Literature, Law, and Rhetorical Performance in the Anticolonial Atlantic

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Introduction

THIS BOOK TRACES a long history of fierce, creative, and distinctly literary responses to a North Atlantic legal imagination in the work of anticolonial African and Caribbean writers. From Haiti’s early-nineteenth-century founding texts to late-twentieth-century postcolonial language manifestoes, these texts undertake subversive experiments with First World state and international legal forms.

In the wake of decolonization—beginning with the independence of the Atlantic world’s first black nation-state in 1804 and continuing through the dissolution of Europe’s overseas empires in the wake of World War II—First World political texts and institutions have provided inspiration for anticolonial thinkers while simultaneously proving to be powerful tools for the perpetuation of empire in a postcolonial era. Colonized peoples, who for centuries had served as legal objects and subjects, now gained widespread recognition as legitimate authors of international and state law. Yet the legal texts and institutions that helped grant decolonized nations their political autonomy were usually crafted by a small elite in conjunction with the country’s former rulers, and often did little to reconfigure colonial economic and political power relations. Law has served both emancipatory and oppressive functions in Africa and the Caribbean, offering newly independent states and their citizens the means of asserting political legibility while also reinforcing colonial structures.
of rule and fostering new forms of economic and political dependency in a
decolonized, but hardly postcolonial, world.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines, C. L. R. James, Aimé Césaire, the organizers of
South Africa's Congress of the People Campaign, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and
Édouard Glissant confront these paradoxes of law as an institutional reality
and imaginative project in revolutionary modernity. Across a wide range of
genres—literary, legal, and otherwise—their work draws on the cosmopolitan
aspirations and the emancipatory potential of the Western juridico-political
declaration, while also exposing First World law's complicity with imperial rule. Critically engaging the experimental forms through which a
modern international community came into being, these writers have asked,
and sought new answers to, the question: Who gets to "write" the law, and
under what circumstances? Their work constitutes a provocative anticolonial
Atlantic tradition of rhetorical performance, a tradition whose critical com­
ment on a Western juridico-political imagination has vital implications for
our not-quite-postcolonial present.

ANTICOLONIAL ROMANCE, RHETORICAL
PERFORMANCE, AND POSTCOLONIAL
"SUCCESS" NARRATIVES

In Literature, Law, and Rhetorical Performance in the Anticolonial Atlantic I
read comparatively across a broad range of aspirational, future-oriented,
often utopian works of African and Caribbean anticolonialism. These texts
audaciously envision and attempt to enact new political identities that were
well beyond the realm of possibility in a colonial/imperial imagination. They
thus lend credence to David Scott's proposal in Conscripts of Modernity that
romance is the "mode of emplotment" best suited to anticolonialism, a move­
ment which, he explains, produces "narratives of overcoming, often narra­
tives of vindication; they have tended to enact a distinctive rhythm and pac­
ing, a distinctive direction, and to tell stories of salvation and redemption.
They have largely depended upon a certain (utopian) horizon toward which
the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving" (7–8). Romance sig­
nals an expectation on the part of colonized peoples that their struggle for
freedom will end in success—that a liberatory postcolonial future is nigh, and
that the path to that future entails committed, organized resistance. Romance,
as configured by Scott, points to the ambition and audacity of anticolonial­
ism as an imaginative project—a project whose scope certainly encompassed
the pressing goal of political independence for colonized peoples in the

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mid-twentieth century, but for which liberation also had psychic and ontological dimensions.

"Romance" also has a second, more specific resonance in my study. The anticolonial writers to whom I attend make strategic use of what I am calling a romance of rhetorical performance—the fiction of reproducing the conditions of a live, declarative speech-act in textual form. They are what J. L. Austin, in his 1962 *How to Do Things with Words*, identifies as illocutionary acts—utterances, either oral or written, that do something through the act of saying something. These texts are imagined, and often seem to imagine themselves, as events in time. They self-consciously strive to imitate—and, indeed, even stand in for—live declarative performances; they aim to simultaneously name, instantiate, and legitimize new postcolonial political communities on the basis of their own authority alone. I argue that this romance of rhetorical performance is fundamental to the anticolonial project; it is also, more broadly, fundamental to revolutionary modernity, in which the written juridico-political declaration has served a privileged genre of articulating political legibility.

Revolutions, Hannah Arendt observes at the outset of her study of the French and North American revolutions of the late eighteenth century, "are the only political events which confront us directly with the problem of beginning" (*On Revolution* 21). Revolution marks the suspension of an existing legal order, a temporality in which the founding violence of a new political authority becomes possible. And in the revolutionary North Atlantic world of the late eighteenth century, written declarations served as a means of confronting this problem of founding authority in spectacular fashion. Documents such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the French *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* are rhetorically risky texts, asserting the existence of a political order that has yet to take shape while also asserting their own authority to declare a new political order into existence in the first place.

Tasked with the burden of endowing political legibility upon communities whose humanity was at best ignored and more often actively denied by the architects of North Atlantic juridico-political modernity, anticolonial writers have radically appropriated and transformed these newly emergent declarative genres of First World law. Their rendering of legibility, visibility, and authority to black subjects within the postcolonial political communities they envision takes place at the level of content—through, for example, the 1805 Haitian Constitution's explicit insistences on blackness as a qualification for national citizenship rather than as the basis for its exclusion. But their more radical disruption to a First World juridico-political imagination takes place at the level of form. Caribbean and African anticolonial declarations are characterized by an intense preoccupation with the precarity and radical potential of the...
declaration’s association with live performance. Public oath-takings, community meetings, and declarations made by charismatic leaders to crowds of revolutionary masses often appear as prominent contexts for (or narrated events within) these documents. They seek to answer the question of how to instanti­ate a truly postcolonial political community in real time but also in perpetua; they aim to bridge what Jacques Derrida identifies as the unbridgeable gap between the constative and the performative, the “are” and the “ought to be” of the declaration of independence, in order to usher in a postcolonial future that remains powerfully connected to its revolutionary anticolonial past.

Of course, there is nothing inherently liberatory about anticolonial revolution or its forms of articulation. Revolutionary declarations are also acts of force through which the legitimacy of the old political order is decimated and claims for a new one are made; indeed, as Derrida argues in a later essay, the force of law and the performance of that force through language are always one and the same. Law is not merely a “docile instrument” of force but also “a performative and therefore interpretive violence” (“Force of Law” 241). The revolutionary declaration not only provides the language through which to render legible a new political order but also serves as a means of obfuscating the inherent instability and illegitimacy of that order. Declaring independence or human rights—in writing or out loud—does not guarantee that independence will be achieved, nor that human rights will be protected. For Arendt, post-Revolutionary France offers an especially devastating example of revolutionary constituting gone wrong; its 1791 constitution “remained a piece of paper, of more interest to the learned and the experts than to the people. Its authority was shattered even more before it went into effect, and it was followed in quick succession by one constitution after another until, in an avalanche of constitutions lasting deep into our own century, the very notion of constitution disintegrated beyond recognition” (On Revolution 125).

At first glance, the history of decolonization seems to tell a similar story: early independence constitutions (from Haiti in 1805 up through the first decades of African postcolonialism) tended to alienate the general population from participation in the process of lawmaking and constituting and was characterized by rapid constitutional turnover and periods of emergency suspension. Postcolonial states have proved largely incapable of combating the continuation of imperial rule by other means—the transformation of a colonized elite into a neocolonial ruling class with no interest in the redistribution of economic or political power in postcolonial society; aggressive efforts by Western governments, businesses, and financial institutions to undermine attempts to nationalize industry and natural resources; and the imposition of a draconian debt structure on the countries of the Global South. Indeed, law—both state
and international—has often facilitated these very betrayals of the anticolonial vision in the years and decades following independence. Late-twentieth-century African and Caribbean constitutional history seems to serve as ready proof of the widespread failure of the romantic aspirations of the anticolonial project.

It is my sense that the field of postcolonial studies has tended to over-emphasize this narrative of the failures of the anticolonial project at the expense of more closely examining the implications of its various kinds of successes. Certainly the reality of decolonization and independence fell short of the emancipatory dreams of anticolonialism in many ways; and certainly, anticolonial-turned-post-independence writers of the 1960s and '70s registered this situation in their work, realizing, as Neil Lazarus puts it in his 1990 *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction*, “that something had gone terribly wrong” with the national liberation project in the years following decolonization (18). There is nothing wrong, on its own, with this pointing out the disappointments and even disasters experienced by African, Caribbean, and Asian countries in the late twentieth century. The problem, as Lazarus himself asserts twenty years later in his 2011 *Postcolonial Unconscious*, is that this narrative has become an automatic and shorthand account of how postcolonial studies frames the relationship between the anticolonial past and the post-independence present. The institutionalization of postcolonial studies within the Western academy was predicated on the “decisive defeat of liberationist ideologies” (9), a ready and uncritical acceptance of the untenability of the anticolonial project after decolonization. The resulting perspective on this literary-historical period has been clumsy and stultifying: “Scholars in the field have evidently not known how—other than through ... wholesale repudiation—to account for the setbacks and defeats of the post-independence years, and more particularly for the stupefying violence and criminality of postcolonial governance” (69). Overstating the extent, the finality, and most importantly the implications of the failures of anticolonialism for the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has had negative consequences—including, Ania Loomba argues, the creation of some uncomfortable overlap with contemporary neoliberal narratives that justify the perpetuation of an unequal geopolitical order in which the Global North remains the winner. And disenchantment with national liberation movements, nationalism, and the nation-state as a unit of meaningful political articulation give way to an uncritical celebration of globalization, hybridity, and postcolonialism as a discursive condition rather than material history. As Benita Parry has noted, the field of postcolonial studies has depoliticized and dehistoricized by quietly but deliberately distancing itself from anticolonial critique (6–7).
failure to interrogate what we mean by anticolonialism's "failure" is particularly unfortunate given the ways in which postcolonialism seems to be losing traction as a necessary critical term in the early twenty-first century, overshadowed by a new emphasis on globalization, empire as a networked entirely de-territorialized entity, and the degradation of the nation-state as the site of meaningful politics. Our postcolonial present calls for more engagement with the anticolonial past, not less. As Jennifer Wenzel observed in her 2007 contribution to an MLA roundtable on the state of the field of postcolonial theory in the new century, "If the era of postcolonial studies is over, it ends just when the need for historically informed critiques of imperialism could not be more urgent" (Yaeger 634). And as Lazarus insists, a richer and more complex account of the post-independence era is all the more essential given the ways in which post-9/11 geopolitics "have demonstrably rejoined the twenty-first century to a long and as yet unbroken history, wrongly supposed by postcolonial theory to have come to a close circa 1975" (Postcolonial Unconscious 15).

Thus argues for the centrality of anticolonial critique to postcolonial studies by attending to the geohistorical and rhetorical specificity of the anticolonial archive. If revolutionary rhetorical performance is precarious, it is also potentially innovative and creative, enriching their audiences' imaginations with novel visions of what political community and justice might look like. In this book, I resist the assumption that the "success" or "failure" of any given text is dictated by whether the exact vision that text charts for the postcolonial future came to pass as anticipated. Many of the texts I explore contain utopian aspirations that do not materialize according to their authors' exact expectations or desires. But their capacity to disrupt predominant ways of thinking and talking about political community is not limited to authorial intent. I read anticolonial literature (broadly construed to include texts that do not readily qualify as "literary") not teleologically—that is, directed at a single, zero-sum postcolonial future that either is or is not brought about—but rather constellationally, as a collection of disruptions to the form of a First World juridico-political imagination, disruptions that continue to take place in the so-called postcolonial era. The African and Caribbean declarative texts I examine are "successful" in the sense that they reconfigure the contours of a liberatory juridico-political imagination for the Global South. They challenge the racism that is inherent in the exclusionary terms of authorship and authority that underlie First World law. They propose alternative ways of conceiving of representation, participation, and political belonging in a postcolonial world yet to come. And they suggest unusual and unexpected uses for the quasi-legal discourses of human rights and humanitarianism that dominate a Western
imagination of the Global South in the twenty-first century—discourses that have radical potential, though they have often been deployed in the service of empire in the post-independence era.

THE ANTICOLONIAL BLACK ATLANTIC

My use of the term "black Atlantic," and my conception of the Atlantic as a geohistorical framework for the textual traditions I explore in this book require some explanation, as in some important respects they work against the grain of much of the scholarship that makes use of these same concepts. The Atlantic is a privileged space in the history of the development of the genres of First World juridico-political modernity—the revolutionary declarations of the late eighteenth century, and then, in the mid-twentieth century, the charters and declarations through which postwar international institutions and legal norms came into being. The title of the Atlantic Charter, the Allied Powers' first articulation of a post–World War II international community, indicates the extent to which the (North) Atlantic would serve as the stage for the conception and creation of postwar international institutions as well as their founding texts. These juridico-political documents of course circulated more widely, and twentieth-century internationalisms were meant to aspire to global inclusivity and avoid privileging one region over others. Nonetheless, the distinctly Atlantic history of Western modernity—with its origins in European overseas exploration, colonial occupation, trade in human cargo, and imperialism—continues to exert pressure on our "globalized" present in any number of ways.

This European and North American genealogy of juridico-political modernity has always coexisted and interacted with what Paul Gilroy has famously identified as a black Atlantic counterculture, one that confronted and challenged Enlightenment thought's long-standing complicity with the "racial terror of colonialism and slavery" that it helped to perpetuate (Black Atlantic 39). Gilroy's 1990 Black Atlantic and its nuanced assessment of the terms under which black writers and artists engage Western philosophical traditions is fundamental to how I approach the work of African and Caribbean writers. And like most postcolonial scholarship produced in the wake of Gilroy's study, my work is informed by his insight that the magnitude of this "counterculture of modernity" only comes into full view through the transnational, transregional, geohistorical scope of Atlantic space. Gilroy's is a "transversal" reading practice, one that remains responsive and responsible to the historical violence through which black Atlantic culture is linked, while also
recognizing the ways in which those links demand comparative analysis in excess of traditional national and regional frames. Literature, Law, and Rhetorical Performance in the Anticolonial Atlantic aspires to an equally reflective and capacious comparative methodology.

Beyond those two crucial insights, however, the "black Atlantic" I have in mind in this book departs from Gilroy’s model in two key senses. First and foremost, I attend to geographical contexts that Gilroy’s study—which focuses almost exclusively on African diasporics living in the Global North—sidelines and even ignores. Here I seek to de-exceptionalize Africa in a black Atlantic critical frame, identifying and comparatively exploring experimental appropriations of the declarative forms that emerge from African and Caribbean contexts. Further, the anticolonial Atlantic world that I explore in this book is characterized less exclusively by its melancholic relationship with the slave trade and slavery (though certainly that experience is integral to the historical imaginations of many of the writers I discuss) and more by active networks of resistance that prompt solidarities—both real and imagined—across regional and linguistic boundaries. Brent Hayes Edwards’s privileging of internationalist networks of exchange over more passive versions of diasporic cultural formation is thus especially useful to me in thinking through the paradoxical, uneven, and aesthetically complex means by which black intellectuals have attempted to imagine political solidarities. In The Practice of Diaspora, Edwards’s critical mapping of mid-twentieth-century cultural and political forms of black transnationalism across Africa and the Americas leads to his crucial insight that “the cultures of black internationalism can be seen only in translation”—that is, as aspiring to solidarity but consistently encountering the problem of how to translate across contexts that are differentiated by nation, region, language, genre, and gender. While working with a different (if occasionally overlapping) archive, Literature, Law, and Rhetorical Performance takes inspiration from Edwards’s insights about the connections between seemingly nation- or race-based conceptions of political community and black internationalisms, as well as his identification of imperfection, failure, and mistranslation as constitutive and productive parts of a twentieth-century black political imagination.

A black internationalist critical framework also helps explain how and why the African contexts to which I attend in this study call for an especially expansive and flexible, and occasionally counterintuitive, conception of "Atlantic" space. Incorporating both Africa and anticolonial history into a black Atlantic critical framework raises questions about the meaning and utility of that framework’s geographical scope: anticolonial projects took place across the continent in the mid-twentieth century, and they did so as
part of transnational, transregional, and transoceanic networks of exchange. As Edwards and other scholars, such as Cedric Robinson, have shown, transatlantic routes of discursive and material exchange are and always have been constitutive of black internationalism. Caribbean and African liberation movements have long been in conversation, and attuned to the historical confluences of colonial occupation and exploitation of black labor. The Caribbean texts, writers, and historical circumstances to which I attend in the book are easy to place within black internationalist, anticolonial, and Gilroyian black Atlantic critical frames all at once. And writers such as James and Fanon, whose political involvement with African decolonization was central and explicit in their work, offer up one important model for understanding the intellectual and political borrowings that take place across African and Caribbean contexts. Moreover, South Africa, the site of creation for the 1955 Freedom Charter, which I discuss in my fourth chapter, boasts not only a geographically obvious connection to the Atlantic but also a well-established history of transatlantic cultural and political exchange with other colonial and postcolonial locales. However, the same cannot be said for Algeria and Kenya, whose decolonization struggles I attend to in chapter 5, and which have no straightforward ties to the history of transatlantic slavery that grounds the black Atlantic of Gilroy's study. In this chapter, as with the other portions of the book that attend to African contexts, my primary interest lies with the strong imaginative, discursive, and political ties between Africa and other parts of the Atlantic world. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's intellectual biography, and the transatlantic exchanges that have been constitutive of his life and writing career, elucidate the importance of these ties. No writers were more central to his aesthetic and political development, in the 1960s, than George Lamming and Frantz Fanon; and from early on, he would seek to draw connections in his critical writing between the settler colonialism that took place in Kenya and the other forms of racial exploitation facilitated by colonial rule in other parts of the world. Moreover, after his arrest and imprisonment by the Moi government for his subversive populist community theater work in the late 1970s, Ngũgĩ left Kenya and spent the next thirty years of his career living mainly in the United States and England, thus joining a new generation of African diasporics whose journeys abroad were spurred by an entirely different set of historical conditions for which Gilroy's conceptual framework offers no explanation. I thus have no qualms about identifying Ngũgĩ, in particular, as a black Atlantic anticolonial intellectual, one whose work points to the necessity of incorporating multiple diasporic experiences, as well as a rich and complex history of transnational political and aesthetic experimentation, into that critical framework.
**LAW AND LITERATURE IN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS**

*Literature, Law, and Rhetorical Performance in the Anticolonial Atlantic* draws on a rich and growing body of contemporary multidisciplinary scholarship that has interrogated the relationship between law and postcoloniality. I am first and foremost indebted to the insights of legal theorists and historians who, against the backdrop of a proliferation of popular and scholarly depictions of late-twentieth-century international institutions as triumphs of a new era of global cooperation guided by a collective belief in human rights, have exposed the long-standing complicity between international law and empire. In his 2005 *Imperialism, Sovereignty and International Law*, Antony Anghie has made a compelling case for locating international law's origins in the earliest years of colonial exploration and encounter, identifying in Francisco Vitoria's sixteenth-century lectures on the legal basis for Spain's authority over (and seizure of land and resources from) the Saracen Indians a "dynamic of difference" (4) between civilized and uncivilized peoples of the world. This dynamic, Anghie argues, persists across four and a half centuries of colonial and imperial rule, and continues to be integral to the institutional and philosophical underpinnings of international law, under new rubrics, in an early-twenty-first-century global order. Revisionist histories of international law such as Anghie's inform my own critical perspective throughout the book.

More importantly, they register for contemporary scholarship many of the insights about the entanglements of a global legal order with the needs of empire that, as I will show, anticolonial writers began articulating much earlier. Anghie's "dynamic of difference," for instance, translates seamlessly into what Aimé Césaire, in his 1950 *Discours sur le colonialisme*, calls a "geographical curse" (34)—a global civilizational imperative that has justified colonial rule in flexible but remarkably consistent ways over time, and that, importantly, has proved capable of accommodating not only pre-twentieth-century theories of scientific racism but also later revisions of those theories that replace culture with biology as the basis for constructing a hierarchy between the Global North and the Global South.

Within this body of postcolonial legal scholarship, human rights and humanitarian law have garnered particular attention. As ideological concepts and as concrete areas of international legal practice, both are often figured as antidotes to empire, entities that provide badly needed advocacy to peoples of the Global South and speak truth to power within the international community. But, as David Kennedy observes, well-intentioned international humanitarian lawyers find themselves confronted by a political economy in which those goals are easily co-opted by the interests of First World states.

Further, as Samuel Moyn has argued, Cold War politics and post-Cold War
neoliberalism have been constitutive to the development of a contemporary international human rights regime. The institutions, discourses, and norms that emanate from contemporary international law do not exist in a privileged outside sphere; they do not enjoy immunity from the exploitative structures inherent in a contemporary global neoliberal political economy that actively perpetuates the “dynamic of difference” between the North and the South. 9

Given the prominence of international institutions in the political and economic constitution of the postcolonial world, especially in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, 10 it is not surprising that when postcolonial literary critics became interested in the intersections of literature and law, they focused their attention almost exclusively on international law. In *Human Rights, Inc.* (2006), the study that opened the floodgates for this now well-established subfield, Joseph Slaughter posits human rights law and the postcolonial bildungsroman as “mutually enabling fictions” whose “cooperative social work” constitutes “a network of conceptual, lexical, and grammatical intersections within the larger discourse of human development and emancipation” (8). In our effort to recognize the problems with human rights law, Slaughter insists, we must do more than simply declare the concept’s bankruptcy, bemoan the co-option by First World imperial interests of its utopian vision for global justice, and identify the limits of its professed universalism. Postcolonial literature, he argues, does not merely speak truth to law’s power. It is only through a cross-disciplinary critical approach that the shared imaginative stakes of literature and law come into view, and through which we can “learn to recognize not only our structural complicity in an international system that extends and denies human rights differentially, but also the triumphalist cosmopolitan pretensions and privileges of our humanitarian reading practices that can exacerbate the divisions between the incorporated and the disenfranchised that both we and these novels presumably aspire to remedy” (326). My book is palpably indebted to Slaughter’s vital insights about literature and law as mutually constitutive fields in the postcolonial world, and how reading comparatively between literary and legal archives thus serves as a powerful interpretive tool for postcolonial studies. 11

**Literature, Law, and Rhetorical Performance** situates international law as one among many juridico-political archives with relevance to African and Caribbean postcolonies. I am firmly in the camp of postcolonial scholars who contend that the nation-state still matters as a unit of analysis. If indeed the nation-state is “on its last legs” (Appadurai 19), then those last legs strike me as still quite sturdy. Thus while U.S.-based Critical Race Theory does not figure explicitly in my argument, its insights have provided crucial theoretical inspiration for my project. Just as postcolonial legal scholars have debunked the
myth of law's transcendence of the realities of race and empire that constitute our contemporary geopolitical order. Critical Race Theory has helped interrogate assumptions about the race-blindness of U.S. law, from its constitutional origins up through contemporary issues such as affirmative action and the right to privacy. These incisive critical treatments of law at the level of the nation-state have been essential to the scope and argument of this book, for, as discussed above, I am convinced that national and international frames of reference for anticolonial responses to a First World juridico-political imagination are inextricable from one another. The extraordinary intervention of Haiti’s 1805 Constitution into the early-nineteenth-century Atlantic world, for example, really only makes sense in light of its stark contrast to the U.S. Constitution’s inscription-through-erasure of race into the country’s founding law.

This dual focus on national and international legal imaginations leads me to different conclusions from those of other postcolonial literary critics about the capacity of anti- and postcolonial texts to formulate strategic, critically astute, and formally innovative responses to law. While in Human Rights Inc. Slaughter attends exclusively to “reformist” strains of law and literature, and to First World legal texts, I explore documents that claim more radical agendas and actively articulate alternatives to the formal and ideological norms of juridico-political legibility. For example, chapter 5 attends to Africa’s first wave of independence constitutions, which have been largely neglected by postcolonial studies and long dismissed as disappointing documents inadequate to the work of ushering in a new and truly liberatory postcolonial political order. I argue that despite their significant shortcomings, including their short-lived legal currency, these constitutions warrant recognition as rich sites of formal experimentation and political innovation.

Decolonization marks the point at which law is no longer authored exclusively by the West. And while postcolonial legal texts and discourses failed to fully instantiate the kinds of postcolonial communities to which national liberation struggles aspired, many of them nonetheless reflect those aspirations, seeking new strategies through which to give life to anticolonial idealism in a postcolonial legal order. Moreover, anticolonial writing that seems to have little (good) to say about the new “postcolonial” juridico-political order is in fact actively engaged in rethinking the grounds on which a more just, emancipatory order might be created well after the advent of political independence. The era of decolonization and national liberation has come and gone, but this archive of resistant black Atlantic declarative interventions can—and should—inform our understanding of what it means to imagine alternative possibilities for law and political belonging in a twenty-first century in which postcolonialism remains largely an elusive ideal.
CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

The book begins with an examination of how Haiti's founding documents appropriate and subversively transform the North Atlantic world's brand-new genres of juridico-political expression, the declaration of independence, the rights declaration, and the written state constitution. Haiti's founding texts foreground the paradoxes of representation, performativity, and revolutionary temporality that underlie the French and North American versions of these new forms. Jean-Jacques Dessalines's fiery 1804 Declaration of Independence severed the new black nation-state's ties to France, but it also signaled a rejection of North Atlantic form, charting an alternative set of generic conventions for the declaration of independence to those established in North America in 1776. Proclaiming the end of slavery on the island and declaring all citizens of the new nation-state "black"—including a handful of Haitians of European descent—the 1805 Constitution went on to make manifest the paradoxes of racial exploitation and political belonging that were silenced in canonical French and North American revolutionary writing. By critically refashioning the quintessential genres of a North Atlantic juridico-political imagination, these texts articulate transformative alternatives for what legal authorship and authority might look like not just for Haiti, but also for a postcolonial international community.

The Haitian Revolution became a crucial historical touchstone for mid-twentieth-century anticolonial thinkers from the anglophone and francophone Caribbean. If Haiti's founding texts are the first instance of the anticolonial black Atlantic "writing back" to First World law and its forms, then C. L. R. James, I argue in chapter 2, is the first anticolonial thinker to theorize the romance of rhetorical performance as a central, strategic component of revolt in the black Atlantic world. In the multiple histories of black revolt that he published—and republished—over the course of his long career, James is fascinated by moments of felicitous connection and exchange between revolutionary black leaders and "the people" whose revolutionary will they aspire to voice; in his histories these are the moments through which revolution has been authored in the black Atlantic world, from the days of Toussaint L'Ouverture up through Julius Nyerere's 1974 Arusha Declaration. Liberation, for James, is never separable from the strategically necessary and productive—if also problematic—work of performance as a means of instantiating new political community. And it is this inseparability that offers up hope for the future in these histories, even in the wake of the disappointments of decolonization.

Aimé Césaire's critical engagement with declarative form takes place contemporaneously with James's—and contemporaneously with the decade...
during which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was being conceived, drafted, and ratified, and gaining discursive weight. Chapter 3 reads Crécy's epic-length poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*), as staging a critical engagement with the Universal Declaration. The romance of universal authorship that underpins the Declaration depends on its skillful elision of the authority of the international body charged with drafting the text and the global community of subjects of human rights that the text sought to bring into existence. Crécy's poem, in contrast, interrogates the ethical and political stakes of speaking for an oppressed population in a voice that claims universal authority. Saturated by a series of speech acts proclaiming independence and personhood, the *Cahier* seeks a declarative form that encapsulates an anti-imperial ethics and politics—a form uniquely suited to the colonized world on the cusp of anticolonial revolution.

The second half of the book shifts focus to African texts and contexts in order to explore the ways in which African writers are engaged with the romance of revolutionary performance in the late twentieth century. Chapter 4 reads South Africa's 1955 Freedom Charter as a radical instance of reimagining the possibilities for political authorship under the unique conditions of southern Africa's "colonialism of a special type." Like Haiti's founding documents, the Charter is at least as radical in its form as in its content, drawing inspiration from international law but transforming some of its key midcentury genres—and provocatively staging what it would look like to insist that the democratic ideals at the core of the Atlantic Charter be applied to Africa's oldest settler colony. The grassroots campaign that led to the creation and ratification of the Freedom Charter was a novel experiment in mass authorship; and the final version of this declarative text puts forth a decidedly localized conception of human rights and political belonging that stands in stark contrast to First World institutions' abstract universalism.

My investigation of the Freedom Charter's radical populism gives way, in chapter 5, to a broader exploration of the diversity of genres of African anticolonialism in the 1960s. Here I define decolonization as a process characterized by multiple, sometimes incommensurate and antagonistic, attempts to constitute the postcolony through rhetorical performance. Reading comparatively among decolonization's myriad forms of constitutive expression—including independence-era state constitutions, "Mau Mau" loyalty oaths, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiongō's quintessential novel of decolonization, *A Grain of Wheat*—I move beyond interpretative approaches that frame this historical moment in terms of anticolonialism's "success" or "failure." Instead I insist on the imaginative and political
complexities inherent in mid-twentieth-century literary and legal articulations of African postcolonial community.

Finally, I turn to the decades during which postcolonial theory became established as a field—and anticolonial thought got repackaged under that rubric as an important piece of postcolonial history. In a comparative transatlantic examination of two prominent late-twentieth-century “postcolonial” writers who due to geographic and linguistic difference had no contact with each other during their careers, chapter 6 examines what happens to anticolonial declarative performance in an era in which anticolonial revolution is supposed to be an anachronism. Critical essays on the politics of postcolonial language by Ngugi and Édouard Glissant appropriate the rhetorical strategies of an ever more prominent discourse of universal human rights in order to interrogate the stakes of linguistic diversity for postcolonial politics. But in doing so, these essays also critically comment on the possibilities—and limitations—of human rights discourse for the not-quite-postcolonial world. Like their midcentury anticolonial predecessors, Ngugi and Glissant seek to articulate an alternative to First World internationalism, one that counters the logic of a form of globalization organized around empire with a radical multilingualism grounded in a definitively anticolonial politics and aesthetics.
CHAPTER 3

Declaring Negritude

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Aimé Césaire’s Cahier d’un retour au pays natal

IN 1947, a multinational group of lawyers, philosophers, and dignitaries was midway through its process of drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was ratified by the General Assembly in the following year. Also in 1947, the Martinican writer Aimé Césaire published the second of what would be three editions of his epic-length poem, Cahier d’un retour au pays natal [Notebook/Journal of a Return to My Native Land]. These were the inaugural texts of two new internationalisms that came into existence contemporaneously, but also largely separately, in the 1940s: a universal human rights movement with close affiliations with international law, and the negritude movement, spearheaded by Césaire along with other francophone Caribbean and African writers that harnessed the power of avant-garde aesthetics to celebrate blackness in defiance of colonial racism. Both of these projects sought to speak truth to power—from a position of relative powerlessness—at the outset of the Cold War and the reconfiguration of global economic and political structures for the late twentieth century.

Despite their contemporaneity, the Cahier and the Universal Declaration were products of geographies, institutions, and discursive contexts that remained tellingly disconnected from one another in the mid-twentieth century. In fact, as Samuel Moyn has argued, it is important to recognize just how little contact there was between anticolonialism and human rights in
the 1940s. In carefully excluding peoples' right to self-determination from its scope, the drafters of the Universal Declaration—none of whom were, or consulted, colonial subjects—steered clear of addressing the most obvious goal of anticolonial movements in the wake of World War II: national liberation. Thus Moyn explains that "human rights entered global rhetoric in a kind of hydraulic relationship with self-determination: to the extent the one appeared, and progressed, the other declined, or even disappeared" (88). In the 1940s anticolonialism and human rights were internationalisms with missions that were not only entirely separate from each other but indeed working at cross-purposes.

And yet these two ideologically and strategically disparate midcentury movements—one literary and black Atlantic, one affiliated with the nascent institutions of First World law—inhabited what David Scott calls a common problem-space, "an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs" (Conscripts 4). Negritudean anticolonialism and universal human rights were the products of intensive formal experimentation, one whose parallels with the generic and philosophical innovations of the Age of Revolution are striking. The foundational texts of both movements sought out, and in fact sought to create, new declarative forms up to the challenge of putting forth radically new visions of global justice for a new world order. Césaire's poem and the Universal Declaration pose and confront a common set of questions about new ways of imagining universal ethics and political community for the late twentieth century—and arrive at very different conclusions.

Midcentury anticolonial critique, I am suggesting, challenged not only the authority of colonial regimes but also a North Atlantic internationalist and universalist imagination that manifested in the human rights project taking shape through the United Nations—an imagination that would play a vital role in the translation of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European imperial rule into the "imperial internationalism" of the late-twentieth-century new world order. Saturated by a series of real and imagined speech-acts of independence and personhood, the Cahier interrogates the fantasies of abstract representation, institutional authority, and universal applicability that underlie the Universal Declaration. Drawing on the conventions and the subversive possibilities of the modernist manifesto, Césaire conceives of the declaration as an inherently ethical act, a risky but vital performance of transnational and transhistorical solidarity meant ultimately to cede the speaker/author's authority to the new collectivity that it brought into being in the first place. Just as Haiti's founding texts stage a critical disruption to the nascent North Atlantic genres of modern political community, so Césaire's poem offers up a
very different version of what a declarative assertion of transnational justice might look like—and whose interests it might serve. Césaire's poem functions as a radical supplement to the Universal Declaration, a necessary mode of imagining—and performatively iterating—global justice through an engaged internationalist politics at the moment of the birth of a universal human rights movement riddled with conservative and depoliticizing tendencies (often despite the desires and intentions of its proponents). Many critical studies of the Cahier have illuminated this poem's thematic and formal exploration of the radical potential of the speech act, of the possibilities for the reinvention of the colonized subject—and the colonized nation—through rhetorical performance. I build on this scholarship to argue that this pivotal feature of the poem signals Césaire's engagement with other midcentury contexts in which the declaration came to serve as a potent mode of articulating new concepts of justice, law, and political belonging. At the same moment in which the First World was developing a renewed faith in the declaration as a means of putting forth universal prescriptions for human rights and global justice, the Cahier scrutinizes the declarative text's ability to claim universal authority.

This chapter shifts the book's focus for the first time to an author and a text that are readily identifiable as "literary." It is my contention that the literary comes to play a vital role in anticolonial thought in the mid-twentieth century, first as a mode of critiquing the colonial past and present, and second as a means of articulating visions of the postcolonial future on the horizon. Indeed, we might observe that there is an inverse relationship between anticolonial writers' embrace of what Raphael Dalleo calls the "ideology of the literary" (97) and the increasingly programmatic and instrumental goals of national liberation movements the closer they got to political independence. As decolonization (as well as post–World War II reconfigurations of colonial authority such as departmentalization) became a reality, literature increasingly became a means through which dissent, critique, and radical visions for the future could still be voiced even as postcolonial forms of governance restricted the scope and ambition of the anticolonial project as that project was enlisted in the service of official state nationalism. Yet as the cases of Haiti's founding texts and James's historical writings have shown, literary strategies are fundamental to anticolonialism's critical revaluation of First World juridico-political expression across a wide range of genres, and they are part and parcel of these texts' revolutionary identity. Revolution is the creation of a space and time outside the law in which law itself gets reimagined. The act of declaring a new political community into existence—of claiming the authority to do so while simultaneously enacting that authority in a textual performance—has an important aesthetic dimension. Literature is thus best understood not as
a space of escape or retreat for anticolonial writers but rather as one of vital political engagement.

This is certainly true in the case of Aimé Césaire. I am unpersuaded by accounts of Aimé Césaire's literary career that see it as divorced from or at odds with his political thought and action. A poet and statesman throughout his adult life, Césaire was highly attuned to points of overlap and convergence between literary and legal approaches to the question of what it means to be human in a not-yet-postcolonial world. He shared with many of the drafters of the Universal Declaration a commitment to humanism and even some form of universalism, though he demanded that both of these philosophical principles be radically rethought outside the oppressively exclusionary parameters of Eurocentrism. While he rarely made explicit reference to human rights in his work, it is impossible for me to imagine that this Martinican poet-politician was unaware of or insensitive to the discourse of universal human rights that was emerging during the most prolific and innovative years of his writing career. I open my reading of the Cahier with a brief discussion of how we might understand Césaire's negotiation of his political and literary work—and of how the title of the poem evokes an important Enlightenment-era legal tradition, suggesting that the text does in fact invite readers to contemplate the relationship between literature and law in ways that critics have not previously addressed.4

More broadly, however, my reading of the Cahier aims to illuminate how the poem occupies the same problem-space as the Universal Declaration—how it raises questions about form, authority, and history that overlap with (or, in some important ways, starkly contrast with) the concerns of the UN-sponsored text. The Cahier is an anticolonial reappraisal of the internationalism of First World international law and its pretensions to global justice in the mid-twentieth century. But such a reading demands a recognition of the capaciousness of the imaginative ambition of midcentury anticolonialism. If we define anticolonialism narrowly, as a program designed solely to win political independence for the colonized world, then this project and that of human rights appear, indeed, to have no meaningful connection to one another. But such a definition does not do justice to Césaire, or to the other anticolonial figures I discuss in later chapters. The negritude movement was not primarily concerned with national self-determination; it was profoundly anticolonial, however, in its challenge to colonialism's discursive and psychic authority in the black Atlantic world. That challenge, I argue, took place by way of an interrogation of the notions of universality and authority that underlie First World juridico-political documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The truly postcolonial world yet to come requires
new declarative forms through which to be imagined and voiced. The Cahier is not a declaration of rights per se. But we might identify it as a manifesto of a postcoloniality yet to come, a new global order under which rights, political belonging, and community will have to be radically redefined by the wretched of the earth.

EXTRALEGALITY, GLOBAL AUTHORITY, AND THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The mid-twentieth century was a radically transformative period for international law, characterized by intense experimentation with new doctrines, institutional structures, and textual forms. In fact, as Nathaniel Berman argues, we might do well to describe midcentury international legal thought as modernist: both it and aesthetic high modernism, he contends, can be read as "an overlapping series of responses to a common cultural situation" (352), characterized by crises of representation, the question of how to give voice to "primitive" cultural or political energies, a high degree of technical innovation, and the juxtaposition of elements that were seen as incompatible under traditional aesthetic or legal systems (354, 362). Translating this claim using Scott's terminology, we might posit that international law and modernist art inhabited a common problem-space in the mid-twentieth century, one that sought new forms through which to accommodate the imaginative, aesthetic, and political demands of the present.

Berman's identification of parallels between midcentury law and aesthetics is a useful lens through which to investigate the experiments with form, language, and conceptions of authorship through which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came into being in the 1940s. Key to the story of the text's origins—its drafting, revision, and ratification under the auspices of UN internationalism—is the development of a peculiar relationship between the Declaration's claims to authority and the way in which its drafters conceived of themselves as authors. As the UN Commission on Human Rights began to think of this text as having universal rather than international applicability and resonance, the committee members' sense of their role as authors changed as well. By 1948 universal human rights, enshrined in the Declaration and officially ratified by the UN, was a fantasy of collective, borderless authorial participation—of a kind of global authorship that sanctioned the text's claims to universal authority. This fantasy masked the far more specific and confined institutional and geopolitical that governed the text's creation. The genre of the declaration, with its liminal relationship to law—and, consequently, its claims
to more than “just” legal authority—enabled this fantasy. Like the North Atlantic revolutionary genres that made their first appearance in the late 1700s, the Universal Declaration signaled a transformative moment in geopolitics that called for the creation of equally transformative genres. And like those earlier declarative texts, the Universal Declaration put forth its radical and utopian political vision while ignoring the complications of colonialism and racial exploitation that were constitutive of the authoring and authorization of this text.

“Human rights” gained discursive and institutional preeminence for the first time in the 1940s; the term made a notable appearance in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s 1941 “Four Freedoms” speech and provided moral gravitas to the preamble of the UN Charter just a few years later. As a component of the UN’s mission, however, human rights played a decidedly minor role. In fact, human rights was not only peripheral but arguably antithetical to the organization’s goal of shoring up political and economic security among its founding member states. Many attendees at the inaugural San Francisco conference, Mark Mazower notes, “saw its universalizing rhetoric of freedom and rights as all too partial—a veil masking the consolidation of a great power directorate that was not as different from the Axis powers, in its imperious attitude to how the world’s weak and poor should be governed, as it should have been” (7). Samuel Moyn observes that pressure to mention human rights in the Charter at all—even “as a negligible line buried in the proposal for an Economic and Social Council and without any serious meaning” (56)—had come not from the major postwar power but rather from smaller member states, newly formed NGOs, and individuals with no affiliation to the UN. During and after World War II, the adoption of human rights by international institutions “reflected a need for public acceptance and legitimacy, as part of the rhetorical drive to distinguish the organization from prior instances of great power balance. It was a narrow portal to offer morality to enter the world, and a far cry from a utopian multilateralism based on human rights” (59).

The United States in particular was anxious to contain and co-opt a newly emergent human rights agenda, working hard as early as 1945 to ensure that the UN Charter would not commit its member states to adopting specific human-rights-related measures (Normand and Zaidi 131). And yet these efforts indicate just how much radical potential such an agenda seemed to hold—and even threaten—at that time. Despite the fact that the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) could claim little power within the UN, its members took their task very seriously; and because of its relative powerlessness, the Commission was in fact aptly positioned to speak truth to power within the organization. The Commission saw itself as counterbalancing the goals of
global security and the sanctity of national sovereignty which were at the heart of the UN's mission, and refuting early-twentieth-century legal positivism with a moral doctrine that had universal applicability (Glendon 176). Setting aside (at least initially) the limitations of what the UN's most powerful member states would ultimately agree to ratify, the CHR began by thinking broadly and idealistically about how to articulate the nature and scope of human rights in the space of an official text.

The UN Charter did not specifically call for a particular kind of document—or, indeed, for any document at all—that would define and delineate the "fundamental human rights" invoked in only vague terms in its preamble. It did, however, charge the Economic and Social Council with establishing the Commission, and in 1946 that Commission met for the first time in the form of an eight-member Nuclear Committee with Eleanor Roosevelt as its chair. The Nuclear Committee quickly expanded into a group of eighteen, all state delegates; John Humphrey, of the UN Secretariat, also participated in nearly every meeting. Over the course of a thirty-two-month drafting process, all fifty-eight UN member states—as well as a number of NGOs—had the opportunity to make recommendations to the Commission. The UN ratified the final version of the Universal Declaration on December 10, 1948, one day after it ratified the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The drafting process was characterized by personality-driven meetings and debates; an earnest effort at maintaining geographical and cultural diversity that was nonetheless frequently undercut by Cold War politics, and the predominance of Western and Western-educated delegates on the Commission; the United States' overarching control over the contents and capabilities of the document; and a central, ongoing tension over what kind of authority the completed text would be able to claim within and beyond the UN.

While much of the commentary and critical debate over the Universal Declaration of the past sixty-five years has revolved around the meaning of "human rights," those two words were the least controversial component of the document's title during the CHR's drafting process. There was nothing inevitable about the Commission's choice to present the UN General Assembly with a text titled a Declaration; it was not until a year into the drafting process that Commission members stopped referring to the text they were creating as a Bill. And it was not until October 1948 that "Universal" replaced "International" as the first word of the working title of the document. Both of these changes were deliberate and controversial, and both had consequences for the kind of authority the document would be able to claim upon ratification.

One of the central tensions within the final text of the Universal Declaration—as well as of the drafting process—stems from the fact that it
is meant to serve on one hand as a prominent instrument of international law, and on the other hand as an explicitly extralegal document, one whose function was finally put forth as eminently literary and pedagogical. The most contentious debate within the CHR centered around the question of whether the document it produced would be legally binding, or whether it would be an early instance of "soft law," a text with commonly agreed-upon moral principles intended to inform international and domestic law but without any mechanisms for compulsion or implementation. A legally binding document would have taken the form of a convention, a kind of text that, Johannes Mor-sink explains, is "far more difficult to write because it is far more detailed than a declaration of general principles. It needs to be done by experts in international law and takes a long time to write. Also, the states that sign a convention or covenant commit themselves to tell 'the authorities' how they have implemented the terms of the covenant in their own domestic legal systems." In contrast, a declaration is "a relatively simple matter. The parties need to agree on the principles to be proclaimed and then proclaim them ... The truth is that nations can walk away from a declaration far more easily than from a signed covenant" (15). As of the mid-twentieth century, the declaration was among the weakest possible instruments of international law.⁶

Despite the strong desire of a majority of the Commission members to present the UN General Assembly with a legally binding covenant, this dream was more or less doomed from the start; the United States and the Soviet Union never had plans to sign such a document.⁷ More than any other issue of contention among the drafters of the Universal Declaration, it was the debate over implementation that most baldly exposed the extent to which the interests of the world's emergent superpowers governed the shape and scope of the final text. Small nations, including the UK, vehemently dismissed the type of document endorsed by the United States and the Soviet Union as mere propaganda. The Commission's decision in June 1948 to work on two separate documents—a declaration and a covenant—simultaneously, and to temporarily table the question of implementation, "taken solely at the insistence of the CHR's two most powerful members against the wishes of nearly every other delegation, was highly unpopular among human rights advocates and the public at large" (Normand and Zaidi 171). The fact that the group did not actually give up hope of presenting the General Assembly with a covenant until quite close to the end of the process speaks to just how fraught the issue of legal authority was for the drafters—and just how ambitious many Commission members' dreams for this text were, in contrast to the realpolitik of the UN at large.

Relinquishing the goal of producing a text with legal authority, however, also made it possible for the drafters to claim other kinds of authority for the
text. Charged with inspiring and educating the public rather than with binding states to uphold and enforce its contents, the Declaration was less obliged to tread softly around the sovereignty of UN member states; nor did it need to confine its scope to the peoples of those member states. The Commission's replacement of "international" with "universal" in the document’s title signaled a shift in focus from the more contained and pragmatic contours of the international community involved in drafting the text to the world at large to whom the text was meant to apply. The title change was prompted by the removal, close to the end of the drafting process, of an article guaranteeing the cultural rights of minorities from the text of the Declaration; Emile Saint-Lot, the Haitian delegate, bargained for this change in order to stress the Declaration's applicability to all groups, even if unspecified as such. Morsink sums up the Commission's replacement of "international" with "universal" as "a shift of attention away from the authors of the Delegation... to the addressees of the document" (33). I would phrase the shift a bit differently, as a dissociation of the exclusivity of the individual writers of the text from the inclusivity of the people to whom the text would apply. In other words, in keeping with the drafters' belief that the rights they were including were inherent and universal, not positively acquired, one would have no need for direct experience with this text in order to be spoken of, for, and to. An international declaration would privilege the contained international community whose members had had some sort of direct say in the creation of this document; a universal declaration would, in contrast, stress the global community to (and for) which that declaration was meant to speak. In making this titular change, the CHR took on metonymic responsibilities, representing the interests of humanity as a whole.

The success of this transformation depended on the drafters adopting an audaciously ambitious conception of their role as authors. With the Universal Declaration, René Cassin proclaimed to the General Assembly in 1948, "something new ha[d] entered the world" because this was "the first document about moral value adopted by an assembly of the human community" (qtd. in Morsink 33). Cassin's romanticization, his implication that the CHR counts as an "assembly of the human community" rather than an assembly within a much more exclusively constructed international institution, is precisely the sleight of hand that the Universal Declaration itself aspires to pull off—an elision of the political constituency involved in authoring the Declaration and the unorganized, undifferentiated, global population that the text declares as its subject. This conception of collective authorship allowed the CHR to see itself as writing a universal declaration, one that manages at once to meet the needs and bear the stamp of an international bureaucracy and to convincingly proclaim a moral imperative with global applicability.
The Universal Declaration ultimately deflects attention away from its creators and on to the subjects of human rights. But it also grounds its authority in the fact that it puts forth few, if any, truly original ideas. When John Humphrey submitted his "draft outline" of an International Bill of Rights to the Commission in June 1947, it was accompanied by over four hundred pages of source material including a number of state constitutions as well as bills of rights by organizations such as the American Law Institute and the Inter-American Juridical Committee (Morsink 6). Members of the CHR did not necessarily think of themselves as original authors, and instead saw their task as one of researching, collecting, distilling, and canonizing a set of already-existent—if not yet declared—tenets on the meaning of human rights. In his 1986 autobiography, Humphrey reflects the importance of the collective accomplishments of the Commission rather than the contributions of its individual members:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has no father in the sense that Jefferson was the father of the American Declaration of Independence. Very many people . . . contributed to the final result. It is indeed this very anonymity which gives the Declaration some of its great prestige and authority. (43)

Humphrey here takes issue specifically with a widespread perception that René Cassin was the architect in chief of the Declaration; in doing so, however, he equates anonymity with a lack of paternity in order to reframe the meaning of the document, at forty years' distance, according to what he identifies as its true original spirit. What paternal anonymity makes possible, in Humphrey's assessment, is the introduction of principles of compilation, editorial decision-making, and anthologizing that go hand in hand with the success of a text intended to establish juridical and moral norms on a global scale. Deflecting attention from himself and his colleagues as authors of the Declaration enables an expanded understanding of this text's authority. This is the Enlightenment-era dream of the encyclopedia reconfigured for a mid-twentieth-century knowledge project: universality finds its legitimation in global erudition.

Accordingly, once the draft text had been transformed from an International Bill to a Universal Declaration, the Commission began to root its authority in morality and pedagogy rather than in law. This shift had already begun in June 1947, with Cassin's drafting of a rhetorically powerful preamble that explicitly cited the horrors of the world wars and stressed the UN's role as a promoter (rather than enforcer) of human rights. While the turn away from implementation disappointed many of the delegates, it also made it possible for the Commission to draft, submit, and ratify a document that conceived of
human rights quite broadly—including economic and social rights as well as the more familiar set of civil and political rights for which eighteenth-century revolutionary declaration provided clear precursors (Normand and Zaidi 173). The General Assembly would not have voted in favor of the rights to social security, employment, leisure time, social welfare, and education proclaimed in Articles 22 through 26 had these articles bound member states to implementation measures, but as moral precepts and pedagogical tools they proved less objectionable. 9

The Universal Declaration’s pedagogical function is inextricably linked to its claims to universality. The text, as well as the broader universal human rights movement it helped inaugurate, were imagined to be profoundly populist in spirit, a “vision,” to borrow Paul Gordon Lauren’s term, shared by its proponents with evangelical energy. The text itself establishes human rights as an essential component of human development in Article 26:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (UN General Assembly Art. 26)

Perhaps the most explicit textual example of what Joseph Slaughter identifies as the tautological nature of contemporary human rights discourse, Article 26 asserts that everyone has the right to be educated . . . about human rights! 10 To reach its full potential—to transform from a “discourse in waiting” (Slaughter 84) to an ideal finally and fully realized—the Universal Declaration must be disseminated, read, and taken to heart by everyone, the entire “human community” to whom the articles of the text apply must itself become universally human rights literate. In the months surrounding the General Assembly’s ratification of the Declaration, Eleanor Roosevelt articulated the significance of the text in precisely these terms. The CHR, she wrote, had “been of outstanding value in setting before men’s eyes the ideals which they must strive to reach” (558). But the work of reaching those ideals remained to be done: the Universal Declaration, she explains, must be made “a living document, something that is not just words on paper but something which we really strive to bring to the lives of all people, all people everywhere in the world” (559). Roosevelt imagines the spirit of human rights as transcending not only the letter of the (quasi-)law but all political and geographical strictures. Precisely because it has not yet been realized, human rights is a pedagogical project;
and precisely because it is pedagogical, human rights both exceeds and aims
to obscure the (localizable, historicizable) internationalism out of which it was
created in order to profess a truly universal ethics.

The Declaration's claim to universal authority—both through and despite
its much more narrowly international conditions of authorship—was a power­
ful fiction, and has remained so in many subsequent narratives of the history
of the text and its role in late-twentieth-century human rights movements.11
But, of course, this fiction depended on certain elisions and silences on the
part of the drafters—particularly when it came to how issues such as colonial­
ism, imperialism, and long global histories of racial exploitation might trouble
this claim. The CHR, Morsink notes, "had an unwritten rule that delegates
were not supposed to refer to 'violations' in various countries. Such allega­
tions would lead to all sorts of ad hominem arguments and block the goal of
writing a declaration acceptable to all the delegations" (32). The UK partici­
pated entirely comfortably in the drafting process—and even came to be seen
as a champion of the interests of smaller nations—because the UN Charter's
creation of a Trusteeship Council effectively nullified any real objections to
Britain's colonial holdings and practices (Normand and Zaidi 134). As Mark
Mazower has pointed out, there was no perceived incompatibility—at least
among Britons—between the existence of the British Empire and the dream
of a more effective postwar version of the League of Nations designed as the
bulwark of an "imperial internationalism" that would secure peace among
Western nations precisely by keeping global imperial structures more or less
intact. The fact that Jan Smuts, one of the architects of South Africa's apartheid
regime, drafted the preamble to the UN Charter is a testament to the extent to
which older strains of imperial thought played a crucial role in the organiza­
tion's ideological origins (62). Nor did the new international order threaten to
impose much scrutiny or pressure on the United States' own version of apart­
heid: even before the CHR had begun its work, the UN had stonewalled two
1946 petitions submitted on behalf of African Americans, one by the National
Negro Congress, and one by W. E. B. Du Bois for the NAACP, which iden­
tified Jim Crow as a human rights violation.12 Neither U.S. segregation nor
European colonialism came up with frequency in the CHR's drafting meet­
ings, and occasional accusations of Western powers' hypocrisy regarding their
own records of human rights violations were interpreted as defensive attacks
from countries with poor human rights records of their own (in particular, the
Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa).13 The CHR also failed to take
advantage of one prime opportunity to incorporate a wider set of perspectives
into the Declaration when it all but completely ignored the results of a 1947
UNESCO report, which had surveyed political, literary, and philosophical
figureheads around the world in order to establish human rights as inherent in and indigenous to all of the world's cultures and nations. Irked by UNESCO's failure to communicate and coordinate with CHR in conducting the survey, CHR members "did their utmost to ignore and bury" its contents, voting against passing the report on to the General Assembly and making no reference to it as the drafting process progressed (Normand and Zaidi 183).

Most importantly, however, from the very beginning the CHR assiduously avoided dealing with the realities of colonialism that shaped the power dynamics of the drafting process. Or, more to the point, the Commission did deal with the problem of colonialism by successfully containing it and preventing it from raising thorny and contentious questions for the next two years. Britain and France drew clear lines between their championing of a new international human rights regime in the UN and their quashing of "civil disturbances" and "insurgencies" within their colonial territories (Klose 123). Within the eighteen-member Commission, India served as the only nonwhite country to have undertaken and triumphed in anticolonial struggle against a European imperial power.14 Colonized peoples were represented only by proxy on the CHR. Moreover, while the preamble of the Declaration acknowledges that under extreme circumstances man can "be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression," the text makes no mention of rebellion or self-determination as a right.15

The CHR's silence on the subject of colonialism, and the lack of direct representation of colonized subjects on the committee, indicates the issue's inflammatory potential, not its irrelevance. My claim here, moreover, is that this silence and the Universal Declaration's fantasy of universal authority is also a fantasy of universal authorship. In positing a universal and indeed global scope for the Declaration, the CHR figures colonized peoples, and more broadly the Global South, as the grammatical and political subjects of human rights. Costas Douzinas cites the consequences of this kind of figuration in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century discourses of human rights and humanitarianism: the present-day victims of human rights violations are very rarely "us." "The premise and appeal of humanitarianism is distance and alienation. We must participate in campaigns and fine-tune our morality because we, Western liberals, have not suffered in the past, because we cannot share the torments of those unfortunate and exotic parts of the world now. Because we have always been human, we must now extend our generosity to those less than human" (Human Rights and Empire 74–75). This, for Douzinas and others, is the story of human rights and postcolonialism in late modernity: human rights and humanitarianism serve primarily as vital mechanisms of empire. They are the next generation of the nineteenth-century civilizing
mission, reconfigured for a new late-twentieth-century global order. The Universal Declaration initially became “universal” through the efforts of small nations, such as Haiti, to ensure that cultural minorities the world over would not be excluded from this document’s scope. But global inclusion and applicability became the means of perpetuating the divide between the West and the Rest, the creators/authors of a global civil society and those who are governed-authored by that society.

The other contemporary story about human rights and postcolonialism, however, is a story about the ways in which anti- and postcolonial movements have made use of human rights discourse toward emancipatory ends in the late twentieth century, when it came to serve as a powerful tool of (at least a certain kind of) resistance from below. Beginning as early as 1950, as Third World delegates developed more of a presence in the UN, human rights gradually became a Third World project, closely linked in its early years to arguments in favor of a UN-sanctioned right to self-determination. Since the 1970s, activism from the Global South has forced the UN and other international institutions to address a wider range of issues under the rubric of human rights and development, two projects which have, during this same time period, become increasingly interconnected.

Conceived and written in an altogether different context, by a poet who had nothing to do with the formation of the institutions of a postwar new world order, Césaire’s Cahier d’un retour au pays natal registers both of these futures of human rights in the postcolonial world. The poem is trenchantly critical of universality and of grandiose, imperial assertions of representational authority. However, it also recognizes and embraces the liberatory potential contained in the act of declaring a new ethical vision for the future, one that—like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—sees a need for much more than just the constitution of new political bodies in order to right the wrongs of the past. The Cahier anticipates the future of human rights both as a radical tool of Third World resistance and as a tool of empire, whose form as well as content must be approached critically.

AIME CÉSaire’S LITERARY ANTICOLONIALISM

In a 1967 interview with René Depestre, Césaire recalls his earliest experiments with poetic form in the late 1930s—and provocatively relates that the first version of what would become his masterpiece, the Cahier d’un retour au pays natal, owed its origins to a moment of deep frustration with verse form:
If *Return to My Native Land* took the form of a prose poem, it was truly by chance. Even though I wanted to break with French literary traditions, I did not actually free myself from them until the moment I decided to turn my back on poetry. In fact, you could say that I became a poet by renouncing poetry. Do you see what I mean? Poetry was for me the only way to break the stranglehold the accepted French form held on me. (*Discourse 82*)

The image that Césaire here constructs of himself in the late 1930s is that of a revolutionary in the most literal sense: turning away from poetry only to return to it as a tradition remade in his own text, the writer began his literary career by breaking the laws of genre and writing them anew from scratch. The poem that Césaire published in 1939—a poem which would be heavily revised for two subsequent editions in 1947 and 1956—was meant to disentangle poetry from its Frenchness, and from French poetry's tradition of exoticizing and romanticizing non-European landscapes. Even if Césaire did ultimately return to poetry—if we, along with the author, retrospectively accept "poem" as an appropriate generic descriptor of the text we now read—then what kind of poem is it? What form did Césaire turn to during his escape from poetic form in the 1930s?

This experience of generic flux that Césaire recalled for Depestre in 1967 speaks to a more general fluidity in this writer's work among disparate modes of thought and expression, and more specifically between the literary and political projects in which he was involved throughout his adult life. In his seven-decade literary career he would demonstrate extraordinary generic versatility, authoring plays, poems, histories, and hybrid works such as his *Discourse on Colonialism* which are difficult to classify under conventional generic categories; but Césaire was also professionally versatile, elected mayor of Fort-de-France and delegate to the French National Assembly in 1946, and holding political office nearly continuously for the next fifty-five years. When critics have attempted to parse the relationship between Césaire's political and literary work, many have done so by contrasting the pragmatism of his career as a statesman with the idealism that characterizes his poetry, drama, and literary essays. Such accounts tend to interpret his (in)famous vote for the Lamine Guèye Act of 1946, the law that conferred departmental status on Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion, as a sign of the dwindling of his anticolonial commitments as a legislator, a point past which those commitments would only survive in his art. In 1946 departmentalization offered the formerly colonial subjects of the French Antilles full incorporation into the French body politic, including economic equality with France's mainland departments. It quickly
became clear that departmentalization would instead offer the former colonies a kind of "fake economic assimilation" coupled with a renewed (though hardly new) imperative toward cultural assimilation with the metropole—a new form of colonial domination under another name (Hale and Véron 55). Critics of departmentalization cast Césaire's support for it as evidence of his abandonment of the project of national liberation, and as an enabling of the cultural and economic alienation that would plague the French Antilles throughout the rest of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. 20

Such accounts tend to assume a fundamental disjuncture between Césaire's literary and political careers, and read his creative work—especially post-1960—as a response to the political disillusionments of decolonization, which left little room for the aspirational aspects of his earlier anticolonialism. The problem with such a critique is that it relies on a fairly narrow conception of anticolonialism as aimed exclusively at the successful attainment of national liberation. In doing so it does not acknowledge the extent to which Césaire's thinking about departmentalization was shaped by a much broader understanding of the world-system that was coming into existence in the 1940s. European imperialism may have been coming to an end in the wake of World War II, but empire, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued, was alive and well—and visible in the Caribbean in the form of a number of occupations by the United States as well as the U.S.-led international political and financial institutions put in place during this time that would, in subsequent decades, exert tremendous control over the economies of nominally independent Third World nation-states. 21 "American domination," Césaire observed in the final pages of his 1950 Discourse on Colonialism, is "the only domination from which one never recovers" (77). Departmentalization offered a chance to shield Martinique from U.S. empire, and thus Césaire's support of the new law, Nick Nesbitt argues, might in fact be best understood as a form of dissidence rather than a turn toward a more conservative and resigned political agenda. 22 Césaire's vote was strategic and pragmatic, and it did not achieve what he had hoped for, as he would spend subsequent decades fighting hard against an increasingly conservative National Assembly intent on curtailing the overseas departments' social and economic self-sufficiency. But to interpret this vote as simply in conflict with Césaire's literary anticolonialism is to ignore the geopolitical contexts in which he cast it.

To better understand the continuity between Césaire's political and literary work, we need a more capacious definition of anticolonialism—one that does not hinge on the "success" or "failure" of the achievement of political independence but instead indicates a critical stance toward empire in all of its historical manifestations. Anticolonialism's end goal is what Raphael Dalleo
describes as postcoloniality, "understood not as the end of foreign domination or even a partial freedom still haunted by the colonial past but as a new form of hegemony born of the decline of the modern colonial system in order to manage the successes of decolonization. There is no law of history that has predetermined how these shifts from one period to another would occur; the interaction of resistance movements with systems of control have dictated the forms of freedom and domination that have emerged" (13). This book similarly presses for an understanding of anticolonialism that recognizes political independence as just one component of a much larger project of reimagining the world in postcolonial terms. Both departmentalization in Martinique and decolonization elsewhere in the Atlantic world revealed the shortcomings of political independence on its own as the end goal of anticolonialism. As Gary Wilder has recently argued, Césaire's capacious thinking about the possibilities for a postcolonial new world order in the 1940s meant that he never felt trapped in a narrow understanding of national self-determination as the only desirable outcome of an anticolonial politics: "Rather than ask why this incendiary anticolonial poet 'failed' to demand independence, perhaps we should ask why he regarded departmentalization as a creative anticolonial act" (Freedom Time 21).

This broad conception of Césaire's anticolonial vision of postcoloniality is key to accounting for the declarative work of his Cahier d’un retour au pays natal, a creative anticolonial literary act that was staged during the same years as Martinique's transformation into a department of France. The poem was published in three separate editions, in 1939, 1947, and 1956; as A. James Arnold has shown, the final version is palimpsestic, containing but also obscuring a diverse range of aesthetic and political contexts with which Césaire engaged during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In the seventeen-year period during which Césaire twice returned to and revised the Cahier, he met André Breton and engaged with European surrealism; traveled to Haiti and deepened his knowledge of African-influenced cultural practices in the Caribbean, such as vodou; joined and quit the French Communist Party; and saw anticolonial politics across Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean begin to transform into concrete plans for decolonization. Of course, the years between 1939 and 1956 were also marked by World War II, the creation of the Bretton Woods Institutions and the United Nations, the onset of the Cold War, and the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The new aesthetic influences as well as political contexts that Césaire encountered during this period constituted the raw materials of a utopian political vision, invested in national liberation but also in conceiving, in the broadest possible terms, of the global ethical conditions under which postcoloniality would one day be able to take root.
Here lies the common ground between Césairean negritude and universal human rights. Both are projects that insist on articulating the ethical dimensions of a new global order. Césaire's version of this articulation, however, refuses to erase the ongoing effects of the colonial past from its scope. Césairean negritude instead insists on a conception of global justice that accounts for that past and the ways in which its violence has been constitutive of Western modernity. In the Cahier, such a conception necessitates first a critical reappraisal of representation, including an interrogation of the relationship between political and aesthetic representation; an insistence on the situated solidarities enabled by internationalism rather than easy assertions of abstract universalism; and a reworking of the relationship between the spheres of literary and legal expression through an engagement with socialist and avant-garde traditions of the manifesto. Like the drafters of the UN text, Césaire was focused on the more fundamental questions of the stakes of what it meant to author and iterate a "declaration" with universal pretensions than he was on the question of what "human rights" meant. Put differently, he recognized that the meaning of "human rights" would depend on the declarative form in which that concept was expressed and the universal authority the declarative form helped to legitimize. Césaire's poem is at once a declaration and a meditation on what it means to declare—and more specifically, on the ethics of representation that accompany the act of declaring. In its experimentation with and intermixing of literary and political forms of expression, the Cahier seeks to forge a mode of articulating an alternative internationalism in which the most basic premises of aesthetic and legal representational authority must be completely rethought.

THE GENERIC AMBIGUITY that Césaire claims characterized his poem's origins is reflected in the first word of its title. What kind of text is a "cahier"? English translators' diverse approaches to this word give some indication of just how wide-ranging its significations are. The gloss for "Cahier" in the first English translation of the poem in 1947, by Emile Snyder, was "Memorandum"; subsequent English editions translated by John Berger and Anna Bosstok in 1969 and 1970 left the first word of the title out entirely, presenting the text simply as Return to My Native Land; Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith's 1983 version, which has become the standard English translation of the title, called the poem a "Notebook" for the first time. "Notebook" accommodates the eclectic nature of the Cahier, its shifts from verse to prose, the fragmented, nonsequential character of its stanzas, and the cohabitation of a narrative centered around the spiritual journey of a first-person protagonist with...
myriad fantastical passages that reflect the poet's commitment to "the image, the revolutionary image, the distant image, the image that overthrows all the laws of thought" (Lyric and Dramatic Poetry I). This gloss also intimates that Césaire's speaker enjoys the kind of freedom that comes with writing for an audience of one, with no clear intent to circulate the contents more widely. It is in this spirit that the poem strays from formal strictures, weaves capriciously between prose and verse form, maintains an unfinished, fragmented quality, and, indeed, admits no necessary obligation to legibility or transparency, a point that the poet-narrator drives home with this defiant pronouncement: "Whoever would not understand me would not understand the roar of a tiger" (Notebook 12).

But "cahier" also has other, older significations which push in the opposite direction of the introspective and semiprivate connotations of "notebook." These significations open up very different possibilities for how we make sense of the revolutionary generic novelty of the poem, and also complicate our sense of the poem's speaker as a private, introspective individual by generically situating him as a potential political representative—a speaker who declares a collective self into existence over the course of 173 stanzas. Before the nineteenth century, "cahier" referred primarily not to the introspective and private spaces of writing that we might associate with a notebook but instead to a genre that was decidedly public and performative. France's cahiers de doléances were the documents in which delegates to the Estates General presented grievances of the people of France to the King. In 1789, when Louis XVI convened the Estates General for the first time in 175 years, the cahiers provided a comprehensive and detailed picture of the concerns of all three estates in the period directly preceding the outbreak of the Revolution. Local baillages met to draft the cahiers that would express regional concerns in a text that was explicitly intended to represent the voice of local constituents, most of whom could participate fairly directly in the drafting process. The role of the delegate who transported the baillage's cahier to the Estates General was precisely not that of the writer; he did not bear the responsibility of representing his local constituency in his capacity as an individual but instead was responsible for transporting that constituency's own words and voice to the legislative assembly. Paul Friedland explains the distinctly nonrepresentative nature of the relationship between the text and its handlers: "In theory, at least, there was a perfect transparency between the deputies and those they represented, and between the cahiers and the grievances of the people, such that it could be said that through the body of the Estates General all the people of France met with their king" (35). The key to this transparency lay in the capacity of the text of the cahier to truthfully present the local voice: "Above all, it was the quality of
the \textit{cahier} and not the \textit{quantity} of deputies that would speak on behalf of those in the region" (36). Referred to as "le testament de l'ancienne société française, l'expression suprême et ses désirs, la manifestation authentique de ses volontés" by Tocqueville (qtd. in Soboul et al. 175), the \textit{cahiers} could lay claim to some measure of genuine collective authorship. Grounded in the idea of the tangible, local voice that could participate in a larger political collectivity on its own terms—that is, without giving way to abstraction, and the supposition of accurate representation by a delegate whose own voice would be meant to stand in for the local—\textit{the cahiers de doléances} provide a notable contrast to the models of political representation that would emerge in texts such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the French \textit{Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen} in the years to follow—texts which asserted "a moral right to represent the nontangible, abstract will of public opinion" (Friedland 57). To link Césaire's poem to this earlier form of "cahier" is thus to link it to a form of political writing that prefigures revolution and that speaks truth to power in a voice that claims a different mode of representational authority from that of the two most famous political declarations of the Enlightenment. Such a reading of the first word of Césaire's title situates the poem in a long tradition of (French) revolutionary protest—and as a type of document within that tradition that imagines representative authority differently from how it comes to be conceived in the texts of North Atlantic representative democracies.

If the poem's title tacitly suggests an affiliation with performative revolutionary political writing, the text of the poem does so much less subtly: the \textit{Cahier} both reflects on what it means to declare a new self into existence (thereby foregrounding the ethical challenges of claiming representational authority), and performatively experiments with mergings of the individual and collective self, the "I" and the "We." Saturated with both actual and imagined speech-acts, the poem begins with a kind of declaration of independence: the poet-protagonist evicts his colonial interlocutor with a forceful "Va-t'en" (Irele 1) / "Beat it" (Césaire, Notebook 1). This speech act of anticolonial resistance seems to work; the colonizer, at least, is never again directly addressed in the poem. But the speaker then turns to face the landscape that the colonizer has fled—a diseased, impoverished, and "sinisterly stranded" Antilles in which other voices besides the speaker's own gradually emerge.

And in this inert town, this squalling throng so astonishingly detoured from its cry as this town has been from its movement, from its meaning, not even worried, detoured from its true cry, the only cry you would have wanted to hear because you feel it alone belongs to this town; because you feel it lives in it in some deep refuge and pride in this inert town, this throng detoured...
from [à côté de] its cry of hunger, of poverty, of revolt, of hatred, this throng so strangely chattering and mute. (2–3)

The poet-protagonist's singular, authoritative "Beat it" contrasts starkly with the "strangely chattering and mute" noise of the Martinican morne that he hears once he has redirected his focus. Through a detour—a concept that Césaire's one-time student, Édouard Glissant, would borrow decades later for an updated and more elaborate theorization of Martinique's political and cultural inertia—the town surveyed by the poet-protagonist has been reduced to a "throng," a babbling mass, estranged from its "true cry" of agony and anger. What has been lost to this town is not speech in particular, but simply a cry—the capacity to register, vocally, an injury, a use of voice that is entirely absorbed in responding to the violence to which it has been subjected.

The contrast between the simple, absolute command with which the poem began and the tortuous struggle of verbal/vocal expression in the morne means that when the poet-protagonist steps back onto the scene as a (potential) speaker, his own capabilities of expression have been altered: the problem with which he must contend is the problem of how to learn to begin to speak all over again, this time in some kind of relation to and with the "squalling throng" and its efforts to bring forth a "true cry." The opening speech-act turns out to be something of a false start, a red herring: saying "Beat it" to the figures of colonial authorities was easy; finding out what kind of speech is possible in the context of the Antillean morne on its own is not. The town that the protagonist encounters "crawls on its hands without the slightest desire to drill the sky with a stature of protest" (9).

In order to reactivate this desire and return the throng to its "movement" and "meaning," the protagonist of Césaire's poem must reassess his own relationship to language. His opening speech-act creates a newfound freedom: once he has kicked his interlocutor out of the Antillean landscape, Natalie Melas notes, the voice of the poem "can, in principle, say anything at all, let loose all its hope and all its recriminations, for there will be no consequences" (575). The speaker accordingly begins fantasizing about new forms of speech acts now available to him:

I would rediscover the secret of great communications and great combustions. I would say storm. I would say river. I would say tornado. I would say leaf. I would say tree. I would be drenched by all rains, moistened by all dews. I would roll like frenetic blood on the slow current of the eye of words turned into mad horses into fresh children into clots into curfew into vestiges of temples into precious stones remote enough to discourage miners.
Whoever would not understand me would not understand any better the roaring of a tiger. (12)

The transformations imagined in this passage depend on the utterance of single words, all tied to natural forces and elements as well as movements, “great combustions,” and the rolling of blood. The stakes of the power of saying that the speaker imagines for himself (a power which is tellingly tied to the power of rediscovery) become clear in the final sentence: he longs for an ultimate challenge to comprehension, the creation of a language that would eschew misinterpretation not because of its transparency but because of its power. Yet unlike the poem’s opening “Beat it,” these speech acts are only imagined, not executed. Further, these fantasies of speaking get extended, shortly thereafter, into fantasies of speaking for.

I would go to this land of mine and I would say to it: “Embrace me without fear... And if all I can do is speak, it is for you I shall speak.”

And again I would say:

“My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, my voice the freedom of those who break down in the prison holes of despair.”

And on the way I would say to myself:

“And above all, my body as well as my soul, beware of assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of miseries is not a proscenium, a man screaming is not a dancing bear.” (13-14)

The poet’s ousting of the colonizer was a lone act of verbal resistance; it may have been effectual, but it left the speaker dependent on a dialogue with a now-absent interlocutor—and aware of but alienated from the anguished cry of the throng. After imagining a new kind of authority for himself—the power to name—he then attempts to combat his alienation from the throng by imagining himself in possession of representative authority. In relinquishing his speech and his mouth to the ailing homeland, the poet assigns himself a dual role as hero and lyricist; he presents the potential of his voice as a form of devotional heroism, a gift accorded the homeland that springs from a place of love. Speech is devalued in the poet’s humble address—it is all the protagonist can do—but it is also the best he has to offer, a replacement for something else, for the “bloodthirsty burst” of protest and revolt that has been both repressed and forgotten. Embodiment underlies the speaker’s concept of representation.
here: the mouth that substitutes for the silenced mouth recalls and seeks to remedy the corporeal violence of silencing depicted a few stanzas earlier. Like the cahiers de doléances, the speaker’s (imagined) words resist representative abstraction, as well as “the sterile gaze of the spectator”; part of the process of envisioning himself as a representative entails being cognizant of the potential dangers of that role.

Critics have praised this cautionary turn at the end of this stanza, and more generally the poet-protagonist’s progression over the course of the poem “beyond a desire to speak for others” (Rabbitt 43) toward “the violent demystification of his desired sense of heroism as a savior of his race who is somehow untainted by the ideology of white supremacy; that is, the one who would speak for, rather than with, the oppressed” (Garraway, “What Is Mine” 80). Césaire’s healthy skepticism regarding his speaker’s representative capacities showcases the subtlety and anti-essentialist thrust of his conception of negritude. But while the poem’s fantasy of representative authority certainly needs to be—and is, in the text—complicated and questioned, I would also caution against losing sight of just how important the presentation of that declarative fantasy is at this point in the poem. Its productive value lies in its articulation of the poet’s desire to collapse his own identity into a collective; it is a profession of love; of a willingness to let his own voice, and the body that houses that voice, serve as a prosthesis; of overcoming the colonized intellectual’s class estrangement; of an openness to the possibility of letting the first-person singular become subsumed within the auspices of a collective “We.”

And, indeed, the first occurrence of the first-person plural appears shortly after this dream of collective synthesis—and after the text’s first iteration of the word “negritude.” Césaire’s collective subject follows the same aspirational pattern as did the lone protagonist, initially imagining but not actually performing a series of naming speech-acts: “We would tell. Would sing. Would howl / Full voice, ample voice, you would be our wealth, our spear pointed” (17). The colonial interlocutor reappears here, but this time gets replaced as well as displaced: “Because we hate you and your reason, we claim kinship with dementia praecox with the flaming madness of persistent cannibalism” (17–18). The “we” forms an alliance with anti-reason, with a negritudean “madness that remembers” (18), in contrast to a rationality that has systematically forgotten the slave trade and the slave plantation. Yet these lines importantly do not mark a stable or definitive transition in the poem from the first-person singular to the plural; rather, Césaire will continue to shift back and forth between the two throughout. The poem’s central rhetorical question—“Who and what are we?”—is answered with a return to the singular voice:
From staring too long at trees I have become a tree and my long tree feet
have dug in the ground large venom sacs high cities of bone
from brooding too long on the Congo
I have become a Congo resounding with forests and rivers
where the whip cracks like a great banner
the banner of a prophet
where the water goes
likouala-likouala
where the angerbolt hurls its greenish axe forcing the boars of putrefaction
to the lovely wild edge of the nostrils.

(18-19)

In the Cahier, Gregson Davis has shown, “négritude is not to be regarded as
a state, but an activity—an activity of self-exploration, of ‘delving’ into the
psychosocial unconscious. Négritude is nothing less than the ongoing pro­
cess itself, the subterranean interior journey” (Aimé Césaire 50–51). Césaire’s
replacement of being with doing, and of “we” with “I,” illuminate the text’s
resistance to temporal fixity, corruptively ubiquitous collective identities,
and—at the level of poetic grammar—the tyranny of parallel structure. The
“I” flows through a steady stream of identities in this stanza; even “Congo”
signifies multiply, first as a geographically located river and then as a snake
(or spiritual entity that encompasses both river and snake) that rejects spatial
fixity. Fabulous metamorphosis disrupts the stability of “I” and “We” as cate­
gories of identity.

The last instance in which “We” appears as a grammatical subject occurs
toward the end of the poem, and in some measure provides a more direct
response to the question of who and what “we” are.

And we are standing now, my country and I, hair in the wind, my hand puny
in its enormous fist and now the strength is not in us but above us, in a voice
that drills the night and the hearing like the penetrance of an apocalyptic
wasp. And the voice complains that for centuries Europe has force-fed us
with lies and bloated us with pestilence,
for it is not true that the work of man is done
that we have no business being on earth
that we parasite the world
that it is enough for us to heel to the world whereas the work of man
has only begun
and man still must overcome all the interdictions wedged in the
recesses of his fervor
and no race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength
and there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquest and we
know now that the sun turns around our earth lighting the parcel des­
ignated by our will alone and that every star falls from sky to earth at
our omnipotent command. (44)

This is perhaps the closest Césaire comes to articulating collectivity in pos­
itve, and relatively static, terms—the "we" is standing at the beginning of
this stanza. But the omnipotence and omnipresence of that speaking voice is
quickly undercut by the existence of another voice "above us," one that now
speaks on behalf of the "we," asserting its legitimacy in a deracialized cos­
mos. And just as the supremacy of the first-person plural is displaced by other
voices, so is the spatial and temporal firmness of its standing: "the work of
man has only begun." Identity can be proclaimed only provisionally, only for
a moment, before it dissolves back into the flow of humanity.

And yet that moment of proclamation is nonetheless crucial, unskippable;
it is an act of beginning, the importance of which the speaker reflects on much
earlier along in the poem. The question of what it means to begin emerges at
the tail end of an early confrontation between the plural and singular voice.

we sing of venomous flowers flaring in fury-filled prairies; the skies of love
cut with bloodclots; the epileptic mornings; the white blaze of abyssal sands,
the sinking of flotsam in nights electrified with feline smells.

What can I do? [Qu'y puis-je?]

One must begin somewhere. [Il faut bien commencer.]

Begin what? [Commencer quoi?]

The only thing in the world worth beginning [La seule chose au monde qu'il
vaille la peine de commencer]:

The End of the world of course [La Fin du monde parbleu]. (Cahier 12)

The first stanza once again features a bold "we," a powerful voice cer­
tain enough of its identity and purpose to enact, through communal song,
an apocalyptic natural disaster and its aftereffects, "the sinking of flotsam
in nights electrified with feline smells." After the break the poem's language
decompresses from a prose paragraph saturated with fantastic, ornate imagery
to a fragmentary, simple, monologic call-and-response sequence. If the song sung by the collective voice just above this question has unbridled power to create total destruction, "the End of the world," then the necessary work of beginning that the poet-narrator takes up is a solitary project, and in some sense an impossible one: to begin is to claim the authority that makes a beginning, but where does that authority come from, how does it get claimed, and, finally, how does this power to begin necessitate the ultimate ending? This conundrum is tied to another: what does it mean for Césaire to foreground this question of beginning at the narrative midpoint of a poem whose linear starting point is the end of daybreak? The problem never quite gets resolved, but only posed and then deferred in the text; "the End of the world of course" to which we return at the end of this stanza is still very much in process, and, moreover, in confusing and collapsing the distinction between beginning and ending, refuses to engage with the desire behind the original question.

Beginning is an act of magic, an audacious and aspirational leap of faith through which new authority takes effect in language. The Cahier marks a revolutionary beginning, an act of self-authorization that Césaire dramatizes midway through as parthenogenesis.

I am forcing the vitelline membrane that separates me from myself

I am forcing the great waters which girdle me with blood

I and I alone
make contact with the latest anguish
I and oh, only I
secure through a straw
the first drops of virginal milk!

The poet-protagonist here brings himself into being, situating himself both inside and outside the creative act—imminent and external all at once, and suggesting that the present must understand its debt to the past in a new way. If birth can take place without the participation of a mother, if the self is accountable to nothing beyond itself for existence, then what Césaire cut loose is the role of inheritance and history in the self’s constitution. Abiola Irele notes that the birthing imagery in these lines locates ancestry elsewhere, as the birthing fluid “recollect[s] . . . the forced voyage of the poet’s ancestors across the ocean and their subsequent ordeal under slavery” (91). Even the boldest statements about self-creation in this poem contend with the indelible
past in one way or another. But it is worth noting that the past appears in this passage as oceanic fluid, as the stream that ushers the poet into (re)birth, and not as the womb or the birth canal. In other words, while ancestry, heritage, and history accompany the poet in this self-birthing process, the poet is solely in control of the process itself; whatever obligation he has to this past, it is of a different nature than filial piety. The ocean, as other moments in the poem make clear, is also a grave, and its ghostly inhabitants are in a somewhat separate category from the ancestors who completed the journey across the Middle Passage: these are the ancestors who in fact did not survive to become biological ancestors. Lineage has an organic, ancestral component in the Cahier, but, freed from the figure of the parent, the poet-protagonist can consider new ways to think about how to hold himself accountable to the future.

Yet the imagery also alludes to a fantasy of parthogenesis that links the passage back to European island romance, and as such threatens to pull the consciousness of the poet-narrator back into the realm of spectacle. Prospero's wife, as Stephen Orgel's reading has shown, is perhaps never more of an absent presence in Shakespeare's The Tempest as when Prospero narrates his own arrival on the island as a form of self-birthing. Nearly three decades after beginning work on the Cahier, Césaire would make his own contribution to the rich legacy of Caribbean writers' adaptations of this early modern European drama; Césaire's Une Tempête features a recalcitrant Caliban resonant of Black Power, a Caliban who abandons a befuddled, impotent Prospero to languish in the decay of a former colonial regime at the end of the play. Yet in the Cahier, the first-person protagonist much more closely resembles Prospero, the ultimate symbol, in late-twentieth-century Caribbean literary contexts, of colonial authority. In Orgel's explication, Prospero's self-birth is a spectacular testament to the character's intellectual and creative sovereignty:

Power, as Prospero presents it in the play, is not inherited but self-created; it is magic, or 'art,' an extension of mental power and self-knowledge, and the authority that legitimises it derives from heaven—Fortune and Destiny are the terms used in the play. It is Caliban who derives his claim to the island from inheritance, from his mother. (8)

Heaven, fortune, and destiny are not among the Cahier's key terms, but there is perhaps no better word than magic to describe the poet-narrator's acquisition of self-knowledge—and with self-knowledge, authority—that begins to unfold about a third of the way through the poem. Verging into sardonic parody, Césaire's poet-narrator indulges in a fantasy of total power that may also be a fantasy of too much power, too much autonomy, the replication of a
sovereign "I" that abandons the obligations and debts that accompany inheritance and suffocates the collective voice. Once again, fantasy, in the *Cahier*, is a crucial but risky activity. For all the declarative work this poem does, it also consistently and consciously raises questions about the ethical implications of that work—the possibilities but also the perils of claiming the authority to represent.

INTERNATIONALISM AND UNIVERSALISM

After his ejection of the colonizer in the poem’s opening stanza, Césaire’s protagonist turns to the unequivocally Martinican morne, a landscape with geographical and autobiographical specificity. It is through his engagement with that landscape that he begins to reflect on the problem of how (and whether) to speak on behalf of others. The *Cahier* cannot declare what it wants to declare without beginning locally, and reconfiguring a landscape long exoticized and romanticized in colonial prose. But the poem is also crucially a product of Césaire’s internationalist vision for negritude, one that grew out of his encounters and collaborations with Senghor, Damas, and other African and Antillean immigrants in Paris in the 1930s. Moreover, Césaire purportedly began work on the *Cahier* while doubly “abroad” from his own native land: in 1936, on the invitation of his Yugoslavian friend, Peter Guberina, he left Paris and traveled to Martinska, an island in the Aegean Sea. The island reminded him of Martinique, and he wrote the first draft of the *Cahier* during that visit (xvii). The poem is thus a product of Césaire’s own earliest experiences with international travel and transnational comparison.

The world described and imagined by the *Cahier* bears witness to Bruce Robbins’s claim that “any given version of internationalism turns out to be local and conjectural”—that there are “many versions” of internationalism, “and they are all imperfect” (7). Césaire’s is a world of multiple internationalisms, of a plurality of discursive solidarities that challenge the hegemonic and oppressive internationalism of First World legal, economic, and cultural systems. These are the basic building blocks of the poem’s political vision, the collective identity and program of collective action that the poet-protagonist both envisions and seeks to instantiate through language. The pluralism of Césaire’s conception of solidarity gets articulated most clearly and insistently in the first two-thirds of the poem; it is a conception that captures the liberatory desires that would, a year before the publication of the final version of the *Cahier*, be articulated on a grander scale at the Bandung Conference, and it is a conception that remains committed to protecting the particularity...
of negritude even as it also constellates negritude beyond that particularity. Diasporic scatteredness and hermetic circularity collide fabulously in the poem’s celebration of “those whose survival travels in the germination of grass” alongside a more general cry: “Eia perfect circle of the world, enclosed concordance!” (36).

Black internationalisms such as negritude are different from other midcentury internationalisms in at least one important respect. Communism, surrealism, international human rights law, and other cosmopolitan projects originating in the Global North presuppose the existence of—and therefore aim to exceed or transcend—the nation-state. But the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and imperialism made such a presupposition nonsensical for Africa and its diaspora; these were the very conditions that had systematically deprived Africa and the Caribbean of nation-state-hood (Edwards 24). Black internationalism is therefore a kind of internationalism that never takes for granted the nation-state and its affordance of important forms of political legibility. Yet for the same reasons, black internationalism also holds up the concept of the nation-state, in its North Atlantic forms, to a high degree of scrutiny. Black Atlantic anticolonialism encompasses what Michelle Stephens identifies as “the contradiction between specific notions of racial nationalism—based in ideals of national sovereignty and imperial civilization, the ship of state itself—and the openness of the alternative routes that ship has taken in its quest for racial freedom” (39).

As we have seen, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights conflates internationalism with universalism; the drafters and the text itself obscure the discretely international circumstances of its creation (within the UN, in the hands of a small and quite Western and Westernized committee) in order to present it as a universal text, written not only for but in some sense by the human community writ large. Such deracinated, dehistoricized universalism is precisely the kind of universalism with which Césaire would take issue in his 1956 letter of resignation from the French-Communist Party. Césaire’s Lettre à Maurice Thorez contains a lucid analysis of the party’s failure to account for the crucial difference of colonialism to the experience of African and Caribbean countries, a failure which serves as Césaire’s explanation for why the party itself is inherently incapable of remedying the problem. After identifying the “embarrassment” of communism in its present forms, the majority of Césaire’s letter works to build a case for the singularity of colonized African and African diasporic peoples, and for the incommensurability of their voice with the platforms of the French and Soviet Communist parties at this point in time. In his final paragraphs, he articulates his decision to quit the Party as a philosophical intervention—one that incorporates his observations of
how race and colonialism refigure Marxist questions and problems, but also one that steps back and considers the possibilities for thinking about transnational (or even global) movements alongside a theory of critically inflected universalism.

Provincialisme? Non pas. Je ne m’enterre pas dans un particularisme étroit. Mais je ne veux pas non plus me perdre dans un universalisme décharné. Il y a deux manières de se perdre: par ségrégation murée dans le particulier ou par dilution dans l’« universel ».

Ma conception de l’universel est celle d’un universel riche de tout le particulier, riche de tous les particuliers, approfondissement et coexistence de tous les particuliers. (Lettre 15)

Provincialism? Certainly not. I do not bury myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in a detached universalism. There are two ways in which to lose oneself: by walled segregation in the particular or by dilution into the "universal."

My conception of the universal is that of a universal rich in all of the particular, rich in all particulars, and profoundly coexistent with all particulars.

Césaire’s Lettre reveals the impoverished nature of communist “universalism,” its failure to account for—and celebrate—difference in an attempt to maintain orthodoxy and centralized aesthetic, philosophical, and political authority. Césaire is unwilling to altogether renounce the concept of universalism; but we might rephrase his “universalism in all its particulars” as more of an internationalism, a movement, a spirit, and—to borrow once again from Robbins—a “feeling” that derives its potency from the fact that it is situated in a particular space and time. If the Universal Declaration masks its internationalism under professions of universal applicability, then the Cahier does the opposite: Césaire’s universalism is much harder to detect, until the final pages of the poem, beneath a number of iterations of his nuanced and capacious internationalist imagination. Césaire’s is an internationalism based on discursive solidarity and subversive reconceptions of a global geography; its impulse toward universalism, with which the poem closes, asserts human unity based not on revolutionary action but instead on something that approximates a human rights ethic, one that situates negritude within a more generalized and transcendent cosmology and sacrifices (or at least seems to sacrifice) the historical specificity around which its internationalist identity is constructed.

As a diasporic internationalism, Césairean negritude is ultimately concerned with affiliations among people rather than spaces. But in the Cahier
those affiliations can be neither recognized nor developed without a reconceptualization of geographical space, a remapping of the world. While relegated to the position of a bitter and despairing spectator in the opening stanzas of the poem, Césaire's poet-protagonist strives to reclaim a positive identity for his "country" and its inhabitants by asserting the authority to reinvent geography itself:

I have no right to measure life by my sooty finger span; to reduce myself to this little ellipsoidal nothing trembling four fingers above the line, I a man, so to overturn creation that I include myself between latitude and longitude! (Notebook 14)

Self-inclusion, in this formulation, entails claiming the geographer's tools as his own, the creation of "my special geography [mon originale géographie] too; the world map made for my own use, not tinted with the arbitrary colors of scholars, but with the geometry of my spilled blood" (43). The maps drawn up by the inventors of powder and compass need to be discarded in favor of a new geography of the globe, one that will render visible the spatial and historical contours of a diasporic community.

To some extent, Césaire's new geography of negritude is a black Atlantic geography, one in which the historical triangulation of Europe, Africa, and the Americas collides with the speaker's (and poet's) present. But it also resists assigning spatial and relational fixity to these continents; recall the way in which elsewhere in the poem Césaire transforms the Congo from its static, passive existence as an African river to a slithering, living entity that eschews geographical fixity. Even the transatlantic connections which are so often invoked as the very crux of negritudean identity, those between Africa and its diaspora, are, on closer examination, less central or determinant than they at first appear. Africa enters the poet-protagonist's consciousness through a language of racial ancestry: "Tepid dawn of ancestral heat and fear I now tremble with the collective trembling that our docile blood sings in the madrepore" (32); "my country is the 'lance of light' of my Bambara ancestors" (44). But the collectivity at the heart of the poem shares the historical memory of the Middle Passage: "We the vomit of slave ships / We the venery of the Calabars" (28). Negritude, for Césaire, is first and foremost a diasporic identity, one that excludes contemporary Africans whose ancestors did not experience the slave-ship hold and its "enchained curses, the gasps of the dying, the noise of someone thrown into the sea" (28).

At other points in the text, the Cahier does make powerful claims for solidarity among present-day Africa and the diaspora. But those claims coincide
with moments in which the poem asserts an internationalism that exceeds both the space of the black Atlantic and African bloodlines. These solidari­ties are established in the first half of the poem, and take the form of lists of historically specific names. The first such list posits a series of imaginative identifications in a passage that leads up to the poet-protagonist’s aspirations of representational authority:

To go away.
As there are hyena-men and panther-men, I would be a jew-man  
a Kaffir-man  
a Hindu-man-from-Calcutta  
a Harlem-man-who-doesn’t-vote

The departure the poet-protagonist contemplates here facilitates—or, more precisely, would facilitate—any number of identifications between the protagonist and other racially degraded figures. The “Kaffir-man,” the “Hindu-man-from-Calcutta,” and the “Harlem-man-who-doesn’t-vote” provide the basis for the speaker’s inclusion of his own racially constructed identity into a larger world of such identities, and at the same time (implicitly) threaten to dissolve the specificity of his experiential identity. Reductive and derogatory labels are ironically reappropriated as the basis for a new form of internationalist solidarity; as Mara de Gennaro explains, Césaire here “denaturaliz[es] racist and culturally elitist concepts and practices constructed in colonialist discourse as inevitable . . . by appealing to a supracultural state of commonality and interconnectedness that, in his view, transcends cultural particularities, including, and especially, the fictive idealism of the West” (61). This “supracultural state” is constellative; there is no central point from which all other points become intelligible. Conversely, any point from within this schema can shed light on its interconnectedness with all others. Racism, this stanza reveals, is an experience that not only is not unique to blacks but that in fact provides the basis for solidarity among blacks and other racially oppressed groups.

Césaire further complicates the poem’s Atlanticism in the presentation of his next list, in which he constellates five cities within the speaker’s radically redrawn global geography: “And I say to myself Bordeaux and Nantes and Liverpool and New York and San Francisco / not an inch of this world devoid of my fingerprint” (15). The first four cities in this short catalog frame a circum-Atlantic space whose unity could derive from the financial and cultural networks of the Atlantic slave trade and its contemporary legacies; San Francisco,
however, conspicuously disrupts that geographical frame. Césaire's naming of this Pacific city in the Cahier has prompted relatively little critical commentary; the most extensive gloss I have come across is Irele's comment that San Francisco and New York denote "cities whose development was largely due to the exploitation of cheap labor, especially that of black workers" (72). Césaire's inclusion of a West Coast U.S. city in this list certainly serves as a reminder that racism against blacks was not exclusive to the South. Yet Irele's gloss seems so intent on connecting San Francisco to a history of black exploitation that it fails to explore the significance of this location to the poem's conception of a plurality of global histories of racial exploitation and colonial and imperial control. More than any other U.S. city, San Francisco is known as the port of arrival for East Asian immigrants to the Americas, and more broadly is associated with the economic exploitation of East Asian workers in the nineteenth-century construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. Césaire's San Francisco reference may signal the reach of the Atlantic diaspora beyond the shores of the Atlantic, but it also brings to mind the existence of analogous diasporic populations that bear the mark of the poet-protagonist's "fingerprint": other transnational throngs whose experience with capitalist and imperialist forms of violence lays the groundwork for comparison, mutual recognition, and perhaps even political solidarity with black internationalism.

These moments of global comparative identification in the Cahier indicate a conceptual approach to internationalism that resembles what Michael Malouf, drawing on Nancy Fraser, identifies as discursive solidarity. Malouf demonstrates how "Caribbean cosmopolitanism" constructed by figures such as Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and Derek Walcott forms by way of "detours through other nationalisms" (14); McKay, for example, "does not 'use' Irish nationalism so much as he dialogues with it, in Fraser's sense, as part of a process of developing an alternative political vocabulary" (85). The multiplicity of political identities (not all of which are nationalist) in the Cahier are similarly situated by Césaire as in dialogue—able to recognize, interact with, and inform one another once the oppressive geography of European imperialism has been thrown out. But this dialogical multiplicity emerges from a poem that also baldly poses the question, midway through, "Who and what are we?" (Notebook 18). The poet-protagonist himself announces the difficulty of asserting any of these identities as stable and fixed. Through the Cahier's ever-widening geographical scope, Césaire maps a plurality of transnational projects and connective networks, registering the poet's investment in situating negritude and black internationalism as in conversation with other movements that exceed the geographical space of the black Atlantic. But it is worth noting that even these movements themselves are discursively constructed;
their participants/constituents need to be made legible to one another as well as to the rest of the world.

In the final pages of the poem, Césaire seems to retreat from his internationalist vision and to locate negritude's essence not in discrete histories of oppression but in a manifestation of universal humanity and an outgrowth of universal suffering. As the Cahier comes to a close, the enumeration of specific trans- and international solidarities begins to give way to a renewed focus on the ethical position of the poet-protagonist, who no longer seems to be in conversation with an antagonistic, absent colonizer-interlocutor, but rather with a higher power: in a "virile prayer" he calls for the universe to

make me into the executor of these lofty works
the time has come to gird one's loins like a brave man—

But in doing so, my heart, preserve me from all hatred
do not make me into that man of hatred for whom I feel only hatred

(37–38)

Just as the speaker's wistful statements transitioned into their own miraculous fulfillment earlier in the text, so his prayer seems to bring about the desired transformation here: "Look, now I am only a man, no degradation, no spit perturbs him, / now I am only a man who accepts emptied of anger / (nothing left in his heart but immense love, which burns)" (39). The poet-protagonist can now distinguish between two kinds of humility—one cruelly demanded by the bèlé's whip; the other a non-oppressive means of facing the future by respecting the past: "Presences, it is not on your back that I will make peace with the world" (41). Colonialism, imperialism, and racial exploitation have hardly disappeared from view, but in passages like this the emphasis is no longer on confronting those enemies through combative assertions of collective strength; the challenge the speaker now faces is an internal one.

The inward turn of the final pages of the poem is accompanied by an increased focus on needs, desires, and experiences that pertain to humanity as a whole rather than to specific groups or nations. Césaire's anaphoric stanzas celebrating "Those who invented neither powder or compass" refer less and less specifically with each repetition. His invocations of "my country," located so vividly in the Martinican morné in the opening pages of the poem, begin to feel more metaphorical than literal as well. And "entrenched as I am in this unique race," the speaker insists that "what I want / is for universal hunger / for universal thirst" (38). Moreover, the final (though not cumulative) definition of negritude offered by the poem is also its most capacious: "no longer a
cephalic index, or plasma, or soma, but measured by the compass of suffering" (43). Biology is unequivocally displaced here in favor of the shared experience of historical trauma—but importantly historical trauma itself is delineated merely as undifferentiated "suffering." When, on the following page, the poet proclaims that "the work of man has only begun," the "man" in question bears no more specificity than the ubiquitous titular figure of the Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen—for, we are then informed, "no race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength / and there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquest" (44).

This shift from the situated internationalism Césaire has envisioned throughout the text to a final embrace of a more abstracted universal humanism at the end tends to be given a lot of weight in criticism as proof of Césaire's own humanist commitments—and as evidence that the poet's ethical vision is transcendent enough to refute charges of essentialism. Here, however, I wish to emphasize the significance of these gestures' appearance toward universal humanism only at the end of the poem—and as an outgrowth of the internationalism to which Césaire devotes so much imaginative attention beforehand. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights places its professions of universal humanity at the beginning of the document, asserting "the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" as "the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" in its opening lines. Césaire's Cahier reverses that ordering; his final universalist claims thus read as claims that have been built and even earned over the course of the poem, constructed poetically rather than assumed as givens from the beginning. The negritude of the Cahier is not meant to be assimilated into a Eurocentric humanism; rather it asserts its right to define humanism from the outside, to draw on the immensely powerful fictions of universalism and humanism that are so constitutive of a First World global ethical imagination in the mid-twentieth century on its own terms.

POETRY OF THE THIRD WORLD REVOLUTION: SIDESTEPPING THE MANIFESTO

Césaire's poem critically reappropriates the internationalism of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by overhauling its geographical scope, its imperialist claims to representative authority, and its obscuring of particularity. In this way it is a counterdeclaration, an alternative vision of global justice to that of imperial internationalism. And while the Cahier is not a "founding text" of the negritude movement in the same way that the Universal
Declaration could be said to found the contemporary human rights movement, certainly by the publication of the second and third editions of the poem Césaire (and his compatriots) probably thought of it in roughly those terms. We might, then, be tempted to describe the *Cahier* as a manifesto, which in the mid-twentieth century was the radical alternative to the juridico-political declaration as well as the liberal political traditions in which that form was enounced. As Martin Puchner has shown, the modernist manifesto—in both its socialist and its avant-garde instantiations—was characterized first and foremost by its theatricality, its provocative seizure of contexts in which the declarative text and its author(s) enjoy no pre-existing claims to authority (25). This is precisely the kind of oppositional declarative work that the *Cahier* carries out. Well acquainted (and affiliated) with the socialist and avant-garde strains of the modernist manifesto tradition, Césaire certainly would have had that genre and its potential for declarative provocation in mind in the 1940s and 1950s, if not before.

And yet it is no accident that Césaire did not identify his poem as a manifesto—that, indeed, no one ever wrote a manifesto of negritude. As a black, Antillean, and anticolonial student of Marxism and surrealism, Césaire had a complex relationship with each of these movements, whose centers of authority were unequivocally European and Eurocentric. Moreover, as Puchner observes, by the mid-twentieth century the manifesto had become as much a means of establishing and signifying new orthodoxies as it was a tool for discrediting older ones. André Breton’s 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* is “a foundational scene from which surrealism emerges” (Puchner 185), a text that secures Breton’s title as the sole legitimate author of surrealism’s manifestos—and his authority over the movement writ large. And while the *Communist Manifesto* “defined for many subsequent writers what a manifesto should be” (11), it also—and because of this definitional and foundational task—discouraged subsequent writers from authoring new manifestos. It makes sense, then, that Césaire—for whom even “poetry” felt too restrictive a formal category when he was writing the first version of the *Cahier*—would have been uninterested in introducing negritude in programmatic terms.

The most clear-cut evidence of how careful Césaire was not to author a manifesto is provided by a text that flirts with, but deliberately does not quite inhabit, that genre. In 1942 Césaire published a poem in *Tropiques* whose text would later be incorporated into the revised 1947 edition of the *Cahier*. As it appeared in the Antillean journal, however, the poem was titled “En guise de manifeste littéraire” [“In the Guise of a Literary Manifesto”]—and dedicated to Breton. If Césaire assiduously avoided claiming the generic designation of “manifesto” in deference to Breton’s exclusive control over surrealism’s relationship with that
form of writing, he nonetheless comes close to infringing on that monopoly by foregrounding the proximity of his poem to the manifesto form. "En guise de manifeste" gestures toward the very thing it proclaims itself not quite identical with; it raises the question of exactly what it takes to be a manifesto, what a good imitation thereof might look like, and most importantly what is accomplished by a text that purports to stand in for this other type of text while also refusing to be identified as such. Dedicated to Breton, this poem contains one of the longer work's most famous celebrations of nègritudean-surrealist "folie," much of which gets incorporated into the 1947 edition of the *Cahier*:

Comptons:
la folie qui se souvient
la folie qui hurle
la folie qui voit,
la folie qui se déchaîne.

Assez de ce gout de cadavre fade!

Ni naufrageurs. Ni nettoyeurs de trancheé. Ni hyènes. Ni chacals. Et vous savez le reste:

Que 2 et 2 font 5
Que la forêt miaule
Que l'arbre tire les marrons du feu
Que le ciel se lisse la barbe
Et cetera, et cetera . . .
(“En guise de manifeste” 7–8)

Let's count:
the madness that remembers
the madness that howls
the madness that sees
the madness that is unleashed

Enough of the taste of this insipid cadaver!

Neither shipwreckers. Nor trench cleaners. Nor hyenas. Nor jackals. And you know the rest:
That 2 and 2 are 5
that the forest miaows
that the tree plucks the maroons from the fire
that the sky strokes its beard
etc., etc. . . .

The refutation of Western rationality that takes place in these lines echoes—or perhaps more accurately does the work of—Breton's displacement of liberal humanism in his first Manifesto of Surrealism, where he declares that "the imagination is perhaps on the verge of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights" (10). And it echoes also Césaire's insistence, in his 1945 "Poetry and Knowledge," also published in Tropiques, that poetry's corrective to scientific knowledge lies in its accounting for a fuller, more holistic definition of humanity, one that sees the human as in partnership with the rest of the natural world rather than nature's oppressor. The poet, he asserts, is "someone who saves humanity, someone who restores it to universal harmony, someone who marries a human florescence to universal florescence" (Richardson and Fjalkowsk 39). Within the text of the Cahier, the stakes of this revaluation of humanism in relation to history and politics become clear. "2 + 2 = 5" is not a game; the theatricality of surrealism's refutation of reason is not at odds with the very concrete problems of colonialism and racial exploitation that the poet-narrator must figure out how to successfully challenge. Not itself a manifesto, the Cahier nonetheless incorporates the poetic strategies of the surrealist manifesto tradition in identifying the aesthetic as a crucial weapon in the struggle against imperial authority.

Similarly, Césaire draws on key features of the urtext of the socialist manifesto tradition, the Communist Manifesto, in order to think negritudean solidarity as a transhistorical as well as a transnational/transregional phenomenon. Critics have paid much attention to the formal and stylistic relationship between Bretonian surrealism and Césaire's poetry; the aesthetic importance of communism, the other internationalism to which the manifesto form was central in the mid-twentieth century, has remained underexplored. It is worth noting that both the Manifesto and the Cahier were created amid a sense of generic flux, a search for a new textual form suited to a new historical and political moment (Puchner 19). More importantly, however, the Communist Manifesto supplies Césaire with the means of challenging the presentism of the juridico-political declaration by way of a radical alternative temporality of global ethics for a new world order. Césaire's poet-protagonist has representational obligations not only toward "those who cannot speak" in the present, but also toward past generations, who exert a ghostly presence in the text of
the poem. The Communist Manifesto's own staging of an ethical encounter with a ghost helps elucidate the stakes and inner workings of how Césaire imagines solidarity across time as well as space—how he imagines an ethics of declaring that opens itself up to black Atlantic history.

The Manifesto famously begins by defining communism as a specter—one of which, Jacques Derrida observes in Specters of Marx, the authors are both enamored and afraid. Specters, Derrida tells us, "have no more important role than that of throwing the time out of joint: the specter may appear to us at clearly identifiable points in time, but it appears as already existent: a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back" (11). Moreover, specters do not appear merely at the bidding of the conjurer; the paradox of conjuring as a speech act is that the effects of that speech act are always already beyond the speaker's control. In fact, the conjurer—also a witness and a kind of host—takes on an unexpected, and perhaps unwanted, ethical obligation to the specter. "The Manifesto calls, it calls for this presentation of the living reality: we must see to it that in the future this specter—and first of all an association of workers forced to remain secret until about 1848—becomes a reality, and a living reality. This real life must show itself and manifest itself, it must present itself beyond Europe, old or new Europe, in the universal dimension of an International" (101-2). Derrida issues a call to embrace this complex ethical obligation, to "learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself" (176). In Derrida's reading the ethical work of conjuring is central to the manifesto genre, in which the "future is not described, it is not foreseen in the constative mode; it is announced, promised, called for in a performative mode" (103). Communism is called forth performatively; but the paradox of performativity is that revolutionary time is unstable and ephemeral. "As soon as one identifies a revolution, it begins to imitate, it enters into a death agony" (115). The brilliance of Marx and Engels's text, but also the problem with which we, retrospectively, have to wrestle, is precisely this paradox.

The specters that haunt the Cahier do not make themselves manifest until midway through, but it is through them that Césaire holds negritudean internationalism accountable to not only a dispersed and disorganized present-day "throng" but also the past through which the African diaspora came to be. The spectral presences in Césaire's poem unhinge the speaker's search for an alternate mode of representational authority from the present; in throwing the time out of joint, conjuration establishes negritudean internationalism as crossing temporal as well as spatial boundaries. If remapping and listing are
two of the principle means by which the Cahier establishes the transnational scope and implications of negritude, then conjuring is the means by which Césaire situates negritude as a transhistorical phenomenon. Shortly before the poet-protagonist imagines himself as speaking for the dispossessed morne he witnesses in the present, he contemplates how he might use language on behalf of the spectral inhabitants of his native land.

And you ghosts rise blue from alchemy from a forest of hunted beasts of twisted machines of a jujube tree of rotten flesh of a basket of oysters of eyes of a network of straps in the beautiful sisal of human skin I would have words vast enough to contain you. (Notebook 12)

Representational authority is identified, early along in the poem, as a means by which the speaker will affirm a loyalty to more than just the despairing present-day morne and its living inhabitants; his ethical obligation, this stanza makes clear, also extends backwards in time, to an ancestry whose presence is spectacularly active amid the vegetation of a “savage earth arisen from the storerooms of the sea” (13). The importance of this obligation becomes clear in the poem’s first iteration of the word negritude, which “rose for the first time” ["se mit debout pour la première fois" (Césaire, Cahier 10)] in Haiti: a metropolitan colonial subject with a Western education, Césaire may have coined the word for negritude relatively recently, but his poet-protagonist can take no credit for inventing the phenomenon. Negritude makes its first appearance in the poem as a very old ghost, one that dates back to—or, as the reflexive verb "se mit" suggests, even predates—Haiti’s revolution. The poet-protagonist’s task is not to create negritude so much as to coax it into view, to instantiate another “rising” of this specter in the present.

Haunted, in Derrida’s analysis, takes place on its own terms: “a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its coming and goings because it begins by coming back” (11). Conjuring is a conscious, intentional speech-act under the control of Césaire’s poet-protagonist; the ghosts that he conjures, however, are beyond his control. It is a risky task, one that threatens the speaker/author’s authority even as it seems to cement it. The Cahier gives voice to negritude, but in doing so acknowledges the limitations of the voice that it gives. The poet-protagonist, the voice of the poem, will never satisfactorily speak for the political community he wishes to call forth. Césaire’s poem embraces the impossibility of the task its speaker sets out to accomplish. These demands are dramatized in the final pages of the Cahier through Césaire’s deployment of two closely linked motifs from classical epic: katabasis and nekiaia. Gregson Davis describes the Cahier’s adaptation of katabasis—the epic hero’s descent...
to the land of the dead—as the poet-protagonist's "descent into the psychological depths that brings him face to face with ghosts of his former self" (Aimé Césaire 43). Confrontation with the "confessions" he hears from the slave ships enables his own confession of identifying with the oppressor's disdain for the "comical and ugly" black man, and a revelation about the farcical nature of his own heroism. In other words, at the very moment that the poem employs a motif from epic that most explicitly figures the protagonist as the hero, it also draws his heroism into question. "It is against this painfully gained insight that we can best understand the positive affirmation of négritude we hear resounding through the later portions of the Cahier" (43). I read the katabasis episode as a means through which Césaire endows négritudean political solidarity with a vital transhistorical dimension. Ghosts first enter into the poem as objects of verbal desire; the poet-protagonist longs to "contain" them with his words. His confrontation with the slave ship that takes place midway through the poem thwarts that will to autonomous control, but also grants him admission to a négritudian fraternity that spans multiple centuries. Just as Virgil initiates Dante into a transgenerational community of great bards in the Inferno, so does the poet-protagonist's "descent" into the depths of an Atlantic past grant him solidarity with that past and its ghosts. The katabasis episode not only enables the poet-protagonist to confront and transcend his own complicity with European oppression and racism; it also establishes "his" négritude as multigenerational and transhistorical, a movement and an ethic that claims affinity with the dead as well as the living.

Katabasis distinguishes the Cahier's relationship to history from that of the Communist Manifesto: while the Manifesto recounts the prehistory of the workers of the world, there is no urgent need in that text to establish transhistorical solidarity between the mid-nineteenth-century proletariat and laborers from earlier historical moments. In contrast, such a recognition is crucial in the Cahier. Katabasis allows Césaire to establish the spectral as a crucial ethical component of négritude: the ghosts of the slave ship are the ghosts to whom the poet-protagonist is responsible, and in turn they offer him a viable ancestry for a present-day transnational political community. He thus finds a way to bring together two strands of thought about modernity—"the catastrophic rupture of the middle passage" and "the dream of revolutionary transformation"—that Paul Gilroy argues are mutually exclusive for writers such as Douglass, Du Bois, and Wright (Black Atlantic 197). The katabasis episode recuperates the slave ship as a viable and indeed essential component of a contemporary black internationalist politics.29

The second epic motif of which Césaire makes use aligns much more closely with the Communist Manifesto's strategies of integrating past and
present. *Katabasis* is a narrative episode in which the hero plays the part of a visitor after undertaking a journey (even if, as in Dante's case, only a dream journey) to the land of the dead. *Nekuia*, in contrast, is an act of conjuring, a summoning forth and questioning of the dead in order to learn about the present—and the future. The conjurer is a host who issues an invitational speech-act and then plays a more passive role in welcoming a visitation by a specter. Césaire's poet-protagonist begins his descent to the Atlantic underworld with a speech act, an incantation:

voum rooh oh
voum rooh oh
to charm the snakes to conjure the dead
voum rooh oh
to compel the rain to turn back the tidal waves
voum rooh oh
to keep the shade from moving
voum rooh oh
that my own skies may open

(20)

A counterpoint to the words from the Catholic mass that appeared a few stanzas earlier, this incantation connotes both a specifically Caribbean oceanscape and more generally a set of distinctly non-Western modes of engaging with a spirit world, modes that allude to but also beyond African spirituality (e.g., the Indian snake charmer). Conjuring signals the poet-protagonist's embrace of a set of original, syncretic strategies for forging transgenerational connection; the initiation of contact with ghosts takes place on his own terms. When the incantation (repeated twice more in subsequent stanzas) is finished, his role becomes notably more passive: at the completion of his "descent" to the slave ship, far from his earlier fantasy of finding words to contain the ghosts therein, he instead becomes first and foremost a listener:

I hear coming up from the hold the enchained curses, the gasps of the dying, the noise of someone thrown into the sea ... the baying of a woman in labor ... the scrape of fingernails seeking throats ... the flouts of the whip ... the seething of vermin amid the weariness ... (28)

These shades (or, rather, their voices) come up to meet the poet; while never himself entering the hold, the Atlantic's deepest circle of hell, he summons them forth from below. Césaire's speaker-hero is less a quester than an
aural witness. In place of life stories, the poet-protagonist hears cries, gasps, splashes, whips. The slave ship releases new sounds and images into his consciousness that disrupt the narrative flow of the poem more than they contribute to it. If *katabasis* establishes the spectral as a crucial component of negritude, the means by which transhistorical as well as transnational solidarity becomes possible, then *nekua* poses the question of what happens when one tries to invoke—which is to say, to declare—that solidarity in the present moment. Conjuring is unpredictable and overwhelming; the poet-protagonist relinquishes control over the project of negritude in welcoming these specters up from the hold, giving way to the ethical demand they place upon him.

Like Enlightenment-era revolutionary declarations, the *Communist Manifesto* derives its authority from a source beyond the text itself (the already-existent phenomenon of communism in place of nature or self-evident truths). But unlike these eighteenth-century texts, Marx and Engels's declaration identifies that authority as spectral—as an authority that haunts and in some sense challenges the authority of the text's declarative voice and the present in which it makes its intervention. Borrowing Derrida's language, we might say that Cézaire's *Cahier* endows negritude with a similar hauntological structure; declaring negritude requires its conjuration. And conjuration introduces an ethical dimension to the work of declaring; Cézaire cannot chart the revolutionary future he imagines for the colonized black Atlantic world without allowing for the fact that that future will be haunted by a past marked by slavery, colonialism, and revolutionary resistance to those institutions. To declare negritude into existence, the poet-protagonist must assume an audacious amount of authority, without which no act of declaration (or conjuration) can take place at all. Performative audacity enables the poet-protagonist to assume the inherent risks of the speech act. But the black Atlantic specters that the poet-protagonist (audaciously) conjures forth then assert their own authority over this rhetorical performance. They reveal this declarative text's affiliation with a much more capacious negritudean hauntology that dates back hundreds of years and spans both shores of the Atlantic. The poet-protagonist's embrace of negritude's transhistoricality humbles him, tempers his individual voice by acknowledging its debt to a multigenerational chain of voices of which it is a part. Conjuration offers Cézaire a way out of the traps of presentism and unsituated universalism that threaten to derail the poet-protagonist at the outset of his quest.

**PRESENTISM AND UNSITUATED UNIVERSALISM** are precisely the traps into which the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* falls. Without question,
of course, much of the impetus behind the UN text stemmed from recent history, namely the horrors of the Holocaust and international law’s failure to offer minority populations any protection in the wake of World War II. But the text itself quite purposely eschews reference to specific historical events; at a rhetorical level, its strategy for dealing with the past is exactly the opposite of the one that Césaire deploys in his poem. The utopian aspirations of speaking truth to power that many of the Universal Declaration’s proponents and drafters shared were reined in by the practical realities of institutional constraints, Cold War politics, and the investments of many UN member states in the continued control of the colonial and “developing” world. The universalism of human rights discourse could not transcend the more narrowly internationalist contexts in which it was voiced. Even in its earliest days of institutional articulation, and well before its future complicity with a new world order were at all self-evident, human rights was endowed with an enormous amount of moral, pedagogical, and quasi-legal authority. The theory of universal authorship and applicability that underlies the Universal Declaration is constitutive of a twentieth-century imperial internationalism through which what Makau Mutua calls the “three-dimensional prism” of savages, victims, and saviors—the central metaphors of a Western human rights discourse—takes shape (10). And it is for this reason that Césaire’s Cahier, with its challenging revaluation of the nature of the declaration, has much to tell us about the form through which the authority to declare human rights is asserted. Césairean negritude is not an “alternative” version of a declaration of human rights; it does not address the question of what the UN Declaration might have looked like had its drafters accounted for colonialism as a humanitarian disaster, or if there had been more representation from the colonized world within the Commission on Human Rights. Rather, Césaire confronts and reworks the declarative form in which human rights first gains its legibility and legitimation within First World international institutions. From within literary space, the Cahier interrogates the form of the juridico-political human rights declaration, and especially the pitfalls and opportunities that accompany its claims to authority. Césaire’s poem, with its incorporation of the performative and spectral imperatives of the manifesto, provided a means of capacious reimagining the nature and the parameters of legal and political belonging in the soon to be decolonized world.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. "Are and ought to be'; the 'and' articulates and conjoins here the two discursive modalities, the to be and the ought to be, the constation and the prescription, the fact and the right. And is God: at once creator of nature and judge, supreme judge of what is (the state of the world) and of what relates to what ought to be (the rectitude of our intentions). The instance of judgment, at the level of the supreme judge, is the last instance for saying the fact and the law. One can understand this Declaration as a vibrant act of faith, as a hypocrisy indispensable to a politico-military-economic, etc. coup of force, or, more simply, more economically, as the analytic and consequential deployment of a tautology; for this Declaration to have a meaning and an effect, there must be a last instance" ("Declarations of Independence" 11-12).

2. See Ania Loomba’s critique of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s Empire in the conclusion of her Colonialism/Postcolonialism (216).

3. See, in particular, Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire; as well as the commentary of some of the participants in the MLA Roundtable entitled “The End of Postcolonial Theory?” (Yaeger). These accounts are countered by a number of others—Simon During, Simon Gikandi, and other participants in the MLA Roundtable, to name a few—that insist on the continued relevance of the historical and ethical imperatives of postcolonialism in the twenty-first century.

4. I borrow the word “transversal” from Ian Baucom, who in turn is drawing on Édouard Glissant’s description of the kind of “cross-cultural relationship” that is constituted through the evocation of slaves thrown overboard—a “network” of “submarine roots” that grounds a comparative critical practice not through “the universal transcendence of the sublime” but instead through an oceanic history of slavery and colonialism (quoted in Baucom par. 6). Baucom connects this reading practice with the stakes of postcolonial studies’ balancing the capaciousness of an oceanic geohistorical framework against the uncritical embrace of global hybridity thus: “one of the most valuable and most particular lessons that ‘postcolonialism’ texts have communicated to us, in Glissant’s terms, precisely the lesson of the ‘transversal’: The coral-become bodies of those slaves drowned in the Middle Passage do link the waters washing the coast of Martinique with an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century history of the Caribbean, with the past and present legacies of the triangular trade, with the Victorian and Edwardian underdevelopment of Africa, Rastafarian and Pan-Africanist narratives of return, the poetry of Aimé Césaire, Afrocentric curricula, and the commodification of Kente cloth . . . To refuse to read these linkages is not to eschew indiscriminate acts of totalization, it is to refuse to read” (par. 9).

5. As Charles Piot observes, the omission of present-day Africa from black Atlantic studies "not only silences a major entity in the black Atlantic world but also leaves unchallenged the notion that Africa is somehow different—that it remains a site of origin and purity, uncontaminated by those histories of the modern that have lent black Atlantic cultures their
distinctive character—and thus risks reinscribing a conception of culture that Gilroy, Hall, and many of the new diaspora scholars otherwise spend much of their work critiquing. This ellipsis also suggests, of course, that Africa has played little role in the development of black Atlantic cultural production, other than as provider of raw materials—bodies and cultural templates/origins—that were then processed or elaborated upon by the improvisational cultures of the Americas” (156).

6. See, for example, Chrisman and Nixon.

7. See Yogita Goyal’s introduction to the Fall 2014 special issue of Research in African Literatures, devoted to a consideration of Africa and the black Atlantic in the twenty-first century, for a thorough and insightful discussion of the implications of incorporating the new African diaspora(s) into a black Atlantic critical framework.

8. See also Koskenniemi and Mazower.

9. See also Orford; Dourzinas; Mutua; Rajagopal; and Berman.

10. See Escobar; Hardt and Negri; and Cheah.

11. Other key works in this subfield include Schaffer and Smith; Goldberg; Goldberg and Moore; and Anker. Not all of these critics explicitly identify their work with postcolonial studies; we might much more readily identify Schaffer and Smith’s book within a World Literature critical framework, for instance. However, overwhelmingly, the literary texts that these studies choose as their objects of analysis come from postcolonial canons.

12. See Crenshaw et al., and especially Harris Patricia Williams; Guinier and Torres; and Holloway.

CHAPTER I

1. See Nesbitt, Universal Emancipation.

2. See, for example, Trouillot; Fick; Geggus; Suck-Morse; Nesbitt; Garraway; and Jenson.

3. For overviews of the formal antecedents of each of these genres, see Lucas; Lyon (especially chapter 1); Wasserstrom, Hunt, and Young and McIlwain.

4. See Fliegelman; Armitage; Slauder; Ozouf; and Friedland.

5. Critiques of Arendt’s political/social distinction appear in Hardt and Negri; Wellmer; and Bernasconi, “The Double Face of the Political and the Social.”

6. It should be noted that while Arendt judged the American Revolution as originating in a more solid, “political” foundation, On Revolution also enumerates the ways in which she thought the United States itself fell short of its own revolutionary ideal within decades of its founding.

7. As Philippe Girard has recently observed, the distinction between Toussaint’s “anti-slavery” and Dessalines’ “anticolonial” programs may be less stark than scholarship has tended to assume; Dessalines’s commitment to national independence was not unequivocal until quite shortly before he issued the Declaration of Independence, for example. See Girard.

8. For a more thorough analysis of Dessalines’s “Africaness,” see Jenson.

9. Deborah Jenson makes a compelling case for recognizing Dessalines rather than Boisrond-Tonnerre as “the crucial conceptual voice” of this and other official proclamations written during the same year (88).

10. Curiously, this passage precedes a series of paragraphs that contain the Declaration’s most notable compromises: Dessalines assures the North Atlantic community that Haiti has no plans to instigate revolt or let its own dismantling of colonialism and plantation slavery spread beyond the geographical boundaries of Haiti.

11. See Madiou 3 and Rainsford 262–63.

13. See Harris.

14. In this sense Dessalines’s constitution has more in common with Napoleon’s 1799 Constitution of the Year VIII.

15. “En conséquence, l’Assemblée Nationale reconnaît et déclare, en présence et sous les auspices de l’Être suprême, les droits suivants de l’Homme et du Citoyen” (“Déclaration des droits de l’homme”). (“Thus, the National Assembly recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and citizen.”)

16. Enemy status in this instance specifically did not apply to Britain or Spain, as the Declaration of Independence had already made clear.

17. See Bernasconi, “Double Face”; Negri; Wellmer; Hardt and Negri; and Frank, who helpfully elucidates Arendt’s misreading of “the people” in U.S. revolutionary contexts as well as offering analysis of the limitations of her treatment of France.

CHAPTER 2

1. See Christian Høgbjerg’s account of James’s transformation from liberalism in the 1930s.

2. See Robinson; Idahosa; San Juan; Henry; and Miller.

3. See Edmondson and Pinto.

4. Another prime example: “The leaders of a revolution are usually those who have been able to profit by the cultural advantages of the system they are attacking, and the San Domingo revolution was no exception to this rule” (19). Cedric Robinson’s chapter on James in Black Marxism does a particularly nice job of situating James as far more self-aware and focused on the potential of the black masses as revolutionary actors than were many of his peers (Padmore, Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Williams), while still circumscribed by his own class affiliations.

5. Deborah Jenson usefully cautions against an overly skeptical assessment of Toussaint’s claims to authorship, however: “The singularity of his voice calls into question strict associations of authorship with the individual print genesis of texts, since he is arguably very much the author of his dictated writings” (67).

6. James’s experiences with Eric Williams’s Trinidad and Nkrumah’s Ghana overlap both chronologically and thematically; James briefly references this overlap toward the beginning of the introduction to this volume, but does not, for example, note that he was ousted from Williams’s good graces right around the same time that Nkrumah shocked him by dismissing his Chief Justice. Nowhere in the introduction does he fully explain the extent to which his experience with both countries in the early 1960s was one of disillusionment and profound disappointment. Apart from The Life of Captain Cipriani and The Case for West Indian Self-Government, both written and published in the 1930s, James never writes a full-length history of Trinidad’s independence movement (nor does he ever label that movement a “revolution,” to the best of my knowledge); but in his 1960 Modern Politics he does comment critically on the island’s postcolonial government in much the same way that he comments on Ghana in the speeches published in part 2 of Nkrumah.

7. See Scott 2014.

CHAPTER 3

1. Beginning in the 1950s, UN delegates from the Third World as well as participants in the Bandung Conference would begin more aggressively framing self-determination as the most basic and pressing human right to which Third World peoples were entitled; as Moyn points out, however, this move was less an embrace of a human rights agenda than an additional
means of demonstrating its limited applicability to the anticolonial struggle. For a very different assessment of the relationship between the early years of contemporary human rights discourse and anticolonial movements, see Roland Burke, who asserts that "anticolonialism was in part conceived of as a struggle for human rights, the two concepts proceeding together in the campaign for freedom and independence" (14).

1. See Mazower.
2. See especially Walker; Rabbitt; Rosello; Melas; Garraway, "What Is Mine"; Nesbitt, "The Incandescent I, Destroyer of Worlds"; and Davis, "Negritude-as-Performance."

4. I have chosen to confine my discussion in this chapter to Cesaire and his own particular brand of negritude in order to do justice to the complexity of his work—and as a result have not considered the way in which the work of Léopold Sédar Senghor might also be responding to a First World juridico-political imagination. Much of Senghor's poetry relies heavily on an essentialist African racial identity in far less nuanced terms than that of Cesaire—though recent scholarship, by Gary Wilder and others, has demonstrated that he was far more canny about race as a social and political construct than is often assumed. See Wilder, Freedom Time, as well as the work of many contributors to the 2002 special issue of Research in African Literatures on Senghor.

5. Key critical interrogations of "human rights" include Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism; Lyotard; Agamben; and essays by Rancière, Hamacher, Maslan, Brown, and Žižek in the 2004 special issue of South Atlantic Quarterly, edited by Balfour and Cadava.

6. In contrast to its eighteenth-century generic predecessors, which preceded revolution and the establishment of new legal orders, the Universal Declaration came into being after a war and after the law of the UN Charter, the constituting text of the postwar period. Already, in a sense, a repetition of key tenets of the Charter, a reaffirmation of faith rather than an original commitment, the Universal Declaration does not stand on its own. Morsink observes that much of the first paragraph of the preamble to the Universal Declaration is purposely an exact reproduction of the opening language of the UN Charter (315).

7. Brian Simpson notes that Eleanor Roosevelt did make an (unsuccessful) attempt to persuade the State Department to reconsider its position on implementation; on the Commission, however, she never wavered in upholding that official position as it stood (429).

8. Cassin's draft declaration is reproduced in full in Glendon 275–80.

9. See Morsink, chapters 5 and 6, for a detailed account of the CHR's debates over economic and social rights.

10. "One of the discursive gambles of contemporary human rights law is its articulation of a fictional international human rights personality that it aspires to bring to life; in other words, contemporary human rights law projects an artificial international legal personality from the human being as a goal to be achieved through the recognition and enjoyment of the rights and duties that the law ascribes it" (Slaughter 60–61).

11. See, in particular, Glendon; Ishay; Hunt; and Donnelly. For more critical recent assessments of the text and its claims to authority, see Douzinas; Moyn; and Normand and Zaidi.

12. See Du Bois as well as Carol Anderson, Eyes Off the Prize.

13. Such conflicts continue to be read primarily as symptoms of how Cold War politics infected the work of the Commission. See, in particular, Glendon.

14. Haiti, Liberia, and Ethiopia, although members of the UN, had no delegates on the Commission.

15. For extensive treatment of this subject, see Morsink; Moyn; and Burke. See Klose for a detailed account of the extensive efforts Britain and France took to defend their suppression of political and civil rights in their colonial territories during the wars of decolonization.

16. See also Angier; Mutua; and Orford.

17. "With the official acceptance of the right to self-determination, the process of decolonization itself became a human right, and lent moral legitimacy of human rights to anticolonial struggles in Asia and Africa" (Burke 37).
18. These two narratives are ultimately quite compatible. Throughout its (contemporary)
history, human rights discourse has served as both a powerful means of critiquing empire and
as a means of enabling empire to reform and thereby strengthen itself. Such is Hardt and Negri's
argument in *Empire*. See also Rajagopal.

19. See especially Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*; and Hountondji. Césaire himself
articulated this same distinction: "Vous trouvez qu'il y a une sorte de hiatus entre ma pensée
thorique et mon action pratique? Mais c'est vrai parce que ma pensée thorique s'inscrit dans
l'absolu et mon action pratique dans un contexte bien déterminé. Je n'a pas dit qu'il y a une
pensée étotérique et une pensée publique, mais enf in, il y a une doctrine et une action" (qtd.
in Armet 92).

20. See especially Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*.

21. See also Dalle's discussion of Caribbean anticolonial writers' critical engagement with
the U.S. presence in the region, as well as with North American capitalism more generally.

22. "For Césaire in 1946, as for generations of economically marginalized Martinicans since
1848, [dissidence] meant appealing to the norms of the French Republic in order to bypass the
particularist, antidemocratic dimensions of French colonial policy:" Nesbitt, "Departmentaliza-
tion and the Logic of Decolonization" (38).

23. See Arnold, "Césaire's *Notebook* as Palimpsest" and "Beyond Postcolonial Césaire."

24. Eshleman and Smith were also the first English translators to remove the possessive
pronoun from the title; "My Native Land" became, more accurately, "The Native Land" in their
1983 translation.

25. "It is important that Césaire's version of negritude never rested on a determinate notion
of black identity, but rather always consisted in an expansive and open-ended celebration of the
black man’s mobility and contact with the other. Césaire’s negritude is already infused with the
humanist values upheld at the end of the poem, and anticipates the ethical concerns that domi-
nate the celebration of universal humanity. Even when he appears to champion the specificity
of black identity, Césaire dissolves that specificity and describes negritude as an opening out
and a gesture of contact with otherness" (Hiddleston 90).


27. It is important, for instance, that while the 1932 single-issue journal *Légitime défense—*
an important, Caribbean-authored precursor to the negritude movement—opens with a declara-
tion, *Tropiques* does not.

28. My translation borrows from Eshleman and Smith’s translation of the *Cahier*, though
not all lines from this poem appear in the *Cahier*.

29. Christopher Miller’s *The French Atlantic Triangle* offers an elegant and more extensive
exploration of the significance of negritude’s refusal to comply with the francophone world’s
long-standing erasure of the memory of the slave trade.

30. My reading of the content of this stanza draws heavily on Irele’s gloss (84).

CHAPTER 4

1. "The conference endorses the position of the African National Congress which declares
that the people of South Africa, like those of Namibia and Zimbabwe, are colonised people. The
conference further endorses the position of the United Nations declaring the Pretoria regime
illegitimate. In doing so, it notes with satisfaction that the African National Congress, the
vanguard movement spearheading the broad alliance of the indigenous people and the other
oppressed black people, including white democrats, recognises the fact that the white popula-
tion in South Africa has severed ties with their respective metropoles, that they recognise South
Africa as their homeland. It is for that reason that the conference fully endorses and hails the
ANC position, reflected in the Freedom Charter, which declares that South Africa belongs to
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