literature.” Moreover, the association is explicitly inclusive and warmly supportive of a wide variety of approaches to the study and teaching of literary journalism throughout the world. The association’s web address is <http://www.ialjs.org>.

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