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Introduction

In the shadow of 1919's "Red Summer" of nationwide race riots, the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Walter White, published *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States* (1919). In Georgia, White reports, a black sharecropper killed a white farmer, sparking a week of white mob violence directed toward black men and women. This form of terrorism—part of what W. E. B. Du Bois dubbed the "lynching industry"—ended with an estimated ten people lynched and pushed about five hundred black southerners to flee the town of Valdosta (White 26–7). When she read White's account of the ritual lynching of a pregnant black woman, Harlem Renaissance poet Anne Spencer¹ wrote "White Things" (1923). This protest poem condenses the histories of slavery, colonialism, and lynching into two stanzas of twenty lines. Its repetition of "things" reinforces the power of a metaphysics of whiteness to turn the world into objects to be dominated:²

Most things are colorful things—the sky, earth, and sea.

Black men are most men; but the white are free!

White things are rare things; so rare, so rare

They stole from out a silvered world—somewhere.

Finding earth-plains fair plains, save greenly grassed, 5

They strewed white feathers of cowardice, as they passed;

The golden stars with lances fine,

The hills all red and darkened pine,

They blanched with their wand of power;

And turned the blood in a ruby rose 10

To a poor white poppy-flower.

This stanza plays on inversions and reversals. The opening lines identify nature with a multitudinous sea of colors. Nature is integrated color, and

white instead of black is *absence* of color. Spencer also displays her pan-African sensibility, as she provocatively casts people of color in the *majority* of the world's population, while whites are the "so rare, so rare" minority. Rare suggests both the sense of rarity as in few *and* the sense of rarity as distilled, rarefied material that has lost all attributes and all color. Descending from what is probably the cold climate of northern Europe—the "silvered world"—they conquer the natural resources and enslave the human labor of Africa and the Americas. "Silvered" also suggests the invention of silver currencies that helped beget the market processes of abstraction and dehumanization. They scorch the earth, bleaching and blanching the color out of the "hills all red," the land "greenly grassed," and the pines "darkened." White imperialism seeks to wipe the world of all color, of all racial difference. The pagan and phallic "wand of power" suggests advanced weaponry and technology—tools that "white things" use to conquer.

So far, Spencer retells with a wink the "Aryan" myth of whiteness—of the white race as an ancient race, as eternal as human civilization. But as Du Bois wrote in "The Souls of White Folk," whiteness is a "modern discovery," an invention of the nineteenth century. The Aryan myth of the first stanza is a modern confabulation. The second and final stanza of "White Things" slingshots around this myth by moving to more historical and geographical specificity. Now taking place during the historical moment of the Jim Crow South, the poem paints ritual lynching as a sinister dance of death:

They pyred a race of black, black men,
 And burned them to ashen white; then,
 Laughing, a young one claimed a skull,
 For the skull of a black is white, not dull, 15
 But a glistening awful thing
 Made, it seems, for this ghoul to swing
 In the face of God with all his might,
 And swear by the hell that sired him:
 "Man-maker, make white!" 20

While the poem ends by narrowing its scope to a specific time and region, it still emphasizes the large scale of black masses; an entire race, and not just a single black body, is "pyred" (l. 12). Both the white perpetrator and the black victim are dehumanized through this oxidation of the black body rarefied

as whiteness, a white skeleton. The white kid is a “young one,” nameless, and the victim merely a “skull,” a white thing of death (l. 14). Both are further dehumanized when the skull become as “awful thing” and the white youth is a “ghoul” (l. 17). Turning the white supremacist Christian beliefs of the Ku Klux Klan on their heads, the speaker states that “hell” rather than heaven “sired” the white boy in a way that further animalizes whiteness. In the poem’s Promethean final line, the white will to dominate becomes so consumed with hubris that it satanically barks orders at God—the “Man-maker”—to change the world white.

What makes “White Things” so rich for an understanding of civil rights and the environment is its movement from the universal to the particular, or the mythic to the historic: the “Aryan” mythology of the opening lines culminate in a concrete historical event: the lynching of southern African-Americans and in this particular case, Mary Turner. The insatiable white will to explore and exploit is also a will to death. Spencer may have also been influenced by Du Bois’s “The Souls of White Folk” essay in *Darkwater*, where he associates whiteness with empire, writing sarcastically that “whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!” (1920: 22). The poem also moves from the white will to explore, exploit, and dominate, to the death drive, hinting at a psychology of whiteness. Freud published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920, where he hypothesized that the death drive and the will to dominate are intertwined in the human organism’s wish “to die only in its own fashion” (47). In Spencer’s poem, the destructive impulse of whiteness recoils on itself, becomes self-destructive in its satanic rebellion against “colorful things” and creation. White European imperialism, or the will to master the world, is in the end only a master of death.

When Du Bois famously prophesized in *The Souls of Black Folk* that the “problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line,” he meant the problem of white domination of the world, of all the “colorful things” human and nonhuman to be exploited (1903: 3). By the 1920s, we can imagine Du Bois emphasizing the ecological dimension of the color-line problem. The 1920s were a theater of environmental catastrophes that especially affected southern black folk: the 1926 and 1928 Florida hurricanes, the boll weevil epidemic, the 1927 flood, and the expansion of industrialization in places such as coal-rich western Pennsylvania. Given these events, it must have become

clear to Du Bois that intertwined racial and ecological crises were emerging problems of the twentieth century. In Du Boisian spirit, three questions motivate this project:

- In what ways do these two problems—the color line and environments—intersect in the era of Jim Crow and conservation?³
- What kinds of tropes and modes of representation did African-American writers develop in response to environmental events and crises? How did they develop these in relation to discourses of mainstream environmentalism and scientific ecology?
- What does this attention to environments tell us about the literature and politics of the civil rights movement during the Jim Crow era?

In pursuit of these questions, this book explores how the color line and the ecological line—the line that runs between humans and their environment—parallel, intersect, and veer apart by soldering African-American writing to the histories of the environment (especially the Southern environment), the conservation movement, and the rise of scientific ecology. *Civil Rights and the Environment* contributes to our understanding of how the politics of civil rights and the environment converged in the black literary imagination. “White Things” offers only one such example of this convergence.

Throughout *Civil Rights and the Environment*, I have avoided imposing an artificial unity on this literary history of civil rights and the environment—to not draw a straight line from a past black environmental imagination to the present’s environmental justice movement. I have also avoided simply translating problematics in the African-American tradition (e.g., the racial uplift debates) into an ecocritical idiom. Since black intellectuals and writers in the early twentieth century were not centrally concerned with developing views on environmental causes such as wilderness preservation, their engagements with environment, ecology, and nature were focalized through civil rights. As a result, their engagements were more indirect and informal, and thus politically and aesthetically *plural* than the relatively coherent views within the early civil rights movement. This pluralism is why looking at civil rights and environment together does not yield a straightforward narrative arc.

This necessarily fragmented narrative notwithstanding, *Civil Rights and the Environment* reimagines many literary genres and critical

disputes traditionally focalized through problematics of race and politics: the Washington–Du Bois debates on racial uplift, New Negro aesthetics, the Great Migration narrative, and black political radicalism. It further challenges the tendency to treat immediate and long-term ecological crisis as an equal-opportunity force when, in fact, it is unequal in its wreck and ruin. The writings of black intellectuals such as Washington and Du Bois offer a way of understanding the role of *difference* in the experience of ecological degradation. Intersecting racial and ecological problems erupted along the color line—and these problems form a hitherto unrecognized and yet constitutive element of our thinking about race, culture, and politics in twentieth-century America. The following sections outline the argument and methods of *Civil Rights and the Environment*.

Toward an African-American Ecocriticism

There are two limitations in the existing work of ecocritical and African-Americanist scholars that I want to redress in this book. The first is a tendency to reduce nature and environments in African-American literature to rhetorical tropes and figurations. For example, Melvin K. Dixon's *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature* treats nature and environment as signifying processes without much material and historical substance of their own (1987). Dixon examines spatial and nature metaphors of mountaintop, wilderness, and underground; these metaphors shape a "topography" for an African-American quest for selfhood; they invent "alternative landscapes where black culture can flourish apart from any marginal, prescribed 'place'" (1987: 2). Likewise, foundational texts in African-American literary theory such as Henry Louis Gates's *The Signifying Monkey* maintain a poststructuralist distance from "nature" or "environment" as categories (1988). Gates identifies and elaborates various patterns of "topological revision" in the black vernacular tradition: the speakerly text, the talking book, and Signifyin(g) in general (1988: xxv). However, he does offer a glimpse of theoretical and historical points of contact between the environmental and the literary. Gates's study reflects a concern with the world as text, with the intertextuality of all texts, and an understanding of "reality" as a

discursive construct. While Gates's analysis of animal metaphors and swamp tropes do fall within the purview of ecocriticism, they are discussed purely as processes of signification. In both Dixon and Gates, there is no concern with natural environments as such.

Similarly, Barbara Foley's *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* analyzes the prevalence of metaphors of rootedness, soil, and trees in the writing of the Harlem Renaissance (2003). Foley argues for the importance of 1919 as a year that marked turbulence in the United States and unleashed revolutionary energies. Much of this energy manifested itself in the race riots that tore asunder many American cities. Similar to Gates in the *Signifying Monkey*, Foley is "centrally concerned with questions of discourse and trope"—questions that encompass the social (but not environmental) history of these tropes during this period. The various nature tropes in New Negro writing, or "organic tropes" as Foley calls them, buttress a strategy of "metonymic nationalism," in which black intellectuals and artists of the New Negro aesthetic sought to deploy their status as a "black nation" as representative of the *American* nation (2003: 160). This strategy failed, Foley argues, because these organic tropes ended up reinforcing the racial essentialism of white supremacy that African-Americans tried to counteract (2003: 162). The "hyper-materiality of the organic trope," Foley argues, "functions metonymically to naturalize identity as a function of place, thereby largely occluding both historical and structural understandings of the 'roots' of racism" (2003: 237). In contrast, *Civil Rights and the Environment* reframes the use of organic tropes in this period by looking at them not merely as tropes for a black nationalism, but as evidence of black writers engaging, critiquing, and appropriating the politics and rhetoric of the conservation movement and scientific ecology.

Many ecocritics engaging with minority literatures have rejected this reduction to representation already, which brings me to the second limitation in the scholarship. Because of the violent histories of slavery and racism, African-American writing often expresses a traumatic and tragic relation to the natural environment—and this tragic relation has been overemphasized by ecocritics at the expense of more positive valuations of nature in African-American literature. Paul Outka's *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* exemplifies this tendency (2008). Outka formulates

his study of the race–nature nexus in a colorful chiasmus: “by trying to see green in black and white, we might eventually come to see black and white in green” (9). Outka succeeds in theorizing the interconnection of race and nature by arguing that, where conventional (white) nature writing experiences sublimity, African-American writing registers trauma. Outka’s white sublime / black trauma narrative, however, can be complicated with attention to cases where African-American writers do experience and represent the natural sublime. For example, this book’s readings of Washington’s *Working with the Hands*, Du Bois’s “Criteria of Negro Art,” and Effie Lee Newsome’s poems published in *The Crisis* reveal more positive relations between African-Americans and the natural environment.⁴

Another problem with the tragic view is that it can potentially impose normative judgments about the “right” kind of relation one should have to nature. Kimberly K. Smith’s *African American Environmental Thought: Foundations* sketches out a genealogy of the environmental justice movement that emphasizes mostly negative relations African-Americans have to nature (2007). She tells the story of how black intellectuals and writers positioned themselves in relation to the environment, from southern black folk culture arising out of plantation life to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Throughout her book, Smith uncovers traditions of black agrarianism as well as African-American challenges to scientific racism, environmental determinism, and primitivism. Even given these positive engagements with nature, however, Smith contends that for “black writers working in this tradition, America—not just the political community but the physical terrain—is a land cursed by injustice and in need of redemption” (2007: 8). Here, she slips into a normative environmentalist position, claiming that black writers’ experiences of racism have “distorted” their relation to the land (2007: 6). Political and economic oppression, she continues, can “impair one’s capacity to interact appropriately with the natural world” (2007: 12). In this model, African-American cultural history is measured against environmentalist standards and found wanting, when the critical relation between the two should be dialectical. From the point of view of a Marxian ecology (which I elaborate on soon), all forms of labor are alienated from nature under the capitalist mode of production.

Related to this tragic narrative of African-American engagements with the environment is the tendency to see the black environmental imagination as

independent from the histories of white-dominated discourses about conservation and ecology, as Kimberly N. Ruffin does in *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions*. Her book weaves together a tradition of black environmental thought in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, focusing on mythic and spiritual understandings of nature. Like Smith, Ruffin argues that African-Americans have been alienated from nature by racial oppression, and that they experience “environmental othering” when restricted from fully accessing nature (2010: 4). Ruffin identifies an “ecological paradox” for African-Americans: they must shoulder the ecological “burden” of naturalized racism, while at the same time cultivating an ecological “beauty” that arises out of resistance to this burden (2010: 2–3). This “ecological burden-and-beauty paradox holds within it the articulation of a wide range of African-American eco-experience in one dynamic story” (2010: 16). Yet this black environmental imagination does not engage with the history of conservation or developments in scientific ecology; it exists as its own tradition, seemingly in a parallel universe. Contrary to my emphasis on environmental history, Ruffin speaks of a unified and ahistorical black ecoliterary imagination.

Environmental History, Environmental Justice, and Eco-historicism

The tension between Smith and Ruffin is a symptom of the disciplinary tension between environmental history and ecocriticism. For the ecocritic, Smith’s account of African-American environmental history could benefit from close textual analysis of African-American writing. For the environmental historian, Ruffin’s close readings of various cultural texts could benefit from a richer account of historical context. This tension between history and aesthetics (or, for literary critics, close textual analysis) is also there in the distance between African-American literary criticism and ecocriticism. Foley, for example, employs a Marxist historicism in *Specters of 1919*, in which African-American literary production of the early 1920s reflect the racialized class struggle and revolutionary fervor of those years. Just as a merger between environmental history and ecocriticism would be fruitful, so too

would a synthesis of African-American literary criticism's historicist emphasis with ecocriticism's attention to ecological aesthetics and the environmental imagination.

This tension between history and close textual analysis has in many ways started to become reconciled through environmental justice criticism, which is inspired by the environmental justice movement. This movement originated in the South and has given ecocritics race-conscious ways of reading environmental literature. The South is where, according to sociologist and activist Robert D. Bullard, "marked ecological disparities exist between black and white communities" (1990: 14). Environmental justice grew out of protests organized by civil rights leaders against the high distribution of pollution and waste in traditionally low-income areas populated by people of color. The governments and industries responsible target disempowered communities in instances of what activists call "environmental racism" (McGurty 1997: 302). Environmental racism and discrimination refers to the "disparate treatment of a group or community based on race, class, or some other distinguishing characteristic" (Bullard 1990: 7).

It has thus become axiomatic among environmental justice critics that early US environmentalist movements were not always friendly to nonwhites. The environmental justice movement has also accused mainstream environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and Audubon Society of indifference to problems facing the urban poor, while showing an elitist concern for wilderness preservation and the national parks—spaces difficult for inner-city, low-income African-Americans to access. The national parks also played a role in the postbellum wars against Native Americans: when Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, the region's Native American inhabitants were forcibly removed by the US Army. Some early-twentieth-century conservationists—and even progressives such as Theodore Roosevelt—had sympathies for white supremacy and subscribed to scientific racism. The movement's—and the criticism it influences—historical recontextualization of environmentalism is invaluable to an ecocritical approach to African-American literature.

With its attention to historical recontextualization and close textual analysis, environmental justice criticism offers common ground for environmental history and ecocriticism. In an overview of the environmental humanities

field, Bergthaller et al. claim that “environmental justice has acted, and continues to act, as a unifying principle for the two fields as multidisciplinary intellectual projects” (2014: 271). Such a multidisciplinary synthesis has been dubbed “eco-historicism” by scholars in the environmental humanities. Gillen Wood defines eco-historicist methodology as the reclamation of “historicist practice for the environmental critic, but with an emphasis on archive-rich historical reconstruction and discourse analysis” (2011: 527). In the context of *Civil Rights and the Environment*, the boll weevil epidemic or the industrial environment of western Pennsylvania in the early-twentieth century provide two such examples of a historical episode of ecological significance that I reconstruct. Eco-historicism is also multidisciplinary, stirring a callaloo of literary and cultural criticism and history with environmental history and related environmental sciences. Environmental humanities scholars such as Carolyn Finney, influenced by environmental justice criticism, have shown a greater attention to cultural texts and aesthetics. In her *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (2014), Finney’s eco-historicist approach draws on multiple disciplines: environmental history, environmental science, ecocriticism, cultural studies, and geography.

Eco-historicism is an especially apt—and I would argue, essential—method for ecocritics’ interpretations of African-American literature. For African-American writers, people are essentially historical creatures. Poets such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Anne Spencer try to come to terms with the traumas of slavery and Jim Crow. Others tried to invent a past, to create new myths for African-Americans. In “White Man’s Guilt,” James Baldwin describes white America’s repression of its enslaving and genocidal past; trapped by that past, white Americans can never understand their need for hate and violence. Malcolm X’s name stood for a lost past. In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin writes about the need for African-Americans to accept and overcome their past, to turn it into something useful so that they can face the future. History haunts all African-American writing, and no interpretation, including ecocritical interpretations, can ignore the call to historicize.

In the spirit of environmental justice criticism and recent articulations of eco-historicism, *Civil Rights and the Environment* employs an eco-historical method in each chapter. The interdisciplinary dimension of eco-historicism

is reflected, for example, in my readings of Booker T. Washington's *Working with the Hands* (1904) and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). These texts are historicized within not only just their sociocultural context, but also the slow time of environmental history; each text is treated as the discursive terrain on which two intertwining histories play out. For example, Booker T. Washington's 1895 Atlanta Exposition address, *Up from Slavery* (1901), and *Working with the Hands* (1904) display a regionalist's love for the southern environment, while also criticizing the cotton monocultures and sharecropping economy that depleted the soil, exacerbated plagues such as the boll weevil, and prevented subsistence farming. William Attaway's 1941 Great Migration novel *Blood on the Forge* portrays the plight of sharecroppers in Kentucky and steel mill workers in western Pennsylvania.

Through a series of eco-historical readings, I want to show that an emergent sense of environmental justice was there from the beginning of the civil rights movement after the failure of Reconstruction in 1877 (the year the last federal troops withdrew from former Confederate states). From Du Bois's concept of "double environments," to Hurston's writing about swamps, to *The Crisis* giving voice to conservationist concerns, civil rights has always already been environmental. This history matters not only because it complicates the history of civil rights and environmentalism, but also because it articulates the full, interconnected scope of civil rights and environmental struggles today.

Marxian Ecology and Intersectional Ecocriticism

In *Civil Rights and the Environment*, I supplement this eco-historical method with a Marxian and intersectional understanding of ecology and environments. I accept the Marxian-ecological critique of capitalism developed by such thinkers as Cedric Robinson, Gayatri Spivak, Lance Newman, Chris Williams, and John Bellamy Foster. A Marxian ecology places emphasis on the "natural"—the ecological and ontological—dimension of Marx's materialism, or what Kenneth Burke calls the "total economy of the planet" (1937: 157). An ecological rereading of Marx demonstrates that *Capital* does not elaborate a labor theory of value, but rather critiques Adam Smith's and David Ricardo's labor theories of value for *not being materialist enough*.

Though the terms were not readily available to him, Marx hints at something like an ecological theory of value (“ecology” was coined in 1866 by Marx’s contemporary, biologist Ernst Haeckel). In a key passage from *Capital* volume one, Marx speaks directly to the context of agriculture in the United States and describes capitalist forms of ecological violence:

[Capitalist production] disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil ... [A]ll progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker. (1867: 637–8)

In theorizing the dual capitalist exploitation of the worker and the earth, Marx reveals their solidarity as the “original sources of all wealth,” as productive forces stifled by a metabolic rift. This rift cuts off the circulation of regenerative material flows—the products of consumption—back into nature and relegates them to mere waste. In *Marx’s Ecology*, Foster recuperates Marx’s use of the concept of “metabolism” to express the material exchange between humans and nature (2000). Foster claims that Marx understands labor metabolically, as, in Marx’s words, “a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature” (1867: 283).

Capitalism has a material limit: the total economy of the planet’s ecosystems. All value ultimately derives from these ecosystems, including human labor-power, which relies on metabolic cycles to fuel it and survive.⁵ Marxian critiques differ from other forms of environmental critique such as deep ecology because they recognize that systemic social and economic change is necessary to overcome the global ecological crisis; they refuse the ideology of half-measures such as “sustainable growth” that preserve capitalism. An

eco-Marxism would uncover the homology between human and ecological exploitation, or as Newman puts it: the “same forces that generate exploitation and oppression, generate ecological damage” (2002: 21).

A Marxian ecology sees climate change primarily as a product of the capitalist mode of production and its constant need to expand, produce, and consume. The “Anthropocene” is too general; the “Capitalocene” is more befitting. While humans throughout their history have had environmental impacts, it took the capitalist mode of production to bring about ozone depletion, global warming, ocean acidification, deforestation, and human-made earthquakes (to name a few exemplars of the Capitalocene). A Marxian eco-historicism shares an affinity with Marxist historicism. While Marxist historicism may see history as the unfolding of capitalism and class struggle, a Marxian eco-historicism sees history through the zoetrope of the Capitalocene.

Examples abound of how Marxian ecology can reanimate the importance of ecology for African-American literary history. A Marxian view does not automatically have to see mystification and ideology when the problem of “nature” arises. Slavery and the exploitation of natural resources were central to the development of capitalism in its early stage of “primitive accumulation” (see *Capital* vol. 1). In his *Black Marxism* (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1), Robinson incorporates the role of nature in his intersectional analysis of race and class, and his genealogy of the black radical tradition ([1983] 2000).⁶ Swampy and wild terrains become relevant in Robinson’s accounts of black resistance to slavery in the forms of marronage and agrarian rebellions. “To reconstitute the community,” Robinson writes, “Black radicals took to the bush, to the mountains, to the interior” ([1983] 2000: 310). Maroons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fled to the wilderness and formed their own communities, which sometimes became a significant threat to the white plantation system, as in the case of the Haitian Revolution ([1983] 2000: 130). The intersection of race, labor, and environments become particularly pertinent to my analyses of Washington’s *Working with the Hands* (Chapter 1), Hurston’s *Mules and Men* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Chapter 4), and Attaway’s *Blood on the Forge* (Chapter 5).

Intersectional or “integrated” approaches to literature augment my use of Marxian ecology, especially in my readings of Hurston and Attaway. Intersectional analysis has come into ecocriticism via ecofeminism and before that, black feminist criticism. The Combahee River Collective Statement is the

source from which most scholars agree that the concept of intersectional or “integrated analysis” originated⁷ (1977: 210). The statement focuses on black women’s experience vis-à-vis “interlocking” systems of racial, economic, and heteronormative oppression (1977: 210). On the surface, these systems appear unrelated and may at first manifest themselves in black women as disjointed subjectivity, aptly characterized as “feelings of craziness” (1977: 211). But through the recognition of the underlying synthesis of these oppressive systems, identity politics can emerge as a counterforce to “combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face” (1977: 210). Identity here is not a preexisting essence. Rather, identities are forged out of their historical, structural, and (for the ecocritic) environmental embeddedness. It is when one becomes conscious of these interlocking oppressions that identity becomes a politics.

The challenge for integrated analysis⁸ is to go beyond establishing mere correlations among these intermeshed systems of oppression and instead to unearth points of causation, homology, and overdetermination. The premise of overdetermination—that the systematic oppression of historically and environmentally embedded groups and identities has multiple causes and origins—is crucial. At the same time, the goal of integrated analysis is not to treat all categories of analysis equally or to create an artificial totality (e.g., in this book I have placed greater stress on race and environment over gender, class, disability, and other identity categories). There is also the fallacy of totalization: that an analysis can never be “intersectional” (in the misleading sense of “total”) enough because it leaves out a category or categories. But this fallacy carries with it the assumption that all categories of analysis are roughly equal. Instead, the overdetermination of interlocking systems of oppression is uneven: the lines of intersection do not form symmetrical angles when it comes to concrete power-structures and situated identities. While intersectional analysis is more complete than atomized analyses of race or class, it also necessarily remains an incomplete striving.⁹

Chapter Outline

Civil Rights and the Environment in African-American Literature, 1895–1941 begins by reframing the Washington–Du Bois rift within the contexts of

environmental history and the conservation movement. Chapter 1, “Up from Nature: Racial Uplift and Ecological Agencies in Booker T. Washington’s Autobiographies,” argues that just as Washington’s second autobiography, *Working with the Hands*, is double-voiced to address both white and black readers, so too does it speak within the dual temporalities of the post-Reconstruction New South and the *longue durée* of southern environmental history. This historical parallax reveals the text’s covert promotion of ecological agencies—forms of resistance akin to that of colonial-era maroon communities—as occurring off the public grid and within the plantation zone. *Working with the Hands* narrates these forms of ecological agencies in two ways: first, by scientifically detailing practices of soil conservation designed to restore sustainability (and profitability) to the soil; and second, by representing the plantation zone as a black-dominated space reconstructed through agricultural labor. By using environmental history to reframe Washington’s autobiographies, I reveal these texts to be more visionary than critics have believed.

Chapter 2, “W. E. B. Du Bois at the Grand Canyon: Nature, History, and Race in *Darkwater*,” focuses on how Du Bois works with and against the emerging conservation and wilderness preservation movements of the early twentieth century. My reading of *Darkwater*’s chapter “Of Beauty and Death” examines Du Bois’s juxtaposition of visits to national parks such as the Grand Canyon with his anecdotes about life under Jim Crow, bringing double consciousness to bear on the history of conservation. Through the use of montage and other modernist techniques, he invokes Colonel Charles Young—the highest-ranking black military officer at the time and acting superintendent of Sequoia National Park in 1903—and casts him as the embodiment of the interfused histories of Jim Crow and conservation. For Du Bois, the national parks become an environmental correlative for integration and racial pluralism, while also being constructs of modernity.

Moving beyond Du Bois and Washington, the next three chapters shift attention to avian, industrial, and swamp ecologies. Chapter 3, “*The Crisis*, the Politics of Nature, and the Harlem Renaissance: Effie Lee Newsome’s Eco-poetics,” examines Newsome, an overlooked but fascinating Harlem Renaissance poet who wrote scientifically about birds. Newsome wrote on topics unusual—even *radical*—for African-Americans at the time: birdwatching,

entomology, ethology, and other forms of amateur nature study. I make a broader argument about the NAACP's *The Crisis* and its unexpected engagement with conservation, natural sciences, and other environmental themes, especially during the 1920s Harlem Renaissance. What Barbara Foley would see as a misleading "organic trope"—the yoking of nature imagery to black nationalism—I see as Newsome's and *The Crisis*'s attempt to critique scientific racism and to substitute conservationist politics as a buoyant alternative to and productive escapism from the burdens of the color-line problem.

Connecting the Harlem Renaissance to the 1930s, Chapter 4, "Sawmills and Swamps: Ecological Collectives in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," analyzes representations of swamps in modern African-American literature, particularly in Hurston's ethnographic and fictional figurations. Drawing on work in environmental history, I argue that for Hurston the swamp is not only an ambivalent site of resistance and exploitation, but also a site for imagining multiethnic, interspecies, and ecological collectives. The tales in *Mules and Men* render into comic form the trauma of slavery and Jim Crow along with the southern environment itself, with its floods, boll weevil epidemics, and wild spaces. This ecological collective is even more evident in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, when Janie and Tea Cake live "down on the muck" of the Florida Everglades with Seminoles and migrant workers. It is only when the hurricane strikes and this collective is invaded by white capitalist forms of forced labor and biopolitical regulation that it is disrupted; racial segregation is restored in the hurricane's aftermath, showing that cycles of environmental inequities complicate Hurston's vision.

"From Black Marxism to Industrial Ecosystem: Racial and Ecological Crisis in William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge*," Chapter 5, helps reimagine the relation of African-American and working-class fiction to ecology. Typically framed as a black Marxist allegory or a Great Migration novel, *Blood on the Forge* complicates and radicalizes both by focalizing them through the ecological problems of the 1930s. The chapter situates the novel alongside a materialist paradigm shift in scientific ecology marked by A. G. Tansley's introduction of the "ecosystem" concept. Attaway refracts the polluted Pittsburgh of 1919 through this shift, in the process linking ecological degradation to racial conflict, sexual violence, and exploitive labor policies. Finally, I argue that the character Smothers anticipates conservationist Aldo

Leopold's "land ethic," though with a black Marxist twist, in ways that echo and signify on the ecological agencies found in Washington's *Working with the Hands*. Through readings of James Baldwin and Ta-Nehisi Coates, the book's Conclusion explores what this convergence of civil rights and environments means for the twenty-first century.

On My Use of Terms: Ecology, Environment, and Nature

In the last two decades, work in ecocriticism, the environmental humanities, and new materialism has led to new theories of nature, ecology, and environment. Following work in philosophy and critical theory that analyzes and questions the concept of nature—Steven Vogel's *Against Nature* (1996), Bruno Latour's *The Politics of Nature* (2004), and Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013)—this project treats "nature" as a discursive category similar to the way that post-structuralists do. However, this focus on discourse does not mean that nature can be reduced to a mere signifier; this avoidance of reductionism is evident from my extensive use of environmental history.

I use the concept of environment in a general sense to designate built and natural environments. By contrast, my use of "ecology" is more specific and complex. Similar to my understanding of nature, I see ecology—and the sciences that lead to its formation—not as a transcendent worldview but rather an amorphous science with historical ties to specific institutions and the various forms of power they embody. I heed Dana Phillips's warning about the shiftiness of "ecology" as a science and "ecology" as a philosophical point of view (2003: 44). Thus, I distinguish between "ecology" as a perspective that encompasses the human and the nonhuman (usually qualifying it as "ecological perspective," or "ecological agency") and "ecology" as a science, which I usually designate as "scientific ecology." Scientific ecology, as Bruno Latour reminds us, is a scientific discourse that has "no direct access to nature as such; it is a '-logy' like all scientific disciplines" (2004: 4). Ecology deals with problems of representation: the science has developed an ever-shifting body of representational scientific concepts, including "community," "succession," "climax state," "ecosystem," and "ecotope." Thus, "nature" and "ecology" both

gesture at the boundaries of signification, but our understanding of the environment is mediated by representation and interpretation.

To quickly illustrate these distinctions: in my first chapter on Booker T. Washington, I distinguish between scientific ecology (i.e., Tuskegee's emphasis on agricultural science) and ecology in its more general sense to refer to the integrated dynamics of the human and nonhuman. I use the term "environment" to refer to the local environment of the Tuskegee Institute, as well as the larger southern region. Washington writes a lot about "nature," so I treat it in multiple ways: as rhetorical strategy, as an ideological historical construct, and as a key element of Washington's political philosophy.