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Introduction • Anti-Imperialist Modernism

Transnational Radical Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War

On a single Harlem night in 1936, down one side of Lennox Avenue marched protestors against the Italian invasion of the last free African state, while across the street, the Federal Theater Project's production of Orson Welles's "voodoo" *Macbeth*, staged as "allegory of an African-American uprising," celebrated its opening.¹ The two acts, a massive mobilization in the United States to protest the European invasion of Ethiopia—including strikes on the West Coast by longshoremen against the loading of Italian vessels—and a modernist rendition of *Macbeth* that also happened to be the first all-black Shakespeare cast in the United States, articulate the decade as a far more complicated set of transnational relationships and practices than the usual domestic focus on labor unions and the New Deal give us. Unintentionally underscoring this fact, the *New York Times* review of *Macbeth*'s opening notes, somewhat smugly, that the play had more attendees than did the protest, suggesting that an anti-imperialist and antifascist protest courted the same audience as a high-modernist performance of Shakespeare. While the reviewer's dismissiveness of protest politics can be ignored as middle-brow posturing, his comment reveals something significant about the relationship of art and social movements in the 1930s: that an anti-imperialist protest not only shares a proximity with Orson Welles's first major directorial debut, these events were seen by a professional critic as coconstitutive and part of the same social world.

Placing an anti-imperialist protest and a modernist rendition of *Macbeth* in the same frame offers a snapshot of an era that places the fusion of modern art, anti-imperialism, and a new representational politics of race at the center of a decade that is often misunderstood as one focused solely on labor rights, poverty, and folk nationalism. The wave of protest against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia as well as countless others against imperialism in the 1930s

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recorded in radical newspapers, pamphlets, fliers, and other movement ephemera—including massive student strikes in California and New York “against war and fascism,” the “Hands off Cuba” and “Hands off Haiti” campaigns, and new organizations for indigenous sovereignty such as the formation of the National Congress of American Indians—suggest that “red decade” of the Great Depression witnessed an upsurge of transnational solidarity based on a radical critique of the United States as an imperial power. While there were and have been anti-imperialist movements prior to and after the 1930s, these interwar years were characterized by a singular internationalist sensibility that cut across racial lines and class lines, and could not be located in a singular subjectivity: multiethnic, multitendency, it existed within networks that included liberal antifascists, socialists, and black nationalists, often linking questions of racial oppression in the United States to colonialism abroad. And perhaps equally surprising for a reader of 20th-century culture, such movements were shaped by and responded to a global language of modernism, an artistic sensibility that brought the spatially dizzying and fragmented experience of imperialism back to the United States, blending avant-garde style with a radical reading of modernity. Coconstitutive with a grassroots movement, there was a vibrant, if not violent, sense of style that located global capitalism as the shock, dislocation, and utopian promise of a socialist modernity. Another way to frame the 1930s might be to ask: when else can we point to a moment in which the liberation of an African nation took center stage in U.S. politics *and* avant-garde culture?

I underscore the anti-imperialism of the era against what I understand to be the most common narrative frame for the Depression, namely that the two decades from the late 1920s to the dawn of the Cold War are often told in a language of national belonging, or as Richard Slotkin puts it, the “rediscovery of America” by left-leaning artists.² Traditionally, the Great Depression becomes thus a story of crisis and return, a sudden split or antinomy in the national subject healed by the progressive New Deal state. Works seen as central to the cultural logic of 1930s and 1940s, from Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” to Louis Adamic’s *Native Ground*, from Kenneth Burke’s evocation of “the people” over the “proletariat” to John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, support this vision, celebrating an inclusive vision of expanding democracy contained within an organic notion of U.S. citizenship. The reach of this cultural work is illustrated by the song “Ballad for Americans,” originally sung by Paul Robeson in Communist Party circles but picked up in 1940 by the Republican Party and used in its national convention. The ease with which such works became incorporated within dominant visions of American exceptionalism has often been seen as a major shortcoming of the

movement, creating, in George Lipsitz's words, "an impediment to genuinely global and postnational politics."³ Whether one points to the Farm Security Administration photographs that evoke the myth of the yeoman farmer, the inclusive patriarchy of Frank Capra films, the working-class populism inscribed in wartime propaganda, even the Communist Party's use of the United States National Anthem to replace the "Internationale" at national congresses, the high point of left politics in the United States has often been interpreted as a by-product of, if not a result of, its embrace of nationalism. Now, nearly a century later, as we are ending over a decade of two imperial wars that witnessed significant support from segments of the Left, understanding and critiquing this formation remains a compelling intervention.⁴

In recent decades, there has been a great deal of revisionist history of the Popular Front era that complicates this nationalist narrative.⁵ Perhaps more than any other single work, Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front* opened us to new ways to think about the relationships among social movements, the state, and radical culture. Arguing against a narrow focus on political parties, unions, and governmental policy, as well as the periodization of history that dates the Popular Front as the three years from 1936 to 1939 when the Communist Party and liberal antifascists formed a common alliance, Denning identifies the Popular Front era as a long social movement beginning in the late 1920s and lasting until the late 1940s. Rather than argue for a totalized portrait of the Depression, *The Cultural Front* proposes a more diffuse understanding of historical moments, formulating the Popular Front as a "bloc" within the Depression, a moment in which an "alternative hegemony" articulated itself through social movements, proletarian cultural production, and aspects of state and mass culture.

As groundbreaking as Denning's work is to opening up fields of meanings with which to read the 1930s and 1940s, *The Cultural Front* often remains within the bounds of what Gramsci terms "the national-popular," the attempt to forge a democratic culture within the bounds of a populist, national frame.⁶ And while no reading of the anti-imperialist culture of the Great Depression years would be possible without Denning and other revisionist cultural historians, to the extent that these works remain within a national frame, they implicitly reinforce the "national-popular" reading of the Depression years. While African diaspora studies have opened new spaces in which to think of the trans-American and even global revolutionary networks of black scholars, artists, and activists, I would like to think of ways in which transnational and international political networks including communists, socialists, avant-garde artists, labor activists, and third-world revolutionaries were coconstitutive. As this book will show, a Nez Perce scholar and

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activist traveling to the Soviet Union, a Jewish playwright and an Anglo-American novelist sailing to Cuba to protest U.S. imperialism, and a growing awareness of the way Manifest Destiny constructed U.S. capitalism were central to the social movements as well as the artistic production of the 1930s and 1940s. In conducting my research, what I found to be remarkable is not the anti-imperialist sentiment expressed by a small avant-garde, but just how pervasive anti-imperialist thought was among broad swaths of cultural workers and activists. Many of the central U.S. ideologies of race, empire, and national identity were challenged not only by marginal groups and movements, but by an entire social and cultural imaginary. I have come to see that much of the period was infused with a Gramscian “common sense” that privileged international solidarity, anticolonial self-determination, and cross-race and cross-border alliances that cannot be located in a single movement.⁷ Anti-imperialism, in so many words, was constitutive of the Popular Front and modernist imaginary.⁸

Reading history through the lens of contemporary theory, it's clear that new work in transnational hemispheric and American studies can help us to understand the implications of these cultural workers, whether they are labor activists in California fighting the long shadow of annexation, Native American intellectuals looking to global Marxism as a way to build an anticolonial framework in the United States, or filmmakers wishing to narrate the imperial infrastructure of the Cold War by telling the story of Mexican American miners in the Southwest. These movements created a counterculture of anti-imperialism in the United States, often mapping their work onto the very contours and layers of U.S. imperial history, noting the way conquest and expropriation are masked by the language of the unified nation. As Amy Kaplan suggests in her volume *The Anarchy of Empire*, the U.S. nation-state is produced through (not despite) its global reach, often defining its borders, ideas of citizenship, and racial notions of national belonging in a dialectical relationship with its imperial commitments on the American continent and abroad.⁹ The U.S. writers who comprise this study take Kaplan's insight as their starting point, self-aware of how their citizenship in the United States is a product of a hemispheric imperial project. As Clifford Odets writes in his play about U.S. imperialism in Cuba, the Cubans experience a “New Deal of terror,” as the very programs designed to help working-class Americans were predicated on U.S. imperial alignments. Such an analysis not only exposes how the nation-state conceals imperial commitments, it suggests the way domestic politics are always already a part of the transnational and hemispheric scope of U.S. power.

As Shelley Streeby argues about an earlier generation of activists, the na-

tion was “called into question” as “the horizon for utopian hopes of justice,” noting as well how the nation-state severed movements for justice from each other.¹⁰ Citing Rebecca Schreiber’s “critical transnational perspective,” Streeby narrates how the early 20th century socialists, members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and Mexican revolutionaries defined themselves across borders, nationalities, language groups, and unified ethnic histories to build a radical global sensibility that targeted both state power and global capitalism. In doing so, these anti-imperialists went far beyond John Hobson’s early 20th-century critique of imperialism, a question of one nation-state expanding into the territorial boundaries of another.¹¹ The writers and artists in my study shared a continuity with earlier transnational and borderlands intellectuals, as their work highlights the dislocations, migrations, and global flows that expose the nation itself as a construct of global capital. If there is any difference in perspective between the artists and activists of the Popular Front period and earlier radical movements, I would suggest it may only be in scale: the scope of the Communist International, a U.S. state willing accommodate, partially and often only rhetorically, the goals of anticolonial self-determination, and an upsurge in civil rights militancy brought forth a working-class, anti-imperialist cultural politics that exceeded in size and reach anything that had come before.

It should be stressed however, that there is nothing inherently radical or critical about *transnational* as a term or concept.¹² As Masao Miyoshi points out, “the transnational” emerged within cultural studies at the very moment the corporation no longer took the form of a national bourgeoisie.¹³ In one sense, the rise of the term within the academy can be seen as an adaptive strategy the humanities employs to remain relevant, offering cultural capital and mastery to an increasingly globalized elite.¹⁴ Michael Denning abandons the term for “international,” noting how “internationalism” was used to suggest a language of working-class, third-world solidarity.¹⁵ Yet one can also consider the way in which all criticism must, by definition, work dialectically within its dominant social formation; one must turn “the transnational” on its head, so to speak. The smooth, global flow of capital carries with it always the possibility—perhaps inevitability—of an unruly global flow of bodies, ideas, culture, and social movements. “Anti-imperialist modernism” can be read as part of a “transnationalism from below,” denoting both the historical formation of “the modern” and a particular mode of artistic and intellectual critique. Anti-imperialism marks a specific claim on the global capitalist order, one that, as Frantz Fanon articulates, was formed out of generative acts of racialized violence and domination.¹⁶ And as a form of modernity, modernism carries with it the peril and promise of the modern world, one born

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out of contradictions of the avant-garde party, mass mobilizations of industrial workers, the hope of an anticolonial revolutionary state, and the novel and photograph as modes of immanent critique. “Anti-imperialist modernism” thus implies a particular historical moment, a revolutionary global vision, a “whole way of life,” to use Raymond Williams’s phrase.

Indeed, as the *New York Times* reviewer of *Macbeth* unwittingly makes clear, aesthetics were also an integral part of the anti-imperialist movement in the 1930s and 1940s. Modernism was by its nature a global artistic movement in terms of its actual practice, but also in the imperial origins of its construction. As I will discuss in greater detail, not only was modernism’s obsession with otherness, spatial and temporal dislocation, polyphony, and radical forms of alienation a break with Victorian formalism, but such forms were language by which global capitalism came to be expressed. As Michael Denning points out in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, “subaltern modernism” was born out of global revolutionary movements, from the Bolshevik Revolution to third-world nationalism, giving rise to a global radical novel as global circuits of migration, thought, and representation increasingly saw the U.S. empire as its target.¹⁷ To the extent that modernism may have been the first truly global art form, it comes as little surprise that imperialism and its other, colonial liberation, exist in its DNA.

And more than just an appendix of tropes and styles, I would suggest modernism, as a movement, is a self-reflexive argument about the meaning of modernity. For radical cultural workers, modernity is both at the nexus of liberation and oppression, and the dialectic between a negative present and a utopian future. As Herbert Marcuse writes of the avant-garde, the role of radical style is to “break the power of facts” with the possibilities of language.¹⁸ For Marcuse, style is a way of representing the present while also negating it; radical style is always a dialectic between reality and possibility. The question of radical style is also, as Frederic Jameson notes, a marker of the imperial moment in Western history, while also an expression of the many contradictions of the global capitalist imperialism: the sabotage of productive forces by social relations, the “false universalism” of equality, the rhetoric of freedom, and the oppressive particularities of race and gender. One can see these contradictions expressed in such works as Tillie Olsen’s *Yonnonidio*, between the avant-garde style of the authorial voice and the realism of the narrator, or in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*’s dialectic style, between literary realism and pulp fiction.

For anti-imperialist writers, this dialectic of modernity has particular implications for both style and content. For Nez Perce anthropologist Archie Phinney, occupying the negative racial identity imposed by his colonizer—

“Indian”—becomes the way forward for pan-Indian organizing; for Clifford Odets, writing about U.S. imperialism requires that he subvert conceits of realism that produce the democratic identity of “American”; for Orson Welles, the modernist style of alienation is necessary to remind viewers that they are both subject and object of imperialism simultaneously. Another way to say this would be that modernism of the Popular Front was a language of the global Left, its radical style a way to signify bonds of solidarity while also recognizing that the very global order that connects them is the one that they oppose.

I formulate this as a project of cultural recovery and cultural memory. I do not propose to prove that other studies of the Great Depression that privilege the continuities with earlier racialized structures of power are incorrect, or that nationalism shared no part in left politics of the 1930s. I will argue, however, that such analyses implicitly participate in the Cold War construction of the Popular Front, which entails a kind of collective forgetting of the social formations and movements of the previous decades. What has not been taken into account is the extent to which the Cold War has shaped our cultural memory of the Popular Front era, beyond anticommunism to the erasure of a whole fabric of political and cultural anti-imperialism. Recent Cold War cultural history has brought to light the extensive anti-imperialist movements that existed within communities of color before the Cold War, as well as the (successful) efforts by the FBI and House Un-American Activities Committee to discredit, harass, and forcibly suppress activists and intellectuals questioning U.S. imperialism.¹⁹ Equally, Cold War historians have pointed out the extent to which the State Department and major Hollywood studios enlisted the cultural logic of international solidarity movements in the cause of U.S. supremacy, reshaping earlier commitments into a language that met with State Department goals.²⁰ This is not to mention the extensive documentation of labor union suppression of members and labor organizations that fostered international solidarity.²¹ Together these often isolated pieces suggest the active presence of such movements, and the way in which institutional and cultural forces during the Cold War both suppressed and refashioned the Popular Front in its own image, not to mention the way English departments have shaped our understanding of modernism. Remembering is always already embedded in the process of forgetting—re-creating the Depression New Deal for the Cold War also meant the suppression of those elements that challenged the postwar social order.²² To the extent the Cold War spoke through a new, muscular language of race, frontier, and empire, it relied on the collective forgetting—and forcible suppression—of earlier artistic and social movements that questioned such projects. Given this record of

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erasure, anti-imperialist modernism offers the view that the political *and* aesthetic contours of 1930s and 1940s transnational movements thus remain as radical now as they were then.

No More (Bosses') Imperial War: Rethinking 1930s and 1940s Social Movements

Clifford Odets's one-act play of the "1935 blues," *Waiting for Lefty*, is seldom remembered as an anti-imperialist text. As the darling of the Left, Odets's play is often taken as a shorthand for the entire "red decade" of the 1930s, seen as a summation of the "ethnic Americanism" of the Popular Front: a strike tale by a plebian Jewish author, it takes place in a working-class, white-ethnic community, features American popular culture and American accents, and imagines less a traditional union than a popular working- and middle-class movement that unites the many ethnicities of the city into a single democratic action. And yet, among the short, often domestic, vignettes of would-be strikers, "The Young Hack and His Girl" centers on the refusal of a young taxi driver, Sid, to join the army to solve his economic woes and marry the girl he loves. Speaking of his brother, Sid laments that the navy will "send him down to Cuba."²³ Rattling off a list of racialized enemies his brother believes "a real American hero" should fight, "Japs, Turks, and Greeks," Sid concludes that the navy only teaches working-class soldiers to "point the gun in the wrong way," at fellow workers rather than at their officers.²⁴ In an earlier vignette, a lab technician turns down a job making "poison gas" for the military by sarcastically telling his manager that he's "not the civilized type," responding to his manager's appeal that the United States should be ready when he expects "those goddamn Japs start a ruckus."²⁵ Reversing the savage-civilized binary, the lab tech smartly points out the barbarism behind the high-tech weapons of "civilization." Both acts in the play underscore the ways in which workers are conscripted into imperial designs by big business and the state, either through appeals to racism against the "goddamn Japs" or through the masculine patriotism of becoming an "American hero." And in both scenes, to be an agent of the U.S. empire is also to be a class enemy—the young lab tech is asked to "spy" on fellow workers as part of his job, and Sid's brother Sam is sent to Cuba to "point the gun in the wrong way."

That the anti-imperialism of Odets's play is a forgotten element of its cultural legacy suggests a great deal about the contemporary invisibility of such movements. Given the centrality of anti-imperialism to the Depression's

most famous play, it's useful to reconstruct what organizations and cultural formations produced and supported such critique. Anti-imperialist thought from the 1920s to the 1940s in the United States is frequently understood by historians through the lens of Communist Party doctrine, emerging in the late 1920s with the inauguration of the Comintern's revolutionary "third period" and ending with the "Popular Front" policy, during which the Communist Party worked with Western colonial "democracies" and liberal anti-fascists to contain the Axis threat.²⁶ Even within this simplified narrative, the Communist Party is acknowledged to have played a crucial role in shaping and supporting anti-imperialist movements in the United States and abroad, forming, in Hakim Adi's words, the "era's sole international white-led movement . . . formally dedicated to a revolutionary transformation of the global political *and* racial order."²⁷ Unlike the earlier Socialist Party or Anti-Imperialist League of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the global reach of the Communist International frequently engaged U.S. labor activists with anticolonial intellectuals from around the world, including Sen Katayama, Jacques Roumain, and Cedric Dover, and in the United States, the party included a great many high-profile members from the colonized world, including George Padmore, H. T. Tsiang, and Cyril Briggs. The Communist Party's ability to export U.S. activists around the world, as well as to introduce activists of color to global anticolonial intellectuals, gave a cosmopolitan and transnational scope to what were before considered local struggles. Working-class communist activists of color in the United States such as Emma Tenayuca, Harry Haywood, and Karl Yoneda all reported in memoirs or interviews that attending Communist Party conventions allowed them to see civil rights and labor rights struggles in the Southwest, the Deep South, and California in global and anticolonial terms.²⁸

And while one can certainly trace a shift not only in official policy but in practice from the early 1930s to the official Popular Front period, even within Communist Party publications—especially regional CPUSA newspapers such as the *People's Daily World* (formerly the *Western Worker*)—many of the same critiques of U.S. empire were simply reformulated. Denunciations of U.S. imperialism (while often still openly made) were changed to more "Americanized" critiques of Manifest Destiny and Indian Removal, for instance, replacing "Hands off Cuba" with an interview of a surviving Lakota veteran of Little Bighorn.²⁹ Or, in another instance, the "Hands off Haiti" campaign of the "third period" was transformed into a critique of the U.S. comprador regime of Stenio Vincent and agitation for the release of Haitian novelist Jacques Roumain. While the agitation for the release of Roumain carried an echo of the "democracy" and "free speech" rhetoric of the Popular

Front, it's clear that Roumain's imprisonment was at the hands of a U.S.-backed regime. And two of the central antifascist crusades of the Popular Front period, the protests against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and fascist coup in Spain had clear antiracist and anti-imperialist overtones, some of which I'll detail below. As Communist organizer Dorothy Healey recounted in her memoir, when the "Popular Front" policy was communicated from the New York City, it "made sense in practical terms" and "fit in with my own sense of the kinds of corrections that needed to be made," and thus seemed merely a continuation of the work she and other party members were already doing.³⁰ Healey's attitude and practice in regard to the Communist Party "line" is revealing in many ways, suggesting local practice and immediate needs often trumped centralized objectives, also suggesting far greater fluidity than the commissar-cadre model often describes.³¹

As Michael Denning argues, the "peripheries were the center," noting both that Cold War history tended to fetishize membership in the party, and that membership was often far more fluid and transient than a single-minded focus on the party would suggest.³² The American League Against War and Fascism (ALAWF) may be thought as a typical anti-imperialist organization of the 1930s. Founded in 1933 by the Communist Party against the rise of fascism in Europe, its concerns and its reach went far beyond the Communist Party and Nazism in Europe. Open about its anti-imperialist politics, in the founding document of the first nationwide antiwar organization, drafted a year after its organization, the ALAWF resolved

to oppose the policies of American imperialism in the Far East, in Latin America and throughout the world; to support the struggles of all colonial peoples against the imperialist policies of exploitation and armed suppression.³³

The League enjoyed a broad constituency that included civic, labor, religious, and ethnic organizations, in large part because critiques of U.S. imperialism were often combined with bread-and-butter issues of redirecting military budgets to relief programs and the arts. The League organized mass meetings, demonstrations, and pickets, and often organized within strategic unions to call for strikes against war materials. Perhaps most spectacularly, the League coordinated with the American Student Union one of the largest "antiwar" student strikes in U.S. history, one that shut down the entire University of California, State University of New York, and City University of New York systems and was estimated to have involved over million students, including 15,000 in Los Angeles alone.³⁴ As one historian writes, by the late

1930s, the League had registered the support of over four million people at its annual conferences.³⁵

For the generation still fresh with the memory of World War I and the Mexican Revolution, “war” had a context that to a contemporary audience would not be available. By the 1930s, it had become a kind of left-liberal common sense that inter-imperialist rivalry between nation-states made war an inevitable by-product of imperialism. Vladimir Lenin argued in his classic work on imperialism that the competition for world markets and the internationalization of finance capital within national economies made conflict between world powers inevitable. Modern “war,” to put it simply, was a result of capitalism expanding beyond national borders; war was simply empire by another name. In this sense, the “antiwar” movement was not an antiwar movement in the current sense of the word, as it merely objected to the causes and beneficiaries of war, rather than the notion of armed conflict per se. As one editorial in a Communist newspaper stated without any sense of contradiction, the “antiwar movement” must “fight pacifism” to avoid “imperialist war.”³⁶

In this sense, CIO president John L. Lewis and United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) president Donald Henderson’s stance against early U.S. entrance into World War II had little to do with the union presidents’ general preference for peace. “The Yanks Are Not Coming” campaign is often interpreted as U.S. “isolationism,” yet I would suggest it was a response to a decades-long antiwar campaign that argued war conducted between imperial powers only benefited monopoly profits. In an insert distributed in UCAPAWA unions, joining the war in Europe would be understood as fighting for the side of “imperialist powers” and, like all imperialist wars, against the interests of working people.³⁷ The common 1930s slogan, “No more bosses war,” as one *Western Worker* headline put it, suggested that opposition to war was in defense of the working class, not a larger pacifistic vision of diplomacy or conflict resolution. Imperialism and fascism, one could argue, were as much targets of the antiwar movement as the notion of “conflicts between nation-states.” With the German invasion of the Soviet Union, spokespeople for the antiwar movement argued that their support for U.S. entrance was consistent with their understanding of war. “The war changed,” activist and author Mike Quin wrote in the *People’s Daily World*: “Yesterday it was a war between rival slave-drivers . . . protecting the foreign interests of Wall Street,” whereas today “It’s fascism against socialism.”³⁸

(Imperialist) “war” and “fascism” were, of course, also inextricably linked within a left lexicon in the 1930s. The ALAWF did not create, but merely named itself after, the Popular Front slogan. While the antifascist movement

today is remembered largely as opposition to Nazis, Black Shirts, and Spanish Falangists, work by Alan Wald, Mark Naison, Glenda Gilmore, Mark Solomon, Paul Buhle, and Michael Denning discusses ways in which antifascist discourse was far broader than a narrow critique of European governments.³⁹ While many historians notice that antifascism was used to battle U.S. racism, the stretch to U.S. and European imperialism was often not difficult to make. Germany's, Japan's, and Italy's fascism was seen as an inevitable outgrowth of a global capitalism system. The three states were understood by many on the 1930s Left as historical "latecomers" to the project of empire building, and their aggressive militarism a way to seize necessary colonies from competitors. To be against "war and fascism" for a certain segment of the more radical Left meant, in short, that one supported a critique of capitalism and imperialism, a kind of commonsense reading of Lenin's volume by the same name. This is not to suggest that all antifascists were anti-imperialists, but rather that anti-imperialism was a major strand within the movement that up to this point has been marginalized. Not nearly enough has been made of the fact that the largest antifascist and antiwar organization in the 1930s called for an end to U.S. imperialism in the Far East, Latin America, and "especially Cuba."⁴⁰

The focus by historians on a Moscow-led anti-imperialist campaign downplays the constitutive nature of imperialism in the production of a U.S. national identity, as well as the very specific and dramatic shifts in military expenditure and policy in the 1930s to which activists responded. As Perry Anderson notes, the "prehistory" of the global, postwar U.S. "imperium" came to an end during the Great Depression, prior to which time the financial center of the globe was still London, the pound sterling was the international currency, the United States retained a relatively small standing army, and the United States produced and consumed primarily for a domestic market.⁴¹ This is not to suggest that the United States was not an empire prior to the late 1930s—Anderson is clear that the United States went through at least two prior imperial convulsions, transforming from a continental power during which the expansion of the empire was also the expansion of a settler-colonial nation-state, to a commercial empire intent on "opening" markets to the East, culminating with the invasion of Spain's remaining colonies.⁴² Yet prior to the U.S. emergence as an "imperium" after World War II, two crucial shifts emerge from the 1930s. Congress's decision to begin "rearmament" as a form of militarized domestic spending not only increased the size and readiness of the military, but also for the first time joined "the internal fortunes of the American economy and external postures of the American state as they never had been before."⁴³ Combined with Cordell Hull's championing of

single “free trade” global market, the new U.S. militarism set the stage for the major imperial expansion after World War II, when the United States took over the global imperial mantle from Britain and western Europe. The radical press quite accurately predicted war with the Japan as early as the mid-1930s, and ALAWF frequently critiqued the hypocrisy of the Good Neighbor Policy. While we cannot ignore the importance of international social movements in building an anti-imperialist movement in the United States, it should be remembered that the anti-imperialist movement in the United States stood at the cusp of the United States’ emergence as a truly global superpower.

Culturally speaking, the anti-imperialist movement reflected both internationalist support for global revolutions, as well as a transnational and hemispheric critique of U.S. particular role as the regional hegemon and a settler-colonial state. The site of the 1933 antiwar demonstration witnessed the crowd of one thousand refuse to drop their hats at the U.S. national anthem, yet “95% of the audience removed their hats when the International was sung.”⁴⁴ The *Western Worker* frequently ran stories ridiculing imperial masculinity, such as the grinning caricature of Teddy Roosevelt above the caption “100 men swore Roosevelt’s a liar,” detailing not only that TR “did not make that charge” up San Juan Hill, but that “Negro troops rescued Teddy from an ambush” earlier in the day.⁴⁵ Not only does the cartoon puncture imperial masculinity as a mythic construct, it also points out that white manhood is threatened by a black masculinity it both suppresses and relies on. Other figures like Captain Bakcsy and Los Angeles police chief Hynes also received scathing denunciations. In one *Western Worker* article, the career of National Guard major general David Barrows is traced from his role as a “butcher” in the Philippines, to commander in the expeditionary force in the Soviet Union, to his current role in the proposed formation of a military police in California to “put Communists against the wall to be shot.”⁴⁶ Also cited as giving speeches endorsing Hitler, Barrows is a figure who travels from the colonial periphery of the Philippines to the center of San Francisco, visiting the violence once used against a colonial population against an urban metropolis in California, in which his “shoot to kill” orders left two water-front strikers dead.

Given that the narrative of antifascism is often told through the lens of the growing threat of Nazi Germany as well as the Communist Party’s shifting position from anti-imperialism to supporting imperial “democracies” as against Axis powers, it should be remembered that the two major national antifascist organizations, the ALAWF and the National Negro Congress (NNC), had membership and leadership far beyond their party begin-



Fig. 1. “Demand Bread—Not Battleships.” Where bread-and-butter and anti-imperialist politics meet. (*Western Worker*, July 31, 1933.)

nings.⁴⁷ The NNC’s opposition to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the ALAWF’s continued opposition to U.S. military spending carried with them an anti-imperialist sensibility that went beyond just anti-Nazism. The question of Ethiopia’s independence and the continued critique of military spending—while part of a larger antifascist vision—were also very much questions of U.S. and European colonial dominance. Indeed, long after the Popular Front policy formally called for unity among liberals and leftists against fascism, implying a strategic “peace” with imperialist powers, the ALAWF continued to call for U.S. disarmament and an end to U.S. imperial domination in Latin America, and to equate Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia with European colonialism. In a summer 1936 pamphlet published by ALAWF’s journal *Fight*, “Billions for Bullets,” the League continued to call for an end to U.S. imperialism, an abolition of the ROTC, and an end to U.S. military spending.⁴⁸ Indeed, nearly all of the major antifascist campaigns in the 1930s are not easily disentangled from campaigns that were more explicitly anti-imperialist, such as the “Hands off Cuba” or “Hands off Nicaragua” campaigns of the early 1930s.

Many within the African American Left criticized the antifascist support

for western European imperial democracies, exemplified by a cartoon in the *Chicago Defender* that gives backhanded praise to the Nazis for “picking on everyone equally,” while England, France, and the United States “pick on the darker races only.”⁴⁹ And yet many more on the left used popular opposition to Nazism to explore links between racism in the United States and the racial eugenics of the Nazi regime. Langston Hughes called the Spanish fascists “Jim Crow people,” thereby explicitly linking the struggle in Spain with civil rights struggle in the South. Paul Robeson called on Congress to enact anti-lynching legislation in the name of opposing fascism in the United States as well as abroad. In California, the Popular Front Left often connected the fight against fascism with the Mexican and Filipino workers’ movements, arguing that California was the state in the union “closest to a perfect fascist set-up” for its brutalization of farmworkers and immigrants.⁵⁰ As one black veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade related in the video documentary *The Good Fight*, he became involved by going to rallies “against war and fascism” that, more often than not, were rallies in support of the last free African nation. As Robin Kelley writes in *Race Rebels*, fighting the Italian and German fascists in Spain was not just a fight against racist powers for African American activists but also a way to strike back at the German-backed Italian invasion of Ethiopia.⁵¹ According to historian Richard Seymour, the International Brigades organized for the defense of the Third Republic were “the logical extension of the anti-imperialist movement,” with its commitment against militarism, racism, and the imperial legacy of the Right in Spain.⁵²

It should also be remembered that “race” was understood as a transnational term, linking slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow, and capitalism into a single frame of analysis.⁵³ The Council on African Affairs and the Communist Party frequently sponsored meetings between civil rights leaders in the United States and independence figures from Africa and Latin America, raised money for and awareness of the colonized world within the United States, and sponsored labor union and community members to travel abroad. Likewise, both organizations recruited and were comprised of members that participated in Garveyite movements and transnational negritude movements that preceded the Popular Front, but also formed an important component of it.⁵⁴ Equally, the Communist Party’s rhetoric of “self-determination for minority peoples” implicitly connected nationalist claims in overseas colonies with African, Mexican, and Native American struggles in the United States.⁵⁵ In part, this was due to the Soviet Union’s own policy on “minority peoples” within its borders, and efforts to gain influence in the third world, but as critics such as Anthony Dawahare and Robin D. G. Kelley have argued, it was also a response to grassroots pressure within the party to develop



Fig. 2. "Civilization Enters Abyssinia." Notice the satire of imperial discourse, as well as the column to the right of the cartoon, celebrating Ethiopia's resistance. (*Western Worker*, November 28, 1935.)

a coherent policy on race, capitalism, and imperialism, and to respond to members' articulations of the centrality of race and empire to the development of capitalism.⁵⁶ The connection between racism and imperialism implies that these scholars and activists understood black Americans as an "internally colonized" population, that there was more than a relation by analogy between the regime of South Africa and the southern United States.

Anti-imperialist feminist activists and intellectuals also articulated their own global politics in the 1930s and 1940s, both inside and outside of left institutions such as the Communist Party and the National Negro Congress. Feminist writer and Communist Party activist Meridel Le Sueur envisioned a global network of women connected by a shared experience of a gendered body and expressed as a culture of feeling. Describing a Polish immigrant to the United States, Le Sueur articulates how "she feels the hunger and suffering of Chinese women and feels as if she is in Flint in the Women's Brigade," locating the "feeling" in her gendered embodiment, "the making of the body,

the feeding and nurturing of it day in and day out.”⁵⁷ This internationalist advocacy for solidarity among working-class and peasant women is reflected in Communist Party journalist and theorist Claudia Jones, a Trinidadian who helped the CPUSA formulate its policies on the “woman’s question.” Writing a weekly column, “Half the World,” Jones ironically signified on the common experiences among women globally, united by marginalization and yet also not a minority. And yet Jones complicates the idea of a unified gendered subject by reminding readers of the axially segmented labor market, structured by gender and race dialectically. Jones applies Lenin’s theory of “superexploitation,” developed to describe the relative relationship of workers in the colonies to the metropole, as a way to describe the experience of black women globally.⁵⁸ Black women, according to Jones, are not only exploited as racialized workers, they are also exploited as women in both the homes where they work and the homes where they live—paid lower wages and often working far longer hours. As Cheryl Higashida argues in her book *Black International Feminism*, Jones (and I would add Le Sueur) were part of a larger movement of women’s groups and intellectuals who understood the theorized role of women and women’s movements to fashion an anti-imperialist politics but also critique the masculinity and patriarchy often implicit in anti-imperialist nationalism.⁵⁹

Many historians have looked at these various tendencies on race in the 1930s and minimized the role of anti-imperialism and black nationalism, noting that even the Communists in the 1930s fought for integration, not black self-determination. I would suggest there is nothing inherently contradictory about such stances, and yet I draw attention to them because they complicate a discursive reading of the era. Social movements are never solely questions of discourse—often claims for freedom and equality exist within but are not contained by dominant cultural expression. As Laclau and Mouffe argue, politics is an “articulatory process” in which meaning is always mediated, unable to be fixed, and situated within various dimensions that lack the ideological closure of dominant institutions.⁶⁰ To the extent that forms of knowledge are functions of power, the ability or desire to construct a stable discourse is questionable when applied to subaltern and marginal groups. Any reading of anti-imperialist culture within the 1930s and 1940s requires one to appraise the whole social environment, not as isolated statements or organizations, but in terms of what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling,” in which social forms do not necessarily articulate themselves in explicit public discourse.⁶¹ Keeping readings of oppositional culture open in this way avoids the frequent pitfalls in which movements are read as a sum total of discursive acts, ignoring the complex, dialectical relationship

among oppressed groups, public statements, “on the ground” organizing, institutional pressures, and compromise with hegemonic forces to achieve immediate ends that often complicates any understanding of how people actually thought, felt, and acted. To put it simply, there is no contradiction between advocating for racial separation as a theoretical horizon and fighting for integration as a daily praxis, given that no oppositional force wields the social or discursive power to implement its program, internally or externally.

Reading “anti-imperialism” this way, as both a radical praxis and an oppositional discourse, may thus allow us to stitch together many threads of radical thought in the 1930s and 1940s, bringing transnational social movements, black liberation struggles, strands within Native American self-determination movements, antifascism, and socialist critiques of global capitalism together under a single unifying rubric, without reducing any of the particular movements to a sum total of their parts. By reviving the term “anti-imperialism,” these movements can be seen as inhabiting intersecting fields of theory and praxis, often within overlapping organizations. We can also consider the significant damage done by Cold War academic institutions, constricting radical history within narrowed fields of analysis, often sidestepping the ways in which lived praxis and political radicalism emerge within intersecting terrains of struggle. Considering how, for instance, labor activists in California came to see the large growers as the logical conclusion of Manifest Destiny offers ways to rethink not only the coordinates of anti-imperialist and transnational thought in the 1930s, but the labor movement within a transnational anti-imperialist framework as well. “Anti-imperialism” also offers ways to think about slower and longer tectonic shifts in policy and popular thought from land management in the U.S. West to popular revulsion against the occupation of Vietnam as having antecedents and starting points in U.S. history, tethering contemporary reality to a longer radical past.

Anti-Imperialist Modernism and the Popular Front

In 1932, critic Edmund Wilson reached San Diego at the end of his yearlong trip across the United States to “study the present crisis,” the roots and meanings of the Great Depression. Reaching his destination in California, he constructs his first image of the state from a singular and remarkable source: the turreted peaks of the John Spreckles’s Coronado Hotel. He comments that Spreckles made his fortune in “Hawaiian sugar” and, just so the reader knows what that means, adds “in 1887 . . . he guaranteed to the Americans the exclusive use of Honolulu Harbor.”⁶² He completes the thought by further noting

that the same year saw the rise of the great “robber barons” as well as “the last attempt of the Indians to assert their independence” until they were “put down by the government and the Apaches penned up in a reservation.”⁶³ It is a compelling construction, and one made with the typical modernist understatement for which Wilson was well known, but one that nonetheless forces the connection among the overseas empire, the great industrial fortunes of the post–Civil War era, Indian Removal, and, I would add, the California shore. He completes the picture by noting that the hotel is “white as a wedding cake,” suggesting both “an ocean liner” and “a colonial mansion,” and “dominate(s) the last blue concave dent in the shoreline before the United States gives way to Mexico.”⁶⁴ This picture, one of whiteness, domination, colonial pretense, national boundaries, and tourism as well as a subtle reference to the “great white fleet of San Diego” that marked the U.S. expansion on the world stage as a Pacific power, manages to locate the West as a midway point between a continuous imperial arc, rather than an end point of the frontier. The overseas colonization of Hawaii and the internal colonization of the Native Americans are collapsed into a single image in which the hotel and the shoreline it dominates become the physical embodiment or objective correlative for imperial conquest.

In Fredric Jameson’s essay “Modernism and Imperialism” he writes of the way imperialism creates a problem of perception, as “colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the homeland.”⁶⁵ This “meaning loss” is compensated within high modernism by an inward and aestheticized style—the impossibility of representing the totality of empire is itself represented by the “tenant-lieu” of an impregnable style.⁶⁶ Indeed as Masao Miyoshi points out, “Hardly any Western writer from Jane Austen to Thomas Mann, from Balzac to D.H. Lawrence could manage to escape from the spell of modern expansionism.”⁶⁷ And of course, Edward Said made a similar point about the entirety of modern Western culture.⁶⁸ While Jameson, Miyoshi, and Said crucially point out that imperialism is constitutive not only of modernity but the modernist literary movement, their crucial theoretical foundation does leave out another possible alternative: that many modernist writers responded to the crisis of representation created by modernity in a very different way, as a mode of self-reflexive critique and even revolutionary aesthetic expression.

As one such modernist, Wilson was one of a large number of prominent intellectuals of the “red decade” to take a “turn to the left” in the 1930s, and his *American Jitters* was seen as his response to the social movements and

epochal changes of the Depression. He, like Malcolm Cowley, Granville Hicks, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Josephine Herbst represented a kind of literary patrician class formed in the movements of literary modernism in the previous decade. Wilson, Ivy League educated and Anglophile in his literary tastes, wrote from the cultural center. Thus Wilson's modernist construction—in which the shoreline is transformed into a perceptual vantage point from which to see into the “infinity” of empire both spatially and temporally—presents a way to think about not only modernism but how *anti-imperialist* work is another form through which modernism was expressed.

In addition, there has been a growing attention to the way in which modernism itself is constructed around a patrician, Anglo-American sensibility. Responding both to poststructuralist critics who label all modernism as totalizing, hierarchical, formal, and phallic as well as to New Critics who wish to reassert the primacy of the aesthetic, intellectuals such as Paul Gilroy, Suzanne Clark, Michael Denning, and Laura Doyle suggest that we replace modernism with working-class, colonized, woman, and writers of color at the “center” of modernity.⁶⁹ Such a view puts into stark relief the way in which the high modernism of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and others within the same circle represents less a universal truth than a particular subject position: the “globalized privacy” of the modern self, anxious to master the “global surround” and assert racial, classed, and gendered power over an increasingly transnational world.⁷⁰ Such a critique also aesthetically and politically recovers the cultural production of a whole generation of working-class, left-wing, black, colonial, and woman writers within a comparative and historical context that suggests their own engagement with a modernist project while not limiting their contribution to an identity formation. Laura Doyle's “em-placement” of modernity or “spatialization” of modernism thus not only forces the question of what lay on the other side of “infinity,” it also gives voice to those faceless members of the colonies described as the “hooded hordes / swarming over endless plains” in Eliot's *Waste Land*.⁷¹ Paul Gilroy's “Black Atlantic” is thus a refiguration of key modernist tropes, suggesting the “homelessness” of the modern subject be thought not so much as a spiritual condition, but as the culture produced in the multiple dislocations of the globalized world that began with slavery. Eliot's horror at the impurity of modern culture is precisely where Gilroy begins, in the “contact zones” between culturally rootless subjects, the violent articulations of an expanding capitalist horizon.⁷² We can think then of C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* or Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* as “modernist” within this frame, as both narrate the conflict/contact of race,

nation, and empire through the transformative subjectivity of a hybrid voice.

In literary history, the shift from modernism to postmodernism marked the Popular Front as a sort of interregnum, an unfortunate gap in the cultural order between *avant-gardes*. Dominated by “social realism,” the Popular Front was regarded by several generations of critics as a return to the 19th-century verities of realism, including its middlebrow sensibility, its positivism, its reification of capitalist social relations—despite its ostensible social critique—and its frequently linear, transparent narrative form. In this sense, 1930s “social realism” is read as a kind of antimodernism. It is seen as a rejection of the aesthetic and its radical indeterminacy for the stable “truth” of social class and the determinism of an equally outdated philosophical materialism. As Barbara Foley points out, much of the 1960s postmodern literary criticism that came out of the legacy of the New Left—skeptical of theories of totalization, materialism, and binary oppositions—reproduced a narrative of Cold War anticommunism by discarding most proletarian fiction as “ideological” and thus retrograde.⁷³ Yet for Denning, the proletarian fiction of the 1930s forms a “third wave” of modernism that fused radical elements of surrealism, mass culture, and the grotesque to create a working-class or “proletarian *avant-garde*.”⁷⁴ Citing Kenneth Burke’s 1935 address before the American Writers’ Congress, Denning suggests we take Burke’s call for a “revolutionary symbolism” as one of the clearest theoretical statements made at the time about the Popular Front modernist project.⁷⁵ As Denning notes, Burke’s formulation of a modern “symbolism” with revolutionary politics marked both a rupture and a continuity with artistic forms of the previous decades. Framing Burke’s address in more contemporary literary terms, Denning refers to Popular Front “social modernism” as a way to periodize and theorize the sensibility of writers as diverse as Richard Wright, Erskine Caldwell, Muriel Rukeyser, and James Agee.

Denning’s formulation not only recovers the aesthetic value of Popular Front literature, but, as importantly, it recovers the revolutionary potential of the modernist project. Denning’s category of “social modernism” suggests that perhaps the binary values encoded in David Harvey’s table—opposing the mastery, hierarchy, logos, and phallogentrism of modernism with the exhaustion, anarchy, silence, and androgyny of postmodernism—is an incomplete story.⁷⁶ While one could suggest that Denning’s formulation of “social modernism” is another attempt to add an unlisted or uncounted group to the modernist canon, I would suggest that it has far more extensive implications for the way we think of both modernism and political movements “from below.” If African American, working-class, Mexican American, Native American, and other multiethnic artists and organizations found within the cul-

tural logic of modernism a liberatory potential, then perhaps we can think of modernism as less the product of one particular subject position than the attempt to construct a subjectivity within a discursive framework of the modern world. The “waste land” of the modern city onto which Eliot imposes his own formal order thus becomes a mobile trope—the abandoned buildings of Wright’s *Native Son* or the silica mine of Rukeyser’s *Book of the Dead*—a site for possible transformative visions of a new collectivity. By reclaiming the modernism of socially committed art, Denning shifts the debate about modernism from specific aesthetic characteristics to the question of an avant-garde, a self-conscious artistic project of social transformation. As Joseph Entin and Paula Rabinowitz suggest, it was the self-conscious use of popular, pulp, grotesque and “sensational” material that marked Popular Front era literature as uniquely modern and modernist.⁷⁷

Burke’s address was, however, considered controversial at the 1935 Writers’ Congress. Calling for a “revolutionary symbolism,” Burke argues that radical writers adopt a “mythic” rather than a “scientific” approach to cultural struggle, dropping the language of “class” for a “national” myth of “the people.”⁷⁸ Suggesting a “politics of inclusion,” Burke encourages radical writers to borrow the language of “bourgeois nationalism” in order to reappropriate it for a democratic project.⁷⁹ As Denning and others have noted, Burke’s address was not well received at the Writers’ Congress, and many within the audience criticized what they felt to be an open embrace of fascist rhetoric. Noting that “the people” was often the term deployed by right-wing populists, it was Burke’s *nationalism* and not his modernism that upset the crowd.⁸⁰ Indeed, rather than find Burke’s use of nationalist rhetoric more inclusive, as Burke had hoped, it was his use of nationalism that the audience, including *New Masses* editor Mike Gold, found the most alienating. It is thus telling that Burke’s address has been adopted by literary and cultural scholars as the theoretical blueprint of “social modernism,” as it has shaped and in turn been shaped by the discourse around nationalism within the Popular Front. If one defines “social modernism” as a “national-popular” movement, key texts are thus remembered: John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land,” Dorothea Lange’s FSA photography, and Paul Robeson’s performance of “Ballad for Americans”—those texts that speak directly to the formation of a new national mythology. The misreading of the Writers’ Congress rejection of Burke—as antimodernist rather than antinationalist—unfortunately reproduces one of the more lasting narratives of modernism and the Popular Front, and its most ugly political legacy, its nationalism.

We can think of “anti-imperialist modernism” as thus an attempt to re-

make modernity by going through, rather than around, the modern categories of race, nation, and empire. As C. L. R. James described modern slaves and proletarians as violently “conscripted” by modernity, and Nez Perce anthropologist Archie Phinney came to argue that indigenous people had no choice but to take the ideas imposed upon them by modernity and convert them to their own purposes.⁸¹ Native Americans, wrote Phinney, must claim for themselves and proudly inhabit their modern racial identity as “Indians” rather than as members of tribes, as it is only by doing so can they—like workers and like other people of color—attain political power. Modernity, as Phinney saw it, is a form of radical dispossession, yet one to which indigenous people may lay claim and which they must refashion in their own image to survive. Phinney’s question, then, is not whether Indians can choose to be modern—they already are. It is how they may enter into relations with an imperial nation-state as “alert, modern communities, struggling for their own interests.”⁸² Like James’s *Black Jacobins*, Phinney saw the violence and dislocations of modernity as also producing their opposite, a means toward a collective vision of self-determination. Langston Hughes’s poem “Letter from Spain” “looked across to Africa” from Loyalist Spain and “seed foundations shakin’”—suggesting that the anti-imperialist struggle inside a fading colonial power has the possibly to free not only Spaniards but the entire colonial world.⁸³ We can think of Hughes’s global vision—“seeing” both the metropole and the colony in a single act—as a liberatory version of Wilson’s gaze across the Pacific at the San Diego shore, seeing the layers of imperial history through the future of Pacific conquest. Both acts of sight—critique and utopian possibility—are the coordinates of a radical anti-imperialist modernist vision.

The anti-imperialist character of 1930s modernism included but also went well beyond the writings of the African American intellectual and political community. Like Wilson’s and Hughes’s gaze into the “infinity” of the Western imperialism, Clifford Odets and Josephine Herbst traveled to Cuba to witness and document firsthand revolutionary and anti-imperialist movements as a way to call into question the limitations of a national framework for political writing. Like C. L. R. James’s *Mariners* which celebrates the international proletariat aboard *Moby Dick’s Pequod*, Herbst also celebrates the multiracial “castaways” of Cuba’s cooperative sugar plantation, Realingo 18, in a series of articles for the *New Masses* that later became her novel *Rope of Gold*. In fictional form, Odets creates a similar multiracial and anti-imperialist army in his unperformed play *Law of Flight* (“The Cuba Play”), based on revolutionary movements in Cuba. *Law of Flight* suggests that subjects on the colonial periphery may fulfill the promise of full democracy in a way the

metropole cannot. *Law of Flight* also produces a radical estrangement for a U.S. reader, as Odets suggests that much of what “Americans” consider domestic—including what we eat—is constructed beyond the national borders and that U.S. citizens produce their national identity based on their presumed otherness from the countries U.S. financial capital directly or indirectly controls.

Part of what has obscured the transnational affiliations of the Popular Front, however, is that Europe was largely displaced as a site of identification. With the bold and crucial exception of Spain, European governments were either fascist or soon to become fascist; intellectual exiles for a change were steaming to New York, Havana, Leningrad, and Los Angeles rather than Berlin, Paris, or Rome. In this sense, the transnational character of the Popular Front was shaped as an identification and solidarity with what would come to be called the third world. Rather than, as Laura Doyle suggests, a modernism constructed between imperial capitals, such anti-imperialist modernism looks south and east not only in gestures of solidarity, but for another vision of modernity itself. James’s *The Black Jacobins* situates anticolonial resistance within a much longer trajectory; it also locates the origins of the modern world in the colonial peripheries, naming the deracinated African slaves as the world’s first modern proletariat. Fused with James’s sensational style, *Jacobins* reorients modernity within an anti-imperialist modernism, that is, rewrites the modern world racially and spatially, locating the revolutionary future in the global South. In much the same way, Archie Phinney’s and Langston Hughes’s travels to the Soviet Union looked east to find another model for modernity not based on the racial hierarchies of the West, locating modernity within a revolutionary socialist project. Shifting their gaze away from Europe was not just a political act for these writers, it was also an attempt to construct a different path for modernity—an “attempt,” wrote Phinney about the Soviet Union “of men to intelligently direct their own history”—precisely the goal of modernity itself.⁸⁴

Arise, the Transnational Working Class: The Making of an Anti-Imperialist Working-Class Culture

The idea of an international working class is, of course, not new. Recent studies of transnational culture often discount the importance of international socialist movements in shaping thinkers now considered central within a growing subcanon of transnational U.S. literature, including Langston Hughes, C. L. R. James, Américo Paredes, W. E. B. DuBois, and Carlos Bul-

san. In the first half the 20th century, Communist parties, left unions, socialist publications, and other radical organizations provided the structure as well as the capital necessary to facilitate publications and arrange for travels; they also provided an intellectual paradigm in which to locate oneself within a global world. As one former Communist Party activist I interviewed in his late eighties explained, “You could be raised in the Bronx, show up in the Philippines, and without speaking a word of Tagalog or anything else, suddenly have hundreds of brothers in arms who would do anything for you.”⁸⁵ And yet socialist internationalism, with its emphasis on working-class movements, relations among states, and seizing state power, cannot necessarily account for or adequately describe the multiple hybrid points of identity shaped by migrant flows, contact zones, borderlands, or the way in which the unequal relationship between colony and center is key to the production of identity. As Donald Pease writes of C. L. R. James’s imprisonment on Ellis Island due to the Cold War’s “state of emergency,” James’s detention was a “colonial encounter” within the borders of the United States, neither between states nor within one.⁸⁶ As a deterritorialized subject, James belonged to neither class nor nation, but was rather with a “federation of diasporas,” a delocalized exile that belonged neither to one place nor another.⁸⁷

Intellectuals and activists such as Salish author D’Arcy McNickle and Chicana labor organizer Emma Tenayuca both wrote that their racialized communities were able to neither constitute independent nations nor constitute abstract citizenship. For McNickle in particular, the Salish reservation was a site of racial violence, exile from which only meant another form of cultural death. In this sense, the reservation is constructed like James’s INS facility as deterritorialized space, neither within the nation nor independent from it, a site caught between a colonial history and a not-yet-becoming hybridity. As one of the tribal elders says in McNickle’s *The Surrounded*, “That’s the way it goes now; the old law is not used and nobody cares about the new.”⁸⁸ And yet for Nez Perce activist and intellectual Archie Phinney, this insight—that indigenous peoples are caught between a past they cannot revive and a modernity they cannot master—is his impetus to found the National Congress of American Indians and to travel to the Soviet Union to explore alternative modes of existence with modernity. Neither rooted to the West nor free of its legacy, Phinney looked to both global socialism and indigenous theories of self-determination to find a “way out” for tribes conscripted into modernity.

On the West Coast, the brutal history of California’s annexation became a crucial frame with which to narrate a violent wave of labor strikes in the agricultural fields of the San Joaquin Valley. Rather than interpret the con-

flict as solely a question of labor and capital, many, including Carlos Bulosan, Emma Tenayucam and Carey McWilliams, as well as anonymous writers and photographers for labor and socialist newspapers such as *Lucha Obrera*, *Agricultural Worker*, and *Western Worker* saw the pattern of landownership and vigilantism as a continuation of histories established by the seizure of the Southwest from Mexico in the 1840s. California as a space is thus rendered as a contact zone, a site of power not resolvable through the national-democratic means of citizenship. Many of the photographers and writers for labor and socialist newspapers explicitly tied the violence of the strikes to the violence of lynching, the occupation of the Philippines by the United States, and other imperial expressions of racial power. This narrative frame at once formed a counterdiscourse to the conservative sentimental nationalism of the New Deal, as well as reimagined labor in the U.S. West as inherently transnational, part of immigrant flows and colonial dislocations.

Indeed, the West became a major site of reevaluation in the 1930s. As Richard Slotkin notes in the third volume of his trilogy on the U.S. West, the high-budget film *Western* fell into a precipitous decline during the 1930s, to be replaced by the urban noble savage, the white-ethnic gangster.⁸⁹ Yet even as Slotkin suggests the A *Western* fell into decline, the emergence of the B *Western* focused on a West ruled by corrupt and powerful white men—“crooked bankers or politicians, or wealthy ranchers”—rather than “savage” Indians or desperate gangsters who must be subdued by the law.⁹⁰ This new West could be seen as a kind of anti-Turnerism, in which the individualistic “pioneer concept” is seen as merely the “saccharine frosting” to the “hysterical brutality” of conquest, or is transformed into a new collective man, as with John Steinbeck’s *Tom Joad*.⁹¹ The blacklisted 1954 film *Salt of the Earth* was the culmination not only of the Popular Front anti-imperialist movement, but also of two decades of critical writing about the West. Taking place in rural New Mexico, Mexican and Native American miners constitute the collective center of the film, challenging the land theft, racism, individualism, and private property on which U.S. settler colonialism relied. In focusing on miners who embody the many dispossessions of Spanish colonialism, Manifest Destiny, and the Cold War, *Salt* undermines the “U.S. West” as a discrete place or concept. Prefiguring José David Saldívar’s *Trans-Americanity*, the film marks the West less as a finite place or privileged site of U.S. nation building, than as a marked sector within a hemispheric system of capital formation.⁹² The many layers of development and dispossession in *Salt*—from the dispossessed Native American miners, to the Mexican American family on whose ranch the mine was illegally built, from the white sheriff and mine executive who speak the language of colonial paternalism and

violence, to the image of the West as a hub within the Cold War expansion of capital during the Korean War—these many expressions of hemispheric capitalism are shown as simultaneous, transnational, and ongoing. There is little coincidence that the reemergence of the “West” as a site of cultural identification in the 1950s—with high-profile Westerns, a politicized suburbia, and the return to frontier narratives of expansion and conquest—coincides with the political defeat of the Popular Front, and the erasure of its more radical anti-imperialist wing.

Emma Tenayuca’s 1939 essay “The Mexican Question in the Southwest” is perhaps the apex of theoretical writing on the U.S. West in the 1930s, fusing socialist internationalism and the transnational politics of the U.S./Mexico borderlands.⁹³ While Tenayuca is primarily remembered as a Tejana labor activist, her writings reflect a dual consciousness as one organizing simultaneously as a Mexican American and within movements that defined themselves as internationalist and working class. Published in *The Communist*, the Communist Party’s theoretical journal, “The Mexican Question” positions the Mexican American population as an internally colonized people and calls for cultural as well as political and economic recognition. As she outlines the dispossession of Mexican land, the marginalization of Mexican culture, the policing of Mexican citizens regardless of citizenship status, the deportation of labor organizers, and the lack of political representation and economic opportunity, she makes the deliberate argument that Mexican Americans, like other colonized peoples, suffer repression as a whole people in both cultural and economic terms, outside of the safeguards of citizenship and nationhood at all levels of identity formation. Yet the article stops short of calling for an independent nation for Mexican peoples in the Southwest, and argues that the fate of working-class people, regardless of race, is inexorably linked. Thus the essay identifies her as a colonial subject, a subject in exile, at the same time that it calls for full democratic rights and an alliance across race and citizenship status. To claim to be a citizen and a colonial subject is not a contradiction, but rather a precise analysis of the liminal and transnational space of an empire within a nation.

In this sense, anti-imperialism is not merely another name for internationalism, yet it does not eclipse it either. This double dislocation of the national subject was a key part of constructing an anti-imperialist modernist vision of stateless and multiethnic solidarity. Rather than the cosmopolitanism of the previous generation of modern writers, the images of grotesque and often violated bodies framed modern exile as one that emerges within conditions of imperial violence. Yet as Pease points out, such statelessness may also presage a utopian future, a “federation of diasporas” that challenge

state power in the name of a new collective vision. Anti-imperialist modernism includes both in its frame—the violence of the present and the possibility of a utopian future. We can think of anti-imperialist modernism as a kind of third term between the transnational and international—a utopian future in which to be both modern and free is no longer seen as a contradiction.

Lost Texts, Rough Drafts, Unassembled Archives: The Transnational as Countermemory

As historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us, what is remembered in a historical narrative is largely a function of power. Exercise of power not only dictates what narratives will or will not remain within the public sphere, but what accumulates as “fact”: archives, let alone histories, are produced at multiple points into which lasting and even permanent silences may be introduced.⁹⁴ The simple truth that one of the best single sources of information about the political, ethnic, and geographic depth and breadth of the Popular Front is the FBI’s 1948 list of subversive organizations says much about how power has shaped the history of that particular movement. Perhaps because of this, much of the post–Cold War recovery has naturalized the Popular Front’s own narrative about itself, developed at the same time most of its foremost figures were silenced, jailed, exiled, or forced to recant: that it was an “American” movement celebrating the United States’ most egalitarian traditions. As the narrative of C. L. R. James’s exile from the United States emphasized by Donald Pease suggests, not all subversions were blacklisted equally.

Numerous scholars of African American history, including Mary Dudziak, Glenda Gilmore, Penny Von Eschen, Thomas Borstelmann, and Carol Anderson, have noted that it was precisely the internationalism of the previous decade that the FBI and state department found so threatening. While mainstream rights organizations like the NAACP were able to gain short-term benefits from giving tacit support to U.S. foreign policy objectives, ultimately, these historians argue, this policy effectively severed black American struggle for civil rights from issues of anticolonialism and racism abroad. Indeed, as Penny Von Eschen points out, “race” and “racism” ceased to be, as they were earlier understood, global terms.⁹⁵ Labor underwent a similar revision of definition, as “international” unions and left political parties equally faced systematic repression, and international solidarity movements were shut down or reformulated to suit State Department and Pentagon needs, so

much so that the AFL-CIO often became an active agent in CIA campaigns in Latin America, Africa, and eastern Europe. Travel itself became suspect; to the Soviet Union naturally, but also travel to Spain, to the Caribbean, to Latin America, China. Perhaps the most telling fact about the Cold War red scare is that the McCarran Act of 1950 not only revoked the passport and citizenship of anyone belonging to “subversive organizations,” but tightened the alien exclusion and deportation laws to include “subversives” as well.

Of course, silence is not merely a negation; it is also generative. As Barbara Foley describes in *Wrestling with the Left*, Ralph Ellison did not merely efface his earlier commitments to the Left when he (re)wrote *Invisible Man*, they were refashioned into an entire discourse that privileged “complexity” over “reductionism,” “ambivalence” over “commitment,” “fluidity” over oppositional categories such as “race” or “class,” embracing many of the Cold War narratives about socialism.⁹⁶ Early Cold War films repeatedly touched on Popular Front themes such as the dignity of labor, inter- and transnational solidarity, democracy, antifascism, and racial pluralism through Westerns such as *Shane* and *The Magnificent Seven*; latent anticommunist films such as *Viva Zapata!* and *On the Waterfront*; and epics such as *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben-Hur* to reinscribe such themes within a nationalist and patriotic frame. Film noirs such as *They Clash by Night*, *Asphalt Jungle*, and *Out of the Past* often represented such values only to suggest that they belong to a lost and nostalgized past, reimagining the Popular Front era as a white, rural, laboring subject, projecting a repressed utopian desire for the Lincoln Republic, for an age that now deems it out of reach. Even left-wing filmmakers such as Orson Welles recast anti-imperialist bonds of solidarity in films such as *Touch of Evil* and *The Lady from Shanghai* as sites of danger and/or forbidden desire.

Alan Wald refers to the process of external repression and internal revision as “deradicalization,” the generative way in which conversions from left to right generate new narratives and new analyses.⁹⁷ One of the most surprising examples—if not the most telling—was blacklisted filmmakers Herbert Biberman and Paul Jarrico’s heavily redacted *Salt of Earth*. A film that documents a miners’ strike at the peak of the Cold War, it represents the resistance of a Mexican American community to the racism, sexism, and class oppression intensified by the onset of the Cold War’s emergent security state. In addition to removing scenes that mineworkers felt either improperly portrayed their community or reinforced negative stereotypes (scenes of the lead mineworker drinking or having an affair, for instance), the committee also removed references to the anticommunism of local officials and the mine

executives, as well as to references to the Korean War and U.S. imperialism. While no record is left as to exactly why these changes were made, it is likely that the pressures felt by civil rights activists and labor unions to prove their patriotism were also felt by the mineworkers' union, a union that had been recently thrown out of the CIO and repeatedly raided and rebaited by other unions for refusing to make its officers sign Taft-Hartley anticommunist oaths.

Examining the way in which even radical filmmakers and a left-wing union felt compelled to revise a film along less international lines powerfully suggests the way in which such international commitments of a previous generation were revised. Such a consistent and pervasive revision of the Popular Front not only reinforced state department and FBI suppression of left-wing internationalism, it reframed a particular memory of one of the most constitutive features of the Popular Front imaginary. The silence entered into the historical record of the Popular Front was, in a Foucauldian fashion, also a proliferation, not merely a repression.⁹⁸ By “remembering” the Popular Front as a lost Lincoln Republic, a reactionary figure such as Ronald Reagan may invoke heartland populism in the name of a more aggressive security and military state. In this way, he came to be seen by many left intellectuals as the inheritor of the Popular Front at the same time he set in motion the destruction of its remaining social legacy.⁹⁹

In the context of Cold War repression, we can take such works as Michael Denning's *Cultural Front*, Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations*, and Robin Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe* as not merely new theories on the long 1930s, but the construction of a new archive, the interruption of the process of historical narrative. *Anti-Imperialist Modernism* is the attempt to produce a similar interruption in the historical sensibility of the 20th century. As Foley notes, written into much postmodern and New Left theory is a latent anticommunism. Yet also written into the assumptions of postmodern and post-New Left theory in the United States is the belief in social progress, that cultural and political movements in the United States have become *more* egalitarian, *more* transnational, *more* open to questions of difference, *more* sophisticated in the way questions of whiteness, empire, power, and sexuality are addressed. While there is no question that the United States has become more open to many questions of difference within the public sphere since the 1930s—especially along fault lines of race, sexuality, and domesticity—there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that contemporary social movements along questions of race, militarism, and empire have lost a focus on inter- and transnational solidarity, as well as institutional and material means to con-

nect these issues to the daily lives of working people and the imaginary of artists and intellectuals.

Anti-Imperialist Modernism is thus in part a collection of lost texts—newspapers with brief print runs, pamphlets, rough drafts, and books long out of print that I hope can do more than simply fill in gaps in history. They are rather attempts to restore an entire web of connections, an imaginary of a generation of social and intellectual activists. That Cuba was a major site of the cultural imaginary of the 1930s is simply not available within the currently circulating texts from the 1930s. And yet the “darling of the Left” in the 1930s, Clifford Odets, visited Cuba as part of a delegation of activists, labor officials, and church groups; authored a pamphlet with well-known journalist Carleton Beals; and went on a speaking tour with ACLU president Roger Baldwin and poet Archibald MacLeish after his arrest by Cuban authorities, all of which became the basis for an unpublished play he worked on from 1936 to 1938. And Josephine Herbst’s last novel in the Trexler trilogy, *Rope of Gold*, ends in Cuba, with the final chapters largely based on a series of articles she wrote for the *New Masses* about a revolutionary sugar cooperative in the Sierra Maestra. And the “Hands off Cuba” campaign staged rallies and passed local resolutions condemning U.S. intervention, after the election of Ramón St. Grau was met with U.S. warships and a velvet coup. Considering these facts also allows us to reconsider why the only novel Hemingway publicized as “political” was set in Cuba and the Florida Keys. Or more centrally to the multiethnic coalitions of the Popular Front, why Langston Hughes might credit his collaboration with Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén with changing his perspective on the global roots of African American poetry; or for Clifford Odets, why going to Cuba seemed a necessary part of his political awakening after he had already established himself as the preeminent playwright of the U.S. Left.

More than encourage us to reconsider a few authors, a site like Cuba alters the entire narrative of the Popular Front. Locating a site of political desire, multiethnic solidarity, and national critique outside of U.S. national borders in an unofficial colony of the United States does more than simply construct transcultural connections. It radically questions the national frame proposed by theorists like Kenneth Burke, and radically alters the cultural memory of the decade that is based on themes of national belonging. To locate a movement in Cuba is not to align with another country so much as to suggest the United States was always already there, and the colonies must be recognized and included. Much like C. L. R. James recentering the Enlightenment in the Haitian Revolution, so recentering an antifascist movement to

the colonies suggests that “the fight for democracy” may indeed be the global fight against imperialism that begins not with European democracy but with European imperialism. For authors like Odets and Herbst as well, such works also crucially interrogate their own racial identities. Odets’s “Cuba play” implicitly criticized the assimilation of Jewish Americans by questioning whether ethnic American dialect—so recognizable a part of the “new American culture” of the 1930s—may be part of the imperial project just as much as weapons or sugar. For Herbst, the last chapter of *Rope of Gold* is not just a statement of solidarity with Cuban socialists; it is also an excavation of her own family history intertwined with myths of Manifest Destiny. By going south to Cuba, she is forced to retrace her own family’s footsteps from the West and confront her own implication in the U.S. imperial project.

Anti-Imperialist Modernism thus rethinks the intersecting histories of cultural modernism and the Popular Front, and in doing so, asks how these histories also help us to rethink the legacy of transnational and anti-imperialist thought in the United States. Framing such historical and cultural connections can help in the formation of a comparative multiethnic approach to U.S. literature, providing conceptual bridges among African American, Native American, Asian American, and Mexican American literatures, especially along shared lineages of empire and transnational racial affinities. Looking at the way in which African American writers and activists saw the Spanish Civil War in the context of European colonialism can help us to reconsider the ways in which people of color in the United States claimed the discourse of antifascism for their own critiques of Western empire: Mexican American antifascists who saw the agribusiness vigilantes within the tradition of U.S. colonialism of Mexican land, or Filipino American activists who saw the violence of the growers’ associations in the light of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines. Tropes such as racial violence, migration, and militarism can also be seen as attempts to theorize the ways in which multiethnic literature and transnational anti-imperialism can be linked. Again, considering the violence in a novel like *Native Son* as a way to theorize African American nationalism has implications for how we read a Native American text like D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded*.

For whatever faults and shortcomings the Popular Front period may have had, it should be remembered that it is to date the only U.S. social movement to raise an integrated socialist army to fight overseas—the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Yet the meaning of that event has still to be fully recovered. When the global justice movement exploded onto the streets of Seattle and into the public discourse over a decade ago, it was with optimism but also distress that the sudden focus on empire and the transnational flows of labor was

perceived as “new.” Or when activists traveled to Chiapas to work with the Zapatistas in the late 1990s, there was little if any memory of the decades of cross-border cultural and political exchange that had gone before. Considering anti-imperialist modernism as a possible site of past examples to learn from can guide current and future activists who wish to create bonds of solidarity across spatial and cultural borders. The absorption of postmodern organizing strategies, based on affinity groups, action networks, and social technologies, avoids many of the problems of hierarchy and statism of which Popular Front movements have been accused. Yet such strategies also construct the fiction of a permanent present, in which movements spring up as their own *causa sui*, without the need for a complex history or the difficulties of institutional presence. And yet the fiction of the political present is almost a necessity, considering the violence to history the Cold War security state has forced upon our cultural memory. While the transnational movements from the late 1920s to the Cold War were far from perfect, the scope, ambition, and the transformational power of the long Popular Front can be appreciated in the current absence of such movements. For cultural producers, considering the way these intellectuals imagined transnational bonds of affinity can provide examples and solutions for the representational problems of empire and spatial fragmentation that face us now.

Chapter 1 begins *Anti-Imperialist Modernism* with Clifford Odets’s journey to Havana in 1935 to document labor abuses on U.S.-owned sugar plantations in Cuba, during which he was arrested before he even stepped onshore and was held for nearly two days in a military prison. As the most famous playwright of the 1930s and one of the founders of U.S. proletarian theater, that Cuba loomed large in his imagination—spurring him to write a play, numerous articles, and engage in a speaking tour—suggests a great deal about the prominence of anti-imperialist thought among the “populist” Left. Inspired by Cuba’s long history of antiracist and anti-imperialist movements, Langston Hughes and Josephine Herbst also traveled to Cuba to envision a mestizo America based on egalitarian multiethnic solidarity—Herbst writing about socialist farming collectives on the island, and Hughes collaborating with Nicolás Guillén to formulate a postnationalist radical politics. For all three writers, Cuba emerged as a way to reconceive of their national and racial identities in relationship to a U.S. imperial project.

For a time at least, Odets engaged in a critical dialogue with what is his artistic calling card, U.S. white-ethnic identity, locating ways in which this ethnic Americanism so central to the “Age of the CIO” was conscripted into a U.S. colonial project. Herbst equally reconceives of her “American” identity, writing in *Rope of Gold* about how a “Mid-Western farm girl” could see

that the same processes of capital accumulation that removed Native Americans and entrapped Cubans in poverty also ended up foreclosing her parents' farm. Rather than see Cuba as a site that she must "save" as an Anglo-American, she emerges with a narrative of self-reflexive mutuality and solidarity. For Hughes, traveling to Cuba culminates in a process that at once reaffirms his diasporic sense of racial identity—he sees the world through "negro eyes"—yet also destabilizes his faith in American-centered black nationalism. This dual racial sensibility, at once affirming a unique racial subjectivity while also denying it a privileged space, blood quantum, or body, echoes Paul Gilroy's formation of racial "routes" rather than "roots" and Michelle Anne Stephens's conception of an empowered black imaginary that has a hemispheric rather than national site of identification.¹⁰⁰

In chapter 2 I consider how the large volume of texts in the 1930s and 1940s on the Haitian Revolution and the global protests over the imprisonment of Haitian novelist Jacques Roumain became a way to reorient, literally and figuratively, a modernist aesthetic that was formed on the backs of African bodies. By imagining African-descended bodies as the "other" to both modernism and modernity, modernist artists and intellectuals imagined an escape from the hyperrationality of modernity through an exoticized (and often eroticized) primitive body. C. L. R. James contradicts this "modernist primitivism" by locating the origins of modernity not in western Europe but in the colonies, and thus the African-descended slave as the "most modern" worker in an increasingly globalized proletariat. Deploying textual strategies of sensation, estrangement, dialectical imagery, and temporal dislocation, James authors the Haitian Revolution as a modernist text to reconstruct an anticolonial vision of "subaltern" modernity. Pairing James's text with Orson Welles's unmade *Heart of Darkness*, I examine how Welles reappropriates the "ur-text of modernism" to argue that fascism is not an aberration but rather the colonial logic of race and power collapsed back upon the metropole. Thus both texts locate the origins of modernity in the colonial project, and suggest that fascism—not democracy—is the end point of a modern world founded on exploitation and racial hierarchy.

Continuing to think about questions of modernity within the context of the U.S. empire, my third chapter engages with the way Native American radicals both incorporated and also reinvented ideas of radical modernity for their own claims of self-determination. Nez Perce anthropologist Archie Phinney traveled to the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s, looking as many writers and intellectuals of color did at the time for a modernity not based on the racial exclusions of the West. Examining his published and unpublished writings on the Soviet Union while he studied Soviet indigenous policy both

in Leningrad and in Siberia, I suggest that Phinney, like many intellectuals of color in the 1930s, saw transnational socialism as a possible means to achieve both racial and national liberation, as well as a methodology to understand his contradictory relationship with the modern world. Putting Phinney's work in the context of both the small number of Native American Communists in the 1930s and other modern Native American writers such as D'Arcy McNickle, I suggest that an anti-imperialist modernism became the way for both to work through a modern social order that both excluded and yet demanded their presence. McNickle's 1936 novel *The Surrounded* focuses on a biracial character who is both a successful model of postcolonial hybridity and a victim of the racial-carceral state, staging a narrative of multicultural inclusion and white racial violence as simultaneous if unresolved outcomes to the new state apparatus of the New Deal. Rather than see Native American writing as separate from political movements of the 1930s, I argue that both writers were crucially informed by other socialist and minority discourses on black nationalism and alternative modernities. Or rather, for victims of U.S. empire, the national is always already the transnational.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I think about how concepts of Manifest Destiny were thoroughly revised in the 1930s. Focusing on social movements and representations of California, I explore how visual and literary stagings of sensational racial violence in California were employed to critique the sentimental nationalism of John Steinbeck and the Farm Security Administration photographs of Dorothea Lange. Employing photographs of "terror" in English- and Spanish-language labor and socialist newspapers such as *Lucha Obrera* and *UCAPAWA News*, these photographs linked acts of violence against farmworkers in the United States with antifascist and anti-imperialist struggles abroad. Such images formed a central counterdiscourse to the patriarchal and nationally and racially bound images produced by the Farm Security Administration and Hollywood film studios. And like the play authored by Odets, these images of violated and wounded bodies created a sensational and experimental language to describe transnational affiliations and bodies, linking violence in the United States to colonialism abroad.

Rather than read California as part of the American nation, I continue in the following chapter to focus on the way three intellectuals, Emma Tenayuca, Carey McWilliams, and Carlos Bulosan framed the state as imperial space, a site of conflict intersected by transnational flows of capital and labor. Bulosan constructs California through travel, writing of the contact with the Pacific Ocean as a continuous imperial arc of U.S. power that stretches from Washington, D.C., to the Philippines. For McWilliams and Tenayuca, California and the Southwest are still "outposts of empire," to use McWilliams's

phrase, in which the conquest of Mexico and the industrial scope of agriculture function to render the “Lincoln Republic” of a producers’ democracy impossible. This visual and rhetorical system of representation allowed both English- and Spanish-language activists in California to link their local struggles with struggles by connecting forms of violence directed against workers in the United States with those inflicted on raced subjects abroad. In doing so, these writers, activists, and scholars produced a transnational, modernist subject that shared a common history united through dislocation, migration, and rupture.

Chapter 6, my final chapter, investigates the way the Cold War both suppressed and reshaped the public imaginary of the transnational Popular Front, using film to explore the production of a sanitized, nationalist 1930s nostalgia. My argument centers on archived revisions of the blacklisted film *Salt of the Earth*, citing the way the constraints of the Cold War limited what was initially a film that was transnational in scope. Thus we can consider the ways the Cold War erased the anti-imperialist commitments of the Popular Front era through HUAC and other state and corporate apparatuses, and we can see how the very adherents of the movement themselves rewrote Popular Front to defend against attacks of “un-Americanness.” I also argue that film noir, while critical of Cold War domesticity, reified a conservative vision of the Popular Front era, often by representing Popular Front themes of labor, collectivity, and anticapitalist modes of existence as sealed off in the past or as fragments of an agrarian American past.

At stake is a historical question about the meaning of the Popular Front as a political and aesthetic movement. Rewriting the cultural history of the 1930s and 1940s allows us to consider both the lineages and the precursors of current left movements, suggesting ways in which the Occupy Wall Street movement and opposition to the Iraq War and the World Trade Organization may have broadened analysis in some areas while narrowing them in others. Such a reading also allows for often isolated or differentiated strands of analysis—the literary, the political, race, capitalism, the nation—to be placed within the pressure and test of political praxis. And recovering such movements also allows us to consider larger questions about the meaning of empire, precisely as many of the intellectuals and activists in this era were debating whether empire was reducible to capitalism; if fighting racism was equivalent to or a precursor to fighting empire; if the changing role of the U.S. empire in the 20th century required different strategies of resistance; if there is a privileged body or site of resistance; what role the Left plays in national liberation movements and Native American self-determination—questions we are still grappling with seventy years later. That these questions

were spoken through the language of transnational socialism, Marxism, and the lived experience of the Soviet Union doesn't suggest that they are better questions, just perhaps different ones than are commonly asked today, and thus provocative. And the same could be said for modernism—that it was an artistic language of global liberation can suggest a more dialectical approach toward art and literature, and ask us if other aesthetic movements can also be seen as products of and responses to their imperial context.