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Tabitha Fisher
Bucknell University, tdf003@bucknell.edu

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Perspectives on Lynching in William Faulkner's Novels and Nonfiction

By
Tabitha Dawn Fisher

A Thesis Submitted to the English Department Graduate Committee
Bucknell University

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The Degree of Master of the Arts in English

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Approved by:

Thesis Adviser: Professor Michael Drexler

Department Chair: Professor Anthony Stewart

TABLE OF CONTENTS

His spirit is smoke ascended to high heaven.
His father, by the cruelest way of pain,
Had bidden him to his bosom once again;
The awful sin remained still unforgiven.
All night a bright and solitary star
(Perchance the one that ever guided him,
Yet gave him up at last to Fate's wild whim)
Hung pitifully o'er the swinging char.
Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view
The ghastly body swaying in the sun:
The women thronged to look, but never a one
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.

"The Lynching," Claude McKay

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner wrote to Malcolm Cowley in 1949, in the middle of his life and after an already-substantial publishing career, that he wished to be "abolished and voided from history" (Gresset ix). Faulkner's comment to Cowley may be read with a certain level of drama as well as remorse for a path Faulkner at once willingly chose and the trajectory of which he could not have predicted. Cowley's publication of *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946 set the stage for Faulkner to transcend the bounds of authorhood to become a cultural icon. In the midst of the Cold War, Faulkner published *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), a novel he used to express views of lynching and the roles of the north and south in black liberation. The novel encapsulated views which Faulkner had expressed more subtly in other texts and propelled Faulkner into a racial conversation heightened by budding civil rights legislation. From there on, Faulkner brought himself fully into the public scene by publishing a series of letters and interviews on integration, drawing mingled praise and ire which follows his legacy today.

Rather than pulling away from the public eye, a course of action Faulkner seems to consider in his letter to Cowley, the 1950s saw Faulkner dive headlong into advising the nation, and the globe, on its collective path. As Michel Gresset writes in his *Faulkner Chronology*, "[By 1955] Faulkner is now a public figure. He no longer refuses to appear in public in his own country, and, even though he may hesitate at times, he usually accepts the requests of the State Department to participate in cultural events abroad" (91). As Faulkner took on this new role, the conflicts between his loyalty to the everyday norms mandated by southern white supremacist ideology and his ideals of human liberty became more pronounced as people like W.E.B. DuBois and Richard Wright challenged him on his statements. Although popular opinion notes a shift in Faulkner's political awareness beginning in the 1950s, I would argue that this shift can be seen

much earlier, and nascent expressions of Faulkner's confused racial viewpoints may be found as early as 1931 in his fiction and nonfiction texts.

In this project, I aim to seek out such expressions and to understand Faulkner's written treatment of systemic racial injustice as exemplified by the lynching of black men throughout his career against the backdrop of United States racial tensions. I seek to discover how Faulkner's explorations of lynching practices and white supremacist ideology changed between his early and late novels and nonfiction. I also seek to develop an understanding of how critical perspectives of Faulkner as racially progressive or regressive have traditionally, and incompletely, been formed through an inspection of his literary texts. Even historicized treatments of Faulkner tend to focus exclusively on his fiction texts. To provide a more holistic understanding of Faulkner's developing depictions, I will provide critical commentary on two of Faulkner's novels alongside a comparative reading of said novels with two of his nonfiction texts.

For my selections, I will read Faulkner's nonfiction letter "Mob Sometimes Right" (1931) alongside *Light in August* (1932) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) alongside the essay "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" (1956) for their presentations of lynching and black rights. To do so, I will engage in a close study of the circumstances surrounding Joe Christmas's murder in *Light in August* and the community action in Lucas Beauchamp's murder trial in *Intruder in the Dust* and compare the representation of lynching in these circumstances to Faulkner's publicly espoused views in local and national news publications. This, I hope, will demonstrate disparity or cohesion in Faulkner's commentary on the racial violence and political circumstances which characterized Faulkner's historical context. In my exploration, I will underscore concepts in Faulkner's depictions of lynching that demonstrate a stance that

reinforces white supremacist narratives, opposing critical recuperative trends that obscure such themes.

In doing so, I rely on scholarship premised on historicizing Faulkner's texts. Scholars such as Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Erin Kay Penner, Ticien Marie Sassoubre, and Ted Atkinson write about the historical context of Faulkner's novels to examine how the cultural relations within the south, as well as between the south and the north, changed (in Faulkner's understanding) post-abolition of slavery and how evolving tensions influenced Faulkner's personal viewpoints and thus his literature. In this overarching method of analysis, there is no way to separate the literature from the history, nor is there a way to separate the author from the culture. Thus, these critics view Faulkner as anything but an impartial distiller of cultural politics. Rather, they acknowledge his problematic, often paternalistic view on racial struggle as they uncover his imaginings of community resolutions to problems motivating racial violence, particularly lynching. These critics often focus on different areas of history such as immediate post-abolition, Reconstruction, Great Depression and New Deal, to name some examples, and select different focal points, such as adjudication for Sassoubre and homoeroticism for Abdur-Rahman, but all use their particular foci to elucidate Faulkner's relationship and representation of lynching.

Critics such as Abdul Razzak Al-Barhow, Melanie Masteron Sherazi, and Thea J. Autry build upon this foundation to argue the ways in which Faulkner shows an awareness of socially constructed racialized roles and their artificiality. Using *Light in August* as their text, Al-Barhow and Sherazi locate Faulkner's characters in places of marginality. For Al-Barhow, the margin is at once a place that makes clear the tenuousness of binaries and a place which allows those binaries to be transcended; those located on the outside border of an ideology can most clearly

see its wobbly foundations. For Sherazi, the violence of murder and lynching present in the novel demonstrates the "incompleteness of social performances, even as the relentless demands of these social performances work ceaselessly to render speaking subjects as passive and complicit within the dominant fiction" (503). Autry treats *Intruder in the Dust* as a text in which self-representation subverts prescribed positions of inferiority and challenges the white supremacist ideological status quo. A number of other critics build upon concepts of community, role play, and psychologically reinforced social positioning to understand the complex identity politics in Faulkner's texts.

A gap I seek to fill in the critical conversation is an integration of Faulkner's public essays and letters into analysis of his novels. Critics like Michel Gresset have incorporated Faulkner's private letters into such analysis, but I have yet to see much done with his letters to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* or his public essays published in the 1950s. Sassoubre's method in tracking the changing legislation surrounding civil rights and integration and its influence on Faulkner's representation of said issues in two novels provides a model for what I see as possible with Faulkner's public writing. I seek to integrate the kind of cultural-historical analysis described above to augment an analysis of Faulkner's public stands on racial injustice and to place these views on a continuum including his notable literary treatments of lynching. In doing so, I see this project as having potential to challenge isolated methods of analyzing Faulkner's texts which I believe provide only partial and overly biased viewpoints which are often dedicated to maintaining Faulkner's canonized status. I seek to understand both Faulkner's writing and critical responses in terms of imagining new possibilities and creating new perspectives rather than reaching closer to an encompassing truth about Faulkner's views and his work.

I have chosen Faulkner's work as the subject of my analysis due to his conflicted status as a literary and cultural icon. On one hand, Faulkner's work is well-crafted, has been utilized to great effect by scholars and writers such as Toni Morrison, and continues to endure in the American literary canon. On the other, Faulkner's texts hold deeply problematic views of racial violence and inequality in the United States that still resonate today. Despite this, literary scholarship today seems to struggle to wholeheartedly acknowledge and explore the gaps and offenses in Faulkner's texts. Faulkner's enduring relevance inside and outside academia makes drawing out Faulkner's troubled content a matter of responsibility. Few critical texts I have read on Faulkner's literature extend their analysis into the current age, leaving their conclusions regarding social change and racial injustice grounded in the regional south of the twentieth century. Limiting the scope of such conclusions, however, ignores a vital reality that Faulkner's depictions and his personal views (for better or worse) are alive and pervasive in America today. As Phillip Gordon writes, "The mythos of a South different from a surrounding world can be very appealing" (72), motivating us to relegate Faulkner's work to the realm of sterilized, periodic scholarship, which misses something about the ways in which public figures influence, solidify, or change enduring ideologies. It is Faulkner's problematic status as a canonized figure and his unsmiling depiction, as well as embodiment, of racist ideologies which serves as a mirror to the current reader, writer, and American. To recognize Faulkner's relevance to the contemporary American's life is an unsavory thing because it forces one to recognize that the injustice and filth that pervades Faulkner's writing *and* his character is something with which America still contends. To bury Faulkner would be to turn one's back on America's history and its future.

To subject Faulkner's life, history, and work to analysis provides an opportunity to understand some important questions. In what ways does historical context influence readings of texts? What do Faulkner's depictions of lynching demonstrate about the dominant ideology of the region and time period, and in what ways are those depictions incomplete? What does Faulkner's inability to represent black independence say about his other work? Does one see Faulkner's tales about racial injustice evolve as society does? What does the critical conversation around Faulkner prove about the priorities and perspectives of individual scholars?

To answer such questions, I begin with "Mob Sometimes Right" (1931), Faulkner's little-discussed letter to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* laying out Faulkner's understanding of the motivations behind lynching. I use this to set the stage for an analysis of *Light in August* (1932) as it is Faulkner's first major novelistic treatment of lynching. *Light in August* focuses on Joe Christmas, a man who believes himself to be of mixed race and finds himself subject to the hegemonic racial scripts of the south. I follow *Light in August* with *Intruder in the Dust* (1948); written more than a decade after *Light in August*, *Intruder in the Dust* occupies itself with how a community takes action to seek what it perceives as justice—one group by forming a lynch mob and the other seeking protection for the wrongfully-accused. *Intruder in the Dust* also makes its focus Lucas Beauchamp, one of Faulkner's miscegenated characters. Both Joe Christmas, who presents as white, and Lucas Beauchamp, who presents as black, attempt to act independently of social roles defined by racial identity and both face the threat of lynching for their attempted defiance. I follow my analysis of *Intruder in the Dust* with an analysis of Faulkner's 1956 "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race," an essay advising black readers to be cautious in seeking equal rights for fear of inciting white violence. I finish with this letter to understand how

Faulkner writes to different audiences about racial injustice and to determine if his views changed over the course of twenty years.

My first chapter aims to show how Faulkner's reluctance to acknowledge change is present within both his early nonfiction and fiction writing. I will show that "Mob Sometimes Right" encapsulates Faulkner's defensiveness of white southern culture and a fear of its unsettling through racial progress. I will explain that his response to W.H. James shows a willingness to defend hate crimes in order to preserve a way of life and explore the possible reasoning behind the lack of critical material on this letter. My analysis of *Light in August* will focus on how the local perception of Joe Christmas' race affects his eventual execution, showing that Faulkner understood the mechanics of southern white supremacist ideology, founded on the false narrative of black male sexual violence, and the artificiality of racial identities. I will show that the attitudes of "Mob Sometimes Right" and a lack of black interiority in *Light in August* complicate the critical narrative of Faulkner's writing as racially progressive and enlightened.

Prior critics such as Abdur-Rahman, Al-Barhow, and Sherazi have well-documented the ways in which racial, sexual, and gender categories are destabilized over the course of the novel, but none correlates the events of the novel with Faulkner's own experiences and views. Readings of the novel's hopeful (Al-Barhow) or disturbing (Sherazi) outcomes are maintained only within the context of the novel and do not seek to extend towards the social change happening in Faulkner's lifetime. Abdur-Rahman provides immense historical and then-contemporary context but does not make a statement on Faulkner's own perceptions.

In my second chapter, I will read *Intruder in the Dust* as Faulkner's direct response to lynching in the south after New Deal legislation began to enfranchise southern blacks. By reading the novel alongside lynching memorabilia and the Truman administration's sanctioned

report on racial inequality in the United States, *To Secure These Rights*, I will demonstrate the ways in which Faulkner's vision of a self-redeeming south lacks the realism that it pretends to represent. The lynching depictions and the characterization of Lucas Beauchamp reveal motives to appeal to both black and northern white audiences through misinformation. I preface this reading with a comparative critical review of articles by Atsushi Marutani, Ticien Marie Sassoubre, and Thea J. Autry which all provide different "visions" of Faulkner's south, demonstrating their perspectives on Faulkner's novelistic intent. I will follow this with an analysis of Faulkner's 1956 "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" to show that Faulkner likewise adjusted his language and message to appeal to his audiences in a continued fear and mistrust of racial progress.

In my conclusion, I will explain the import of reading Faulkner's novels within the context of his nonfiction, his politics, and his historical moment. It is the responsibility of scholars to analyze Faulkner in a way that is ethical and refuses to support an unwarranted agenda of canonicity. Although there is not one correct perspective on Faulkner, it is a mistake to promote readings of him which deliberately exclude racist themes and perspectives that become clear upon recontextualizing his work. Although Faulkner held ideals of universal freedom, the coherence across all four texts of Faulkner's fear of change and his reluctance to grant black people the right to self-determination demonstrates a lack of growth on Faulkner's behalf. The continued recuperative texts which seek to deny these problematic aspects of Faulkner in spite of such overwhelming evidence demonstrate a need to continue reading Faulkner's fiction in light of his nonfiction.

"NEVER GOT OUTSIDE THAT CIRCLE": READING FAULKNER'S DENIAL OF RACIAL PERFORMATIVITY AND THE WHITE SUPREMACIST NARRATIVE IN "MOB SOMETIMES RIGHT" (1931) AND *LIGHT IN AUGUST* (1932)

> "He felt like an eagle: hard, sufficient, potent, remorseless, strong. But that passed, though he did not then know that, like the eagle, his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage."
>
> *Light in August*, page 160.

"MOB SOMETIMES RIGHT"

I will begin this project by pairing Faulkner's little-analyzed 1931 letter, "Mob Sometimes Right," with his 1932 novel *Light in August* to demonstrate the ways in which the racial perspective posited by Faulkner in the letter is simultaneously posed and contrasted within some of Faulkner's novels which, traditionally, have been treated as demonstrating Faulkner's more enlightened views of race relations in the south. I seek to argue that strains of both the backwards and progressive views of race that various critics read into Faulkner may be found in both the letter and the novel. Neither will provide the stark truth of Faulkner's racial feelings, which were complicated and often conflicted between idealism and Faulkner's perception of practicality, but they do evidence an odd type of cohesion which I believe embattles the perception that Faulkner was wildly contradictory in his ways of speaking about race. What leads to this impression is, I believe, that one finds in Faulkner's novels an expression of his aforementioned ideals and in his letters the aforementioned perception of practical solutions. Whether these notions were realistic in execution or even contradictory to each other is less important than understanding they were *both* what he believed.

Both the letter and the novel come alongside Faulkner's major entrance into the literary scene. Jonathan Cape published the sensationalist *Sanctuary* on February 9, 1931, bringing

controversy, attention, and much-needed sales to the struggling Faulkner. *Sanctuary* served to turn Faulkner into "the most important figure in American letters" as Faulkner himself wrote to his wife shortly after the novel's publication (Millgate 6). William Faulkner soon began to receive attention from the critics that would transform him into the literary giant he became in the decade before and following his death. 1931 marks the beginning of Faulkner's journey to national, then international, significance and thus serves my purpose in assessing how Faulkner has been read through his public literary persona. Both Faulkner's letter and novel come shortly after this inauguration; the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* published "Mob Sometimes Right" on February 15th, 1931, and Faulkner began *Light in August* (under that title) on August 17th, 1931, publishing the novel on October 6, 1932 (Millgate 6, Blotner 249).

In both texts, lynching is the focal point. The climax of *Light in August* is an event which critics often read as a lynching; the event serves as a culmination of Faulkner's ruminations on race as a socially constructed, psychological phenomenon. *Light in August* can be read rather optimistically as a text about the potential for social change and has often been read by critics as supporting a view of Faulkner as socially progressive. "Mob Sometimes Right," however, is Faulkner's declaration of a view of lynching which plays into contemporary racist narratives. The letter has not garnered much critical attention, despite emerging in 1992. Both texts, I would argue, hold similar racial attitudes.

In "Mob Sometimes Right," Faulkner writes a response letter to W.H. James of Starkville, Mississippi. James, a man identifying himself as black, wrote a short letter entitled "They Can Stop Lynching Now" to the *Commercial Appeal* in praise of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, an activist group which campaigned for antilynching legislation by speaking to women's societies, service groups, law enforcement, and

elected officials while condemning extrajudicial punishment and confronting potential lynch mobs (McMillen & Polk 8). The nationwide organization established a Mississippi council in early 1931. James' letter is in support of a nascent group facing heavy criticism in the south (9). In commenting on lynching itself, James repeats the misinformation, which will run through both letters, in writing, "How strange it seems that history never gave a record of a single lynching until the days of reconstruction" (qtd. in McMillen & Polk 3). James makes statements regarding the undeserved nature of lynching, claiming that "[w]e are today for the most part as humble and submissive as we were [before Reconstruction]" and claiming that the group's leader, Mrs. J. Morgan Spencer, would "be an ideal one for governor" (3). James ends the letter by supporting the group's difficult work in condemning lynching in the lynching capital of the world, writing, "…I am sure they will succeed, because when they are determined they know no defeat…through the efforts of these good ladies, when we flee for protection to the strong arm of the law, we won't be met with the rope and torch" (3-4). Thirteen days later, Faulkner published a scathing reply to James' letter, which he titled "Mob Sometimes Right."

In "Mob Sometimes Right," Faulkner engages an argument which one is hard-pressed to read as anything other than a defense of lynching. In the opening of the letter, Faulkner attempts to distance himself from a defense of lynching, writing, "No balanced man can, I believe, hold any moral brief for lynching," and then proceeds to spend the rest of the letter striving away from that initial point (qtd. McMillen & Polk 4). The letter itself is much longer than James', and its logic is confused and contradictory, making it difficult to understand logically. In it, Faulkner promotes several points mired in social Darwinism, white supremacy, and misinformation. The basic tenets of Faulkner's argument are, in order of appearance:

1. Lynching arises as a method of extrajudicial justice which fundamentally seeks to address miscarriages of justice. On this point, Faulkner writes, "we in America have seen, ever since we set up to guide our own integral destiny, miscarriage of elementary justice on all hands…So is it strange that at times we take violently back into our own hands that justice which we watched go astray in the blundering hands of those into which we put it voluntarily?" (4). Who Faulkner means by "we" and "those" is vague and seems to change throughout the essay. "We" may mean the general southern populace, and the implied "they" may be southern law. Another possibility, which I find likely given Faulkner's notable distaste for the north, is that "they" are northern, or federal, legal representatives. Although the implication that northern law is bungling dispensation of justice in the south does not seem to make sense, Faulkner's preoccupation with the legacy of reconstruction intervention may be surfacing here, as it does in later work.
2. Those who find themselves the victims of lynching are those who deserve it either because they are guilty of raping white women (as they are often charged) or because they have strayed from their homes where they are well known and put themselves in danger with strangers. To quote Faulkner, "I do not say that we do not blunder with our 'home-made' justice. We do. But he who was victim of our blundering, also blundered. I have yet to hear, *outside of a novel or a story,* of a man of any color and with a record beyond reproach, suffering violence at the hands of men who knew him…Note the crimes in compensation of which lynching occurs. Sacredness of womanhood, we call it" (4-5, emphasis mine). Faulkner makes a definitive statement here that lynching occurs as a result of sentimentality over the purity of white women. By "sacredness of womanhood," Faulkner means the crime of black-on-white rape, which McMillen and

Polk note "was only *alleged* in 19 percent of lynching cases" (10, emphasis mine). While on occasion lynching errs in punishing an innocent black person, Faulkner argues, illogically, that those who are victims of such errors also erred. If they are innocent, Faulkner seems to say, getting lynched means they must be guilty of something, if only being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

3. The standard of social conduct for blacks in relation to whites is stricter due to a "natural human desire" to dominate the weak; Faulkner argues that the law is designed to protect this domination because "the law has found out that the many elemental material factors which compose a commonwealth are of value only when they are in the charge of some one, regardless of color and size and religion, who can protect them" (4). Faulkner does not make provision for the circumstance in which a black man could assert such control over a white man. Faulkner asserts that "circumstance" has put the black man in the "weak" category, and this is enforced by the law as well as extrajudicial correctives to the law (4).
4. Lynching, as the "black man's misfortune," is a punishment visited on "a particular class of colored people" who take advantage of American welfare and use humility as a ruse to take advantage of the strong (6). Faulkner writes, "Lynching is an American trait, characteristic…In Europe they don't lynch people. But think of a man living for 15 years doing nothing at all, in France say, or Italy. It cannot be done anywhere under the sun except in America" (5). Faulkner draws authority for his supporting anecdote of a black man living off welfare and selling his government-provided food to "wop and bohunk immigrants" from "a colored man, a friend" (5). Such black people who take advantage of "white folks' sentimentality" suffer from the same sentimentality which lynching

springs from (4, 5). I cannot determine how Faulkner equates the two, other than Faulkner's distaste for the American welfare system; he writes elsewhere, responding to James' comments about humility, that "the black man who is a valuable integer in the social fabric…any one who does a fair day's labor…has no reason to assume humility…it just happens that the colored man is better fitted to trade in humility" (6). This is particularly harsh in light of the Great Depression, which began two years prior to Faulkner's letter.

5. Lynching cannot be a distinctly southern enforcement of white supremacy because it originated in the "outland," primarily New England, and came to the south with reconstruction (6). Faulkner does not support this with any evidence other than "most of the lynching[s] with which I am acquainted have occurred in outland newspapers" (6).

I have let much of Faulkner's text stand in this list format with minimal commentary due to the extreme illogic of the letter. It would take too much space to cover every logical fallacy Faulkner engages in; his positions on whether "the law" needs to be enforced or defied, whether there are actually "innocent" victims of lynching, and where lynching actually originates all contradict themselves within the space of a few pages. It is worth reading the letter in its entirety to grasp the difficulty in merely understanding the text.

More disturbing than the organization are Faulkner's repeated assertions that the lynching victim deserves his fate. Whether it be for rape, natural weakness, or a duplicitous advantage taken of the white man, Faulkner claims that only "the deserving and the fortunate among us" will "die in our beds" (McMillen & Polk 6). The rest, "with the population what it is," "will die on cross-ties soaked with gasoline" (6). Faulkner's comment on "the population" could be in reference to the lynching victims or the violent lynchers. However, due to Faulkner's continual

blame of the act on "sentiment" and his consistent attempts to assert the guilt of victims, it seems to me that Faulkner is referring to blacks who he feels take advantage, whether of women or of the system. Despite Faulkner's assertion that "mob violence serves nothing," he seems to believe that lynch mobs serve to remove undesirables from society just as well as juries do. Those who have license to determine who is undesirable are people such as Faulkner: white men with public voices.

I will return to comparative aspects of the letter in my analysis of *Light in August*, but I would like to note that this letter perhaps ought not to shock as much as it seems to. Faulkner scholars have been hard-put to fit "Mob Sometimes Right" into the preferred perception of Faulkner as a progressive. Noel Polk and Neil R. McMillen, who unearthed the letter, have expressed the difficulty in digesting Faulkner's statements, writing, "We are hard pressed to understand Faulkner's letter, since it stands so completely in accord with contemporary racial attitudes in white Mississippi and the South generally, and runs to completely counter to the sensibility and sympathies that write so profoundly about racial problems in his fiction" (6). McMillen and Polk's comment is useful in framing what I will explore as a recurring trend: the need to understand Faulkner in accordance with a particular agenda. That need makes such statements appear to be incongruous when, as I will argue, they truly rear their heads repeatedly in Faulkner's work. In novels, however, they are easier to pass over. McMillen and Polk have extra stock in preserving Faulkner's image as they are two of the foundational scholars, along with others I referenced in my introduction, who helped make Faulkner a literary giant. Preserving him is their job.

That being said, the two do an admirable job as scholars in attempting to understand the letter; their twelve-page article quotes both letters, considers the issue of authenticity, and then

tightly debunk the myths Faulkner's accusations stand on. McMillen and Polk refuse, bravely if reluctantly, to let Faulkner slide on his egregious comments; they also refuse to let him pass on the "product of his time" excuse, writing, "[Faulkner] lived in a moment of radically different social sensibilities from our own…[However,] any one of W.H. James's 'good women' could have provided him with enough statistics to explode nearly every myth that drives his letter," clearly demonstrating that Faulkner had every ability to see what was going on around him (10).

However, McMillen and Polk go on to write that Faulkner's fiction as time went on showed him to be "for his time, a life exemplary of courage in a highly volatile world. And we might best take this 1931 letter, his first known non-fiction meditation on the subject of lynching, as a record of how far his personal sympathies had come to get where he was in the 1950s, not to say in *Light in August, Absalom Absalom!, Go Down, Moses,* and *Intruder in the Dust*" (13). I can only bring myself to disagree with the sentiment of excusing Faulkner's statements by his later work; people such as W.H. James and the women of the ASWPL showed greater courage in 1931 on the subject of racial injustice than Faulkner, and his direct, public disparagement of the antilynching movement echoes, rather than contrasts, comments he will continue to publish throughout the 1950s. Much of Faulkner's work that McMillen and Polk use to redeem Faulkner here does not speak as highly to his progressive sensibilities as they might like to think.

Despite my agreement that *Light in August* demonstrates an exquisite understanding of the reliance of white supremacy on racial performativity and the "pathology of lynching," as McMillen and Polk state, I also believe that the kernels of Faulkner's racial ideology as expressed here are just as present in *Light in August,* if one knows where to look. *Intruder in the Dust,* as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, itself repeats some of the ideas in "Mob Sometimes Right" word for word in the mouth of Gavin Stevens, and its attempt to speak on the

future of social progress through the issue of lynching is problematic in many ways. Moreover, Faulkner's racial commentary in the later 1950s, such as his 1956 "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race," which I will analyze, continues the illogic, the misinformation, and out-of-touch approach that Faulkner begins with in this letter. "Mob Sometimes Right" stands as representative of the broader themes in Faulkner's troublesome racial commentary.

This moreover highlights critical trends in Faulkner studies. Critics, particularly those entrenched pillars of Faulknerian tradition, struggle to read the problematic Faulkner without recusing him. I praise McMillen and Polk for a willingness to take on the letter when it so clearly disgusts them and works against their established beliefs regarding William Faulkner. "Mob Sometimes Right" is a letter which, as they state, "challenge[s] Faulkner's reputation as a clear-eyed observer of the Southern racial scene," an estimation of Faulkner that scholars are reluctant to give up (7). One must wonder if such a challenge accounts for the dearth of criticism regarding "Mob Sometimes Right." Indeed, I have been hard pressed to find scholars willing to attempt hearty analysis of the letter other than McMillen and Polk and Donald M. Kartiganer.[1] Some critics, like Ted Atkinson, André Bleikasten, and Theresa M. Towner, will make use of McMillen and Polk's 1992 response to Faulkner's letter or provide a summary of the letter. Others appear to ignore the letter entirely; the notably exhaustive Blotner, in his 2005 revised biography, mentions nothing about the letter. Neither do Richard Grey, Carolyn Porter, or Robert W. Hamblin and Charles A. Peek in their respective biographies, all written after McMillen and Polk's 1992 article. It is not possible for me to say whether these scholars and others have read "Mob Sometimes Right" or not. Additionally, they may not have considered it relevant for shorter, more topical biographies.

[1] Kartiganer's response is cursory and so I have not utilized it in my analysis.

Additionally, scholars may be reluctant to engage the letter, doubting its authenticity because Faulkner wrote it under the family name, "Falkner." McMillen and Polk consider the matter of authenticity in their analysis, but settle any doubts that Faulkner wrote the letter, as does Towner (122). Despite the shocking nature of the letter, there is little reason to doubt its authenticity as there would be no reason to disparage Faulkner by writing a false letter in his name. Although the *Commercial Appeal* published the letter after Jonathan Cape published *Sanctuary*, the novel had yet to receive the reviews and ire that launched Faulkner's dubious fame and could have sparked retaliatory measures. Moreover, the author of the letter would have had to compose it before *Sanctuary*'s release in order for it to be published on the 15th. McMillen and Polk note that none of Faulkner's friends or usual defenders, nor Faulkner himself, stepped up to refute the letter, which they surely would have done had it been falsely written (7).

An equally unlikely possibility that McMillen and Polk do not address is the possibility of the letter as a publicity stunt. However, I find it doubtful that Faulkner would have done such a thing; the content of the letter would have to stretch quite far to relate to *Sanctuary*. In addition, the views of the letter are so in-line with public perceptions of the time that the letter would be unlikely to draw white southern ire. For this reason, Kartiganer suggests that "Faulkner is deliberately adopting the voice of the man he regards as the 'standard' Southern white… In other words, he was adopting the voice of Falkner without the 'u,'" but Kartiganer does not provide a reason why Faulkner would do such a thing. Considering Faulkner's daughter, Alabama, had recently died, I am not sure Faulkner would have been up for playing such games. For these reasons, it seems "Mob Sometimes Right" is Faulkner's unadulterated, authentic opinion.

Although there are reasons why scholars may not address the letter, every time it has been excluded through means other than ignorance has been a choice. Knowing the nature of

Faulkner scholarship, the gap in commentary on the letter creates concern that Faulkner scholars may be ignoring the text because it does not fit into the narrative one normally tells about Faulkner's work. For that end, it is simpler to pretend the letter does not exist. But it *does* exist, in the Ole Miss archives and in history. W.H. James received his reply. It is now the responsibility of current scholars to respond to Mr. Falkner's statements.

For the reasons I have explored, I will analyze Faulkner's concurrent novel, *Light in August* (1932) with consideration for the tenets laid out in "Mob Sometimes Right." Does one find in *Light in August,* as McMillen and Polk propose, a novel which works against the white supremacist narrative which Faulkner echoes in "Mob Sometimes Right"? In what ways does the novel respond to issues of lynching or seek to address change in southern race relations? What message, if any, does Faulkner send to the black community? These are all questions I seek to explore. Since I have been unable to find any scholarship comparing the novel and the letter, I would like to spend some time framing some of the more recent scholarship on *Light in August* which I find useful in describing the mechanics of Faulkner's depiction of race. Using this foundation, I will then engage in an analysis of the novel which demonstrates Faulkner's simultaneous sensitivity to racial constructions and lack of desire to imagine a south of social change. In doing so, I hope to speculate on how the attitudes of "Mob Sometimes Right" find their way into *Light in August* as reflections of Faulkner's own anxieties about the south.

LIGHT IN AUGUST OVERVIEW

Light in August is structured around the perspectives of the primary characters Joe Christmas, Lena Grove, Joe Brown (also known as Lucas Burch), Byron Bunch, Gail Hightower, and Joanna Burden, while also including sections narrated by, or through the perspective of, many townsfolk and minor characters. Lena Grove, a pregnant young woman from Alabama,

travels to Jefferson, Mississippi to find the father of her child, Joe Burch, who is living in Jefferson under the name of Joe Brown. Joe Brown, while working at a mill in Jefferson alongside Byron Bunch, a man who falls in love with Lena when mistaken for Brown, has taken to bootlegging with Joe Christmas, a drifter of indeterminate race. Joe Christmas, in the three years preceding the novel's opening, has been living on the land of, and having a sexual relationship with, Joanna Burden, the outcast spinster final descendent of a family of northern Reconstructionists. The taboo nature of their relationship drives their affair to a fever pitch where, after Joanna attempts a murder-suicide, Joe Christmas kills her. After a period of flight and capture, Christmas flees from custody once more and is hunted down by the National Guard, headed by Percy Grimm. Grimm castrates Christmas and kills him on the kitchen floor in the house of Gail Hightower, an outcast ex-minister whom Bunch visits weekly. This plot is told out of order, with heavy usage of flashback, and narrated by a large range of characters.

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Light in August has been read for years as one of Faulkner's most sensitive explorations of race. Critics reading *Light in August* for its attention to racial violence, particularly lynching, draw into play a variety of perspectives centering around Joe Christmas and his violation of or coherence to a racial social schema. Some see Joe Christmas as an individual working against the dominant racial discourse; others find him to be a symbol for the racial crisis of the south. I argue along the lines that Christmas' lifetime of occupying various racial roles, chosen or not, indicates an awareness on Faulkner's behalf of the contingency of race along social lines which appears to work against contemporary narratives of racial determinism. I *also* read Joe Christmas as a character through which Faulkner contemplates the state of the southern racial order in a modern age of emerging black empowerment. In doing this, I find *Light in August* to represent a

reluctance towards social growth on Faulkner's behalf rather than a signpost of his supposedly progressive racial politics. In *Light in August*, I will argue, Faulkner at once demonstrates the aforementioned awareness and sensitivity as well as a world which is quite narrowly focused upon the future of a white society, not an equitably integrated one.

To do so, I have drawn from contributions and gaps within the more recent (post-2010) *Light in August* scholarship. Doing so allows me to assess the current pulses of Faulkner scholarship as well as somewhat escape the influence of entrenched scholarship devoted to maintaining Faulkner as a literary idol. For my reading of the novel, I find placing critics writing on Joe Christmas' racial identity in conversation with each other to be productive. For this chapter, I read together Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Abdul-Razzak Al-Barhow, and Melanie Masterton Sherazi as exposing the ways in which Joe Christmas represents the racial ideological crisis of the south, what the limits of Faulkner's perspective reveal or occlude about racial narratives, and the gaps in perspective left open by the text. I pair these critics due to their shared sensitivity to the social elements of Joe Christmas' arc; they devote considerable attention to the psychological, semantic, and performative elements which contribute to Christmas' fate while all reaching differing conclusions about the novel's ending and the notable absence of black voices in the novel. Moreover, Abdur-Rahman serves as reference for both Al-Barhow and Sherazi (among many more), allowing me to connect the conversations and note departures. It is for this reason I will begin with Abdur-Rahman.

ALIYYAH ABDUR-RAHMAN (2011)

Abdur-Rahman's chapter, "White Disavowal, Black Enfranchisement, and the Homoerotic in William Faulkner's *Light in August*," seeks to understand how Joe Christmas serves as an emblem of the southern post-slavery crisis in establishing a race-based social order

after federally-enforced black male enfranchisement (130). Abdur-Rahman seeks to diverge from standard readings of miscegenation in *Light in August* as a metaphor for the south's racial history to suggest that miscegenation "is also the principle means by which Faulkner contemplates and represents the imperiled state of white masculinity in the post-Reconstruction era and the homoerotic desire and dread underpinning the white male obsession with black manhood" (130). She also aims to demonstrate how Faulkner links miscegenation and homoeroticism in Joe Christmas to offer his critique of southern attitudes towards whiteness in the post-slavery period.

Abdur-Rahman draws heavily from sources elucidating the social rebalancing between races that took place following emancipation up to the 1930s, discussing shifts in black manhood from "feminized" slavery to masculine legal autonomy. She also references the cultural climate of the time of publication, where white masculinity was particularly threatened by the Great Depression and minstrel shows exemplified the commodification of blackness. "Textual blackface," Abdur-Rahman notes, was adopted by white authors to "meditat[e] on…the fragmented self in early-twentieth-century American culture" (132). "White-authored" representations of black people in American texts, therefore, do not reflect the "inner or cultural life" of black individuals, but instead reflect the "development of white American culture and consciousness" (132).

In explicating Joe Christmas' racial identity, Abdur-Rahman utilizes Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of difference between the signifier and the signified as well as Lacanian psychoanalysis to read the text of Joe Christmas' mixed-race body, writing "The position of African Americans after slavery posed a threat not only to the established social schema but also to the very symbolic order that gave whiteness coherence" (135). Abdur-Rahman's concise explanation of lynching as a method of containment (of black male sexuality and economic and

social influence) makes her text foundational for understanding why Joe Christmas is lynched; he represents a distinct threat to the white-willed social order. Joe Christmas, for Abdur-Rahman, stands not as an individual forging a discourse with the power to change social norms, but as Faulkner's representation of the disruptive presence of the miscegenated individual to white-ordered society; she writes, "Like the flat surface of a painting, [Joe Christmas] is a drawn figure" (130). Joe Christmas becomes, then, a symptom of Faulkner's racial preoccupation.

I find useful Abdur-Rahman's careful differentiation between Christmas' influence within the narrative (what, plot-wise, the character accomplishes) and *Faulkner's* assertion of what such a person means for the south, something much less easy to nail down. This line of differentiation separates interpretation on the reader's part from intention on the author's. Reading Joe Christmas as symptomatic of Faulkner's conflicted feelings on race opens *Light in August* to conversation with Faulkner's nonfictional texts, such as "Mob Sometimes Right." Abdur-Rahman's psychoanalytic tone reminds readers that the novel says more about the artist than about itself.

Thus, I find Abdur-Rahman's assertion that "*Light in August* ends with the wish for the reconstructed white family…[which] is offered as a buffer to white masculinity and a safeguard against the increased presence of nonwhite peoples in the national polis…" to be an intriguing suggestion of Faulkner's feelings, if not his intent (142). While I am unconvinced that the hodgepodge family unit of Byron Bunch, Lena Grove, and Grove's bastard baby indicates a restorative prophecy for the southern family unit (at least not one without parody), I do agree that Faulkner closes the novel with the future of white people leaving behind the racial conflict of Jefferson. Abdur-Rahman insists from the beginning of her text that *Light in August* is about white people, despite the primary struggle of the novel revolving around blackness; I would use

this to suggest, particularly in light of the attitudes of "Mob Sometimes Right," that the novel presents more about Faulkner's interiority than any individual characters'. Abdur-Rahman herself does not take the analysis that far; although she intimates it, she never accuses Faulkner of desiring a return to order of slavery outright. She also acknowledges, but does not delve into, the lack of interiority for every black character of the novel. This is something Al-Barhow will pick up on.

Other key concepts I find useful are Abdur-Rahman's psychoanalytic reading of the novel in which Joe Christmas finds himself a victim of the symbolic order (or vice versa), the concept of blackness as inherently miscegenated and abject in the post-slavery south, the nonexistence of a corporeal race (which I refer to as the artificiality or socially contingent nature of race), and her pairing of homoerotic enactment and repudiation with the lynching act. Many of these I find foundational to Al-Barhow and Masterton's analyses.

ABDUL RAZZAK AL-BARHOW (2010)

While Abdur-Rahman analyzes the existing symbolic order of racism present in Jefferson, Al-Barhow builds on this to ask how marginalized characters in William Faulkner's *Light in August* enact change on that symbolic order. His article, "Focusing on the Margins: 'Light in August' and Social Change" asserts that semantic practice, which he refers to as "talk," instills and undermines rigid racial and sexual categories. He writes, "As it dramatizes social relations in the form of 'talk,' or verbal exchange of meanings and values, *Light in August* examines social change on a linguistic level as a shift in the semantic weight of categories and binaries toward a performative view of race, in contrast to the biological concept that the community's 'voices' are desperately trying to maintain" (53). Al-Barhow illustrates this process in action through a focused analysis on Mottstown's struggle to "tally [Christmas' behavior] with

the behavioural pattern which they associate with the word 'nigger[2]'" and the inculcation of Christmas' identity crisis through the "talk" he is exposed to in the orphanage (56, 59).

Al-Barhow utilizes Terry Eagleton to demonstrate how ideologies grow out of social realities and how communities reinforce those ideologies to naturalize them and close gaps for critique (55). Al-Barhow indicates that this "gap" is pushed to the margins of society, where talk works ideology into malleability. Al-Barhow identifies the broader Southern historical context to explain the ways in which southern social categories came to be and how they changed, connecting this with the text of the novel; Al-Barhow writes of Brown that "Brown's artificial blackness is far from being an individual case; rather, it is a symptom of a substantial social transformation during the Great Migration, when a class of poor whites replaced African Americans deserting the South altogether or moving from the countryside to urban centers within the South" (62).

Al-Barhow usefully details the difference between hegemonic ideology and social reality, with the hegemonic ideology built on supposedly-biological categories of whiteness and blackness and the social reality being that behavior cannot be tied to race; individuals such as Joe Christmas demonstrate the falsity of racial categories (56-57). Al-Barhow's discussion of race as performative and the role of talk as constitutive of identities within the hegemonic social order is useful and works well with Masterton's discussion of performativity and racial role playing. I agree on the general principles of Al-Barhow's argument; Joe Christmas suffers the psychological and physical fate he does because the "talk" surrounding him forces him into a

[2] Whenever I use this term, I place it in quotes to indicate its usage within Faulkner's texts. It is not my preferred term. However, when characters in Faulkner's texts use the word, they are referring to a particular role into which they have placed individuals of a variety of racial backgrounds. I myself use "black people" or "black Americans" (post-slavery) when discussing people who, in Faulkner's time, were known as negro. I also do not censor the slur because I do not wish to mute the implications of Faulkner's usage.

categorical role designated by white supremacist southern ideology; he becomes a "nigger" as determined by the town and suffers the allocated fate of lynching. However, Al-Barhow's argument does not convince me that social change actually takes place in the community of Jefferson; the evidence of unstable ideology does not inherently undermine that ideology's practice.

Although I would agree on general principle that racist ideologies are eventually destructive to their communities, I disagree with Al-Barhow's assertion that *Light in August* is "Faulkner's demonstration of how the racial ideology that holds this society together is the same ideology that will tear it apart" (53). Al-Barhow bases this conclusion on the endings of Hightower, Byron Bunch, and Lena Grove, claiming that the characters all experience "rebirth" through the birth of Lena's baby (53). Moreover, he argues that the marginalized characters of Hightower, Bunch, Grove, and Joe Brown/Lucas Burch, in their breaks with heteronormative and white supremacist ideologies, represent a change which is coming to Jefferson. However, while I agree that these characters represent marginality, and Joe Brown most notably symbolizes an overall shift in the laboring force in the south from blacks to poor whites (indicative of larger social change brought by the Great Migration), the majority of them do not indicate "looking forward to a new social order based on love" as Al-Barhow claims (53).

Hightower and Bunch, while experiencing newfound sympathy for Joe Christmas' plight after meeting his grandparents, are unable to change the town's dominant narrative. Bunch's suggestion that Hightower compromise himself by providing Christmas with an alibi is unsuccessful; Hightower accedes to it far too late, as Percy Grimm chases Christmas into the minister's kitchen (*Light in August* 464). Hightower's fate afterward is vague; he thinks "I am dying" while lost in a miasma of nostalgic memories, and the chapter ends with Hightower still

under the influence of his own history (493). Lena Grove, Bunch, and Brown all leave town; Bunch's love is unconsummated (despite attempts to climb into Lena's bed), Brown does not receive his reward money, and Lena is content to travel, ostensibly in search of Brown, just as she did in the novel's opening. These marginal white characters do not accomplish bringing new movement or cohesion to their society; they move outward and away from it while the smoking remnants of Christmas' struggle against hegemonic discourse serve to reify the racial narrative the town maintained all along.

A gap I see in Al-Barhow's reasoning is trying to read social change into characters who, while not outright ideological villains like Percy Grimm or Eupheus Hines, enact the everyday reinforcement of hegemonic practices. Despite their marginal status, the characters Al-Barhow identifies have no investment in changing the racial prejudices of their town. None of these characters are protesting the treatment of their black communities. This makes sense; the voices that motivated social change along racial lines rarely came from white southern men.

The marginalized voices which *did* motivate social change were black members of communities and women, such as members of the ASWPL. In *Light in August*, the character actively seen working for the social uplift of African Americans is Joanna Burden, whose work is marked by distinctly paternalistic overtones. I would propose that Faulkner's condemnation of Joanna Burden and his contempt for the antilynching movement as outlined in "Mob Sometimes Right" aligns him with those who judged members of the ASWPL as afflicted with the "Negro Complex"; Joanna's reconstructionist legacy as fixated around the "curse of the black race" (253) motivating her philanthropy to "help them up out of the darkness" (276) as well as her obsessive, destructive negrophilia may well be Faulkner's parody of such groups. For his part, Al-Barhow identifies Joanna Burden alongside characters such as Percy Grimm, Eupheus Hines,

and McEachern, agreeing with Michael Lackey's assessment of the characters as "dangerously ideological" (Al-Barhow 64). Al-Barhow does not attempt to recuperate the one character in *Light in August* actively invested in social change.

Al-Barhow notes that in a novel rife with semantic shifts, Faulkner presents a distinct gap in the voices of African Americans, something noted by Abdur-Rahman. Al-Barhow writes that "[o]ur frustration at being blocked from examining this role [of African Americans' agency in social change] makes us strongly aware of an unbridgeable gap in the text…why does Faulkner create such a gap in his text, and what is the function of this gap?" (69). Noting that this gap exists is important, but I take issue with Al-Barhow's unqualified answer that "Faulkner chooses to leave a gap in his text because he finds in the gap a more complicated and aesthetic expression of this muted role" (69). The idea that Faulkner would deliberately choose to excise the voices of black people in *Light in August* as an aesthetic choice strikes me as an attempt to retain Faulkner's image as an enlightened observer of the racial politics. Al-Barhow himself asserts that Faulkner could represent black perspectives by referencing the "mulatta" of *Go Down, Moses* (1942) (69). If Faulkner can do this, then why does he choose to only show parodic or tangential black characters in *Light in August*?[3] Surely Faulkner knew that there was a desire for change among southern blacks; he responds to this exactly in "Mob Sometimes Right." He silenced W.H. James' perspective quite enthusiastically. What, then, does the novel gain by refusing the black American's perspective? Why would Faulkner choose to leave this gap if not for aesthetic reasons?

Perhaps Al-Barhow's assertion that change will occur in Jefferson points to an interesting fact; change *was* happening in Faulkner's world, whether he acknowledged it or not. The

[3] I am not counting Joe Christmas for reasons I will explore further on.

ASWLP finally began to see success in 1936 and many black-sponsored groups would crop up in the south mid-decade (McMillen & Polk 19). Al-Barhow's conclusion may be based on the equation that, since Jefferson is based in the real-life Oxford, Mississippi and the Civil Rights Movement did eventually take hold in the south, change must be coming to fictional Jefferson. However, if one takes Abdur-Rahman's work to mean that *Light in August* reflects the concerns and interiority of the author, it is possible to see that, although change logically *should* come to Jefferson, it does not over the course of the novel because Jefferson is Faulkner's fantasy. In Faulkner's world, there is not room for the success of uplift movements and no room for black voices. Eventually, as Sherazi will demonstrate in her analysis, all narratives will be subjected to the southern white hegemonic regime.

MELANIE MASTERTON SHERAZI (2014)

In her article, "'Playing It Out Like a Play': Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden's Erotic Masquerade in William Faulkner's *Light in August*," Melanie Masterton Sherazi analyses the relationship between Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden and its fallout for its performative framing to expose the ways in which hegemonic scripts control individuals. She argues that the novel's repeated usage of theatrical framing "signals a subversive treatment of historically contingent performances of social identity" in which the players (here Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas) fluctuate between "marginal and mainstream" performances (485). She writes that "their affair…is…the manifestation of a collective social fantasy, conjured within the racialized and gendered structures of domination…their erotic play is always already public insofar as its climax and outcome are predetermined and will be played out upon the public stage" (484). Sherazi describes Joe Christmas' murder of Joanna Burden and eventual lynching as inevitable as the roles they take on in their affair, Joe as the black rapist and Joanna the violated white

woman, are scripted by the "social discourse of the Old South"; in that discourse, their scene always ends with a lynching (498). Sherazi concludes that, while Joanna cedes to the dominant discourse, Joe Christmas, in passing as a white man in Mottstown post-murder, defies and rejects "the restrictive circle of Southern discourse" and triumphs (503).

I find useful Sherazi's discussion of masquerade versus mimicry; she determines that Joanna's forced feminine performance is in line with the hegemonic discourse, while Christmas' engagement in mimicry is defiant of that discourse in demonstrating the performativity of race (501). I also find Sherazi's discussion of the symbolic order as it applies to racial roles to be interesting; she carefully identifies the interlocking narratives in which Christmas must choose roles and the ways in which other "players" determine the outcome of those choices. For example, Sherazi identifies that Christmas' refusal of a black public identity cannot prevent him from being placed in that role; because the town determines Joanna Burden to be a white woman in death *and* because Joe Brown identifies him as black, Christmas' "punishment as a black rapist and murderer will be played out on the public stage" while at the same time demonstrating the arbitrary nature of that narrative (501). Sherazi's discussion of the "circle" in which Christmas is caught, the symbolic order, expands neatly on Abdur-Rahman's detailing of southern racial history and lynching narratives.

What I find debatable in Sherazi's article is the assertion that "Joe forges an alternative, ex-centric discourse by way of his recognition and rejection of the restrictive circle of Southern discourse" (503). I find this, in light of Christmas' lynching, to be a bit optimistic. Christmas, try as he might, still falls within the narrative of the town; as Al-Barhow notes, Mottstown's talk does the work of returning Christmas to that "nigger" role regardless of his individual attempts to strive away from it. Regardless of Christmas' choices, he has always been socially constructed

and, without recognition of his individuality, his ex-centric discourse, by an other, his life cannot create a new discourse for others to engage in. His discourse must have an interlocuter, diegetic or not, to be actualized. As Sherazi does not identify any metatextual engagement in that narrative (Christmas as an inspiration to real individuals of mixed race, etc. which creates a discourse going beyond the plot, for example), in gauging Christmas' success in forging that discourse within the novel I would have to say he fails. Gavin Stevens' reduction of his story to a battle between his white and black blood, as Al-Barhow notes, indicates the way in which his narrative serves the hegemonic regime. Why, then, does Faulkner, in so clearly demonstrating the contingency of social roles on history and the true meaning of race as psychosocial, allow Joe Christmas to fail?

Using these critics and other sources to articulate questions such as these opens *Light in August* up to a more metatextual reading. These scholars build a strong foundation on which one can begin asking questions of Faulkner's textual choices. I seek to understand how Faulkner, in utilizing Joe Christmas as a probe by which to explore the southern racial script, can continue to exclude the voices of black southerners. By using "Mob Sometimes Right" as a comparative text, which none of these scholars have done to my knowledge, one may further open up *Light in August* as a text of exploration and limitation. As Faulkner lived through the Great Migration and saw the change in the southern racial scene, as he read and responded to the hopes of blacks for greater justice, he wrote a novel indicative of his vision of a changing world. As he used Jefferson as a playhouse in which to stage his own scenes, he may have been reaching into a place of security and stability in a radically changing world.

A COMPARATIVE READING OF *LIGHT IN AUGUST*

Although in seeming contrast to this heightened awareness, the attitudes Faulkner presents in "Mob Sometimes Right" are present in *Light in August* if one knows to look for them. This is not to say that *Light in August* "agrees" with "Mob Sometimes Right." For one thing, "Mob Sometimes Right," as I have noted, cannot even agree with itself. I would argue that *Light in August*, however, bears in its pages some of the broader themes found within the letter. What I am proffering is not a dominant new theory of Faulkner's racial attitudes that runs along all texts. I am instead aiming to show that certain attitudes emblematized in "Mob Sometimes Right" exist beyond Faulkner's most egregious outbursts and stand as stable, if conflicted, ways of thinking about people of color in their relation to whiteness. By reading *Light in August* alongside the letter, I hope to disarm the common excuse that Faulkner's racial views are inconsistent and thus must be separated from his art.

I will begin my analysis of *Light in August* by showing, as I and others have asserted, that Faulkner uses Christmas to demonstrate an understanding of socially constituted racial identities. If *Light in August* is about white people, it is more specifically about how white people construct and enforce the racial identities of others. I will show that Faulkner uses Joe Christmas' origins and mid-life experimentations to undermine the concept of biological determinacy of racial behavior. I then will engage an analysis of how Joe Christmas' internal racial identity is psychologically, not biologically, constituted (and compromised) by his social sphere in early youth. I will proceed to demonstrate the contrast Faulkner makes between this internal racial identity and an external racial role playing in which individuals such as Christmas are interpellated by the social sphere into roles fitting ideological racial narratives. Alongside this analysis and in further passages, I will engage points made by Faulkner in "Mob Sometimes

Right" to identify where they play into *Light in August*, whether they appear to conflict with the text or converse disturbingly well with the *Commercial Appeal*'s "Falkner."

I will then devote a section, in relation to the conversation regarding racial role playing and lynching narratives, to understand, from a variety of viewpoints, why Joe Christmas is lynched. To conclude, I will engage the gap identified by the critics I have cited thus far and discuss the role of black characters in *Light in August*. What, if any, character do they have? What is the extent of their influence on the plot and what roles do they play where they appear? I hope to draw from this a conversation that speaks to reasons for reading the novel. What is it one hopes to draw from a novel ostensibly about lynching which excises the voices of its most frequent victims?

BIOLOGICAL DETERMINACY

To accomplish a socially contingent interpretation of race, Faulkner takes care to develop ambiguity regarding Joe Christmas' biological racial origins. In doing so, Faulkner undercuts the dominant southern narrative that blacks behaved a certain way due to an essential nature. The opening of the novel gives little to no indication of Christmas' physical, racial characteristics, and the presentation of Christmas' youthful identity formation precedes any revelation of parentage. To make analysis easier, I will engage these elements out of the novel's presented order.

Faulkner makes it clear that Christmas physically presents and passes as white; his physical body bears no stereotypical black features.[4] Faulkner consistently describes Christmas' skin as "parchment-colored" (34) or simply "white," although white characters often refer to him as a "foreigner" (33, 196) or a "wop," a derogatory term for those of Italian descent (225, 275).

[4] Scholars who use descriptions of Christmas' "dark, insufferable face" (32) as an indicator of dark skin take the quote out of context.

Black characters, when given dialogue, consistently identify him as white, such as when Jupe says about and to Christmas, “It’s a white man…What you want, whitefolks?” or when the black man tortured by the sheriff talks of Brown and Christmas as “two white men…I just heard talk about two white men lived here” (117, 293). Joe himself identifies “my skin, my hair” as indicators of his “nigger blood,” as he puts it, but does not provide specific details to underscore this belief (196). Never does a white character identify Christmas as black without prompting; when Christmas goes to Mottstown and the authorities take him in, the town conversation revolves around how Christmas’ appearance entirely defies their expectations of a “nigger” murderer. In the communal voice of the white townspeople, Faulkner writes, “He don’t look any more like a nigger than I do…He went into a white barbershop like a white man, and because he looked like a white man they never suspected him” (350). I cite so many examples to show that Faulkner, throughout the novel, shows that Christmas, outwardly, looks white; there is no physical reason for others to identify Christmas as black other than through verbal suggestion. If Christmas cannot be interpellated as black for corporeal reasons, then the verbal force which places him into his racial positioning must be the power of an ideological narrative founded on white supremacist paranoia.

Faulkner also qualifies the notion that, despite not showing it, Christmas could still have “black blood.” While this point is more ambiguous, Faulkner denies the reader any kind of confirmation that Christmas’ paternal or maternal origins are of color. In the latter half of the novel, Faulkner confirms that Christmas, who grew up in a white orphanage and later in a white household, has ambiguous racial parentage. His mother, Milly Hines was white; however, her father, Eupheus Hines, allows her to die in childbirth (379). Thus, the reader never directly receives her perspective on Christmas’ paternal origin. Since Christmas’ grandfather, Eupheus

Hines, murders Christmas' father because he believes that he is black, claiming he "could see in his face the black curse of God Almighty," the reader never hears the father's claim to a race (*Light in August* 374). Christmas' mother, as Mrs. Hines states, claimed that Christmas' father, a circus worker, was Mexican, but Hines refuses to believe her. After the murder trial, the father's employer comes to the Hines' and claims "[Christmas' father] really was part nigger instead of Mexican" (377). The reader learns all of this filtered from the perspective of two mentally unstable old people, casting doubts on its veracity. This leaves three possibilities, all of which are plausible: Christmas is part Mexican, part black, or white. Since there is no way for the reader to know, it is not possible to definitively blame Christmas' violence on his race as the southern racial ideology would demand.

To clarify, for the townspeople, and Christmas himself as I will later show, simply the suspicion that Christmas is of mixed race is enough to condemn him. Having apparently heard Mrs. Hines story, Gavin Stevens, the Jefferson District Attorney, provides a reading of Christmas' actions as biologically determined by his "black blood," despite supposedly knowing that the story is doubtful. Stevens, probably the most well-educated person in Jefferson, uses this information to determine that Christmas runs into Hightower's house and allows himself to be shot to "[defy] the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years" (*Light in August* 449). Christmas himself believes that it is his blood which causes his torment, as when he confesses to Bobbie "I got some nigger blood in me… I think I got some nigger blood in me…I don't know. I believe I have" (196-197). However, I find that the immense amount of attention Faulkner pays to the power of social suggestion, along with the ambiguity surrounding Christmas' race, undercuts a strictly biological reading. Christmas' repeated suggestions that the

locus of control over his actions exists externally, as I will explore later, indicates to me a refutation that Christmas' blood motivates his actions.

This refutation of biological determinacy is one point at which I would say "Mob Sometimes Right" and *Light in August* cohere, if in different tones. As tempting as it is to condemn the letter entirely and read Faulkner as asserting such, "Mob Sometimes Right" does not make any statements on the behavioral tendencies of black people as biological. The closest Faulkner comes is in asserting that "the colored man is better fitted to trade in humility, just as the Irishman is for politics," which seems to me to state that it is the ways in which particular races and ethnic groups have been treated which enable certain behaviors (qtd. in McMillen & Polk 5). Although Faulkner characterizes black landowners broadly as gaming the system (and being permitted by whites to do so), he never goes so far as to claim that black blood, in the novel's terminology, is the deciding factor in trickery or humility. Rather, he, in responding to the assertion that black people are humble by nature, claims, "Humility and submissiveness are as false a part of a black man's *social* equipment as a white man's" (5, emphasis mine). Faulkner's attention to the social aspect intrigues me; despite the repugnance of the letter, the viewpoint that racial behavior is socially motivated and caused by "circumstance" (4) falls in line with what Faulkner proffers in *Light in August*; since Christmas' blood is in question, one can only read his actions as socially motivated. I will elaborate further on what Faulkner means by "circumstance" in the next section, but the concept of external influence on individual behavior, rather than a biological origin, is prevalent in the novel as well.

TALK AND CIRCUMSTANCE

"*Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something.*"

Light in August, page 104.

"It's not his fault what he is. But it's not our fault, either…"

Light in August, page 135.

In *Light in August*, Christmas' behavior is not spurred on by blood, but rather a result of his racial identity constituted from social interactions in his youth coming into conflict with an ideology in which that identity is abject. Al-Barhow's concept of "talk," the vocalized manifestations of internalized ideologies, creates Christmas' identity by labeling him as miscegenated, as other, from youth. It is this othering, which operates inside a racialized, post-slavery system in which blackness is inherently abject, which creates Christmas' racial identity. It is the unfitness of this racial identity to cohere to the post-reconstructionist reactionary social schema of a black-white binary which puts Christmas in conflict with his society and molds his behavior. *Light in August* articulates this process well, while "Mob Sometimes Right" takes it as an unchangeable given of southern society, relegating it to the vagary of "circumstance." Both depictions, I would argue, exclude the southern history and politics which make this unfair othering a distinctly *racial* issue.

Christmas internalizes his identity as a "nigger" when he is identified as an outsider in youth. After allowing Christmas' mother to die, Eupheus Hines brings the infant Christmas to a white orphanage to obscure his origins and takes up a janitorial position there to watch him. The children of the orphanage begin calling Christmas "nigger." The reason behind the children's labeling is unclear; Faulkner implies, but never states outright, that Hines uses his position to insinuate that Christmas is of mixed race among the children at the orphanage, crafting his

identity as an outsider and a racial other to bring him towards his eventual lynching as a rectification of Hines' self-perceived sin in allowing Christmas to come into the world. However, Hines denies that he inculcated questioning of Christmas' race in the children, saying, "I never told them to say it, to call him in his rightful nature, by the name of his damnation. I never told them. They knowed. They was told, but it wasn't by me" (*Light in August* 128). Hines' self-perception as the messenger of God, as well as his late-life determination to have his grandson lynched, complicates his claim. Moreover, at younger than five years old Christmas feels that Hines has influenced his outsider status. The narrator interprets his feelings as, "*That is why I am different from the others: because he* [Hines] *is watching me all the time*" (*Light in August* 138). This difference forms Christmas' identity at the orphanage, motivates his speedy adoption, and impacts his self-perception into adult life.

Faulkner shows the childish cruelty with which the children label Christmas to stem from a more pervasive ideology when showing the power of such labeling among adults. When the dietician finds Christmas in her closet, she calls him, "You little nigger bastard!" and confesses she has heard the children using the slur (122, 133). From there, she tells the matron of the orphanage that Christmas is of mixed race in order to get rid of him. The implication that Christmas could be of mixed race is horrible enough that the matron desperately places him into a white family (135). Even though there is no material evidence of Christmas' race, the mere implication of miscegenation forces him from the white social order because relegating blackness is what gives southern whiteness coherence. Christmas retains the memory of the labeling, fixing racial ambiguity as a part of his identity which he can never determine nor fully deny. This conflict of living as an embodied signifier of the unstable southern social order drives Christmas' behavior.

Faulkner affirms that circumstances which create Christmas' identity are based on social mores and laws derived from geographical history when Christmas ventures into the north and discovers that the taboos against his supposed mixed race are constructed. The discovery that his abjectness is not essential, but rather contingent, motivates a period of experimentation in which Faulkner demonstrates the lines between internal identity and social role playing. As he wanders, Christmas makes a habit out of claiming he is black after sleeping with white prostitutes to avoid paying, but a non-reaction from a northern prostitute ignites a violent reaction from Christmas, who beats the woman until she nearly dies (225). Christmas' violence isn't motivated by some savage black blood, as white supremacist ideologies would interpret it, but by the idea that the entire ideology which has dominated his life *and* constituted his identity has no bearing outside of a narrow region. Faulkner writes, "[Christmas] did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with a black skin" (225). Christmas himself does not have black skin, so Christmas' reaction has nothing to do with his biology. Rather, it is a response to the schism created when he realizes his abject status, his suffering, is entirely arbitrary.

Further conflict comes when Christmas realizes that, despite the arbitrariness of this role, an abject identity does not cease to influence lived reality once the subject realizes its lack of foundation. To the point, Christmas realizes he cannot simply choose what he wishes to be because he has already been psychologically marked and hailed by a social order which demands he choose a role. Christmas attempts to wholeheartedly adopt black living in Chicago and Detroit but finds no success because he cannot excise the marking the social order has left on his psychology. Christmas "live[s] with negroes, shunning white people. He ate with them, slept with them…lived as man and wife with a woman who resembled an ebony carving" and spends each night "trying to breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable thinking and

being of negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being..." (225-26). Christmas' attempts to become "fully" black by removing some supposedly white part of himself places into conflict two modes of thinking about race which I have already explored: the biological corporeality of race as exemplified by "the white blood," and the ideological and psychological construction of race in "white thinking and being."

To expel *white* thinking and being, however, Christmas would have to expel an identity constituted for him in ways that are deeply entangled; to expel whiteness, Christmas would have to expel blackness, masculinity, class, and a host of other categories. Christmas cannot move beyond race nor fully integrate as a black man because he cannot step outside of an identity structure mandated by the symbolic order. Christmas' internalized otherness disables his ability to cohere to his new society, causing him to act "belligerent, unpredictable, uncommunicative" and fight "the negro who would call him white" (*Light in August* 225). Christmas must face an unstable ordering of the world which has come to inhabit him.

Light in August asserts this perspective of identity formation as influenced by ideologies and prefigured social roles. While this presentation is sophisticated, what I find lacking is a deeper understanding on Faulkner's behalf of exactly how *black* living factors into the social order. For Faulkner, Christmas' status as supposedly miscegenated is what makes him abject; Faulkner does not seem to recognize that, in the southern white supremacist ideology which he takes for granted, *blackness itself* is abject. Abdur-Rahman's assertion that blackness is abject in a post-slavery social order because "slave" is the only role identified for blacks in the south goes beyond Faulkner's conceptualization of race. Faulkner depicts Christmas as having no place in society, but does not acknowledge that, in southern society, black people have no true role as people. Black society is something which exists "out there"; for Faulkner, black skin signifies

otherness, but only abstractly. He recognizes the impact of this ideology on Christmas, but not to its full extent. I will further analyze Faulkner's inability to conceptualize blackness outside of its role in corrupting whiteness later in this chapter, but for now I wish to recognize that Faulkner is not really talking about black living when he talks about Christmas; he is talking about the ways in which the white southern ideology perceives blackness.

One can clarify Faulkner's one-sided way of perceiving race by reading into the "circumstance" portion of "Mob Sometimes Right." In this section, Faulkner writes,

> It will be said that the standard for a black man is stricter than that for a white man. This is obvious. To make an issue of it is to challenge and condemn the natural human desire which is in any man, black or white, to take advantage of what circumstance, not himself, has done for him. The strong (mentally or physically) black man takes advantage of the weak one; he is not only not censured, he is protected by law, since (and the white man the same) the law has found out that the many elemental material factors which compose a commonwealth are of value only when they are in the charge of someone, regardless of color and size and religion, who can protect them. (qtd. in McMillen & Polk 4)

Like many of the other terms in this text, "circumstance" is a vague word, like "law," used to cover a wide range of details Faulkner does not bother to elaborate on. What Faulkner seems to imply is that "circumstance" is, simply, a matter of birth into black or white skin. Behind that implication lies a whole of southern history that Faulkner neglects to identify; he simply takes for granted that the natural role for black people in the southern system is one of inferiority. A surface level reading would seem to contradict that notion; Faulkner repeatedly uses phrases like "any man" or "regardless of color" to appear to not see color. However, one must note that, although black men are free to take advantage of weaker black men, Faulkner does not

acknowledge the possibility of black men being strong enough to take advantage of weak white men except through trickery, which he later condemns. It is clear that, in Faulkner's view, there is a predetermined place for blacks beneath whites. He does not even consider the possibility of their mobility. Their place is simply a matter of "misfortune" (5).

This is clearly not the case. The systemic subjugation of people of color in the United States was and continues to be aimed at reinforcing an ideological narrative of inferiority. During reconstruction, southern politicians took legal action to repeatedly undermine legislation aimed at uplift of black Americans. The Black Codes and Jim Crow laws reinscribed the inferiority of black Americans that the white south lost after abolition; Christmas' psychological torment is a direct result of one-drop rules meant to enforce white supremacy. It is not simply happenstance that blackness is a death sentence for Christmas or people like W.H. James, regardless of Faulkner's omission of history in the letter and the novel.[5] White southerners deliberately sedimented the racial narrative of black inferiority through laws and public performances like lynching. Lynching created visual examples of the narrative white southerners desperately needed to reinforce their ideology. White supremacists reified repeatedly the lynching narrative of a black man encroaching on white women and meeting with violent, retributive justice, something which Faulkner calls "sentimentality," to place black people, particularly men, into roles of savagery and inferiority. This intentional role assignment is something to which no one can claim Faulkner's ignorance; he depicts its function precisely in *Light in August* as the town hails Christmas into the "nigger" role.

[5] In accordance with the trend, Faulkner's depiction of reconstruction history in *Light in August* focuses on its impact on whites.

WILLING AND UNWLLING RACIAL ROLE PLAY

"If public talking makes truth, then I reckon that is truth."

Light in August, page 364.

After his time in the north, Christmas returns to Mississippi and engages in a three-year relationship with Joanna Burden, the spinster descendant of the Burden abolitionists who continues to promote racial uplift in the south. Joanna Burden, raised by a father who believed whites had to lift blacks to relieve their curse upon the white race, is outcast by the town. Burden and Christmas' relationship begins when Christmas, believing Burden has been setting out "food for the nigger" in feeding him, enters her room and rapes her (238, 236). Burden, not responding to the rape as Christmas expected, comes to his cabin and shares her family history. In return, Christmas tells her he has no idea who his parents are, "Except that one of them was part nigger," to which Burden asks, "How do you know that?" (254). This is the first time anyone, including Christmas, has questioned this identity, and Christmas, stunned, replies, "I don't know it…If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time" (254). Nevertheless, the two enter into a sexual relationship predicated on Christmas playing the role of a black rapist and Burden playing the role of the southern white woman, with Burden creating different fetishistic scenarios. Faulkner gives a few examples, writing,

> Sometimes the notes [Burden writes] would tell him not to come until a certain hour, to that house which no *white person save himself* had entered in years and in which for twenty years now she had been all night alone; for a whole week she forced him to climb into a window to come to her. He would do so and sometimes he would have to seek her about the dark house until he found her, hidden, in closets, in empty rooms, waiting, panting, her eyes in the dark glowing like the eyes of cats (260, emphasis mine).

These scenes enact the narrative of black predation while underscoring their artificiality as Faulkner explicitly identifies Christmas as white. When the two have sex, Joanna insists on calling him "negro" (260). This is the same cultural script that lies at the center of lynching's justifications; the southern paranoia of the emancipated black man "[stirred up] to murder and rape," as Burden herself puts it, led to the myth that lynching existed to preserve white womanhood, a myth which Faulkner promotes in his letter (249). Faulkner demonstrates his awareness of the artificial nature of this roleplay, and thus the lynching narrative, by drawing attention to the artificiality of the sexual scenes by referring to the relationship as a play with three phases.

Faulkner uses this apparent undercutting of the racialized roles through this private interaction to further show how they are enacted in the public sphere. Despite the fact that Christmas' racial origins are ambiguous, despite his physical passing for white, and despite the falsity involved in the affair, Faulkner still shows the town cohering Christmas to the black rapist role and lynching him. His depiction of this process emphasizes a thorough understanding of how individuals are stripped of agency when hailed by the social sphere into hegemonic positions. Burden herself begins this process; as she nears menopause, she begins to talk to Christmas about having a child, which Christmas refuses. He thinks, "*Why not? It would mean ease, security, for the rest of your life. You would never have to move again. And you might as well be married to her as this* thinking, 'No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be'" (*Light in August* 265). By having a child, Christmas and Joanna Burden would have to either make permanent their forbidden play or fall into a more accepted positioning, with Christmas repudiating his agency and cohering to a white role. The

potential child would solidify these heteronormative and sexual expectations *or* their violation, denying Christmas the fluidity he has enacted his entire life.

Burden then explicitly presents Christmas with two choices: he can either take over her business affairs and publicly assume the role of a white man (*Light in August* 268) or attend a black law school by assuming the role of a black man (276-77). After Christmas spurns the first option, Burden, in enacting the hegemonic narrative of the south, attempts to force him into a racial position as a black man who is subordinate to her. Their exchange reinforces Burden's racial positioning,

> "You can read law in Peebles's [Burden's black lawyer] office. He will teach you law. Then you can take charge of all the legal business […] Tell them," she said.
>
> "Tell niggers that I am a nigger too?" [he said.] […]
>
> "Yes. You'll have to do that. So they won't charge you anything. On my account." (276-77)

Christmas violently repudiates Burden after this, revolted by the idea of being locked into a publicly black social performance. Since Christmas has been unable to fully occupy a black or white identity, he maintains individual agency around the ability to move between racial boundaries. However, Christmas' defiance of such external determinations is not more powerful than the white social sphere. Ultimately, Christmas is constituted by the community and forced into their hegemonic narrative via lynching.

Burden's response to Christmas' rejection of her plans is to state, "Maybe it would be better if we both were dead" (278). The statement quickly becomes an unspoken, mutually agreed-upon death pact; Christmas approaches Burden's bedroom on the night of her murder perceiving it as her request, thinking, "*I had to do it. She said so herself*" (280). What Christmas

does not realize is that Joanna is planning a murder-suicide; when Christmas comes to Joanna's bedroom, he comes armed with a razor to kill her, but she is waiting with a double-barrel pistol loaded to kill him first, then herself. When she fires at Christmas, the gun misfires, and Christmas cuts her throat (282-83). Christmas' murder of Burden, despite its defensive nature, sets in motion the process by which the town folds him into the "nigger" rapist role. Faulkner shows an awareness of how this narrative, always at the ready in the southern white unconscious, is enacted in the social sphere.

Before the townspeople even suspect Joe Christmas, the white bootlegger, they believe that Joanna must have been murdered by a black man. At the crime scene, they "believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and [the town] knew, believed, and hoped that [Joanna Burden] had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward" (288). The town believes that a black man must have committed the crime because, in the eyes of the white south, that is what black men do; the predation of white women is inherent to the race within the white supremacist regime. This is what Faulkner means when he specifies "not by a negro but by Negro"; moreover, they hope Joanna had been raped in the most savage way because it reaffirms the tenets of white supremacy. The town has a ready-made costume for the murderer of Joanna, who, fitting with the white supremacist narrative of predation, becomes the "white woman" in the text from here on out. This description is indicative of Faulkner's acute awareness of white supremacist hegemonic script of the black predator and its gratuitous nature.

Joe Brown undoes Christmas' white mimicry and finalizes Christmas' positioning in this narrative by accusing him of being black to the authorities. When trying to cash in on a reward posted for the capture of Burden's murderer, Brown's story comes under scrutiny. "Desperate by

then" to save himself from suspicion and preserve his own safety, Brown tells the sheriff, in the eyes of the town (the jail's windows are "lined with folks' faces against the glass" [97]), "Go on. Accuse me. Accuse the white man that's trying to help you with what he knows. Accuse the white man and let the nigger go free. Accuse the white and let the nigger run" (97). The marshal, upon hearing this, tells Joe Brown, "You better be careful what you are saying, if it is a white man you are talking about…I don't care if he is a murderer or not" (98); in the eyes of the south, to be white and to be accused of being black is worse than to be accused of murder or bootlegging or extramarital sex. This labeling works the same way that it does when Christmas is a child; from this point on, Christmas becomes "that white nigger that did that killing up at Jefferson last week," and his fate is sealed.

THE LYNCHING (?) OF JOE CHRISTMAS

In this section, I would like to discuss Christmas' death in terms of lynching. The basic definition I will offer for lynching is ritualized killing for the sake of ideological reinforcement. Lynchings are not always of black individuals, and they occur in a variety of forms. American lynching originated, not in New England as Faulkner claims, but in the western United States as a method of frontier justice employed primarily for political, not racial, reasons, (NAACP). However, during the reconstruction era, lynching became a distinctly southern practice as a method of reinforcing the white supremacist ideology because it served as psychical and psychological terrorism for black communities and created imagery to reify the white supremacist narrative (Wood 10). Lynching that relied on psychological impact for its efficacy would have been most prevalent in the United States as Faulkner wrote *Light in August*. When discussing whether Christmas' death is a murder, a lynching, or justified killing, it is important to consider both the basic definition of lynching and these historical circumstances. Rather than

settling on one determination, I would like to first look at the way the novel presents Christmas' death and then analyze, from a variety of frameworks and perspectives, whether Christmas' death qualifies as a lynching and what this means for an analysis of *Light in August*.

When Christmas is captured in Mottstown, a lynch mob assembles outside the sheriff's office. This lynch mob appears in the middle of the day and is composed of "two hundred men and boys and women too," characteristic of lynch mobs at the time (*Light in August* 354). The mob is clear about what it wants, with individuals demanding the sheriff turn over Christmas. Faulkner describes their commentary: "'Did he give that white woman a fair trial?' And they hollered then, crowding up, like they were hollering for one another to the dead woman and not to the sheriffs…'Yaaah,' somebody hollers; 'we reckon you don't want him lynched. But he ain't worth any thousand dollars to us. He ain't worth a thousand dead matches to us'" (355). Although the mob does not count Christmas as a person, his real value to them is an opportunity to reassert their ideology as they demonstrate in their emphasis of Joanna Burden's status as a white woman. Faulkner emphasizes that the crowd is speaking "to the dead woman" because the ravished, dead white woman is symbolic of the overall ideology. White murderers may get a fair trial, but black men who step out of line meet mob justice to reinforce social schema. So far, the circumstances in this scene fit with the qualifications for a lynching. However, the sheriff manages to calm the crowd, and Christmas makes it back to Jefferson. Christmas' actual killing complicates standard perceptions of lynching.

In Jefferson, Christmas breaks from the police and flees to Hightower's house, pursued by Percy Grimm, a member of the National Guard. Grimm pursues the armed Christmas into the kitchen, where Christmas takes cover behind a kitchen table. Grimm shoots him through the table six times before castrating the still-living Christmas in the most famous scene of the novel:

> When the others reached the kitchen they saw the table flung aside now and Grimm stooping over the body. When they approached to see what he was about, they saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell," he said. (*Light in August* 464).

Christmas dies of his wounds after the castration, and Gavin Stevens, the lawyer set to defend him, sends his body to Mottstown with his grandparents.

Whether one determines this death to be a lynching depends on a number of factors. To begin, Christmas is a rapist and a killer; his initial sexual encounter with Burden was, on the surface, nonconsensual, although the town does not know the facts of the encounter. This is complicated by the consensual nature of the sexual encounters of the following years, as well as Christmas' killing of Burden to be both premeditated and in self-defense; Christmas plans to kill Burden, perceiving it to be her request, which would make his act a murder, but her attempt to shoot him forces him to act to save his own life. In addition, according to Gavin Stevens, Christmas plans to plead guilty to his charges (458). Lynching is not characterized by the guilt of the victim, but to understand Faulkner's complex treatment of the lynching narrative, as well as the variety of critical response to Christmas' death, one must understand that Christmas fits, in part, the stereotype of his prescribed role as a rapist and a killer.

Lynchings are commonly extrajudicial in nature, carried out by vigilante civilians or those acting outside of the purview of the law; Christmas' murder is not. Although Percy Grimm is not a regular member of the police force or the sheriff's office, the sheriff invests him with authority, saying "Well, if you won't [leave your pistol at home], I reckon I'll have to make you

a special deputy" (455). Since Grimm has legal authority, and Christmas breaks the law by stealing a weapon, running from police, and assaulting Hightower, his actions are justified, if not sanctioned, by the state; he may at most face consequences of using what one would now call excessive force. In legal terms, Christmas has not been lynched, but has been neutralized as a threat by legal authorities.

In terms of enforcing ideologies, however, Christmas' murder could be considered a lynching because Grimm's intentions in killing Christmas are to protect the tenets of white supremacy. Grimm forms what he refers to as a militia in order to, as he states, "let the law take its course. The law, the nation. It is the right of no civilian to sentence a man to death. And we, the soldiers in Jefferson, are the ones to see to that" (451-52). However, as I have noted, Grimm's special deputy status exempts him from civilian status, and it is clear that he sees himself (and his mob) as soldiers, hence not civilians. Moreover, Faulkner makes clear Grimm's ethnonationalist views of the "law, the nation" rest on maintaining white supremacy. Faulkner writes that Grimm believes wholeheartedly in, "a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men…" (451). Grimm's determination to further white supremacy under the guise of dispensing justice is exactly the goal of the southern lynch mob, and his determination is far from isolated. Grimm successfully forms his militia and invests them with the same blind faith in the justness of their cause: "So quickly is man unwittingly and unpredictably moved that without knowing that they were thinking it, the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism

and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs" (456-57). Grimm stands as an excellent leader of a potential lynch mob.

Finally, the violence which Grimm dispenses on Christmas creates the same spectacle at which lynchings of black men were aimed. Grimm's castration of Christmas as a method of sexual subordination echoes the emasculating lynchings that served to undo southern reconstruction and civil rights movements of black male empowerment. The most feared element of southern black manhood was sexual agency, and lynchings often sought to reify a feminized image of black men (Wood 8). Christmas' castration cements this image in the minds of those who witness it: "[Blood] seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes" (*Light in August* 465). The image of Christmas' mutilated body, Faulkner states, will endure in the minds of the white witnesses forever, creating a lasting monument to white supremacy. The spectacle in the performance of a lynching was intended for such white audiences as well as black audiences. As Wood writes,

> It was the spectacle of lynching, rather than the violence itself, that wrought psychological damage, that enforced black acquiescence to white domination. Even more, mobs performed lynchings as spectacles for other whites. The rituals, the tortures, and their subsequent representations imparted powerful messages to whites about their own supposed racial dominance and superiority. These spectacles produced and disseminated images of white power and black degradation, of white unity and black

> criminality, that served to instill and perpetuate a sense of racial supremacy in their white spectators. (2)

The inability of the white men who witness Christmas' murder to forget the scene plays to the psychological impact of the lynching act which Wood describes. Its long-lasting impact accomplishes Grimm's ideological goal of reinforcing the narrative of white superiority. However, it is not possible to state whether Christmas' murder also creates this psychological impact on the black community because Faulkner does not provide any black perspectives on the events. Readers know that the black community knows about Christmas' arrest and escape; while on the run, two black children and a man recognize and flee from Christmas when he approaches them (336-37). However, Faulkner does not provide their perspectives on the murder in the way he does the white town.

In discussing Christmas' death as a lynching, the final perspective I would like to consider is Faulkner's as proposed in his 1931 letter. In "Mob Sometimes Right," Faulkner clearly states that lynching comes to those who "blunder" (McMillen & Polk 4) and serves as recompense for violating the "sacredness of womanhood" (5). He claims that it is "[n]ot a thing," or a practice, "but a reaction" as a result of "sentimentality" (5). When Percy Grimm murders Christmas, it is surely reactionary; he is prepared for it, but I would not say the murder is premeditated. The murder, I would say, arises from the sentiment that Faulkner describes. It is the revolting sentiment of white pride, an unyielding belief in white male superiority. And Christmas, as I have noted before, violates Joanna Burden's virginity and murders her. By all accounts, Mr. Falkner would consider Christmas' death to be a lynching. The only question is whether the mob is, in this case, right.

LIMNING THE GAP: THE MISSING PERSPECTIVE

As I have alluded to, I find disturbing the lack of black voices in a novel which I see as delicately outlining the systemic racializing and marginalizing of individuals, a novel which thrives on a multiplicity of perspectives, novel which culminates in a travesty of which people of color suffered the most. I have to agree with Abdur-Rahman's assessment that the black characters of *Light in August* have little interiority (130). In reading the novel, it may be possible to forget they even exist. However, they are present throughout the text, suffering quietly the violence of other characters without any voices of their own. Hightower's male cook is whipped by the Ku Klux Klan (72), Christmas beats a girl with whom he is about to have sex (156-157), the Jefferson sheriff whips a black man for information which he could have obtained anyway (291), Christmas terrorizes a black church (322-324). I could go on. More prolific are black characters who go unnamed. Three black communities are named in the novel, in Chicago, Detroit, and Freedman Town, without Faulkner affording them any perspective. Christmas' voice cannot be said to represent them. Faulkner clearly acknowledges their presence and their awareness of the drama taking place in their own town. Why, then, does Faulkner choose to exclude these voices?

In reading *Light in August*, one must understand that Faulkner is not attempting to write about blackness in America. If he is writing about lynching, it is not lynching as black people experienced it, as an "inhuman crime" which "strike[s] at the very foundation of our most sacred institutions" as W.H. James put it (3). Faulkner limits himself to explorations of otherness as it touches whites and, in *Light in August*, runs up against the dependence of southern whiteness on southern blackness. Why, then, does Faulkner refuse to stray into talking about black American experience in any genuine way when he seems to understand so thoroughly the white

supremacist narrative under which black Americans so struggled? Based on my reading of "Mob Sometimes Right," I come to the conclusion that Faulkner has a vested interest in not exploring those perspectives. Faulkner so quickly shuts down W.H. James' letter because he does not want to hear about the effects of lynching on black Americans; he wants to defend a way of living which he feels is natural for the white male southerner. He makes his female character devoted to the black southern uplift movement a crazed negrophile for the same reason he derides the work of the ASWLP. As time goes on and the south changes beyond New Deal politics, as the New South economy emerges and civil rights activism comes to the forefront, it becomes apparent that Faulkner fears social and political change. He does not want the everyday, the practical, to change, even as his ideals make him averse to things like lynching. Change, however, cannot be stopped.

I have written that I find Faulkner's exclusion of black voices disturbing. I am not alone in this; the amount of scholarship devoted to digging up black voices in Faulkner, not to say in *Light in August* specifically, demonstrates the need to find something redemptive or condemning in Faulkner. Faulkner has been a staple of the American literary canon since Malcolm Cowley's publication of *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946; since his death, his popularity worldwide only soared. Is there a need, in the age of the Black Lives Matter movement, to reassess Faulkner's texts for more than just their aesthetics and their artistry? If one relies on Faulkner to say something about blackness in America, is he played out?

I do not have answers to Faulkner's relevance. Neither can I possibly say, as a white American, what Faulkner does or does not have to offer readers and scholars of color worldwide. What I will claim, however, is that Faulkner's sedimentation in the American canon as a voice on racial conflict in America demands we reconsider his texts in their political context, *alongside*

his other statements on race, if we are to continue discussing him. Scholars cannot, and should not, try to separate the artist from the man because his public statements reflect more about his writing than a first glance shows. This becomes only clearer as time goes on.

THE "PRACTICAL REASON OF HIS FUTURE": LYNCHING, (MIS)REPRESENTATION, AND BLACK LIBERATION IN *INTRUDER IN THE DUST* (1949) AND "LETTER TO THE LEADERS IN THE NEGRO RACE" (1956)

"…there is something stronger in a man than a moral condition."

"A Talk with William Faulkner," page 19.

For the next phase of this project, I look ahead sixteen years to Faulkner's publication of *Intruder in the Dust* in 1948. By this time, the United States had emerged from World War II to enter into a new ideological landscape characterized by the Cold War. Truman would shortly be elected for a second term as president in an election that would shock the nation and polarize the south. The war-time economic boom had engendered a newly empowered, politically mobile black middle class that threatened the established social order. Upon returning home, white veterans inflicted retributive violence on black Americans who had filled industrial and professional gaps during the war, and black veterans returning home faced violent prejudice, often suffering assault for wearing their uniforms in public, all of which horrified the Truman administration and drew the critique of the Soviet Union (Sassoubre 199).[6] In response, Truman would use executive authority to promote civil rights and push integration efforts, encouraging the flourishing of the Civil Rights Movement of the fifties.

Meanwhile, William Faulkner was emerging from a six-year novelistic slump. When the United States entered World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Faulkner was finishing *Go Down, Moses* (1942). A rather conflicted patriot, he spent the bulk of the forties in "salt mines" of Hollywood, screenwriting wartime films meant to capture American hearts and

[6] For further information on lynchings targeting black veterans, see the Equal Justice Initiative's report on "Lynching in America: Targeting Black Veterans" at https://eji.org/reports/online/lynching-in-america-targeting-black-veterans.

wallets (Gresset 69). Likewise, he spent his novelistic energy toiling in a project that would consume him for over a decade, an allegorical World War I novel entitled *A Fable* (1954) (Gresset 74). The war engendered in Faulkner a new sense of national responsibility and awareness which would find its outlet in *Intruder in the Dust* and come to full fruition as Faulkner became a spokesperson for the State Department in the 1950s.

Intruder in the Dust, more than many of Faulkner's novels, gives critics the clearest portrait of an intentional, political Faulkner whose novelistic voice most closely approaches the register of his public letters and essays. Early on in this chapter, I will survey critics who each recognize the importance of seeking out Faulkner's intentions and his growing awareness of his cultural positioning. For my part, *Intruder in the Dust* presents a Faulkner interested in promoting a viewpoint of southern race relations that will feed into his growing political presence. Thematically, the novel follows *Light in August* in presenting a view of racialized social codes and appropriate behaviors as well as the consequences of refusing to adhere to such norms. Both novels feature lynching in abstract ways which serve to center conversation. In *Light in August*, one must question whether a lynching ever occurs, and the violent specter of the act vaguely hovers around the text before suddenly emerging in the finale. In *Intruder in the Dust*, however, avoiding a lynching propels the plot, and, while the act itself never takes place, imagined deaths fill the pages. While Joe Christmas receives racial interpretations from his community after he is dead, *Intruder in the Dust*'s Lucas Beauchamp is the centerpiece of imagining from the novel's beginning. Both novels demand attention to their racial politics and their violence, but *Intruder in the Dust*, in inspiring the success that would allow Faulkner to become the canonized author he continues to be, requires readers to look more closely at whom Faulkner speaks to and what he tries to make them believe.

In this chapter, I will analyze Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* as Faulkner's fantasy for a new south characterized by upstanding citizens who, though conservative politically, seek what is best for their community and act to inspire change. I call it a fantasy because I read the novel as built upon a deliberate misunderstanding, or misrepresentation, of the southern racial scene and the process of social change. While seemingly a progression from the Faulkner of the 1930s, this Faulkner likewise refuses to imagine a practical expression of racially progressive ideals. I will assert that Faulkner, likely well-meaning in his war-inspired desire for universal cooperation, promotes a vision of society which demands the marginalized take action at the same time that Faulkner himself refuses to allow them such agency. To do so, I will pay special attention to the visual elements of the novel's lynching fantasies, contrasting their diegetic context with the contemporary context of racial violence made apparent by texts such as the Civil Rights Committee's report (1947) and artifacts such as lynching memorabilia. In addition, I will compare the novel's assertions to Faulkner's 1956 *Letter to the Leaders of the Negro Race* to show how Faulkner recommends action which undercuts the thesis of social change proposed in *Intruder in the Dust.* In doing so, I hope to illuminate a vision of Faulkner which takes as a given Faulkner's conflicted and conflicting perspectives on race relations. Faulkner was not a civil rights champion nor did he hate black people. He was severely limited in his capacity to translate his ideals for freedom into just action. Instead, he chose to promote behavior for blacks seeking justice that was limiting, narrow, and regressive, undercutting real work done for the cause of civil rights.

INTRUDER IN THE DUST OVERVIEW

Intruder in the Dust is part detective story and part ethical and political musing. Faulkner structures the book into two parts: the main action of the whodunnit plot consumes the front

matter of the novel, while the denouement is subsumed by meditations from Gavin Stevens, the lawyer who provided the biologically deterministic interpretation of Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, and his nephew Chick Mallison on civil rights and the role of the south in black liberation. The novel begins with the arrest of Lucas Beauchamp, another of Faulkner's recurring characters and a major character in *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Lucas Beauchamp is a local black farmer descended of a white plantation owner who is well known in Yoknapatawpha for his refusal to adhere to acceptable black behavior; namely, Lucas Beauchamp carries himself with a dignity and refusal of subservience that infuriates the white townsfolk. At the beginning of the novel, Lucas has been arrested for the murder of Vinson Gowrie, a landowner from a rural section of Yoknapatawpha called Beat Four. Lucas awaits an inevitable lynching in Jefferson's jail.

Chick Mallison, whom Lucas had once saved from drowning, eagerly anticipates Lucas' impending lynching as an opportunity to have Lucas acknowledge him from a subordinate position (*Intruder in the Dust* 31-34). However, upon confronting his uncle, lawyer Gavin Stevens, who has been assigned to defend Lucas, over his apathetic approach to the facts of Lucas' case, Chick Mallison, his black companion Aleck Sander[7], and the spinster Eunice Habersham[8] dig up Vinson Gowrie's grave to confirm that Lucas Beauchamp's distinctive gun could not have killed Gowrie (*Intruder* 102). In doing so, they discover that several people are implicated in a timber stealing plot, resolved when Crawford Gowrie, Vinson's brother and the

[7] The relationship between Aleck Sander and Chick Mallison is comparable to the one shared by Roth Edmunds and Henry Beauchamp, who were both nursed by Molly Beauchamp, Lucas' wife (*Go Down, Moses* 131). Roth Edmunds owns the plantation on which Lucas Beauchamp is a tenant when *Intruder in the Dust* takes place. Faulkner writes that Chick, "had spent a good part of [his] life in Paralee's, Aleck Sander's mother's cabin in their back yard where he and Aleck Sander played in the bad weather when they were little and Paralee would cook whole meals for them halfway between two meals at the house and he and Aleck Sander would eat them together, the food tasting the same to each…" (*Intruder* 12).

[8] Miss Habersham is generally considered to be Miss Belle Worsham of *Go Down, Moses*, due to their identical relationship to Molly (*IitD*) or Mollie (*GD,M*) Beauchamp, Lucas' wife.

true murderer, commits suicide (237). Lucas is released from jail and the lynch mob disperses, leaving Chick and Gavin to debate on the reasoning behind the lynch mob's departure.

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

In forming my argument, I read both critiques of the novel from the 1950s and the 2010s. Although I had been seeking out analyses on *Intruder in the Dust*'s lynching imagery and character study on Lucas Beauchamp, much of the criticism revolves around Chick Mallison and Gavin Stevens, unsurprising considering their dialogue consumes most of the novel and considering Lucas Beauchamp disappears for much of the story's action. Most critics seem to read *Intruder in the Dust* as a bildungsroman centered around Chick's ability to engage with both black and white members of his community and resultant issues. Whether Chick represents an enduring adherence to normative southern social codes or represents change in white southern mentality differs depending on the interpretation, as well as how much the critic decides Gavin Stevens has influenced Chick. Both Laurie Fulton and Jean Graham agree that Chick engages with his uncle's politics and interpretation of history to grow and move beyond southern expectations. Graham writes, "…while Gavin's speechifying is the major influence on Chick's decisions, behavior, and growth, it is ultimately opposed to them. Gavin, like all other adult males, is an idealist and a rhetor; Chick, a realist and an actor" (83). Many scholars today agree with the distinction made between Chick and Gavin, while some acknowledge their potential for mutual influence. Gone, it seems, are the days of equivalating Gavin Stevens with Faulkner himself, giving Chick Mallison more redemptive mileage than he may have had in the past.

While I am not overmuch writing about these characters and their arcs due to the focus of my analysis, I do want to propose my standpoint on reading them as Gavin and Chick *are* the medium through which Faulkner presents the novel. I agree that reading Gavin Stevens as

Faulkner's mouthpiece is excessively limiting. As I have discovered throughout this project, Faulkner's own statements, verbal or written, cannot always be taken for his opinions or his intentions, and so trying to reduce understanding more about Faulkner to simply reading the highlights of Stevens' best and worst moments is unhelpful. However, neither do I wish to dismiss Stevens as "parodic" as Autry does (20). As many critics have noted, Gavin Stevens has a marked influence on Chick's opinions even at the close of the novel when Chick is most contentious towards his uncle. Moreover, Faulkner allows Stevens' dialogue to fill so much of the novel's space that to disregard his commentary as parody would be to toss the entire novel. If one is to take seriously Chick's contemplations and eventual conclusions, one must take seriously how he engages with his uncle. If his decisions on political engagement come to be the same as Stevens', as Atsushi Marutani asserts, then Stevens' "smoke blowing," as Polk as notoriously referred to it, must be considered rather than dismissed.

This is to say that, although I am not endeavoring to engage the text this way in this project, that I read Gavin Stevens and Chick Mallison not as polar opposites, with Stevens representing backward destructive racial ideology and Chick representing hopeful potential for social change, but as Faulkner's attempt to dialogue between points of view which are not dissimilar. The similarities of their opinions and the fact that Chick's thoughts overwhelmingly originate in his uncle's lecturing, as well as their tendency to collaboratively interpret events means that one may treat the dialogue between Chick Mallison and Gavin Stevens more as an internal dialogue Faulkner holds via the pages of the novel. Moreover, the opinions Stevens works through with Chick may be found, as I will point to, in several of Faulkner's nonfiction pieces.

There is a similar dynamic between *Intruder in the Dust* and Faulkner's later nonfiction just as there is cohesion between "Mob Sometimes Right" and *Light in August*, pointing to a larger trend in Faulkner's fiction and nonfiction. *Intruder in the Dust* stands out as Faulkner's most bald fictive musing on such issues. If Lucas Beauchamp emerges as the black subject for Faulkner to consider, Chick and Gavin become Faulkner's voices of meditation. Treating Chick and Stevens in this light opens up both a space for musing, a refusal to adhere Faulkner to one exact point of view, while also attributing to the novel some of the polemicism it has been ascribed. Faulkner's message, as one can see, is not straightforward or clear cut, but *is* communicated. How exactly one interprets *Intruder in the Dust* changes depending on critical focus, but the search for Faulkner's message and intentionality is consistent among critics.

Before beginning my own analysis of *Intruder in the Dust*, I wish to provide an overview of a few key articles from recent Faulkner scholarship which I feel show the breadth of analysis on *Intruder in the Dust* and highlight themes present throughout scholarship on the novel. For my selection, I will be reviewing work from Ticien Marie Sassoubre, a lecturer in law and humanities at Stanford Law, Atsushi Marutani, a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, and Thea J. Autry, a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University. Marutani and Autry's articles were published recently in the *Faulkner Journal*, Marutani's in 2015 and Autry's in 2018; Sassoubre's article came out in *Criticism* in 2007. The three critics utilize different lenses of analysis, but their analyses circulate around themes of community and economics as a result of their shared grounding in historical context. Between their respective attention to law, ethics, and the visual sphere, the disparities and commonalities between the three reflect both recent work on *Intruder in the Dust* as well as older trends. I see reflected in these articles ideas and themes found in John Bassett, Lorie Fulton, Jean Graham, Keith Clark, Doreen Fowler, and more.

Therefore, I find them to be helpful in establishing common and significant critical trends as well as identifying some issues which, to my knowledge, have not garnered significant critical attention. I pull from their work a special attention to the way in which Faulkner crafts a fantasy of the south based upon his reaction to shifting social and economic positioning of southerners in the late 1940s. *Intruder in the Dust* can be read for visions of new approaches to history, articulated ethical stances, perspectives on community relations, and the role of the black man in America. From these visions, I seek to find not one message, but a variety of perspectives.

TICIEN SASSOUBRE (2007)

Sassoubre's article, "Avoiding Adjudication in William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust,*" details the south's political and ideological reactions to federal intervention, tracing the racially-motivated legal battles between the north and the south from pre-Reconstruction to the integration battles waged beginning in the 1930s and 1940s (183). Sassoubre argues that extrajudicial "home-rule" tactics such as lynching have historically been the south's recourse in response to federal policies encouraging the uplift of black citizens. Sassoubre argues that extralegal methods had been the primary means of reinforcing the slavery-era racial status quo since its abolition, and legal methods such as Black Codes and Jim Crow laws were seen in their contemporary moment, locally and federally, to merely reflect "the reality of the existing community" (188). By following legal history from the Fugitive Slave Act onward, Sassoubre demonstrates that, to the south, "the protection of the customs of slavery amounted to the protection of private property and economic stability" even after slavery had ended, generating southern hatred of federal intervention which seemed dedicated to the destruction of southern economic independence (187). Sassoubre's historical analysis enables

her to write about two of Faulkner's novels, *Go Down Moses* (1942) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) as grounded heavily in the ties between history, communities, and economics.

Building from this background, Sassoubre analyzes the roles of extralegal action and legal recourse in Faulkner's later texts, *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*, in contrast to his earlier texts, *Sanctuary* (1931) and *Light in August* (1932). She writes,

> The lawlessness of lynching does not threaten but rather coexists with the rule of law in these texts [*Sanctuary* and *Light in August*], because Faulkner conceives law as properly the expression of the values of the community…But by the late 1930s, Faulkner would have cause to reconsider the role of lynching in Southern culture….For Faulkner, [federal intervention in the form of integration efforts] represented the imposition of exogamous law, indifferently and artificially generated by a bureaucratic state, on historically specific and distinct communities—with potentially disastrous consequences for those communities. (185)

Sassoubre explicitly references the lynch mob in *Light in August*, expressing that its acquiescence to Sheriff Kennedy comes from a respect for the jurisdiction of the legal system which it perceives as acting in its favor, in accordance with this early Faulkner's vision of law (185). Lynching in *Light in August*, according to Sassoubre, does not function to violate the law but to reinforce its mandates. *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*, however, signal to Sassoubre a shift in Faulkner's representation of lynching. Sassoubre argues that these later texts present lynching and the violence visited on the black communities as a result of "the ascendance of market relations in the South," seen by Faulkner as a northern influence, and the violent

extralegal behavior exhibited by mobs as a channeling of outland (northern) attitudes.[9] She writes that the mob which gathers to lynch Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust* is composed of "creatures of the federally willed transformation of the south" (201). In Sassoubre's reading, *Intruder in the Dust* stands as an assertion that, while racial difficulties in the south are grounded in unjust history, northern economic and social influence has served to exacerbate problems and further victimize black southerners.

In the section "Avoiding Adjudication in *Intruder in the Dust,*" Sassoubre contextualizes the novel's composition in the Truman administration's desegregation of the military and the Civil Rights Committee's report on southern hate crimes alongside the revival of "federal antilynching and anti-poll tax legislation that the South had considered dead for a decade" (198-99). Sassoubre primarily analyzes the Truman administration's civil rights work in terms of southern response, detailing the rise of the Dixiecrat movement and the rise of the Southern Block as a legal response. Sassoubre's reference to these political developments spurred me to read the Civil Rights Committee's report, *To Secure These Rights* (1947). Doing so gave me access to details of incidents of southern racial injustice contemporary to Faulkner's writing. Moreover, the publication of the document provided insight as to the public perception of the south in 1947 to which Faulkner directly responds in *Intruder in the Dust*. Sassoubre's reference enables an engagement with what I will read as the misinformation on lynching in *Intruder in the Dust*. Sassoubre's careful attention to the historical legal history is a treasure trove for scholars

[9] In analyzing "Mob Sometimes Right" (1931), one can see that both perceptions of the lynching's relationship to the law are present in this earlier Faulkner. His statement that, "the law has found out that the many elemental material factors which compose a commonwealth are of value only when they are in the charge of some one, regardless of color and size and religion, who can protect them…" (qtd. in McMillen & Polk 4) reflects the idea that the law works alongside the southern state of racial customs. His later assertion that lynching is a northern custom that came to the south alongside Reconstruction (McMillen & Polk 6) reflects the foreign nature of lynching which emerges, according to Sassoubre, in Faulkner's later writing. Sassoubre includes McMillen and Polk's article analyzing the letter in her footnotes but does not acknowledge that *both* attitudes are present in the 1931 publication itself.

looking to connect the contemporary conversation of *Intruder in the Dust* with a wider southern history that goes beyond Reconstruction. Often, the texts providing historical background on Faulkner have a scope beginning pre-Civil War and ending at the beginning of Reconstruction, but Sassoubre draws connections through the Cold War era in which Faulkner wrote. Her text is oft cited among recent Faulkner scholarship and fills historical gaps that allow connections between other Faulkner scholars.

Sassoubre' text also explains how, at the time of Faulkner's writing, black Americans benefitted economically from wartime industry and moved towards urban centers, as well as joined organizations like the NAACP. "In other words," Sassoubre writes, "the interests of blacks began to carry unprecedented political and economic weight" (199). This context places *Intruder in the Dust* in a similar historical positioning as *Light in August* in regard to shifting economic situations along racial lines; lynchings were exacerbated in the 1930s by the Depression's lowering of southern white economic status to a place previously reserved for southern blacks, the flight of black Americans to the north to escape racial violence, and reactions to federal intervention in southern economics via New Deal legislation (185). While southern whites came to occupy economic and labor positions reserved for blacks during the Great Depression, World War II allowed blacks to rise to the economic and labor positions previously reserved for whites, breeding similar instances of racial violence but enabling political response from blacks in the 1940s.

Moreover, *Intruder in the Dust* only vaguely acknowledges the emergence of the black middle class due to the burgeoning market economy, but Sassoubre notes the economic developments' strong influence over the community relationship that forms between Lucas Beauchamp and select white characters. Immunity from northern market influence helps

differentiate members of the Old South and New South which, in Sassoubre's reading, forms the basis of a transracial bond between Lucas Beauchamp and the white characters who come to his aid. The whites who act to protect Lucas Beauchamp, she argues, are grounded in the tradition of the Old South which Lucas, in "association with the old planter culture of his white grandfather," also shares (202, 200). In contrast, the lynch mob, comprised of "wage laborers and petty criminals," "are not, in Faulkner's mind, indigenous" (201). This analysis fills a gap I find in Atsushi Marutani's analysis of southern racial tension and is expanded upon by Thea J. Autry's engagement with the economic exchanges of the novel. Sassoubre concludes that *Intruder in the Dust* offers a vision of justice accomplished through cooperative extrajudicial black-and-white problem solving grounded in a shared southern identity.

According to Sassoubre, rather than stripping the south of its customs and traditions by implementing new federal laws and urbanizing schemes, Faulkner argues, southern race relations should be improved by reaching back to the "mutual interdependence" of the Old South: "…Faulkner intends this relationship between Lucas and Chick to provide a model for a new regime of race relations in the South: continued mutual interdependence, with whites acknowledging their debt to black labor instead of denying it. And personally seeing justice done" (202). Sassoubre asserts Faulkner's vision of this is threefold, beginning with the actions of marginalized women and children to secure justice for blacks, followed by local white legal authorities picking up on the trend, and reaching completion when full racial cooperation is enacted (204). Sassoubre notes the unlikelihood of this path as a solution, stating that this vision "may finally be directed less at imagining an alternative legal regime than at imagining a different south" (205).

Sassoubre notes from the beginning of her article that "Of course, the idea of community-based justice for blacks and whites that Faulkner elaborates in these novels is neither historically viable nor free from assumptions we would now easily identify as racist and paternalistic" (186), but I find her explanation of Faulkner's vision as one along local community lines to be useful as I work to break down the role that lynching has in Faulkner's fantasy of the south. Sassoubre's focus on the local (rather than global) nature of the community and its inclusion of Lucas Beauchamp contrasts with critics like Marutani who point towards the novel's universalist notions of morality. However, there is overlap in how she defines justice in *Intruder in the Dust* as "what is best for the community, not the individual" (204). Marutani's observation of the novel's ethics is *also* focused around community preservation which he reads as extending outward globally. Both of these perspectives contrast with Autry's focus on individual black subjectivity, which fills a gap left by both Sassoubre and Marutani.

Although I am unconvinced by Sassoubre's argument that *Intruder in the Dust* represents true mutual cooperation and respect between the races for reasons I will explore, I think that Sassoubre's assertion of Faulkner's vision of racial cooperation, and the path to it, points to important questions. What is Faulkner intending to convey? What vision does he seek to enforce, and how successful is he? How realistic is Faulkner's vision, and does it matter? For one answer to these questions, I turn to Atsushi Marutani. Marutani contrasts with Sassoubre in his conception of community in *Intruder in the Dust*, but importantly embarks on an intentionalist reading of the novel. While Marutani's answer to the question of Faulkner's "vision" differs from other critics, it is this differentiation which is so valuable to articulating the south Faulkner presents.

ATSUSHI MARUTANI (2015)

Atsushi Marutani proposes in his article “An Ethic of the White Southern Self: The Dialectics of Historical Identity and Individual Anonymity in ‘Intruder in the Dust’” that the novel is Faulkner’s attempt to derive from the white southern historical experience an ethic of community belonging that affirms “a moral universalism in terms of human freedom” (72). The locus of this experience is the historical legacy of slavery, but Marutani prioritizes Faulkner’s attention to ethics to reach a conclusion which, as he describes it, “transcends the limitations of a practically and immediately effective answer to contemporary racial politics” (72). By reading the novel as a bildungsroman based upon “white Southern identity” and tracing Chick’s evolving view of his place in his community, Marutani concludes that Faulkner’s intention is to send a message: white Southerners should use their regional identity as a way of manifesting freedom of choice to make ethical decisions (86).

Marutani’s critical approach is grounded in an intentionalist reading of Faulkner’s work based upon Walter Benn Michael’s practice in *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* which, according to Marutani, “reconstruct[s] the vision that Faulkner proposes” and “argues that Faulkner is committed to universal values” (72). Marutani’s focus on an intentionalist reading is significant as he acknowledges but sets aside critical conversations regarding Faulkner’s supposed ideological shift in the 1940s from aesthetics to political engagement (Marutani explicitly contrasts himself with Faulknerian scholars such as Dimitri and Karaganis) to assert that Faulkner’s true focus is in an ethical approach to, not a practical engagement with, racial politics (74). This reading disregards Faulkner’s concurrent nonfiction work to focus on Faulkner’s ideals. Marutani works from an ethical theory grounded in “an Aristotelian conception that centers on communal values” as opposed to Kantian moral

categories of good and evil; Marutani specifies that his usage of "ethical" refers to "the philosophical synthesis of historical individuality and universal morality" within his argument (74).

In addition to this ethical framework, Marutani engages with Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the face to trace Chick's changing ethical stance. Marutani writes, "The transition in Chick's perceptions [of the singular face of the mob and Lucas' face]…inspires the young boy to reflect on his own historical and communal identity as a Southern white, leading him eventually to define himself in response to it" (75). These encounters with the face, while varying from Levinas' conception, serve for Marutani as a way to trace Chick's dissociation with the mob, and thus experiencing it as Other, before eventually recognizing the mob as self through an exploration of his own historical identity. As he writes,

> …Chick perceives the white mob as the Other…Recoiling from their injustice, Chick does not include himself among them…When later Chick observes…'the composite Face of his native kind his native land, his people his blood his own' [190], he both emphasizes the communal bond with 'his people and criticizes their lack of historical consciousness…Faulkner brings historical sensibility into the development of Chick's ethical awareness and thus makes the boy realize that the Other is actually the self. (Marutani 76)

These interactions with the faces/Face of the mob and the transition effected by an encounter with Lucas' face turn Chick's focus towards the legacy of his community's guilt, triggering Chick's contemplations and debates with his uncle over the determinacy of southern history and the most practical engagement with racial politics. Marutani contends that it is through these conversations and Chick's attention to the mob that he cultivates an ethical stance based upon

universalist notions of morality; his ethical formation derives from his assessment of the mob's cowardice in the face of their actions and thus finds its culmination in an assessment of white southern manhood.

Like other critics I have thus far reviewed, Marutani emphasizes the importance of the Cold War context in analyzing *Intruder in the Dust*. Rather than simply focusing on the Cold War's impact on Faulkner, Marutani draws much broader conclusions about its significance, informing the reader that "[in] the early Cold War…the violent pressure of the North and the political correctness of neoliberalism jeopardized the establishment of such an ethical white Southern identity" (86). For Marutani, the south's association of northern "neoliberalist capitalism" with European totalitarianism and the perceived encroachment of that totalitarianism engendered an "identity crisis" for the south, leading to works such as *Intruder in the Dust* which contemplate the nature of white southern identity. While not as far-reaching as Sassoubre, Marutani thus also indicates the influence of northern economic development on southern culture and policies. Marutani deftly brings together the tensions represented in the novel between Old South romanticized agrarian lifestyles and New South, post-war capitalist engagement. However, Marutani does not engage the post-war economic boost's influence on the emerging black middle class nor does he relate this to Lucas Beauchamp's agency as based upon money.

Marutani's conclusion that Faulkner reaches for a universal morality grounded in ethical community engagement contains complex connections with much of Faulkner's nonfiction writing from the Cold War era. Marutani does not explicitly reference these materials. His proposition that *Intruder in the Dust* has, at its core, historically-based community identity connects to Sassoubre's assertion that the novel's actions are motivated by attempts at extralegal community-based solutions, although I think the two would differ on whether the novel asserts if

this southern brand of community engagement can extend beyond the south (Marutani seems to imply that Faulkner would like it to). Marutani does not address the elements of black-white cooperation which Sassoubre identifies.

Marutani's exclusion of explicit race relations leads, in my opinion, to slippages in his argument. As Marutani reads *Intruder in the Dust*, Chick accepts the importance of his southern history as a means of recognizing sin in order to absolve it but rejects history as the arbiter of his identity. This is the line Marutani draws between Chick and Gavin, as Gavin, as he argues, defines the individual southern self-based upon that shared Civil War history, "the instant when it's still not yet two oclock on that July afternoon" (*Intruder in the Dust* 190). In this analysis, Gavin's motivation towards justice is based upon an inability to deny that historical obligation rather than a choice one makes and is thus fatalistic (Marutani 80).[10] Chick, on the other hand, sees historical sin as something to be cleared in order to be free to make autonomous choices. Marutani writes, "[Southern white] guilt has to be accepted and cleared as their own because otherwise they cannot be autonomous subjects and therefore cannot make an ethical choice (83). Therefore, Gavin and Chick reach what Marutani calls the same political conclusion for different reasons; both agree that it must be the white south's responsibility to achieve racial justice without interference from the north because, for Gavin, they are obligated by history and, for Chick, they are obligated in order to be free to make ethical choices. Chick formulates his conclusion after the mob disperses.

Marutani does not dedicate much attention to Chick's initial motivation for helping Lucas, an action which seems counterintuitive to Chick's predisposed community obligation. Marutani's argument hinges on why Chick makes the decision to help Lucas in the first place.

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[10] Stevens' proposed attitude is reminiscent of Joanna Burden's motivations for racial uplift as presented in *Light in August*.

Marutani briefly indicates that it is Chick's desire to rid himself of shame which motivates his actions, but does not explain why Chick does not merely allow the white mob to lynch Lucas, which would rid him of the reminder of his guilt (83). Marutani notes that it is an encounter with Lucas' face in the midst of the mob which allows Chick to see the mob as Other then as self, motivating his ethical journey, but Marutani does not explain why Chick experiences Lucas' face as an encounter. He states Chick's decision to listen to Lucas is a "morally sound act" which the "native land" has inculcated in him (77), but also stresses the importance of autonomy apart from history in Chick's journey (84). Chick must have a choice, then, to decide to encourage the lynch mob or to combat it, and he chooses to assist Lucas. If Chick is predisposed to act in obligation to his community, what inspires him to apparently act against those community interests in listening to and helping Lucas in the first place? I say "acting against" because, as I have explored, maintaining white supremacy gave southern whiteness cohesion. Chick would be doing his part in supporting the community by putting down a black man who causes trouble.

My conclusion (and Thea Autry's conclusion) would be that Chick's initial encounter with Lucas disables his ability to see Lucas in the inferior position that the white supremacist ideology mandates and thus his primary experience of accepting the Other as the self comes in relation to Lucas, not the mob. Autry's article allows me to explicate this point in more detail, but in essence Lucas comes to save Chick at a key point in time which disables his interpellation into the white supremacist viewpoint. Chick's immediate and continual identification of Lucas with Chick's own white grandfather (*Intruder in the Dust* 8, 24), I would argue, evidences his inability to see Lucas as other than human, even as he strives to hate him, setting up the factors needed for an encounter with the face. Including Lucas in his sense of community by recognizing him as the self would push Chick, under Marutani's theory of ethics, towards racially just actions

as a means of defending the southern community. However, Marutani does not allow for this conclusion in his analysis by restricting his definition of southern community to only include white characters; his analysis of Lucas is minimal, and he does not acknowledge the other black characters in the novel.

Moreover, instead of simply narrowing his analysis to white characters, Marutani spends time discounting Lucas' importance in Chick's developing identity. Marutani clearly distinguishes himself from critics who treat Lucas "as a significant character" because of his "status as the in-between" (74); he implies that making Lucas a focus of analysis creates a confusion of "identitarianism[11] with universalism" by setting up a conflict in the binary of black and white as the novel's focus (74).[12] Marutani then states, "Simply put, Lucas suffers because of his whiteness…," and this, in combination with Lucas' disconnect from the black community, indicates to Marutani that it is not Faulkner's intention to discuss racial politics (75). Marutani confuses, in my view, the injustice of southern hegemony which labels things such as self-determination, autonomy and pride as the realm of whiteness and Lucas' racial identity; Lucas does not suffer because of his whiteness, but because he lives in a racist society that will not allow him to be who he is without white skin. Marutani then writes, "Consequently, in order to reflect on Faulkner's intention as the implied author, *Intruder in the Dust* as a whole should be read as a novel about *white Southern identity*, not as one about *racial politics*; it seems to make more sense to read it as "a young boy's growing up into manhood" [Brooks 288]" (75, emphasis mine).

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[11] I do not believe Marutani is using this term in the context of post-WWII far right movements.

[12] Marutani himself references this conflict:

> "…the binary race politics between blacks and whites is virtually attenuated and transforms—as reflected into the shift in the 'faces'—into the problem of establishing the subject position of a Southern white man that is not primordial identity (and therefore, not about its difference from black identity), but rather about a historically specific ethical stance" (77).

Marutani's explication of Faulkner's "intention," used in the singular, as one exclusionary towards racial politics strikes me as misleading given what scholars know about Faulkner's writing of *Intruder in the Dust*. Marutani approaches *Intruder in the Dust* with the opinion that one can determine an author's beliefs by reading their text, stating "…the explication of an author's beliefs [is a] a difficult task but not in principle impossible" (73). However, research makes it apparent that Faulkner intended to discuss the race relations and racial politics which Marutani seeks to exclude. *Intruder in the Dust* evolved, as all novels do, but unlike *Light in August* which, as Abdur-Rahman states, began with white people (130), *Intruder in the Dust* began with Lucas Beauchamp as the focus. Joseph Blotner writes in his 2005 biography, "Seven and a half years earlier [around 1941] Faulkner had told Haas about an idea: 'a mystery story, original in that the solver is a negro, himself in jail for the murder and is about to be lynched, solves murder in self defense,'" and, further on quotes, "'The story is a mystery-murder though the theme is more relationship between Negro and white,' [Faulkner] told Ober, "specifically or rather the premise being that the white people in the south, before the North or the govt, or anyone else, owe and must pay a responsibility to the Negro" (428). Based upon Faulkner's own statements, I disagree with Marutani's assertion that *Intruder in the Dust* "should" be read at the exclusion of racial politics firstly because they are obviously present in the planning and execution of the novel and secondly because excluding an analysis of said theme creates gaps in such an analysis. I see opportunities for connection between Marutani's Levinisian faces and Autry's Lacanian-grounded analysis of Lucas Beauchamp's portraiture, and I see an analysis of Chick and Lucas' meeting as essential to understanding how Chick's ethical *and* political standpoints take shape.

I *do* agree that the novel itself makes a shift from black-white relations to a universalizing notion of morality; Lucas fades from the picture until the final scene. This falls in line with what scholars know about Faulkner's Cold War politics. In addition, I agree that Lucas Beauchamp's character, although never quite accepted into the culture, is entrenched in the white Old South, deriving power from subscription to white plantation culture. Lucas proudly states that "I ain't got friends" and, as Autry points out, crafts his image in defiance of southern black roles, modeling himself as "a McCaslin" (19). This may mean that Faulkner cannot perceive value outside of white methods of being. It may mean that Faulkner saw models of what he saw as respectable black Americans performing the sort of image crafting that Lucas does; as Autry points out, Lucas' portraiture alone is indicative of a history of black middle-class uplift efforts (24-25). This reflects the ways in which Faulkner thinks about blackness.

However, Lucas' conception as a character emerging from white ways of thinking does not mean that scholars should exclude Lucas from significance. If this were the case, there would be no way to discuss blackness in Faulkner because all of Faulkner's perceptions of black southernness were filtered through the lens of whiteness. Moreover, although Chick's southern identity is, I agree, the primary focus of the novel, Lucas is the absolute center of Chick's story. It is a bit ridiculous to state that one ought to ignore Lucas' significance and, more broadly, the presence of black characters throughout the novel, in order to read *Intruder in the Dust* as Faulkner intended. Moreover, to make a division between "white southern identity" and "racial politics" treats whiteness as a given, apart from race itself. One cannot talk about whiteness without talking about race. Marutani may fairly decide to focus on ethics or Chick's whiteness, but to talk about a "historically specific ethical stance" and not discuss blackness within that history reads as unnecessary erasure which creates a gap in Marutani's argument.

I turn to Thea J. Autry to address this gap. In contrast to Marutani, Autry engages an analysis of the novel in which Lucas Beauchamp's self-determinacy is the focus; she, like Marutani and Sassoubre, references Lucas' place within the community as related to the regime of the Old South, but expands upon this to how changes in economic attitudes serve as Lucas' primary method of empowerment. She concludes with her own perspective on Faulkner's vision for the changing south, placing black subjecthood at its center.

THEA J. AUTRY (2018)

In her article, "'As Out of a Seer's Crystal Ball': The Racialized Gaze in William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust,*" Thea J. Autry utilizes bell hook's concept of the oppositional gaze alongside "George Yancy's Fanonian phenomenology" to assert that the act of looking upon a subject has potential to racialize the individual and disable their subjectivity (21). Autry's racialized gaze has the power to "metaphorically blacken" the individual subject to it, creating in them an inferior subject position which, historically, had been used to lock black subjects into the "racist symbolic order" (qtd. in Autry 34). Autry argues that Faulkner, while retaining an "interest in securing the centrality of whiteness" in *Intruder in the Dust*, also uses the novel to "subject the racialized gaze to disruptive inversions" (20). According to Autry, this creates a new dynamic within the "visual sphere" wherein black bodies are subject to a "scopic regime"; this regime is built upon a "the stigma of spectacle" historically naturalized through lynching practices (including photography and souvenirs), caricatures such as blackface, and fetishizing displays which make the black (dead or living) body its subject, such as the display of Saartjie Baartman's body (21). Autry argues that Lucas Beauchamp "exemplifies the capacity of the black gaze…to disrupt regimes of viewing power, and thereby, constitute racial identities" (20). She argues that *Intruder in the Dust* is "a racial bildungsroman, the story of Chick's discovery of

his own whiteness and his confrontation with the myth of its transcendence, or its sameness across and taxonomic authority over difference" (19).

Like Marutani, Autry argues that the novel's focus is Chick's formation of a white identity, but Autry differs in locating Lucas Beauchamp's gaze as the catalyst for Chick's racial discovery. By analyzing scenes in which Lucas Beauchamp asserts authority over white hegemony through the gaze and through economic sway, Autry asserts that Beauchamp is "not a passive object upon which blackness or ideas of blackness are imposed, but a self-defined participant in the processes of race formation and destabilization" (20). She concludes that *Intruder in the Dust* is Faulkner's "[acknowledgement of] the inevitability of black self-determination and the weakening doctrine of white supremacy" (35).

Autry, to a lesser extent than Sassoubre, grounds her argument in the historical context of Faulkner's composition. She writes that the usage of gaze in *Intruder in the Dust* "signals the author's own confrontation with the changing social landscape of the US south" (20). In the midst of desegregation and civil rights winnings in the Supreme Court and elsewhere, Autry argues that "autonomous black subjectivity" had become undeniable, even to Faulkner (32). Autry emphasizes that, by 1948, Faulkner's involvement in national racial politics had lessened his need to assert the white-centered definitions of race present in *Light in August* (34). She credits Faulkner's shift to emerging changes in the struggle for civil rights as well as his reading of Richard Wright's *Native Son*; Autry proposes reading Wright introduced Faulkner to the idea that he had a black readership (34). She contends that Lucas Beauchamp was intended, in part, as an appeal to black readers.

Autry also calls upon the history of portraiture and its usage by the emergent black middle class as a method of self-representation. Autry provides examples of the black portraiture

from early emancipation to explain its significance in combatting the white supremacist imagery reified through specular acts of lynching and racist caricature. She writes, “Lucas’s portrait in particular emerges out of a tradition of Negro portraiture that not only reflected increased economic access but strategic choices about the portrayal of self” (24). Autry pays particular attention to Chick Mallison’s experience of this portraiture at the beginning of *Intruder in the Dust*:

> [Chick saw it] the gold-framed portrait-group on its gold easel and he went to it, stooping to peer at it […] there looked back at him again the calm intolerant face beneath the swaggering rake of the hat […] and beside him the tiny doll-like woman […] there was something ghastly, almost intolerably wrong about it or her […]
>
> “Molly dont like it because the man that made it took her headrag off” and that was it […] “I told him to,” the man said. “I didn’t want no field nigger picture in the house…” (*Intruder in the Dust* 14-15).

In Autry’s analysis, the portrait and its composition become ways for Lucas to assert a self-representation in defiance of societal expectations. Despite being a black southern farmer, Lucas refuses to allow himself or his wife to be perceived as “field nigger[s]”; the portrait provides the possibility of “correcting Negro identity” in the face of “demeaning pop culture images” (Autry 25). Lucas uses the portraiture to take ownership over his image and also asserts his manhood as equal to white men in controlling the representation of his wife, a right only afforded to black Americans after the Civil War, and engaging in the market as an enfranchised individual. Autry writes, “Along with the watch-chain and the toothpick and the uncovered wife, the portrait as an object of display forms a currency with which Lucas can both announce himself as a citizen and enter into the economy of citizenship…” (24-25). Autry’s connection of economic means with

the visual sphere through portraiture emphasizes her focus on the gaze and money as traditionally white methods of asserting power which are coopted by Lucas.

The portrait scene is also a scene in which Autry emphasizes the psychological impact of viewing. Autry builds upon the Fanonian phobogenic object as well as Lacanian theories of the gaze to analyze Chick's early encounters with Lucas as formative to his identity. Because Lucas rescues the young Chick from the frozen creek, "[d]iminished physical power and the misfortune of being saved by a Negro force Chick into subordination…" and disrupt his interpellation "as a Southern white supremacist" (23). Autry reads the portrait scene as a finalizing moment for the disempowerment of Chick's white gaze. She writes "…the boy's efforts [to place Lucas into a disempowered subject position] are impeded…[Lucas is] the surveilling presence Chick can neither escape nor surmount" (24). By locating Lucas as a figure of psychological import for Chick, she underscores the ways in which perceptions of whiteness relied on acknowledgement from the black other. This analysis is important for understanding Chick's motivations towards helping Lucas; rather than acting out of an innate sense of morality, Chick needs to rescue Lucas in order to achieve the recognition he desperately seeks after as well as to finally attain a sense of superiority of which Lucas has stripped him.

The three critics I have surveyed here represent themes engaged with by numerous other scholars. Reading them together highlights for me some of the major themes of the critical conversation and points of contention in analyzing the novel. All three critics highlight the import of the changing economic, legal, and social landscape of the south. They draw attention to the importance of community lines and changing social order; Marutani and Autry bring to the fore the significance of the visual sphere on self-perception and identity. Significantly, they all draw attention to the ways in which scholars talk about Faulkner; all three, in seeking the novel's

vision for the south, point to the importance of Faulkner's voice in imagining, realistically or not, a new world. For Sassoubre, this vision is one of community protected beyond legal and racial lines. For Marutani, it is one in which the identities of individuals are grounded in a desire to protect their communities, which begin local and move towards the universal. For Autry, the vision is one where the dominant regime is undone by its own tools and the black individual achieves recognition. These visions demonstrate that *Intruder in the Dust* is a novel about perspective; it is about Faulkner's perspective of a changing south, but also reflects Faulkner's imagining of external perspectives. It is a novel which aims to see and be seen by, a variety of audiences.

Thus, my analysis will focus on the images presented in the novel and what their composition asserts about the functioning of south as a community with a focus on race relations. I will engage an analysis of the lynching imagery of the novel; although no actual lynching takes place, the proliferation of lynching references creates stark visuals that require critical attention. I focus heavily on the concept of imagining and a reading of others in reference to the novel's action but also in reference to the ways in which scholars seek to imagine and read Faulkner's intentions. I will return to themes explored in my previous chapter regarding representational disparities, not only in the novel but in the critical conversation, and what those gaps produce. I will conclude with an analysis of the novel's unrealistic and realistic depictions of social change; alongside this, I will analyze Faulkner's "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" to determine Faulkner's vision for social progress.

IMAGINATION'S FUNCTION IN *INTRUDER IN THE DUST*

As I have noted, the action of *Intruder in the Dust* is easily summarized; the novel's significance truly lies in dialoguing and the internal journey presented through narration. This

narration in depicting internal narratives or dialogue produces visuals for the audience to imagine as they read, producing a dynamic of viewership. Much of the novel is about observing from the outside (as Chick, Gavin, and the town view Lucas) and viewing from within through imagining. In a novel which is as visually impactful as *Intruder in the Dust*, it serves to pay close attention to the images which Faulkner presents outside of the novel's main action. One can understand the importance of this visual and imaginative element if one reads the novel as Chick's bildungsroman, as many critics suggest one do.

Much of Chick's personal growth is represented as an ability or inability to imagine; when Chick follows Lucas' command to come to his house, Faulkner articulates the positioning of the two in this scene, which will determine the dynamics of the entire story, as a shared inability to imagine a different way of things. Faulkner writes, "the true reason [Chick must follow Lucas to his house] was that he could no more imagine himself contradicting the man striding on ahead of him than he could his grandfather, not from any fear of nor even the threat of reprisal but because like his grandfather the man striding ahead of him was simply incapable of conceiving himself by a child contradicted and defied" (*Intruder in the Dust* 8). Chick's inability to imagine contradicting Lucas comes from his perception that Lucas cannot imagine Chick contradicting him, a dynamic which highlights Lucas' determination to transcend racial social codes through which Chick would normally, as Autry has noted, have every opportunity to assert his authority on a racial basis. However, Chick's age and his association of Lucas with his grandfather due to *his* age (and other markers of southern white planter aristocracy) undermines his racial authority, allowing the opportunity for Lucas to undermine Chick's identity as racially superior. This curiously engendered racial empathy, articulated as an act of imagination, comes

into conflict with Chick's culturally-historically enforced white supremacy, the conflict which dominates the novel, in another moment of imagining.

Before, during, and after Chick's time in Lucas Beauchamp's house, the narration reflects on the smell that characterizes black dwellings, the "smell of Negro" that Faulkner mentions in *Light in August*. The scent comes to represent Chick's internalized and normalized sense of racial living and the ways in which Lucas compromises his sense of racial norms. Faulkner writes that, before entering Lucas' home, Chick,

> could smell that smell which he had accepted without question all his life as being the smell always of the places where people with any trace of Negro blood live as he had that all people named Mallison are Methodists… But the smell meant nothing now or yet; it was still an hour yet before the thing would happen and it would be four years more before he would realize the extent of its ramifications and what it had done to him and he would be a man grown before he would realize, admit that he had accepted it… (11-12)

For Chick, the scent representative of institutionalized black poverty and disenfranchisement is tied intimately to his sense of whiteness. It is only once Chick attempts to make Lucas subservient by forcing money upon him as a form of white patronage that this sense of normativity comes into conflict with his identification with Lucas and ignites the questioning of southern racial norms which characterizes the novel. Faulkner articulates Chick's place within the southern white ideology through an inability to imagine, writing, "he *could not even imagine* an existence from which the odor would be missing to return no more. He had smelled it forever, he would smell it always; it was a part of his inescapable past, it was a rich part of his heritage as a Southerner" (12, emphasis mine). These two instances, in which Chick fails to imagine defying Lucas and living a life other than his racially determined one, encapsulate the dichotomy upon

which Faulkner builds the novel, signifying imagination's import. Chick comes to negotiate his white southern identity due to the conflict between two poles of the unimaginable.

Faulkner continues to use the concept of imagining as a way to reassert this central conflict, such as when Chick imagines himself and Lucas as old men in a state of mutual forgetfulness of the past's sins (26-27) or when Ephraim tells Chick that white men are too "cluttered" to imagine things beyond what they currently are (70). The majority of the novel's material comes from such imaginings, visualizing, or dialogues which create portraits in the mind of the reader. The actual action of the novel is quite short, so Faulkner uses internal and external imagining to create visuals that substitute diegetic action. Therefore, it is imperative to grant weight to imagining and visualizing, even when it occurs within narration exclusively because it creates the reality and message of *Intruder in the Dust* just as thoroughly, if not more so, than the bare plot.

The force of imagining and visualizing is essential to *Intruder in the Dust*'s internal construction and the development of meaning within the novel because *Intruder in the Dust* is, itself, Faulkner's act of imagining a new south. It is his response to critiques of the south and his musing on how race relations may be improved. It is, as I will show, a well-intentioned fantasy that fails in many ways to blend with a practical approach to contemporary racial relations. As each of the critics I have surveyed each propose their own versions of Faulkner's vision for the novel, their own imaginings of Faulkner's intentions, I wish to analyze some of the key elements which fit into Faulkner's envisioning of this reformed south. Primarily, I wish to focus on the character of Lucas Beauchamp as Faulkner's ideal redemptive black American and the mobilization of the marginalized, particularly the whites marginalized by youth.

FAULKNER'S FANTASY AND AN INTRUDING REALITY

LUCAS BEAUCHAMP

"…both of them observing implicitly the rules: the nigger acting like a nigger and the white folks acting like white folks and no real hard feelings on either side…" *Intruder in the Dust*, page 48.

If Joe Christmas is Faulkner's "nigger" as Abdur-Rahman states (130), Lucas Beauchamp is the opposite. While also under the threat of lynching and disdained for acting out of accordance with racialized social codes, Lucas Beauchamp never succumbs to white Yoknapatawpha's demand that he behave subserviently. Even under threat of death, Lucas never lowers himself before white men. When he sits in the Jefferson jail awaiting the lynch mob, Gavin Stevens tells him, "has it ever occurred to you that if you just said mister to white people and said it like you meant it, you might not be sitting here now?" Lucas responds by saying, "So I'm to commence now…I can start off by saying mister to the folks that drags me out of here and builds a fire under me" (61). Lucas acknowledges that southern whites will not cease to hate him if he acts in accordance with their expectations because their expectation is that he exist solely to be despised. The Lucas Beauchamp of *Intruder in the Dust* is a change from Faulkner's admirable negro character who endures; Lucas Beauchamp resists.

For this reason, from the novel's publication Lucas has been popular with readers looking for black representation in Faulkner. Although Lucas lacks the interiority of his *Go Down, Moses* iteration owing to *Intruder in the Dust*'s close third person narration, Lucas is often seen as Faulkner's best rendition of a black man. In her 1953 analysis, Irene C. Edmonds writes of Lucas, "…he stalks forth here with the commanding dignity of a free spirit, his strength evolving from his ability to contain suffering, and from the certain knowledge of his spiritual independence. One senses that Faulkner has come to realize that the Negro is not so easily

understood by the white man as he may have formerly readily believed or taken for granted" (202).[13] Although I could not find as much recent work dedicated solely to Lucas, he is a character which deserves more critical attention in Faulkner studies, particularly if he is Faulkner's representation of, as Autry proposes, the contemporary force destabilizing the racial status quo.

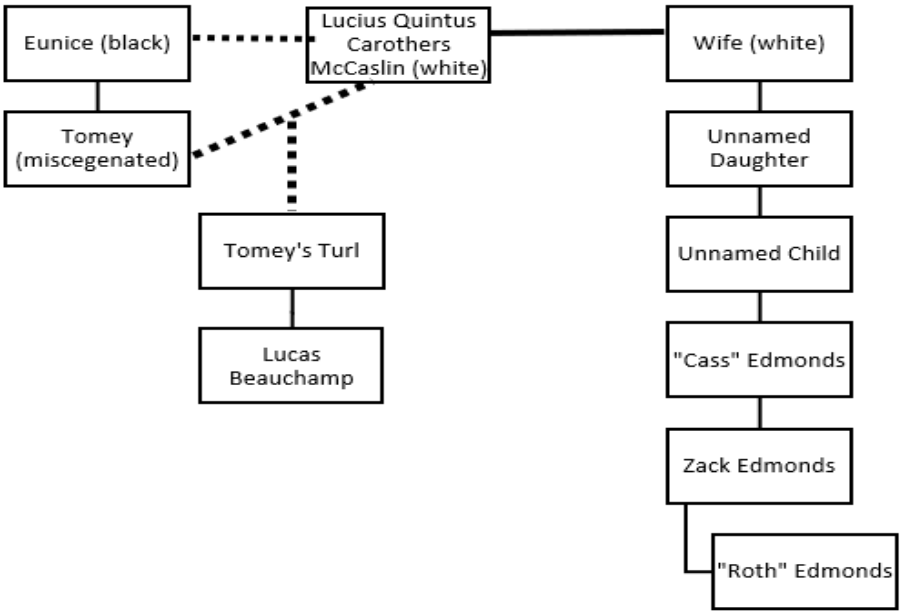
Since Lucas holds such critical and social significance, it serves well to try to establish what makes him such an imposing figure to the established white supremacy. He vanishes for much of the narrative, and his resistance to acquiesce to white demands often takes the form of silence. There are no grand Lucas Beauchamp speeches to dissect in *Intruder in the Dust*. Therefore, we must work with information presented about Lucas and the ways in which other characters react to him. Early in the novel, Faulkner uses Chick to introduce to the reader well-known information about Lucas. Upon encountering him for the first time, Chick already knows Lucas' genealogy and background, remembering,

> …the man was son of one of old Carothers McCaslin's, Edmonds' great grandfather's, slaves who had been not just old Carothers' slave but his son too… the story, the legend: how Edmonds' father had deeded to his Negro first cousin and his heirs in perpetuity the house and the ten acres of land it sat in-an oblong of earth set forever in the middle of the two-thousand-acre plantation like a postage stamp in the center of an envelope… (8).

This information is based upon a genealogy that Faulkner establishes in *Go Down, Moses*. Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, here referred to as "old Carothers McCaslin," is one of Yoknapatawpha's earliest settlers, and his name conjures in relevant texts the plantation wealth

[13] Irene C. Edmonds was assistant professor of humanities, speech, and drama at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University from 1948 to her death in 1968. The inclusion of her article, "Faulkner's Black Shadow," in *Southern Renascence: the Literature of the Modern South* was highly contested due to her race and gender.

and shame of the Old South. L.Q.C. McCaslin is guilty of two prominent Faulknerian sins, miscegenation and incest. L.Q.C. McCaslin purchases and impregnates his slave Eunice in an act of miscegenation, begetting a daughter, Tomey. McCaslin then commits incest in raping Tomey, causing Eunice to drown herself on Christmas day of 1832 (*Go Down, Moses* 253). The child of Tomey and L.Q.C. McCaslin, Tomey's Turl, is Lucas Beauchamp's father. All of the Beauchamps are descended from L.Q.C. McCaslin, as are the white McCaslins and the Edmonds family, who now own the plantation apart from the section deeded to Lucas Beauchamp. Lucas, like most of the white male descendants of McCaslin, derives his name from his progenitor.



Lucas Beauchamp's simplified ancestry

If not for racial taboos, Lucas Beauchamp would be L.Q.C. McCaslin's inheritor after Ike McCaslin repudiated his birthright. Lucas identifies himself with the McCaslin family name, affirming his sense of self-hood through association with white planter culture. As noted, Autry's analysis of Lucas' portrait group enables him to manifest this self-perception in the private

sphere. Control over the depiction of himself and his wife affirms his citizenship and status as a southern man. Lucas has himself captured as an independent, self-determining man in an image and then lives the reality of the image by wearing costume corresponding to, and thus performing, white citizenship. The gold toothpick, the hat, and the watch chain, Chick Mallison notes, are all "such as his own grandfather had used" and, in fact, belonged to L.Q.C. McCaslin (*Intruder in the Dust* 12-13). Lucas mimics the visage of a white, Civil War era white landowner in order to flip scripts of white supremacy. In this way, Lucas' portrait serves as the antithesis to the specular reinforcement produced by the lynching practice.

In the public sphere, Lucas continues to be uncowed by the white town's demand that he engage within their parameters. Faulkner voices generally the country's obsession with Lucas early in the novel and then provides an example of how Lucas' confidence ignites violence from white citizens. The white men of the county, Faulkner writes, "had been thinking about him for years: *We got to make him be a nigger first. He's got to admit he's a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted*" (18). *Intruder in the Dust* proffers a distinction between what it means to be a "nigger" versus being black, or "negro"; the subservience and social positioning of the black body demanded by white supremacy constitutes the former and physical identifiers of race are defined by the latter. In the southern white ideology, the two are connected. Therefore, Lucas performs the role traditionally associated with whiteness in the south as only whites could be considered man, human, or citizen. This violates so thoroughly the norm of the south that "anyone […] could tell [Chick] about the Negro who said 'ma'am' to women *just as any white man did* and who said 'sir' and 'mister' to you if you were white but who you knew was thinking neither and he knew you knew..." (*Intruder in the Dust* 18, emphasis mine). Although Lucas consents to pay lip service to the white supremacist hegemonic system,

he makes no effort to disguise his lack of sincerity and penetrates the thoughts of the white citizens who are offended by it. He consistently positions himself in a role of mastery in his roleplay, infuriating the white townspeople.

This fury, however, seems to only increase the power Lucas has over the whites he encounters. He knows the type of reaction his behavior will engender but refuses to compromise his agency to abate it. Faulkner narrates an incident where a white man attacks Lucas in a general store.

> something happened […] perhaps the way Lucas walked, entered speaking to no one and went to the counter and made his purchase […] or perhaps just nothing was enough […] "Keep on walking around here with that look on your face and what you'll be is crowbait," the white man said. […] with no implication of anything at all but almost abstractedly […Lucas] said: "Yes, I heard that idea before. And I notices that the folks that brings it up aint even Edmondses…" (19-20)

Lucas' comment to the white man in the general store is a statement that, in terms of land ownership and southern legacy, Lucas should be his superior according to the rules of the Old South. This refusal to accept inferiority angers the man into attacking Lucas, although the store owners prevent the white man from harming him (20). The emphatic hate whites feel for Lucas derives from their dependence on Lucas to perform subservience in order to continue to assert their supremacy. The fate of the county's conception of white supremacy relies entirely on black Americans like Lucas Beauchamp; Gavin Stevens says at one point that Lucas has become "tyrant over the whole county's white conscience" (*Intruder* 195). Faulkner uses Lucas to demonstrate the absolute dependence of the white identity on the black subject's coalescence into subservience, and ways in which individual black Americans may defy that positioning.

Faulkner's representation of Lucas' disruptive authority, however, proves problematic upon interrogation.

If one is to read Lucas Beauchamp as Faulkner's attempt to imagine a black character with disruptive power, one must understand where Lucas derives his subversive potential. Lucas manipulates imagery and presents an image of himself as equal to the whites around him. In this, Lucas' dependence on whiteness to create this identity is problematic. Critics respond to this issue in several ways, generally arguing either that Lucas' whiteness and his stark independence invalidates his power as a role model for black communities or that his manipulation of whiteness generates a powerful subversion of racial codes with the potential for social change.

Sassoubre asserts that that Faulkner aligns Lucas Beauchamp as a member of the Old South community alongside Sheriff Hampton, Will Legate, and Skipworth by pointing to their shared past, Lucas' initial rescue from the Gowries in Beat Four by Skipworth, and the collaborative action in apprehending Crawford Gowrie. However, I am unconvinced that the white characters truly accept Lucas as a member of their Old South community. The white characters who include Lucas in their community do not treat him with the respect Sassoubre implies when she writes, "…Will Legate has hunted with Lucas and his white cousins in the old days" (202). These hunting parties hold significance in Faulkner's work as a refuge away from urbanizing society and those who are privy to them do generally belong to a distinct order or community, although one not without its gender and racial divisions. Although this dynamic is present in *Go Down, Moses*, in *Intruder in the Dust*, Lucas himself says, "I aint 'quainted with no Will Legate" (61).[14] This severs him from any entrenched relationship with the Old South

[14] If this is a discontinuity, it is a rather minor one for Faulkner. A trend in scholarship on *Intruder in the Dust* is whether this novel's Lucas Beauchamp the same character in *Go Down, Moses.* Because I am engaging with the novel in a rather isolated way, the intentionality of such discontinuities matters less to me, but Sassoubre is relying on material from *Go Down, Moses* to make her argument for *Intruder in the Dust*.

circle. Moreover, when Lucas is "saved" from the Gowries by the local constable Skipworth, whom Sassoubre aligns with Lucas as "relics of the old South" (200), Skipworth takes Lucas to his house and chains him, an old man, to a bedpost (*Intruder in the Dust* 37); Lucas lies on a dirty floor all night before being taken to the jail, which I fail to read as a full acceptance of Lucas into the respect afforded to and by the Old South community (44). Moreover, the "cooperation" between Lucas and Hampton at the end of the novel which Sassoubre interprets as a sign of restorative extrajudicial act is tainted for me by Lucas' treatment in the scene. Lucas and Hampton are in a car on their way out towards Beat Four to arrest Crawford Gowrie, but Lucas is not an equal member of the group. Lucas' function in the operation, as Gavin puts it, is to act as bait (206).

Moreover, Lucas, despite being innocent, is not allowed to bring his gun to the encounter, and the sheriff refuses to listen to what he has to say. His dismissive response is,

> "After all the trouble you got into Saturday standing with that pistol in your pocket in the same ten feet of air a Gowrie was standing in, you want to take it in your hand and walk around another one. Now I want you to hush and stay hushed. And when we begin to get close to Whiteleaf bridge I want you to be laying on the floor close up against the seat behind me and still hushed. You hear me?"
>
> "I hear you," Lucas said. "But if I just had my pistol-" but the sheriff had already turned to [Chick's] uncle… (213)

Lucas' denial of his gun is significant for two reasons. The first is that, like Faulkner's severance of Lucas from the hunting culture, denying Lucas his gun denies him full masculinity. The legal and sexual potency of the emancipated black man made him a target of fear and hatred, as Sassoubre notes (183). Stripping Lucas of his gun continues to deny him his masculine place in

this regime. Secondly, the gun serves as a symbol of Lucas' economic and social independence, as well as a tie to his white planter heritage which he capitalizes on to maintain his self-determinative identity. Lucas places high value on the gun that once belonged to his grandfather/great-grandfather, Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, which he wears every Saturday when he puts on his historical garb. The gun, which Lucas maintains "old Carothers" sold to him (*Intruder in the Dust* 221), stands in for McCaslin's "pure and uncontested authority" (Sassoubre 191). This is the same sense of authority which Lucas harnesses to create his identity. Likewise, this authority, held by a black man, incites his community to such hate as to lynch him. It is the very authority which Gavin and Hampton continue to strip away from him in this moment which Sassoubre identifies as the final phase of Faulkner's envisioned black-white cooperation. Therefore, I don't agree with Sassoubre's assessment that the novel entirely supports the vision she articulates.

Although Lucas is not a full member of the white-characterized Old South community, neither is he a fully integrated member of the black community, something which Marutani uses to assert that Lucas Beauchamp is not central to Faulkner's message. While I would not go that far, it does seem that Faulkner's need to distance Lucas Beauchamp from the black community to make him distinct says something about how Faulkner conceives of admirable blackness. Lucas deliberately strives away from association with other black people and does not have a relationship with them, as Aleck Sander voices when he notes that the black people in Jefferson know Lucas will be lynched, saying, "It's the ones like Lucas makes trouble for everybody" (*Intruder in the Dust* 84).

Thea Autry responds to criticism that Lucas does not figure into black methods of being in writing, "If it is true that Lucas's withdrawal from blackness contributes to his sense of self it

is only insofar as the blackness away from which he moves is not an essence or an abstract collective, but a conscription that accosts his body from outside…Lucas defies the stereotypes, discourses, and myths that clamor to define him and, in his establishment of the power to disrupt supposed racial identities, is more than a mere elision on Faulkner's part" (34). Autry argues that Lucas' power to disrupt racialized identities through his influence on Chick signals Faulkner's intention to represent black self-determinacy. I agree with Autry that Faulkner has intentions towards black representation in writing Lucas Beauchamp; Faulkner's awareness of the ever-heightening political situation during the Cold War, as well as questions of equality in the south brought to the forefront by the Truman administration, seems to me to have inspired Faulkner to offer up his best and, as Faulkner's later writing shows, the independence and dignity he writes into Lucas Beauchamp are emblematic of Faulkner's standard for black people deserving of equality.

I cannot attest to whether Lucas Beauchamp was useful to black Americans as a role model other than to cite critics like Edmonds who speak to his value. Neither can I make claims as to whether he *should* or *should not* be considered a good example. What I do wish to point to is the ways in which Faulkner, deliberately or not, complicates the reader's envisioning of Lucas as the novel progresses. If Lucas, in utilizing white coded performances, moves away from a "conscription that accosts his body from the outside," he does not manage to escape such assault on a narrative level. Faulkner, as much as he may attempt to build Lucas as a character, undercuts his imposing initial image by the creekbank repeatedly by making him the subject of imagined lynchings. Although Lucas is never actually lynched by the end of the novel, he repeatedly suffers envisioning of the act. We must take seriously Faulkner's usage of these

descriptions particularly if we are to accept, as Autry suggests, that Faulkner wrote with black readership in mind.

LUCAS LYNCHED

As the reader exists external to the novel and perceives the story through the written medium, and because *Intruder in the Dust* has a close third person omniscient narrator focused on Chick, the reader experiences the diegetic actions of the plot (the grave digging, for example) at the same psychological level as extradiegetic actions such as imagining. In other words, the visual imagery of the imagined moment, whether it "happens" plot-wise or not, is just as real as events which occur in context. This does not affect much if one is considering the difference between internal dialogues or grave robbing, but the phenomenon gains a level of gravity in considering Chick's imagining of Lucas' lynching. Because the novel is presented the way it is, although Lucas' lynching never "happens" in the diegetic action, the reader experiences his lynching just the same through imagined moments as if it really occurred. One can only speculate at the individual impact on readers experiencing this, but if Thea Autry is correct in asserting Faulkner was writing with black readership in mind, the lynchings take on a different tone. These lynchings have the potential not only to undermine Lucas' depiction as defying a role of inferiority, but also to create a depiction of lynching which undercuts the actual challenges black people in America faced in the 1940s.

Some of the imaginings depict Lucas personally, while others are less specific. The novel alludes to lynching's particular imagery numerous times. Often characters do so directly, such as the jailer's comment, "Look at them [the black prisoners] …Peaceful as lambs but aint a damned one of them asleep. And I dont blame them, with a mob of white men boiling in here at midnight with pistols and cans of gasoline…" (55). Moreover, the main characters, Gavin, Lucas, and

Chick, are often blunt about the threat Lucas faces. During the interview in the jail, Gavin says to Lucas, "You're in jail, depending on the grace of God to keep those damned Gowries from dragging you out of here and hanging you to the first lamp post they come to" (*Intruder in the Dust* 61). This forwardness is a shift from *Light in August*, where Faulkner only uses the word "lynch" to describe the act. Variations on the word "lynch" appear eight times in *Light in August*; the count is twice that for *Intruder in the Dust*. Moreover, *Intruder in the Dust* features "gasoline" or references to burning blacks eleven times, and hanging or "rope" six times.[15] Through these and other descriptors, Faulkner proliferates the violent image of a lynching via hanging and burning; he repeatedly reminds readers of the threat it poses to Lucas and, to a lesser extent, the other black citizens of Yoknapatawpha.

IMAGINING LYNCHING

The most jarring descriptions of lynching occur in moments of imagining, dark fantasies of the act which create stark portraits of the act in the reader's mind. These descriptions are sometimes quite short, but the level of detail and its alignment with actual lynching practices make them incredibly impactful. In coming from Chick's perspective, they reinforce Faulkner's exploration of how Chick comes to perceive racial roles in society, as previously noted. In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas performs this analysis through experimentation, but Faulkner never explores the actual danger he might live under as a black man in the south because Christmas only performs as black in the north or within the private sphere of Joanna Burden's home. However, since the *Intruder in the Dust* is about Chick building racial empathy, the affliction of lynching on the southern black community must feature prominently to be a full exploration.

[15] All of these counts are in reference to lynching; "rope" appears thirteen times in the text, but not in the relevant context.

These imaginings, like the above moments of inability to imagine, come at points in the narrative in which Chick wishes to distance himself from Lucas through hatred and, later, where he begins to empathize with Lucas' situation. The first comes when Chick goes to see Lucas brought to the jail by Sheriff Hampton. Having spent the past four years desperately searching for Lucas' recognition of him as superior, Chick joins the mob of people gathered outside the jail awaiting Lucas' arrival. Chick thinks,

> […] *What the hell am I doing here* then answered himself the obvious answer: not to see Lucas, he had seen Lucas but so that Lucas could see him again if he so wished, to look back at him not just from the edge of mere uniqueless death but from the gasoline-roar of apotheosis. Because he was free. Lucas was no longer his responsibility, he was no longer Lucas' keeper; Lucas himself had discharged him. (41)

This imagining of Lucas' death by hanging and burning is a culmination of Chick's desire to be rid of his shame motivated by the humiliation of having been the guest in Lucas' home. Chick needs to see Lucas dead to redeem "that old once frantic shame and anguish and need not for revenge, vengeance but simply for re-equalization, reaffirmation of his masculinity and his white blood" that he feels when he is unable to force Lucas to pick his coins up off the floor (26). Chick has seen Lucas in handcuffs, but needs Lucas to acknowledge his white, dominant masculinity by witnessing Chick from the ultimate subordinate position represented in the lynching practice. Chick cannot simply allow Lucas to die and erase the knowledge of his shame, which is why Chick has to imagine the two as old men together and why Chick does not simply leave town before the lynching happens as he considers (31). Chick has to see Lucas lynched in order to feel superior because Lucas stands in for the antithesis of black submission. What Lucas will come to represent in this "apotheosis" is the climax of black inferiority, a justification of

Chick's racism, the internalized white supremacist southern ideology which comprises his entire identity. This need to see Lucas as inferior is why Chick feels he is free once Lucas allegedly shoots Vinson Gowrie. By acting "like a nigger," Lucas has supposedly set Chick free from feeling shame over firstly treating Lucas as inferior and secondly failing to make Lucas inferior because, in committing murder, Lucas has proven himself to be inferior all along.

This is likewise why Chick has to dig up the body as Lucas asks; he has to know for sure if Lucas is guilty in order to feel secure in his superiority. Chick's desperate need to affirm his superiority incited by his personal interaction with Lucas and his unwilling, youthful identification with him paradoxically forces Chick to discover that Lucas is innocent. When returning to the jail to listen to Lucas' plea, Chick once more reflects,

> […he] heard Lucas saying something to him not because he was himself, Charles Mallison junior, nor because he had eaten the plate of greens and warmed himself at the fire, but because he alone of all the white people Lucas would have a chance to speak to between now and the moment when he might be dragged out of the cell and down the steps at the end of a rope, would hear the mute unhoping urgency of the eyes. (67)

It is not the uniqueness of Chick as an inherently moral being which urges him to listen to Lucas, but a combination of factors created by the racial politics of the south (Lucas' white ancestry, his self-possession, Chick's coming of age in the new south, Chick's white identity, Chick's youth and Lucas' maturity) which forces him to discover the truth about Lucas' guilt to reaffirm his identity.

These factors likewise undercut Lucas' representative power as self-determinative. Lucas may be "equipped…to invert existing structures of authority" (20) as Autry argues, when it comes to Chick, but it is Chick's status as a child rather than any systemic power imbued in

Lucas which allows him to do so. Moreover, Faulkner himself posits an alternative thesis for Lucas' influence on Chick; it is because "…the earth which had bred his bones…was still shaping him into not just a man but a specific man…[with] the specific passions and hopes and convictions and ways of thinking and acting of a specific kind and even race…since it had also integrated into him whatever it was that had compelled him to stop and listen to a damn highnosed impudent Negro" (Intruder 148). It is, then, not that Lucas can push Chick to deny his southern brand of white supremacy through an exertion of individual will but that Chick, due to being born in the south, inherently possesses the proclivity to stop and listen to Lucas; it is a particular brand of southern exceptionalism that allows Chick to seek justice for Lucas rather than any external force. This brings the power back to the southern white ideological system; in Faulkner's conception, it is the society which invests individuals with a desire for justice or injustice, not individual determination or, at least, not a black man's individual determination.

REACTIONARY LYNCHING (MIS)REPRESENTATION

Faulkner's presentation of such lynching images ventures towards an authentic representation of the state of southern racial violence for the sake of proposing a vision of the south for popular consumption. Faulkner's graphic imaginings and blunt acknowledgement of lynching as a southern reality are an attempt at realism to lend credence to his eventual argument of southern determinacy. However, the vision Faulkner presents is biased and seeks to conceal the even-more disturbing state of the south. In working towards the long final dialogue of the novel, Faulkner crafts a portrait of the south which seeks to make an argument about its role in black liberation. This portrait is convicting in part, but largely defensive. Through *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner responds to concerns about the northern perception of the south. References to contemporary northern intervention and politics are casually peppered throughout the novel

("Aint you heard about that new lynch law the Yankees passed?" [*Intruder* 137]), but Chick and Gavin's major dialogue reveals the most clearly articulated perspective. Chick's characterization of the north as victim to "a volitionless, almost helpless capacity and eagerness to believe anything about the South not even provided it be derogatory but merely bizarre enough and strange enough" provides insight as to an intention of Faulkner's to present a contrary image of a south that may be self-redeemed of its admitted ugliness. After all, Gavin Stevens comes around to Lucas' innocence, Chick redirects his ire at the white mob, and Lucas is saved. However much Faulkner may have acknowledged the violence of the south in contrast to the 1931 Faulkner who knew of no southern lynchings, the post-war period also enflamed Faulkner's desire to defend his home and southern tradition. This, I believe, caused Faulkner to conceal more than he reveals in *Intruder in the Dust*.

I have alluded to the changes in United States' national policy during the Truman administration which, in my reading, factor prominently to the reactionary nature of Faulkner's novel. The tension felt most potently in Stevens' ranting against the federal government ("Yet people in the North believe it [Lucas' freedom] can be compelled even into next Monday by the simple ratification of votes of a printed paragraph" [152]) has roots in the contemporary context. Southern lynching was the shame of the United States as it sought to present itself as a bastion of freedom. In an attempt to rectify this, President Truman issued Executive Order 9808, bypassing the southern block and forming the President's Committee on Civil Rights, whose responsibility it was to provide "…recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment by legislation or otherwise of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States" (The Report of the President's Committee

on Civil Rights VII). This was a huge step for Civil Rights which infuriated southerners like Faulkner.

To gather information, the Committee conducted a series of interviews, public hearings, and received "hundreds of communications" from citizens and organizations, including the NAACP, to compose a report (XI). The committee published its findings in a December 1947 report entitled *To Secure These Rights*, a year prior to *Intruder in the Dust*'s publication. *To Secure These Rights* analyzed various injustices which minority communities faced and the foreseeable consequences should discriminatory and violent actions continue. Due to the notably high rates of violence against black Americans in the south, the report often cited incidents that seemed, to white southerners, to unfairly target their homes. The direct citation of lynchings and other violent and discriminatory actions in the south in the federal report aired the south's dirty laundry on the national stage, embarrassing white southerners. Rather than shaming southern lawmakers into change, the exposure reaffirmed their dedication to maintaining white dominance.

Moreover, the report closed with a list of eighteen recommendations, the first three of which focus on enabling federal intervention in local racial discrimination/violence cases (152-153). Suggestions such as these were deeply offensive to not only to white supremacists, but southern provincialists who believed in, utmost, the independence of the south in resistance to "outlanders" as a defining characteristic of southern identity. Laws to enact these recommendations would plant "outland" officials, such as federal investigators and the staff which would occupy regional offices, in southern states to, as white southerners saw it, interfere with local communities' ability to handle matters of justice on their own terms, just as the carpetbaggers of the Reconstruction era had. Southern politicians, particularly southern

Democrats, (whom the report notes were exclusively white elected [36]), countered Truman's adamancy with their own stubbornness. The threat of federal, and thus northern, intervention in white southern politics affronted the southern white supremacist sensibility which grounded itself in self-jurisdiction and flagrant flouting of federal finger-waving.

Southern resistance couldn't combat federal intervention entirely; the Committee's findings resulted in two executive orders, one which desegregated the armed forces and one which forbade discrimination in Civil Services programs; in addition, Truman used the report as a basis for proposing legislation to Congress to move the country towards integration ("Agency History"). All these matters increased racial tensions and put pressure on southerners to decide where they stood on civil rights; Faulkner was one of those southerners. As Sassoubre notes, "Thus it was with a sense of dislocation and disempowerment that Faulkner watched the transformation of the national landscape wrought first by the war and then by the Truman administration" (198). Documents like *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner's notorious 1956 Howe interview, and numerous other letters and speeches demonstrate Faulkner's need to defend the south.

One can see that Faulkner occludes the southern lynching epidemic in *Intruder in the Dust*, even as he seeks to reveal it, by comparing his depiction to other contemporary documents. There is, unfortunately, an abundance of reference material from which to work, as evidenced by collections such as James Allen's *Without Sanctuary*, a collection of nearly 100 lynching postcards detailing lynching. Compared to the reality demonstrated through such artifacts and *To Secure These Rights*, Faulkner's depictions are quite tame. The subtlety of such a depiction goes beyond artistic choice, however, and strays dangerously into misrepresentation of lynching practices. At the beginning of the novel, characters repeatedly say that the Gowries will not

lynch Lucas on a Sunday because it's the sabbath; however, in a caption on photo 11, Allen writes,

> The dominance of Christian symbology is resurected [sic] in the lynchers' preference for bodies of water, bridges, and landmark trees. Bodies of water are the traditional locations for baptisms; bridges symbolize the most profound rite of passage, the great "crossing over" to death; and trees are the very symbol of life and of Christ's crucifixion. The lynchers sought, in the conscious selection of these sacrificial sites and in their participation in these ritualized murders, their own salvation and passage to a safer place without sin and evil - both of which, in their minds, were physically embodied in the "offending" victim.

Religiosity, clearly, would do little to stop an actual lynch mob. Lynchings did not discriminate on the day of the week, holy or not, because lynch mobs believed they were dispensing justice, whether or not the victim was guilty. Shame never factored into the equation.

However, Faulkner cites shame as the very reason that Lucas escapes lynching and paints an idealistic picture of community-based justice. After Miss Habersham, Aleck Sander, and Chick return from digging up the Gowrie grave, Sherriff Hampton tells Miss Habersham, who is urging him to act, "…folks dont start lynchings in daylight. They might finish one by daylight if they had a little trouble or bad luck and got behind with it. But they dont start them by daylight because then they would have to see one another's faces" (112). Hampton is not lying to soothe an old woman or dissemble the truth; he is repeating a sentiment that Gavin Stevens will later share with Chick: "…there is a simple numerical point at which a mob cancels and abolishes itself, maybe because it has finally got too big for darkness, the cave it was spawned in is no longer big enough to conceal it from light and so at last whether it will or not it has to look at

itself…" (197). Chick, who at this point has come to challenge his uncle at every problematic turn, eventually agrees that the mob flees from town due to shame (198). Faulkner's repeated assertion that shame would prevent a lynch mob is somewhat laughable considering the evidence of lynch mobs numbering in the thousands gathering in the middle of the day to grin into cameras photographing them with their victims. Numerous lynching photographs reveal crowds so large they do not fit into frame. If Faulkner is indeed writing in response to *To Secure These Rights* or any number of the elements of antilynching discourse circulating at the time, he would have known this to be the case. The Committee records an instance of lynch mob members called out by name. In *Intruder in the Dust*, this should have induced shame in the mob and forced them to disperse. However, the report paints a different picture:

> On July 20, 1946, a white farmer, Loy Harrison, posted bond for the release of Roger Malcolm from the jail at Monroe, Georgia. Malcolm, a young Negro, had been involved in a fight with his white employer... Upon Malcolm's release, Harrison started to drive Malcolm, Malcolm's wife, and a Negro overseas veteran, George Dorsey, and his wife, out of Monroe. At a bridge along the way a large group of unmasked white men, armed with. pistols and shotguns, was waiting… As they were leading the two men away, Harrison later stated, one of the women called out the name of a member of the mob. Thereupon the lynchers returned and removed the two women from the car. Three volleys of shots were fired as if by a squad of professional executioners. The coroner's report said that at least 66 bullets were found in the scarcely recognizable bodies. (22)

If the woman's identification of the lyncher incited shame, his response was not to run, but to destroy his witness. Nor did the presence of Harrison, a white man, move the mob to any kind of deferral, nor should it have; Harrison refused to identify the murderers. This lynch mob did not

care about the guilt of any of its victims, nor the presence of women, nor the defense of a white person, all mitigating factors in Lucas' fate in *Intruder in the Dust*. They killed rigorously and without shame or fear of reprisal. In contrast, Faulkner's lynch mob respects propriety and refuses to mow down an old white woman to get to Lucas, no matter how infuriating they have found him. When he is proven innocent, the mob disperses, and Lucas walks through town the next Saturday without a threat (234). As the 127-page report, Allen's postcard project, and numerous other sources evidence, it is Faulkner's depiction, not the Committee's, which is exceptional.

This is not to say that Faulkner does not acknowledge the widespread danger that lynching poses. Faulkner's repeated notes that there are no black people out in Jefferson while the lynch mob is around demonstrates an understanding on his part of the threat the lynch mob poses to the standers by. However, Faulkner's depiction of Aleck Sander likewise strolling around town after the averted lynching (231) implies that the lynching problem in Jefferson, once solved for Lucas, is solved across the board, at least for the moment. He demonstrates none of the lingering horror that lynch mobs incited in black communities. Faulkner's depiction of the lynching problem is one which is troublesome, but overall defanged, a dangerous concept to proliferate during a time where the push for legal response to such violence was finally gaining sway.

In *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner proffers a solution to the racial violence of the south which is grounded in empathetic community action. However, the discourse of this solution is the fantasy of a white gradualist built upon falsehoods of the pathology of racism and lynching. Faulkner proliferates misinformation of how lynchings work and the results, or likelihood, of white intervention in injustice against black Americans. I take issue with his assertion that mobs

are formed of small groups which only operate at night and in secrecy which will dissolve once the individuals of the mob are identified. The President's Committee for Civil Rights report *To Defend These Rights* cites several incidents where, in the course of the intervention above described, lynchings escalated and resulted in massive violence and death. Considering *No Sanctuary*, a composition of the souvenir postcards taken at lynchings throughout the early twentieth century, one can see that Faulkner's assertion of the secrecy and size of lynch mobs is completely inaccurate. Faulkner's attempt to promote his fantasy of white southern community actions misinterprets and misinforms readers on the reality of lynching in the south. The effect of this is to reify, rather than subvert, the ideology of white supremacy and to mystify its practices.

FURTHER FANTASIES: A NEW SOUTH

Faulkner presents this version of lynching in response to the revealing depictions of the south which emerged to condemn contemporary racial violence. As Sassoubre, Marutani, and Autry all point out, Faulkner envisioned in *Intruder in the Dust* a south characterized by its sense of community and the power of individuals to make ethical choices. Through the strength of Lucas Beauchamp and the courage of the marginalized Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham, Faulkner manifests in Yoknapatawpha a southern community which solves its problems and avoids violence through extralegal cooperation. This is a hopeful image, and perhaps it is moving of Faulkner to imagine such a future. However, the fantasy that Faulkner forges is misaligned not only with reality, but with Faulkner's own recommendations for action.

To understand this, I want to once more examine Faulkner's thesis for change as presented in *Intruder in the Dust*. In the novel, it is the marginalized who are free to get things done. In Faulkner's vision, women and children bring the older men, those who wield power, onto the side of justice. In the absence of racial equality, it is with these individuals that change

may be entrusted. It is Chick's youthful positioning which allows him to be changed in an encounter with Lucas. When deciding whether he is to believe him, Chick recalls being told,

> Young folks and womens, they aint cluttered. They can listen. But a middle-year man like your paw and your uncle, they cant listen. They aint got time. They're too busy with facks. In fact, you mought bear this in yo mind; someday you mought need it. If you ever needs to get anything done outside the common run, dont waste yo time on the menfolks; get the womens and children to working at it. (70)

Marginality and youth, in *Intruder in the Dust*, are key factors of mobility. Age and centrality are barriers to understanding. It is because of Chick's age that he can listen and act outside the boundaries of acceptable behavior to save Lucas; Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander's marginality allows them to do the same. Gavin Stevens, however, despite having the connections and (limited) sympathies to bring Lucas' rescue to fruition, cannot act to begin with because of, the novel asserts, his age. Gavin resorts to talk rather than action because he is older white man. He realizes this when asking what brought Chick around to believing Lucas was innocent, saying, "I want to know, you see. Maybe I'm not too old to learn either" (124).

Faulkner's championing of youth as the means of change may be the most realistic element of his fantasy. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, antilynching and civil rights movements often started with women and the youth, a trend which only increased throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Although Faulkner grants Aleck Sander little significance for his part in freeing Lucas and clearly anticipates white youth as the leaders of change, he does seem to imagine a south where the marginalized have hope to be heard. If one were to read *Intruder in the Dust* by itself, it might appear a dated yet well-intentioned imagining of the south.

I am reluctant, however, to grant Faulkner the credit his most popular biographers do for his representation of social progress in *Intruder in the Dust*. It is true that Faulkner's "moderate" (in the relativity of deep south politics) views on civil rights earned him the outrage of his home state; his own uncle derided his work as "writing those dirty books for Yankees!" (qtd. in Blotner 430). Others feared the so-called politically progressive stance of the novel would encourage people to communism, a great fear as the Cold War began (Dominy 40). *Intruder in the Dust* may, in the myopic sight of these reviews, contain the "courageous and generous spirit" that Edmund Wilson praised Faulkner for in his 1948 review of the novel. It would also be remiss of me to refuse to acknowledge that merely granting the black body a modicum of subjectivity in the south had radical potential. However, the chance for political change, the chance to take a stand on the rights of the black individual and declare his or her humanity, did not prove to be Faulkner's serious investment. When push came to shove, Faulkner abandoned this praise of youth and action and self-determination in favor of defending the autonomy of the white south. This becomes clear when looking once more at Faulkner's nonfiction.

1956: INFLEXIBLE FLEXIBILITY

Eight years after publishing *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner had fully stepped into his role as a spokesperson for the white south, both nationally and internationally. He had won the Nobel Prize shortly after publishing *Intruder in the Dust* and now possessed international acclaim. Faulkner was in full flourish as a public figure and used his platform to speak on civil rights and racial politics as he had been doing since the 1930s. Unfortunately, his attitudes, as I have noted, had not changed much in the intervening twenty-plus years. Instead of progressing from 1948 by presenting a more realistic view of the southern racial scene, his attitudes regarding the true authority of the black individual and the black community to act against repression stagnated and

solidified. This becomes particularly clear in reading texts which spoke directly to black audiences.

On February 21, 1956, Russell Howe interviewed William Faulkner on southern integration. On March 5, 1956, *Life* magazine published Faulkner's "Letter to a Northern Editor" or "Letter to the North," in which Faulkner infamously told the leaders of southern integration efforts to "Go slow now" (87). On March 22nd, 1956, Russell Howe published "A Talk with William Faulkner" in *The Reporter*, revealing statements which dog Faulkner's legacy even today. That September, *Ebony* published Faulkner's "A Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" as "If I Were a Negro" (107). In these documents, Faulkner reaffirms the tenets he lays out in *Intruder in the Dust*, unfortunately not in the way one might hope.

These documents arise from the direct action of the Civil Rights Movement to integrate schools in the south. Early February of 1956, Autherine Lucy, a black woman, attended classes at the University of Alabama after courts forced the school to allow her to attend. Race riots broke out almost immediately. The Montgomery bus boycotts were underway. The south was broiling, and Faulkner spoke out on a variety of platforms. Never again would his novels directly approach racial violence as *Intruder in the Dust* did, but Faulkner would, until his death in 1962, often respond to current events through essay or interview.

The Howe interview is certainly Faulkner's most notorious racial commentary; critics often quote his statement that he would shoot Negroes in the street to defend Mississippi from the rest of the United States. He goes on to clarify that he would not shoot Mississippians, black or white, claiming that the north is forcing what was once a cultural issue between the north and the south into a race issue between blacks and whites (Howe 19). Faulkner's defenders prefer to discount this interview because its statements are so bald and because Faulkner disavowed the

remarks repeatedly. However, having read the Howe interview along with many other documents, including the two "Letter" articles, I see little difference between the remarks made from one publication to the next. Although "Letter to a Northern Editor" and "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" posture as refinements of prior statements, all three documents say essentially the same things.[16] As much as Faulknerian scholars wish Faulkner had not said the things he did in the Howe interview, comments made thrice over are hard to erase. Since I see these documents as quite similar, I will only engage an analysis only of "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" alongside my analysis of *Intruder in the Dust*, especially considering this letter quotes the March letter.

If one can speculate that Faulkner intended *Intruder in the Dust* to be, in part, for black audiences, one can confirm that "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" is meant for black readership. It may be one of the few (or only) Faulkner texts geared specifically towards black readers. Not only is the title indicative of its goal, but its publication in *Ebony* guaranteed it would be read primarily by black audiences. I found little scholarship on the *Ebony* letter itself, and perhaps this, along with the sensational nature of the Howe interview, is the reason. Faulkner writes, "But a white man can only imagine himself for the moment a Negro; he cannot be that man of another race and griefs and problems" (110). However, the letter is entirely an act of imagination in which Faulkner advises members of the NAACP and black readers to adopt a course of "inflexible flexibility" in their approach to gaining equal rights, envisioning a way for black Americans to demonstrate that they "deserve equality" (111). The letter is fraught, to say the least.

[16] Something which I feel gets confused in discussing these articles is that Faulkner professes to be on the side of racial equality, if not on the side of legally enforced school integration. Faulkner is caught between a fear of change and his belief that segregation is morally wrong. This is not to defend Faulkner, but to highlight his internal conflict.

The letter begins with Faulkner's refutation of his violent Howe statement and a quotation from his March "Letter to a Northern Editor" in which he advises "the NAACP and other organizations working actively for the abolishment of segregation: 'Go slow, now. Stop now for a time, a moment. You have the power now…" ("Letter" 107). Faulkner, in a shift from his "Mob Sometimes Right" stance that the strong are favored by society, here claims that, if the NAACP pushes too far, the south will mobilize through a deep instinct to champion "the underdog simply because he is under" (108). Faulkner reaffirms and reframes his "go slow" stance and uses this letter to expand on his suggested strategy.

Faulkner then establishes the context for his March letter, writing, "When I wrote the letter and then used every means I knew to get it printed in time, Autherine Lucy had just been compelled to withdraw temporarily from the University of Alabama by a local violence already of dangerous proportions" (108). Faulkner's advice to "go slow" or, as he reframes it in this letter, "be flexible," was motivated, he claims, by the fear that Autherine Lucy would be killed (108). Rioters did not have time to kill Autherine Lucy; the University of Alabama permanently expelled her, and the NAACP elected not to fight the second expulsion (Hughes 307-08). Faulkner writes of this, "I want to believe that the forces supporting Miss Lucy [the NAACP] were wise enough themselves not to send her back—not merely wise enough to save her life, but wise enough to foresee that even her martyrdom would in the long run be less effective than the simple, prolonged, endless nuisance-value of her threat…" ("Letter" 108). Faulkner does not want the NAACP to repeatedly send an individual like Autherine Lucy to a university, but to send a multitude of black individuals ("entitled by his ability and capacity to go…cleanly dressed, courteous, without threat or violence…") to the university day after day to demonstrate that whites will never be free of such a nuisance, which will "make the white man himself sick

and tired of fighting it" ("Letter" 109, 110). Faulkner's strategy of what he calls "inflexible flexibility" is to annoy whites into granting integration and equality of their own volition.

In imagining himself to be a negro, Faulkner suggests the key to achieving success in the fight for equality is to use the patience which "the white man has devoted three hundred years to teaching us" as "a weapon against him" in protest efforts while maintaining "cleanliness and courtesy and dignity in our contacts with him" (111). He says, "[As a negro] I would say to others of my race that we must never curb our hopes and demands for equal rights, but merely to curb with flexibility our methods of demanding them" (109). Finally, Faulkner claims that, "above all," black Americans must learn "the responsibility of equality" in order to earn,

> '…the right to *opportunity* to be free and equal…the willingness and the capacity to accept the responsibility of that opportunity—the responsibilities of physical cleanliness and of moral rectitude, of a conscience capable of choosing between right and wrong and a will capable of obeying it, of reliability toward other men, the pride of independence of charity or relief.' 'The white man has not taught us that. He taught us only patience and courtesy.' (112)

Faulkner returns here to the sentiment he expressed in "Mob Sometimes Right" that the "valuable integers" of society thrive apart from government welfare or taking advantage of the system. He makes a distinction from the humility that W.H. James suggested was valuable in 1931, contrasting it here with "courtesy and dignity." Twenty-five years later, these tenets of Faulkner's values have not changed, it seems. Neither has the vagueness with which Faulkner describes the circumstances of black living in the United States. Why, for Faulkner, is the black individual not inherently deserving of the opportunity for fair treatment? Why does the black

individual have to forge “ties” to the rights of liberty while whites seemingly just possess it? Why is freedom something which must be earned?

Faulkner demonstrates a clear ignorance of the necessity of legal intervention to protect Autherine Lucy just as he demonstrated ignorance of legal efforts to protect victims of lynching in the 1930s in his reply to W.H. James. More troubling is his apparent ignorance of the systemic nature of violence against black Americans. What Faulkner fails to acknowledge, what may seem obvious to readers today, is that rioters were not threatening Autherine Lucy any more than they threatened Lucas Beauchamp. White supremacists are not interested in the actions of individuals but rather the status of an entire race. Their actions represent the holistic threat against black bodies with the temerity to demand respect that they have from the beginning of slavery in the United States. They are acting in the mentality that James Allen shows so vividly in *Without Sanctuary*, that “…to kill a Negro wasn’t nothing. It was like killing a chicken or killing a snake. The whites would say, ‘Niggers jest supposed to die, ain’t no damn good anyway—so jest go on an’ kill ‘em’” (Allen 12). No matter how cleanly dressed or courteous or dignified these victims may have been, that would not be, never be, enough to make the virulent racists gathered at university quads or town squares see black people as human.

Faulkner, it seems, should know this. Did he not write Lucas Beauchamp, a black man of infinite dignity, possessing white heritage to boot, chained to a bedpost for a crime he did not commit? Did he not demonstrate the ignorant need for nearly every character in *Intruder in the Dust* to see Lucas reduced to “Sambo,” to “nigger”? And was Lucas not saved, not through scraping and kowtowing to local demands, but through the intervention of individuals boldly defying the white authority and white norms regardless of consequence?

Faulkner tells his black readers in "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" that "[Negros] must teach [them]selves that [which the whites have not]. [Black] leaders must teach [them] that. [Negros] as a race must lift [them]selves by [their] own bootstraps to where [they] are competent for the responsibilities of equality, so that [they] can hold on to it when [they] get it" (112). This is not the image he presents in *Intruder in the Dust*, where Lucas must be imbued with honor by his white rapist ancestor and saved by a white boy who despises his integrity. It is not the image that, despite all his idealistic posturing, he truly believes in. And it is not the image Faulkner presents on February 20th, 1958, when he told students at the University of Virginia,

> …the Negro, is not yet capable of, or refuses to accept, the responsibilities of equality. So we, the white man, must take him in hand and teach him that responsibility…Let us teach him that, in order to be free and equal, he must first be worthy of it, and then forever afterward work to hold and keep and defend it. He must learn to cease forever more thinking like a Negro and acting like a Negro. This will not be easy for him. His burden will be that, because of his race and color, it will not suffice for him to think and act like just any white man. He must think and act like the best among white men. (*Faulkner at Virginia*, Raven, Jefferson and ODK Societies, tape 1)

Faulkner is playing to his audience in "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race," just as he is scheming in *Intruder in the Dust* to dupe northern audiences into thinking southern racial violence is not as bad as it seems. Slow progress is not what Faulkner wants to happen; it is white control that he wants, altruistically or not. Faulkner's writing is another way of trying to halt black-centered movements, to slow the pace of change so that white men like Faulkner can catch up and retake control. If there is to be change, Faulkner wants it on his terms. He wants the black individual to earn their rights by presenting themselves as he would like them. But

Faulkner cannot imagine a black equal or a black superior. He cannot bring himself to imagine, to empathetically live the black individual's existence in the United States. But what Faulkner's varying responses show, from "Mob Sometimes Right" to his commentary in Virginia, is that that perspective would not be silenced. The unimaginable perspective that Faulkner could not bring himself to explore in *Light in August*, the perspective he shut down in "Mob Sometimes Right," is, in 1956, a reality. He no longer has the privilege to refuse to imagine it. It is there.

CONCLUSION

"What about your belief in the principles espoused in your books?"

"I shouldn't be betraying them."

An Interview with William Faulkner, page 19.

Throughout the 1950s, Faulkner would continue to be involved with conversations surrounding race in the United States. Never again would he write about lynching in his novels as he did in *Intruder in the Dust* or *Light in August*, but he would continue to write nonfiction pieces, answer interviews, and speak on the matter, particularly as he came to work for the State Department and the University of Virginia. The filming of *Intruder in the Dust* in 1949 left him financially solvent for the remainder of his life, and he continued to publish until his death, although Faulkner's political speaking waned in the sixties. He died in 1962, living through the early protests of the Civil Rights Movement, including the triumphs of the Little Rock Nine and Ruby Bridges, activists who followed in the wake of Autherine Lucy. He lived to see the changes which others knew to be inevitable and missed many more.

After his death, Faulkner's critical popularity soared. Through the efforts of Jill Faulkner Summers and a cohort of Faulkner's biographers, colleagues, and critics, William Faulkner entered the American literary canon, popularized by New Critics and disseminated amongst college and even high school curricula as an avenue for learning about the American south, race relations, modernism, and more. Even now, Faulkner is sedimented within literary studies worldwide and still actively read. William Faulkner is the thirtieth most frequently assigned author according to the Open Syllabus project, which catalogues over six million syllabi from a non-exhaustive list of countries. Moreover, Faulkner has influenced countless writers and critics, whether they speak in praise, critique, or ambivalently regarding his work. Outside of the academic realm, Faulkner continues to pervade culture, if not in the political way he did during

his lifetime. In 2005, Oprah's Book Club read three Faulkner classics over the course of the summer: *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury,* and *Light in August,* demonstrating Faulkner's endurance in mainstream America's literary consciousness. Faulkner's pervasive presence in culture and the relevance of the racial violence explored and exposed in his work requires that we continue to pay close attention to his potential influence.

Throughout this project, I have sought to explore the function of Faulkner's lynching representations in a variety of forms over a period of twenty years. The goal of choosing such a variety of texts is to seek out either disparity or cohesion in Faulkner's commentary on a cultural, social, and political issue which characterized both his work, the time in which he wrote, and the period in which we continue to read his work. In my exploration, I have highlighted trends in Faulkner's depictions of the causes of lynching and its resolution which evidence a stance that reinforces white supremacist narratives. This is in opposition to the critical trends promoted after Faulkner's death which often sought to depict him as strictly racially progressive.

My first chapter aimed to expose Faulkner's fears about southern racial progress as present within both his early nonfiction and fiction writing. In "Mob Sometimes Right," I have demonstrated that Faulkner possessed a defensiveness of white southern culture and a fear of its unsettling through racial progress. His illogical and misinformed response to W.H. James and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching shows a willingness to defend hate crimes in order to preserve a way of life privileging white male dominance. In comparing this letter to *Light in August*, I have shown that Faulkner held an acute awareness of the southern white supremacist hegemony and the artificiality of racial ideologies and identities. He understood the false lynching narrative, in which black men encroach on the purity of white southern women, as well as its economic and historical motivations enough to complicate it in

his depiction of Joe Christmas. However, within the novel lay the attitudes which Faulkner presents as his own in "Mob Sometimes Right" and a refusal to imagine or depict black perspectives which reveals a fear of social change. This confounds the dominant critical narrative about Faulkner's writing as racially progressive and enlightened, illustrating both cohesion in Faulkner's racist attitudes over time as well as a reluctance on behalf of Faulknerian scholars to expose these interrelated writings.

In my second chapter, I analyzed *Intruder in the Dust* as Faulkner's most direct novelistic attempt to communicate his stance on racial politics. His depiction of lynching and his purposeful attempt to place a black man at the center of his narrative reveals political motives to appeal to both black and northern white audiences as Faulkner crafts a posture of realism which is, at best, an idealistic vision of a racially equitable south (which nevertheless falls short) and, at worst, seeks to conceal the truly violent and unjust condition of southern race relations through misinformation. The effect of this is to forge an image of the south, and the author, which promotes transracial cooperation and progress. However, my analysis of Faulkner's 1956 "Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" shows that Faulkner deliberately adjusted his language and message to appeal to his audiences for the sake of preserving the stability of white dominance. Faulkner's ideals of universal freedom should not elide Faulkner's ever-present fear of change and his reluctance to grant black Americans rights to safety and liberty. The continued recuperative texts which seek to deny these problematic aspects of Faulkner in spite of such overwhelming evidence demonstrates a need to continue reading Faulkner's fiction in light of his blatant nonfiction.

Throughout this project, I sought to understand what critics have said about Faulkner in the past, what they are saying now, and what view of Faulkner's work we should forge going

forward. I have framed much of my commentary in terms of perspectives because, as I have made clear, Faulkner's texts have not changed; it is what we seek to derive from Faulkner that has changed. Since Faulkner continues to play such a significant role in American culture and because we live in a period of continuing hate crimes and politically, culturally, and legally sanctioned oppression, not only in the south but nationwide, what we derive from Faulkner matters.

This project began, for me, as a way to understand Faulkner's relevance or value for readers of all ages and backgrounds. Faulkner's canonicity, I understood, was not something earned in any particular fashion. Through research, I came to learn of the complex political and social circumstances which made him useful for the United States' motives. My country needed to believe certain things about itself, that it could produce art from what others saw to be the absolute dredges of society and that that society could be redeemed. Faulkner became a tool for that purpose.

As someone who came to love Faulkner in my undergraduate career for his confusing and artful storytelling, I wanted to see Faulkner's novels as means for others to find voices for their own fears and frustrations. When conceiving of this project, knowing a little about Faulkner's role in the American educational system, I thought that Faulkner could be repurposed in a way that would allow young people, high school students, to reimagine their country in new ways. I was a senior in high school when Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown were all murdered in 2014. I thought that, perhaps, students living under the anxiety and fear of a repressive, hateful system could make something for themselves out of Faulkner's tormented characters of color. I had thought that, through critique of Faulkner's ills and appreciation for his merits, wherever they might be found, the biased American canon could provide a foothold in

some way for those born into a system which rejects their being by design. I had hoped that, wrong as the whole operation was, that this foothold would be enough for those individuals to stand up and make themselves known.

This project changed through all that I learned about Faulkner's history, his positioning, his writings. All that I learned about Faulkner and the scholarly world surrounding him to this day shifted my focus to those who distill and disseminate Faulkner to those young minds rather than the minds themselves. The project became not about one method of redeeming or repurposing Faulkner but instead an inspection of what we are actually doing with his works. The author is dead. The canon is unfounded. All that is left is the readers, the teachers, and the scholars. If we are to continue to read and work with Faulkner's work, our choices in doing so deserve scrutiny. Are we seeking to uphold any agenda? What may we be trying to omit or hide in an author's text? Are we wrongly using Faulkner, the legendary figure, as a prop for our own biases or needs?

There is no pure motive in literary analysis or in teaching literature. Every choice is inevitably loaded with political and social significance and reflects us in some way. If we are to analyze or teach Faulkner, it is essential that we at least point to the shallowness of our own perceptions. This project serves, I hope, as a primary example; its exploration is, inevitably, cursory at best. To posture otherwise would be dishonest. However, I hope that it is useful in pointing the way to a host of other information and perspectives.

My recommendation to anyone teaching Faulkner's work, any literary work, would be to point to this multiplicity, this abundance of shallow pools. Our myopia is incurable. Thus, we must make the choice to use or gesture towards as many critical lenses as are available to us.

We must be brave enough to recognize that, although we may find pieces of Faulkner or others useful for our own agendas, those pieces are incomplete and biased. Using fragments of an author's work without acknowledging that there is a greater context simply to further that author's relevance is unethical scholarship and does a disservice to those who study from us.

Rather than try to frame Faulkner as either strictly progressive or regressive, we should be clear that there is great ambivalence in Faulkner's work. Awareness of and adherence to white supremacist ideologies both pervade both Faulkner's fiction and nonfiction. It would be a mistake to isolate Faulkner's politics exclusively to one statement or one text and to strip his fiction texts of their history and social context. We cannot read Faulkner, or anyone, for one message and exclude the rest.

This project has left me with more questions than answers. This is because I do not believe it is possible, at least for me, to answer many of these questions. Does continuing to talk about Faulkner do more harm than good? How valuable is Faulkner for people of color? Is it feasible to use Faulkner productively to talk about race? Can literature serve as a corrective for the systemic racial problems in America? The list goes on. It is my hope that this project has served to inspire more questions than answers for anyone reading it. With the aid of such questions, we can come to understand how much we need to seek the perspectives and information only others can provide. The more we seek the vision of others, the less likely we are to allow silence and violence to go unnoticed.

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