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One Time, One Place? Richard Wright and Eudora Welty's Shared Visual Politics in the Depression Era

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ONE TIME, ONE PLACE?

RICHARD WRIGHT AND EUDORA WELTY'S SHARED VISUAL POLITICS IN THE
DEPRESSION ERA

A Thesis,
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

MALLORY N. BLASINGAME

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ABSTRACT

This thesis questions the absence of critical comparative studies of Mississippi-born authors Richard Wright and Eudora Welty. I argue that, though the authors' writing has traditionally been understood as residing on opposite sides of the political spectrum, they share a political vision of the rural South and urban North in the Depression era that is established in their documentary works—Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* (1941) and Welty's *One Time, One Place* (1971)—and extends into such fictional works as Wright's "Big Boy Leaves Home" (1936) and *Native Son* (1941) and Welty's "Moon Lake" (1949) and "Flowers for Marjorie" (1941).

In chapter one, I write Welty's and Wright's documentary work more firmly into the Depression-era documentary context that included Farm Security Administration photographers and popular documentaries to demonstrate how the authors both participate in common strategies of documentation and attempt to revise the problematic representations, methods, and messages found therein. I also outline the authors' established pedagogies that instruct readers on how to read their work and examine how critics have traditionally accepted such instructions and, lately, have begun to push back against them.

In chapter two, I read the authors' documentary texts both according to and against the authors' pedagogical strategies, paying particular attention to their methods of captioning, framing, and otherwise confining the photographs and looking for moments when the photographs defy such efforts to send messages that conflict with the authors' carefully

established narratives. The chapter finds that both authors' projects betray a tension between revealing their subjects and their experiences to their viewers and protecting them from potentially exploitative readings. This tension at times leads to contradictions within the texts themselves that reveal cracks in their carefully constructed messages.

Finally, in chapter three, I argue that the authors' shared vision of Depression-era representation extends into their fictional works. I demonstrate how each author uses "fictional stills" to halt highly visual moments and encourage the reader to look at the ways in which static representations of race and class confine and even destroy individual lives.

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INTRODUCTION

Richard Wright (1908) and Eudora Welty (1909) were born one year apart in Jackson, Mississippi, and, although their lives took markedly different paths in ways reflective of the divergent experiences and worldviews their respective social and racial realities afforded them, their development and recognition as writers overlaps significantly. As Richard Brodhead has noted, certain “coincidences mark Wright and Welty as joint exploiters of the circumstances of authorship in the late-1930s—early-1940s United States” (106). They both emerged into public recognition during this time period (105); they received similar accolades; and, not least important, both worked for the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s (106). Though their paths would ultimately diverge, their shared beginnings and trajectories as writers certainly invite critical comparison. In spite of these similarities, however, critics have not engaged in comparisons of Wright and Welty that move beyond their biographical similarities or autobiographies and into a critical consideration of how their production as authors reflects their interpretations of a shared time and place.

This thesis will seek to begin to fill this critical vacuum by using their respective compilations of photographs and text—Welty’s *One Time, One Place* (1971) and Wright’s *12 Million Black Voices* (1941)—to compare their representations of the Depression-era rural South and the people who lived there, before stretching that comparison into “photographic” moments in their fictional works that likewise overlap in their presentation of region, race, and economic hardship. In so doing, I will enter into a conversation begun by Katherine Henninger in her book

Ordering the Façade: Photography and Contemporary Southern Women's Writing

(2007) about the representational history of the South. Although Wright and Welty are usually placed on opposite sides of the spectrum—Wright is read as "nationalist" and "polemic" and Welty as "regionalist" and "sentimental"—the authors present a surprisingly shared image of Depression-era Mississippi. This vision at once participates in and agitates against the dominant representations of the era, as seen in, for instance, Farm Security Administration photographs by Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. Entering Wright and Welty into the "historical legacy of visual material expression in and of 'the South'" and, later in the thesis, through discussion of the "fictional stills" or "frozen" moments of their fiction, into "a rhetorical dynamic of the visual 'placing'" that Henninger begins to establish in her work, this thesis seeks to break down the other critical scaffoldings that have for so long contained Wright and Welty in separate camps (5).

Though Henninger argues that "we can best learn the meaning of actual photography in the South...by seeing what rhetorically constructed photography means in the stories that are told about it" and consequently focuses much of her argument on "fictional photographs" (actual photographs that appear in fictional texts), I believe that we can also learn a great deal about, to quote Henninger, "how southerners relate to photographs, what meanings they associate with them, what power photographs hold in southern culture" (5) through analysis of how authors invoke and critique such representational traditions more specifically in actual photography and more generally in "photographic" fictional moments. I therefore wish to analyze how two Southern writers carefully crafted photographic compilations of Depression-era life, likely with the very questions Henninger poses in mind. In thinking about how Wright and Welty "relate to photographs" and "associate meanings" with images and pedagogical directions, we can come to

a deeper understanding of how such representations are crafted and negotiated. These understandings of image construction can then be taken into the authors' fictional texts. Here they reveal how relationships and politics of power are based on and filtered through these same representations, which characters internalize or project onto others in order to fix meaning upon and often disempower them. Through such an analysis, we will find that both Wright and Welty are making shared political statements about the Depression era in the South and beyond.

Though often anthologized together, Welty and Wright do not share critical space. What are the reasons for such lack of criticism? Welty and Wright may have contributed to this lack themselves by abstaining from commentary on each other's work. In a 2011 article in *The Oxford American*, Ellen Ann Fentress writes of her disappointment—shared, no doubt, by many other scholars—that Wright and Welty never met. As Brodhead notes, their autobiographies illustrate the high likelihood that “they would have laid eyes on each other, that even if without recognizing it they formed part of each other's daily world or visual field” while growing up in Jackson (106), but there is no evidence that the two authors ever interacted or even read one another's work. Despite the fact that during their childhood, they shopped on the same streets, visited or worked in theaters a block away from each other, and attended schools that were also in close proximity (107), the fact that they were moving in segregated spaces of the 1920s and 30s worked to keep them apart. The physical separation that divided them would later become a shared fictional and photographic focus for both authors, however, as they sought to demonstrate the social and economic inequalities of the Depression era in both photographs and text.

Even if the authors did not ever come into one another's vision while walking through the streets of Jackson, they could not have remained ignorant of each other as their literary careers developed along uncannily similar courses. Both published first short story collections and then

novels between 1938 and 1942, and Wright's *Native Son* was published the same year (1941) as Welty's *A Curtain of Green*. Welty won the Guggenheim three years after Wright won it in 1939 and the O. Henry Award in 1941 and 1942, the two years directly following Wright's win in 1940. In spite of these similarities, however, the critical trend past this point has been to trace the authors along increasingly divergent paths, as Wright moved north to Chicago, New York, and ultimately Paris, where he died in 1960, while Welty lived in her childhood home in Mississippi until she died, much later, in 2001. But, as Suzanne Marrs's accounts in her biography of Welty's travels to New York and throughout the country to give lectures and visit friends make clear, Welty and Wright in fact continued to circulate in similar spaces, in spite of Welty's continued physical and thematic attachment to Mississippi and Wright's increasing distance from it. And even as they grew farther apart geographically and ideologically, to the point where critics like Brodhead are able to claim that writing came to "mean, for them, profoundly different things" (119), Wright's and Welty's experiences continued to converge in at least one more way: their work for the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s.

Welty was hired by the WPA in 1936 as a junior publicity agent. Her job included such responsibilities as "writ[ing] publicity" and "driving a tour through the city" for WPA conferences, but, as Suzanne Marrs notes, her official WPA work was "far less interesting than the terrain and people she observed" (*Biography* 53). Welty remarked of her time working for the organization, "I didn't really get an idea of the diversity and all the different regions of the state, or of the great poverty of the state, until I traveled and until I had talked to people" (Marrs *Biography* 52-53). While traveling for the organization, Welty often took photographs of the people and places with which she came into contact, and many of these photographs were later compiled into *One Time, One Place*. Clearly, Welty was engaged in both the discovery and

representation of her home state during her time with the WPA, and her photography, though not directly connected to her work responsibilities, was nonetheless taken within that context and thus facilitated and informed by it.

By the time Wright was hired by the WPA, he was already living in Chicago, so his experience with the organization was of a different nature than Welty's. He was hired in 1935 by the Federal Writers' Project, a branch of the WPA located in Chicago and New York and "designed to give employment to impoverished or needy, but capable writers" (Walker 68). Though he was "loaned" temporarily to the Federal Theatre Project in 1936 (69), Wright spent the majority of his tenure as a supervisor for the Writers' Project, working alongside such authors as Margaret Walker, Saul Bellow, and Ralph Ellison (70). While working for the Project, Wright wrote and published "Big Boy Leaves Home" (1936) and "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" (1937), and, though he eventually parted ways with the organization when he was labeled a "turncoat" by the Communist party and decided to leave for New York, his friend and biographer Margaret Walker marks his time with the WPA as one during which his talent and interests were "coalescing into the magic results of his daemonic genius" (85), soon to be demonstrated in *12 Million Black Voices*, which Walker calls "one of Wright's best prose statements, showing his imaginative powers at their best" (170).

Though they were unlikely to meet in their work for the WPA, the fact that both Welty and Wright worked for and were shaped artistically by their time with the agency in 1936 again marks an important crossroad in their lives and work and constitutes just one of the many shared experiences that make Wright's and Welty's seemingly willful refusal to acknowledge each other's presence or work so confounding. Both Suzanne Marrs and Margaret Walker mention the other author in their biographies of Welty and Wright, respectively, acknowledging that they,

at least for a time, circulated within the same space (Marrs 10-11) and were both, as Walker puts it, products of the same “climate of literary genius” in the state of Mississippi (18). But in both (rather sizeable) biographies, the authors merit only a paragraph or two at most. The biographers are simply following the lead of the authors, who denied or missed the opportunity to talk about each other’s work in interviews, book reviews, or critical comments (Fentress 115).

Fentress notes that this mutual ignorance must have been purposeful, for both were friends with Ralph Ellison and had professional relationships with Edward and Mary Louise Aswell, and it seems likely that one of these shared connections would have offered to introduce them (114).

Ultimately, Fentress conjectures, Welty must have “fled Wright...because [hers] was just the kind of individual decency that, in the patriotic, dutiful mid-century, Wright branded as incomplete and downright complicit” (117). Invoking the Rod Moorhead sculpture in Jackson, Mississippi, where Welty and Wright are cast in marble and standing back to back, Fentress concludes, “The statues can’t help but represent that which is impossible to change, set in stone and unbudging” (118).

It is certainly impossible to change the authors’ lived experiences and shared refusal to recognize one another; it is highly unlikely that we will ever find some previously undiscovered correspondence between the two or reviews of each other’s work. But that impossibility does not mean that we must accept their silence and allow them to remain “unbudging.” Though Welty may have feared what an interaction with Wright would force her to confront about the insufficiency of her own writing and existence as a white woman in the South, that does not mean that we should continue to facilitate their separation. If we push hard enough, we may find that it is not impossible to turn Welty and Wright around and to put their words, images, purposes, and pedagogies into conversation. Indeed, by doing so, this thesis will prove that

Wright and Welty share strategies of visual representation that give readers a unique insight into Depression-era subjects and lives.

I will make this claim through analysis of the photographs, text, and pedagogical strategies in the authors' photographic collections. For Welty, these visual strategies take the form of framing her African American subjects in ways that attempt to showcase their individuality and indomitable human spirit. For Wright, they draw attention to the particular struggles of African Americans, impoverished by the Great Depression and suffering from continued racism and tenant farming situations that, for Wright, all but replicated the system of slavery. Aware of the exploitative potential of such representations of black poverty, both authors also attempt to shield their subjects from the exploitative and sensationalist gaze, however. Welty does this in her photography by avoiding problematically universalizing her subjects' experiences, Wright by subtly demonstrating that W. E. B. Du Bois's "veil" remained in place, even in photographs that purport to "reveal" their subjects. This double purpose of revealing and concealing often creates moments of subversion within the photographs especially, when they conflict with the authors' directives for reading, which are established in their introductions and continue through their captioning, framing, and contextualizing of the photographs. These subversive moments serve to open up further dialogic space between the two texts and their authors because we no longer have to accept their at times contradictory purposes as binding our methods of reading.

Extending discussion of these shared representational strategies from their photographic collections into their fictional works will further link the authors. This thesis provides a new lens through which to consider their shared representational politics. The extension of this argument into fiction is important because critics have often treated the authors as occupying opposite ends of critical, political, and aesthetic spectrums. However, this is a surface difference. As we will

see, the authors share many underlying themes, particularly relating to the visual politics of race and class. Part of the reason for this separation is that, outside of their autobiographies, both of which depict the authors' early lives in Mississippi (though in strikingly different fashion), Welty's and Wright's writing seems to inhabit very different racial spaces. Although Welty includes many African American characters in her work—sometimes as main characters, as in the story “Powerhouse” in *A Curtain of Green* (1941), for instance, but more often in supporting roles—her protagonists (especially those upon whom critics have focused) are often white characters living in the rural South. By contrast, Wright writes largely of black male characters in Northern urban settings, with a few key exceptions including *Uncle Tom's Children* (1936), set in the South, and *Savage Holiday* (1954), a novel in which the characters are white.

The writers have enhanced this perception of difference through their professed relationships to the political, as well—relationships that critics have often too readily accepted. Wright declares in his “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937) that the “Negro writer” is “being called upon to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die” (43). Contrastingly, Welty writes in “Must the Novelist Crusade?” (1961) that “great fiction shows us not how to conduct our behavior but how to feel. Eventually, it may show us how to face our feelings and face our actions and to have new inklings about what they mean” (810). Ultimately, she famously asserts, “Fiction has, and must keep, a private address” (809). Recently, critics have begun to challenge the resultant understanding of Welty as apolitical, however. Marrs and Pollack's *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Novelist Crusade?* (2001) in particular claims the private spaces in her fiction as political, making this an opportune time for me to bring Welty into conversation with an author more readily accepted as political and even polemic like Wright. Through analysis of their work, we will find that both authors are ultimately engaging

the political in their own ways: Welty through her representation of “private” moments that have political impact and Wright through more overt, publicly-directed rhetoric. A closer look will reveal that both writers use the methods more traditionally associated with the other to provide insight into race and class politics during the Depression.

This thesis seeks to provide a critical bridge from consideration of Welty’s and Wright’s shared Mississippi lives to a more direct comparative engagement with their work. In chapter one, I will further outline critical assessments that have deepened the personal and philosophical split between Wright and Welty. Positioning my thesis against these assessments, I will argue that both authors carefully fashion individual pedagogies for reading their work that direct readers away from avenues of comparative criticism. After establishing these pedagogies generally by visiting the authors’ autobiographies, I will use their respective photography projects, Welty’s *One Time, One Place* and Wright’s *12 Million Black Voices*, to demonstrate the ways in which the directive instructions—seen here most prominently in their introductions, but also in the organizational strategies, body text, and other confining structural strategies—for reading their work compromise critics’ ability to investigate their shared themes, strategies, and concerns. In this chapter I will also write Welty and Wright more firmly into the Depression-era context, for it is within this context that we can most clearly see the authors’ shared political vision of their home state. I claim that the authors both participate in and attempt to rewrite and revise the genre of black and white photographic documentary that proliferated during the Great Depression and included such works as Caldwell and Bourke-White’s *You Have Seen Their Faces* and Agee and Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

In the second chapter, I will begin the work of reading past the authors’ directives by analyzing the underlying themes and messages that the text and especially the photographs

themselves communicate when released from authorial control. The chapter will first consider the projects individually, both through the lenses the authors establish for us and through alternative, subversive readings that the photographs provide, before bringing them together to outline Wright and Welty's shared vision of the Depression-era South. The chapter will examine the authors' attempts to represent racial politics, poverty, religious practice, and individual subjectivities, paying close attention to what Wright's and Welty's representative choices reveal about their own political vision of the South. I will argue that the photographs at times subvert Welty's and Wright's intended messages. For example, Welty represents subjects who look at or pose for the camera in ways that attempt to shut out the photographer and, by extension, the viewer. And Wright edits out and otherwise neglects to include images that threaten to subvert his narrative of collective African American hardship and despair.

By beginning with texts that share the “one time” and “one place” that the authors inhabited in their early years, I hope to find a more easily identifiable space of common ground before moving in chapter three into an analysis of the “fictional stills,” or moments in which the authors “freeze” the action of their fiction to allow readers to look closely at significant political and representational constructions that work like photographs or slow-motion films. I will argue that both authors engage and critique Depression-era representational strategies in both rural Southern and urban Northern spaces to reveal the extent to which the representational politics of race, class, and region work to create a blind spot for its consumers, who become unable to see past such ideological representations when attempting to interact and communicate with people whom they are only able to understand as representative “types.” Although this is a barrier rooted in FSA representations of Southern subjects and spaces, both Welty and Wright represent its national implications and work to reveal them through "stilled" moments in their fiction.

I. DIRECTED READINGS: BIOGRAPHIES, CRITICAL RESPONSES, AND PEDAGOGICAL DIRECTIVES

Eudora Welty compiled *One Time, One Place* in 1971, selecting from photographs she took in 1936 while working for the Works Progress Administration to create what she calls in the text's introduction a "family album" (9). Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* (1941) is also a compilation of photographs, but they are mostly taken by other photographers working for the Farm Security Administration around the same time Welty was taking her photographs. Wright weaves his own broadly written narrative of "Negro life in the United States" around these photographs (xx). Though taken at the same time and in the same context, the authors' photographic works are representative of different purposes: Wright writes of his attempt to "render a broad picture" (xx), while Welty asserts that the message of her photographs is "personal and particular" (8). But the books also provide space in which to push back against standard assumptions about Wright's polemics and Welty's supposed lack thereof. Both separately and in relation to one another, these texts facilitate a meeting point between the two authors that can then be translated into the fictional texts that critics have thus far been so insistent upon keeping apart. Although both authors establish pedagogies for the reading of their photographic texts that encourage us to continue viewing them differently, I will show that these pedagogies are in tension with the photographs. In fact, what will become apparent are the similar ways in which Wright and Welty frame them. Wright may establish himself as polemic

and Welty may sound sentimental and even nostalgic, but ultimately both are at once political and romantic in their portrayal of poor Southerners of the Depression era.

Throughout the rest of the thesis, I have borrowed James Goodwin's term "photo-text" to describe Wright's and Welty's photographic projects. The term comes from Goodwin's article "The Depression Era in Black and White," which discusses *12 Million Black Voices* alongside other Depression-era texts. I selected this rather broad term with the intention of bridging the gap between the ideological work of both authors. Welty's book is generally termed a "collection," whereas Wright's is called a "documentary," and, as with the descriptors "personal" and "polemic," these terms encourage us to separate the authors' work. The terms also elide the textual decisions both authors are making that affect the ways in which audiences are encouraged to read their photographs. By highlighting the combination of photography alongside such other textual elements as captioning, organization, and, particularly in Wright's case, accompanying narrative, I wish to highlight the extent to which the authors are in control of their images through construction of specific texts that direct their readers' gazes according to specific pedagogies. By eliding the generic distinctions and naming them "photo-texts," I also wish to allow these photographic projects to enter into conversation with one another and place them within the broader context of Depression-era photography from which the term arises.

Goodwin classifies Caldwell and Bourke-White's *You Have Seen Their Faces*, Evans's *American Photographs*, and Lange and Taylor's *An American Exodus* as photo-texts in his article. Though this is not a group of titles with which Welty's work is generally grouped, it is my intention that removing more specific genre categorizations and grouping *One Time, One Place* alongside such books under the shared moniker of "photo-texts" will allow for a serious consideration of the ways in which Welty's "family album" adheres to the conventions of

Depression-era documentary works published during the years when Welty was taking her photographs with the intention of having them published. Though her photo-text's ultimate publication date of 1971 generally allows it to skirt such analysis of her photographic productions as products of the politics of representation at work in, for instance, FSA photography, it is important to note, as Pearl McHaney does in her chapter "The Observing Eye," that Welty actually applied to the Farm Security Administration, before she took the job with the WPA, "for an appointment as a photographer to document the [WPA] projects in particular and the American scene in general alongside professional photographers Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Marion Post Wolcott, and Ben Shahn" (14-15). Welty also made her first attempt to publish a book of her photos in the late 1930s, (Marrs *Biography* 43), and she had two exhibits of her photography in New York in 1936 and 1937 (Henninger 42), placing her right in the midst of the documentary boom of the 30s and 40s.

Just as both Welty and Wright were "exploiters of the circumstances of authorship" in the 1930s and 40s (Brodhead 106), they also took advantage of the opportunities of the New Deal. I have already discussed their work for the WPA, but their works' categorization as "photo-texts" alongside other FSA and Depression-era photographers like Evans and Lange also writes them into that tradition of photography and documentation. Wright fits more obviously into this tradition, though he was not a photographer himself. He collaborated with Edwin Rosskam, who selected the photographs for Wright's text mostly from the FSA archives. Rosskam also served as photographer or editor of photos for four other documentary works between 1939 and 1942 (Stott 233-234).

Whereas Wright is securely situated within the FSA framework, Welty's introduction to *One Time, One Place* indicates her desire not to be grouped with such documentary efforts. In it

she attempts to distance her photo-text from her work with the WPA and asserts that the “Depression, in fact, was not a noticeable phenomenon in the poorest state in the Union” (7). Katherine Henninger notes that Welty was “careful to distinguish her photographs from Walker Evans’s” when interviewed in 1989, “implying (tactfully) that Evans’s are too overtly editorial and even exploitative of their subjects” (42), a criticism that she was not alone in expressing and that likely also accounts for her unwillingness to be associated with his and other FSA photographers’ work. But, as Henninger continues on to note, “Welty does appear to protest too much” (43); although she may have attempted to avoid the type of exploitation she found so troubling in Evans’s photographs, she was nonetheless participating in an effort at photographing life during the Depression at a time when such documentation was a widespread practice. It is worth noting, too, that her photo-text’s 1971 publication places it within a period during which FSA photographs were being “‘rediscovered’ in the 1960s and 1970s” (Fleischhauer and Brannan 7).

By attempting to write Welty into this context in which Wright’s work is already solidly located, I do not mean to imply that the authors always strictly adhere to the conventions of FSA and Depression-era photography. Both were no doubt aware of the complications inherent in Depression-era documentation, such as the exploitative potential of moves like Erskine Caldwell’s placing of words into the mouths of the subjects of Margaret Bourke-White’s photographs through his captions in *You Have Seen Their Faces*. Though Wright, too, attributes language to his subjects in *12 Million Black Voices* by using the pronoun “we” throughout his narrative, he is critical of the idea that a reader can ever fully understand them. In his first sentence, he writes that though the reader may “think you know us..., we are not what we seem” (10). Bourke-White is also criticized for manipulating the impression created by her

photographs in *You Have Seen Their Faces*. She writes in her notes at the end of the text, “It might be an hour before [the subjects’] faces or gestures gave us what we were trying to express, but the instant it occurred the scene was imprisoned on a sheet of film before they knew what had happened” (51). As William Stott argues, Bourke-White’s selection of expressions for her subjects takes away any sign of dignity, leaving her readers to see only “[f]aces of defeat...; people at their most abject” (220). It is this type of representation that Welty is attempting to avoid when she speaks of the exploitation inherent in such documentation efforts, but her photographs should be understood within their Depression-era context, not as detached from the period and its traditions altogether.

By including Welty in this documentary context, I will demonstrate how she is working against common strategies of the time (such as Caldwell’s captioning and Bourke-White’s selective capturing) through her presentation, almost entirely without comment, of her subjects living their lives, with little to no staging on her part. This thesis will also provide a comparison between her and Wright as contemporary revisers of such traditional representations, to show how both comment, whether implicitly or explicitly, on the politics of the New Deal and its projects such as the FSA in their works. And, finally, through a direct comparison of Welty and Wright, my thesis will skirt her directive to read her work as apolitical by placing her amidst a specific, highly politicized historical moment and investigating the ways in which she critiques other, more clearly polemic works like *You Have Seen Their Faces* through her desire to create a different type of representation of her 1930s subjects.

This thesis seeks to provide a lens through which Wright and Welty can be read together, as both resisting and repurposing the tropes of capturing, viewing, and captioning made famous by Depression-era photography. Often they can be seen resisting or conflicting with one another’s

methods and narratives, as well, but these differences also create an opportunity for them to interact, opening up a dialogic space. In order to establish that lens for a comparative reading, it will be useful to consider how differing methods of representation extend to other areas of their work, most notably their autobiographies. Wright's *Black Boy* (1944) and Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings* (1984) were, like the photo-texts, written from very different times and perspectives. But, because critics have most often addressed the authors together through the lens of autobiography and because autobiography is itself a type of "documentary," a brief consideration of their relationship provides a helpful entrance into more thorough criticism of *One Time, One Place* and *12 Million Black Voices*.

Jennifer Jensen Wallach writes, "Autobiography is a peculiar genre, which purports to be both literature and history but is not entirely one or the other" (446). Already this attempt at defining the genre is complicated, caught between considerations of truth and fiction, which is reflective of the same complication inherent in defining documentary. As Bill Nichols writes, documentary, like autobiography, is a "fuzzy concept" (21); it is "not a reproduction of reality, but a *representation* of a world we already occupy" (20). Even though there are definite differences between documentary and the strictly fictional representations to be found in other texts or films, those "differences...guarantee no separation between fiction and documentary" (xi), or between fiction and autobiography, for that matter. Nevertheless, both documentary and autobiography are traditionally seen as presenting information that is somehow more "truthful" than fiction. Taking these similarities into account allows for Welty's and Wright's autobiographies to become themselves a type of "documentation" that follows many of the same patterns that we will see in their photo-texts. There is already a comparative critical conversation surrounding the authors' autobiographies, so by drawing this connection between autobiography

and photo-text, I hope to extend that already-present critical conversation into a new realm of authorial comparison.

Wallach claims Wright's autobiography and others like it work to defamiliarize historical knowledge and experience through personal accounts and literary language. She champions Wright's "ability to universalize his experience" by creating a narrative that is "simultaneously particular and universal" (457). Indeed, Wright's "black boy" is not only a representation of himself, but also the typical "black boy" of his time, who takes part in the Great Migration from the tenant farms of the South to industrialized Chicago and is left wondering at the end, "Well, what had I got out of living in the city? What had I got out of living in the South? What had I got out of living in America?" He concludes that "all I possessed were words and dim knowledge that my country had shown me no examples of how to live a human life" (383).

Although the "I" here is Wright, this first person pronoun is also clearly meant to capture a broader understanding of black male experience. It is not a far jump from *Black Boy's* "I" to the "we" who narrate *12 Million Black Voices* and similarly trace a narrative of shared black experience.

In his article "Autobiographical Traditions Black and White," James Olney continues the critical thread of reading *Black Boy* as historical and allegorical, while juxtaposing it with *One Writer's Beginnings*, which he claims "does not take its place in any discernible, definable tradition of southern autobiography" (134). Although both autobiographies are "as fine as any book we have from Wright or Welty" and although "either book could bear some such subtitle as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man/Woman*," Olney argues that the books are ultimately completely different, a "contrast that serves to make the points...that autobiography by black southern writers is altogether different from autobiography by white southern writers, and one of

the crucial differences—perhaps *the* crucial difference—is the relationship to the individual talent of the autobiographer to a tradition of writing in this mode” (136). Thus, *Black Boy* is written into a canon of African American autobiography stretching from Douglass’s *Narrative* to Gaines’s fictional *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (136), while Welty’s autobiography is understood simply as the story of “*one* writer’s beginnings, *this* writer’s beginnings” (138).

Of course, this is not an uncommon reading of either text, and Welty certainly encourages her autobiography’s dehistoricization by making almost no mention of the larger Jackson community and the politically charged atmosphere in Mississippi during her childhood. Instead she acknowledges that she “came of a sheltered life,” although, she continues, “A sheltered life can be a daring life as well” (948). But in fixing the authors into these traditions of black self-representation as communal and white self-representation as individualist and creating such broad generalizations about “black” and “white” autobiographical customs, Olney and other critics overlook the potential to read around and outside of the pedagogies of reading that each author constructs. As Brodhead notes, “There is reason to think that Wright and Welty might have had a greater mixture of experience than their books record, concerned as they are to create a coherent expression” (118). To read the autobiographies solely along the critical models Wright and Welty provide for us is to ignore the inherent fictionalizations and complications of autobiography to which Wallach alerts us and, beyond that, to lose the potentially contrary or subversive implications of work that is traditionally understood in opposite terms.

Similarly, to use the lives and viewpoints constructed so carefully by the authors in their autobiographies as blueprints for reading the rest of their works—almost all of which were written after the time period covered by the autobiographies—is to ignore the “political unconscious” that Fredric Jameson tells us is always present beneath the surface of texts.

Wright's and Welty's autobiographies provide us with a concrete starting place for a dialogic project; we cannot ignore that the authors grew up in the same physical place and, with it, the same racially charged environment that each would later represent and critique. The autobiographies also show us the extent to which each author attempts to contain and control his or her work and alert us to be looking for such attempts at containment and redirection in the rest of their works. As Jameson writes, "It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative" of the "history of all hitherto existing society" of which each of the authors' texts is an iteration and "in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity" (20). And that is the goal of this thesis: to "restore to the surface" the histories and messages that bring Wright and Welty into dialogue but that each spends a great deal of time attempting to suppress.

With this in mind, we can begin to find meaning that runs contrary to the master narrative each author attempts to create in autobiography and elsewhere in his or her writing. Wright's story "remind[s] us that the Great Migration was hardly a linear development for those who lived it and that every individual experience of this move had its own rich circumstantial history" (Brodhead 112). And though Welty may be insistent that hers is just the story of "one," the almost total lack of recognition of the black people with whom she lived in close proximity reveals a great deal about "seeing" beyond what she includes in the section of the same name.

Although it appears in her autobiography that segregation keeps her from seeing an entire group of people, her earlier photographic work corrects for this apparent institutionalized blindness by venturing outside of segregated spaces and reconstructing a "family album" of Mississippi in which whites and blacks receive equal representation. Wright, in contrast, is constantly aware of the presence of white people because Jim Crow laws regulate his movement in relation to them.

He engages this issue visually and textually in *12 Million Black Voices*, as well, in, for instance, certain photos that highlight the constriction of African American movement when in the presence of whites. In the autobiographies, we see “[t]wo lines infinitely diverging but tracing paths learned in the place where they had intersected: one that defined writing as an extension of, one that made writing an aggression against, a once-common home” (Brodhead 126). These trends continue to a certain extent, with the authors’ insistence that we read their narratives along divergent lines in not only their autobiographies, but also their photo-texts and fictional works. These directives keep critics from challenging pedagogies of reading established by the authors’ own assertions of the apolitical or the polemical and continue to allow them to be “mutually invisible.”

This critical blind spot is further facilitated by the content and organization of authors’ photo-texts. Wright presents *12 Million Black Voices* as attempting to “seize upon that which is qualitative and abiding in Negro experience, to place within full and constant view the collective humanity whose triumphs and defeats are shared by the majority, whose gains in security mark an advance in the level of consciousness attained by the broad masses in their costly and tortuous upstream journey” (xx-xxi). Here his preface introduces the “philosophy of secular history and his conception of the Black nation’s assumption of self-conscious nationality” that he narrates throughout the text (Reilly 117). As in his autobiography and fiction, Wright’s narrative in his photo-text is broad in its scope, professing to tell the story of an entire nation of people and spanning from the Middle Passage to the present of the 1940s. Although this organization would be clear without the introduction, Wright’s preface encourages us to read the photographs only through that authorially-approved lens. We are not trusted to make our own judgments of the images.

Similarly, Welty's preface and organization attempt to limit the ways in which her readers view her photographs. In contrast to Wright's broad, polemic message, however, Welty encourages us to view her subjects through a personal, individualizing lens, thereby directing our readings away from a consideration of the broader historical context of her subjects' lives. She organizes her photo-text by days of the week and, both in her title and preface, indicates that we are to read these photos as the product of "one time" and "one place." "[W]hat I respond to now," she writes, when looking at the opening photograph of the photo-text of an African American woman standing in front of a blurred, indistinct background (and, implicitly, what we as readers *should* respond to), "is not the Depression, not the Black, not the South, not even the perennially sorry state of the whole world, but the story of life in her face" (11). As in *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty looks away from the political meaning both in the framing of the photograph, which takes focus away from the background that might give us insight into her subject's living or working conditions, and in her description of it. That political message could be derived here from assessing, for instance, the impact of the Depression or of the South's racial politics on her subjects' lives. Though Welty does not provide us with such a reading herself, the potential to read the photograph politically is nonetheless there, just as we can see individual faces and seek to better understand their personal experiences through Wright's collective narrative. Just as the autobiographies can be read against the authors' directions, so, too, can the photo-texts be read against the grain of such directives by looking past the organization and other "textual" elements and examining what the photographs themselves can show us about the authors' personal and political vision that is not initially apparent.

Certainly such instructive introductions are not uncommon in the genre, but Wright's and Welty's prefaces mark their texts as divergent from the traditional strain of photo-texts

prominent during the time, which generally contained “urgently humanitarian rhetoric” of text and images and focused on the plight of southern tenant farmers (Stange, *Symbols* 106). Welty’s preface, in particular, agitates against inclusion in the body of Depression-era documentary, while Wright’s redirects that body of work to new purposes in his discussion of the specific plight of black FSA subjects, who were harmed not only by the dwindling of agriculture but also by the psychological violence of living in the racist environment of the United States.

Though, as established earlier, she was working for the Works Progress Administration while she took the pictures included in the text, Welty writes in her preface, “In snapping these pictures, I was acting completely on my own...; they have nothing to do with the WPA. But the WPA...gave me the blessing of showing me the real State of Mississippi, not the abstract state of the Depression. The Depression, in fact, was not a noticeable phenomenon in the poorest state in the Union.” Here Welty is making a clear attempt to distinguish her images from those produced and used by the FSA, which to a certain extent did seek to show “the abstract state of the Depression” (7) and “to publicize not only the long-standing rural distress that had necessitated...federal intervention, but also the ameliorative effects and the unique long-range goals of agency programs” (Stange, “The Record Itself” 2).

Welty’s dislike of that type of generalizing abstraction gave rise to a host of reviews and criticism that sought to romanticize and individualize her endeavor. Frances Neel Cheney wrote in her early review in the *Nashville Banner* in 1971, for instance, that the photographs “will evoke a nostalgia for a period, less than forty years ago, but light years away from the present,” for “anyone who lived through the Depression.” Because Welty was not trying “to indict anybody, or to prove anything,” Cheney continues, “those too young to remember will gain an added understanding of the period,” ostensibly coming to appreciate it in ways that the

“indictments” of the “social-worker photographer” might not allow (200). Cheney’s review accepts the directive of Welty’s introduction and posits, somewhat puzzlingly, that one of the most destitute times in American history is one to which it is desirable to go back.

That it is possible for Cheney to react to Welty’s photo-text in such a way is indicative of the success of Welty’s goal of presenting her subjects as individuals living in “one time” and “one place” rather than as representatives of broader national issues. As Cheney acknowledges, this is an impressive achievement that separates her work from other Depression-era photo-texts. But the fact that her photographs and accompanying text allow for such sentimentalizing of a time that must have been particularly difficult for her subjects points to the potential for such a project to go awry and to allow readers to overlook some of the more difficult realities of the Depression era. Welty’s introduction, the glowing lighting of many of the photographs, and the organization of the photo-text according to days of the week all evoke a positive, apolitical reading of her subjects’ lives. Because we do not see direct conflict between races here, it is easy for critics to overlook the extent to which highly political concerns characterized even the daily activities and experiences upon which Welty directs us to focus.

Such an impulse to sentimentalize the era is particularly troubling when it extends to the reviewers’ perceptions of the racial relations of the time. Madison Jones laments the fact that Welty’s photo-text only threatens to “leave with the viewer any significant residue of sadness” when the viewer realizes that the photographs of African Americans “surely do testify to the presence of an intimacy and trust now almost entirely vanished. More than the span of years,” Jones concludes, “it is this presence that dates these memorable pictures” (202). Perhaps the easy interaction that Welty describes in her introduction is a thing of the past, but it seems unlikely that the interaction was entirely characterized by “intimacy and trust,” as both Welty

and Jones wish us to view it. If Welty's introduction to her photo-text, in which she writes that "photographs of black persons by a white person may not testify soon again to such an intimacy" (10), allows her photographs to be read as evidence in support of revisionist racial history, then there is cause to step back and consider new lenses through which to view it, as a photo-text that does differ in scope and purpose from other Depression-era documentation but that shares the genre's awareness of its particular moment and interest in revealing the social and political realities that shape individual lives.

Melvin E. Bradford writes in his 1973 essay, "Miss Eudora's Picture Book," in the *Mississippi Quarterly* that "[n]othing ideological or a priori intruded between the girl with the Kodak and the persons into whose lives she was busy 'imagining herself' (659), but I argue that, though Welty's solution to the social contradictions of her moment appears to be to attempt to skirt them by focusing on the individual, that in itself is an ideological choice. Also reiterated in Bradford's article is the nostalgia for the Mississippi of the 1930s, when, Bradford claims, "all of Mississippi was still, in one sense, a family" (660). This claim, like Jones's earlier, is again facilitated by Welty's introduction, in which she urges the reader to understand her photo-text as a "family album" (9). As Katherine Henninger notes in *Ordering the Façade*, however, the family album is not as ideologically "pure" of a form as Welty and Bradford present it. Though apparently "innocuous," "eminently quotidian," and "intensely personal," aspects that surely appealed to Welty when choosing the structure of her photo-text and attempting to avoid the problematically universalizing tropes of much Depression-era documentation, the family album is nonetheless "thoroughly public, reinforcing social conventions of the image, as well as cultural visions of community and 'place,' that underpin national and cultural identity." Henninger cautions that the "naturalizing effects of photography and of family can serve both to cement and

to mask ideology, to guarantee that familial and national hierarchies of gender, class, religion, region—everything—‘really is so’” (86). I want to argue that Welty is not nostalgic for the Mississippi and the racial relations that existed within it before the dawning of the Civil Rights Movement. But, before making that argument, it is important to acknowledge the extent to which her own directives for reading the photo-text have allowed critics to respond in such sentimentalizing and dehistoricizing fashions. By instructing the reader to view the photo-text as apolitical, unaffected by issues of white privilege, and detached from the context of Depression-era documentation, Welty makes possible these problematic readings, which contradict the highly political motives and messages we will find when we read beyond her directives.

By making this argument for a more politicized reading of Welty’s photo-texts, I align myself with recent critics, who have begun to similarly resist Welty’s own framing of her photo-text. Henninger, for instance, writes that Welty’s “‘insider’ view” (42) differentiated her work from that of FSA photographers because her Southernness made her “inseparable” from “the world [she] photographed” (Ferris qtd. in Henninger 42) and allowed her to present her subjects in a way that “refus[ed] any easy or final designation as victims.” Welty nonetheless held a status as a white Southern woman of the middle-class that gave her a “certain level of access, especially to poor southerners, whose poverty rendered their lives visually accessible to all sorts of outsiders.” By virtue of their race, class, and education, both Welty and the FSA photographers from whose tactics she sought to disassociate herself were allowed such privileged access. Henninger goes on to note that Welty seems to have “felt considerably less comfortable, or perhaps less interested in, accessing poor white southerners’ lives on film,” judging by the larger amount of photographs of African Americans in her photography (43). Henninger’s reading, like my own, resists the idea, so fully accepted by earlier reviewers and

critics, that Welty's project is somehow unburdened by issues of racial representation and access, even as it still takes pains to differentiate her photo-text in most other ways from other Depression-era documents.

Suzanne Marrs and Harriet Pollack, too, in "Seeing Welty's Political Vision in Her Photographs," argue that, "though she did not set out to make polemical statements with her camera, Welty has from the start been politically engaged" through her photography. Though Marrs and Pollack do not examine *One Time, One Place* specifically, their argument that her photographs show us what Welty was "choosing to look at in the 1930s and, concurrently, what she was able to see," thus "reveal[ing] a political vision," is certainly pertinent to our discussion. Though professing to be apolitical, the photo-text includes photographs that are loaded with political significance. Marrs and Pollack provide an instructive model for how to find political meaning in a collection that resists such categorization. But the authors stop short of writing Welty into the specific political moment of Depression-era photographic representation, focusing instead on a more general reading of how the "photographs reveal a political vision that penetrates her times and anticipates issues to come" (223).

It is this gap that this thesis seeks to fill. Though Henninger, Marrs, Pollack, and others have begun the work of revising early readings of nostalgia and sentiment with which critics and reviewers responded to *One Time, One Place* and have laid the groundwork for it to be read politically, the political import of Welty's photo-text cannot be fully revealed until it is latched to its specific contextual moment and written into the canon of Depression-era photography. Only then can we understand the extent to which Welty is subverting the traditions of that form through such choices as formatting and photographic framing. Such a reframing of the photo-text will allow for an acknowledgement of what Welty shares with Wright and FSA

photographers like Walker Evans, in opposition to whose work she attempts to frame her photo-text in her insistence on highlighting the individual humanity of her subjects. I will place her work in a politicized context that does not allow for those subjects to be read into a purely nostalgic, idealized narrative of 1930s social, political, and racial relations. Welty and Wright will be revealed to be in dialogue, for both are negotiating the politics of Depression-era representation by at once sentimentalizing their subjects in an attempt to celebrate and claim significance for their lives beyond their work and experiences of hardship while also launching political critiques of white racism and the New Deal by representing moments of racial tension and economic difficulty.

In fact, Welty is already literally written into this context alongside Wright and others whose political visions have long been acknowledged. “Window Shopping,” one of the photographs included in *One Time, One Place* (58), is used as the cover art for Jeff Allred’s *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*, but there is no discussion of Welty in the entire book. Though Allred himself may not have chosen the cover art or have meant for Welty to be associated with his discussion of Depression documentary, which includes essays on *12 Million Black Voices*, *You Have Seen Their Faces*, and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the presence of one of Welty’s photographs on the cover of such a text illustrates how representative of that era her photography is, no matter how reluctant she or her critics are to make that connection visible. The space is there, and her photographic work is already infiltrating the conversation; she needs merely to be written into it.

We can begin this work of writing Welty into the Depression-era context by further addressing her connection to New Deal initiatives and representation through her work for the WPA. Lawrence L. Levine notes, “The photographers were not unique. The writers [like

Welty] employed by the... Works Progress Administration, who left us a monumental collection of interviews with a wide spectrum of Americans did collect and record their subjects' names and asked them questions that frequently elicited many of the details of their subjects' lives," unlike many of the FSA photographers. "But they too were specifically interested in those they interviewed as types..., and those details that did not directly bear upon such categories were usually neither elicited nor preserved" (26). Though the specifics of Welty's work for the WPA are unclear, her description in the preface of "interviewing a judge in some new juvenile court" and "writing the Projects up for the county weeklies to print" seems reflective of the kind of work that Levine describes and of the overall publicity goals of the FSA (7).

Even had Welty not worked in a similar capacity for the WPA, however, there is room for critique of her denial of inclusion in the body of Depression-era photography and assertion that the Depression was "not a noticeable phenomenon." Her disdain for "sentimental," generalizing photography and even of the attempt to make photography political (Marrs 42) was also shared by many of the most famous FSA photographers, including Walker Evans, who "was concerned with the possible encroachment of 'politics' or 'propaganda'" (Stange, *Symbols* 115) and believed that "the value" of the photograph "lies in the record itself" (Evans qtd. in Stange 115). Both Evans and Dorothea Lange were ultimately dismissed from their positions with the FSA because of their desire to retain control over their images (117).

By comparison, we find Welty not so much in conflict with the purposes and values of FSA photographers as in accordance. Critics such as Louise Westling have distinguished Welty from Evans by arguing that his "relationship with his subjects was that of a strongly marked outsider from the North and from a privileged class, who moved into their homes to study them and who changed the circumstances of their lives in the process," while Welty "seemed a natural

part of her subjects' world who did not seek to pose them or otherwise interfere with their ordinary activities" (602). However, both photographers ultimately understand their purposes in very similar ways, hedging away from the "propagandistic" potentials of their photography and instead allowing the individual subject or photograph to speak for itself. And, as testimony by Anthony Grooms about his first viewing of Welty's photographs makes clear, Welty was perhaps not as much a "natural part of her subjects' world" as she would like to think. Grooms writes, "I felt that my privacy, the privacy of my family, had been invaded. How dare this white woman take pictures of us and sell them for art? Again, I wanted to know what Welty knew about the lives of black people" (48). Obviously, Welty's "intimacy" with her subjects is not always appreciated and has the potential to be exploitative.

Here as in her autobiography, Welty seeks to direct our reading and, ultimately, our seeing of her photographs. "This book is offered," she writes, "not as a social document but as a family album—which is something both less and more, but unadorned" (9). "In taking all these pictures, I was attended, I now know, by an angel—a presence of trust," she insists. "In particular, the photographs of black persons by a white person may not testify soon again to such intimacy" (10). But Grooms's observations alert us to the fact that this can be understood as a threatening intimacy with people who may not be comfortable being viewed as part of her construction of "family." Similarly, her admission (of which she appears to be proud) that "the majority of [the photographs] were snapped without the awareness of the subjects or with only their peripheral awareness" (9) again writes her into a broader critical conversation about photography, documentary, and appropriation than the one in which she directs us to involve her. She believes that such impromptu and unsanctioned photography allows her to avoid the sentimentalizing, stultifying posing found in much Depression-era photography, but it also aligns

her methods problematically with those of Margaret Bourke-White, who recounts her shooting of a church service without getting permission in *You Have Seen Their Faces* and asserts that “the only reason we were successful was because the minister had never had such a situation to meet before” (53). Though Bourke-White describes the situation flippantly here, her methods have increasingly made her subject to critique by those who read her actions as invading a private space and taking advantage of the black church members.

Even in her efforts to evade the categorization of documentary, Welty embroils herself in the issues of representation and exploitation at the heart of all documentary projects. As we have seen, critics have not traditionally received *One Time, One Place* as a work of documentary and instead have followed Welty’s direction to consider the collection largely as a testament to Welty’s artistic powers of vision and empathy and evidence of her personal initiation into a greater understanding of her home state. Though Welty constructs a rigid pedagogy of seeing for her readers and viewers through her introduction and organization, instructing us to look at “the story of life” in her subjects’ faces rather than their race or often destitute surroundings (11), the act of placing her photographs within the context during which they were taken allows us to swerve around her direction and to consider how Welty participates in the process of and responds to the complications inherent in documentation.

Even if we are to accept Welty’s profession that she did not intend to endow her work with political meaning, she is implementing what Fredric Jameson calls the “cultural dominant or ideological coding” that was specific to her historical moment (89). Even without an overtly political message, Jameson tells us, a particular form brings with it a “political unconscious.” Indeed, Jameson writes, contrary to what Welty encourages us to think about her texts in claiming that they are *not* invested in a particular political ideology:

[I]deology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions.

(79)

Jameson demonstrates that a completely “pure” text, free from all ideology, cannot exist by illustrating how a genre such as romance constitutes a “form without content that nonetheless ultimately confers signification on the various types of content (geographical, seasonal, social, perceptual, familial, zoological, and so on) which it organizes” (113-114). Welty’s use of black and white photography can be read through a similar lens, as a dominant form or genre of the Great Depression, albeit forty years later, which, though it claims no political content, constitutes an “ideological act” within a political history of representation of race and poverty. Although there is a gap between her own conscious directive and the political unconscious of the text itself, the composition of the photo-text can and should be read within the context of that “broader system” of Great Depression political and racial representation of which her “individual text,” is a specific “utterance” (Jameson 85).

Wright’s approach to documentary is much more in keeping with what we might consider its traditional definition in that he composes his text to send a clear message about a collective body of people and to inspire a response in his audience. He overtly acknowledges his participation in the dominant form of the time and certainly understands his text as speaking within and out of a larger body of photo-texts. In his introduction to *12 Million Black Voices*, Wright writes that the “text...purport[s] to render a broad picture of the processes of Negro life in the United States.” In the process of constructing a unified narrative, the “talented tenth” are

“omitted in an effort to simplify a depiction of a complex movement of a debased feudal folk toward a twentieth-century urbanization” (xx). Here Wright is in some ways following in the path of the FSA in exactly the fashion of which Welty was so critical; in its mass production and distribution of images to national media, the FSA risked decontextualizing particular experiences in favor of the grand political narrative of collective hardship and federal intervention (Stange, *Symbols* 126). Wright’s relationship to the FSA becomes even more apparent when one notes that almost all of the photographs included in the text are taken from the FSA collection and that, as mentioned earlier, the selection and arrangement of photographs in *12 Million Black Voices* was directed by Edwin Rosskam, who was hired by the FSA in 1938 to “design exhibits and to promote and supervise the use of FSA photographs in books” (111).

Where Wright’s book and the more general understanding of FSA documentation differ, however, is in Wright’s decision to use the photographs of black workers taken by FSA photographers to create his own narrative of “the processes of Negro life in the United States.” By repurposing photographs taken by “outsiders” like Evans into a narrative which, like *Black Boy*, captures both his own experience (as indicated by his use of the pronoun “we”) and an overarching narrative of black experience, Wright’s text encourages us to reread these photographs, some of which were no doubt already well-known at the time, according to his own directions for reading them, which are starkly in contrast with Welty’s. Before moving into a discussion of their differences, however, it is important to note that both authors’ projects seek to reshape the Depression-era documentary form, and their divergent directives and constructions are in part a commonly-held effort to ensure that distinction. Wright continues that he wishes to “seize upon that which is qualitative and abiding in Negro experience, to place within full and constant view the collective humanity whose triumphs and defeats are shared by the majority, whose gains in

security mark an advance in the level of consciousness attained by the broad masses in their costly and tortuous upstream journey” (xx-xxi). Rather than consider each subject’s story individually as Welty apparently does, Wright is interested in using subjects’ images as representative of a “collective” experience shared by “masses.”

Though this approach evades some of the issues of Welty’s photo-text, in that Wright himself did not take these photographs and is thus able to skirt the criticism of having exploited his subjects through their initial photographic capturing and in that he confronts the political and social realities of the subjects’ lives head-on rather than largely denying their existence, his project is far from free of complication. Early critics including Charles Curtis Munz, for example, were skeptical of Wright’s categorization of the book as a “folk history.” Munz writes in *The Nation* that “beyond a little doggerel verse from a few Negro songs, and an occasional sharp interpretation of the Negro’s mind work, it is not a folk history at all” (qtd. in Natanson 247). And reviewers and critics across the board found both the text and photos to be verging on the propagandistic. The text, Nicholas Natanson writes, “raged and roared, at a cost in sensitivity,” while “[p]ictorially, the dominant accent was one of muckraking” (247). Natanson argues that Edwin Rosskam was simply “too single-minded in fitting—or bending—FSA pictures to the textual message” (249). Similarly, William Stott writes that Rosskam’s choice and positioning of photographs in the text “stripped them of their integrity by insisting on just what they should mean” in the context of Wright’s words (233). Although Stott and Natanson criticize Rosskam alone for these choices, Wright, too, contributed to this effect. Stott notes that those words were highly “sentimental” (234), written by a man whose “whole effort is to shock, touch, enrage his audience, as he was enraged, and he used any means to this end” (235).

Most objectionable to critics was Wright's use of the first-person plural voice, which Stott argues "conflates the present with the past so that all American Negroes of all time are made to share his opinions" (235). This conflation is apparent from the very beginning of the photo-text, when Wright outlines a shared emotional experience for several groups of African American workers: "Our outward guise still carries the old familiar aspect which three hundred years of oppression in America have given us, but beneath the garb of the black laborer, the black cook, and the black elevator operator lies an uneasily tied knot of pain and hope whose snarled strands converge from many points of time and space" (11). Not all reviewers were bothered by this propagandistic voice; George Streater, for instance, wrote, "Why should we not have a good propaganda, after four centuries of vicious propaganda to make life easy for white folks who have bled and exploited black folk?" (qtd. in Natanson 251). But the dominant trend in criticism of Wright's photo-text is, at the least, uneasiness about the universalizing, homogenizing effects of the use of "we" and, often, outright condemnation of it as "a fundamental act of cultural suppression" (Natanson 247). As Natanson and Scott indicate, Wright's collective voice directs us not to see the subjects of his photographs as individuals but as representative of a collective. This effect is further enhanced, as I will discuss later, by Wright's and Roskam's selection of many photographs in which the subjects' faces cannot clearly be seen.

Also troubling is the fact that Wright's photo-text sought to speak for a body of individuals of which he, by this point in his career, could not fully count himself a part, omitting altogether discussion of the "higher echelons of black society" (245). "Ironically," Natanson writes scathingly, "the white tendency that had proven so stultifying over the years, that of treating the black millions as a monolithic mass, was repeated in 1941 by a black author who

knew much better” through the use of this first-person plural voice (247). As problematic as that voice may be, however, it was not one that was often allowed to speak, even as the subjects of the photographs it surrounds in Wright’s text were depicted, cropped, and captioned in media throughout the nation. And it is certainly not a voice that is heard in Welty’s text, though she urges us to search for her subjects’ stories in their faces and assures us that she understood and was welcomed by them. Though Natanson appreciates Wright’s photo-text as a “publishing milestone for the black file” of FSA photography, which was otherwise often neglected or edited problematically in such publications, he and many other critics are ultimately unable to overlook its use of “we” (244).

This inability to see past the rhetorical positioning is a recurrent theme in criticism of *12 Million Black Voices*, so much so that critics have begun to comment on the extent to which it has hindered further and more varied critical consideration of the photo-text. As Joel Woller writes in his article “First-person Plural: The Voice of the Masses in Farm Security Administration Documentary,” “*12 Million Black Voices* has yet to really be heard, as a series of overwhelmingly negative critical responses to Wright’s narrative technique have helped to keep [it] in obscurity” (341). In his analysis of the reasoning behind this critical block, Woller argues that, though Wright’s use of the first-person plural is certainly problematic, it can in some ways be read as a revision of a similarly problematic but much more culturally dominant, authoritative form of expression that has enjoyed a much more lasting presence in the canon of Depression-era documentation than Wright’s photo-text. Revisiting *12 Million Black Voices* to consider how Wright is writing at once against and through such a culturally dominant voice, as Woller does in his article and as I do in this thesis, frees his work from the critical quagmire in which it has until very recently been caught and opens space for critics to investigate other ways in which Wright

is both using and reworking the strategies and tropes of his moment to speak back against the “fixed, mythic, and identity-confirming ways of seeing” that dominated during the Depression era (Woller 341).

Other critics have similarly sought to pull Wright into fresh critical contexts by analyzing his revisions and navigations of various cultural narratives. Dan Shiffman, for instance, refocuses the discussion from Wright’s “narrative style” or the work’s “emotional power and sentimentality” to an analysis of how it “revises the generic rags-to-riches immigrant success story touted as quintessentially American” (444). Barbara Foley, too, reads past the dominant critical trend of condemning Wright’s voice as offensive and appropriative by arguing in her book *Radical Representations* that Wright’s apparently one-dimensional, dominating voice is, in fact, an iteration of the “dialectical narrative strategies” that he developed in his Depression-era writing “that enabled him to explore the full implications of the contradictory admixture of integrationist and nationalist tendencies in the Communist approach to the ‘Negro question’” (206). Such revisionist critical works reveal the ways in which Wright is working to craft a new, subversive voice to counter a culturally dominant one and undermine the commonly held understanding of Wright’s narrative voice as monolithic and totalizing. Finally, in the same book on whose cover Welty’s photograph appears, Jeff Allred challenges criticisms of Wright’s first-person plural voice in a similar vein as Woller, arguing that the voice “both partakes of the era’s characteristic emphasis on collective identity and critiques it.” Because the “we” in the photo-text “never simply issues from ‘the people’” but from “a collective narrative voice that is raced and classed,” it is able to “speak...to readers from an alien position that is nonetheless domestic and hence challenges the dominant Depression-era nationalist/populist structure of feeling” (134).

Wright and Welty both recognize the ideology inherent in aesthetic form and attempt to revise the form in such a way as to disrupt and expose that ideology. As we have seen, much has been done in recent critical work to expose how Wright's first-person collective voice performs such a rupture, but it is the project of this thesis to expose how he does so through other narrative forms. I will examine the placement of photographs in relation to each another and the surrounding text and Wright and Roskam's revision or manipulation of the photographs themselves from the ways they have been used in other photo-texts. Though Wright and Welty may ultimately both have made problematically appropriative moves in their photo-texts—Wright through his construction of a collective voice and Welty through her assumption that her presence was appreciated and her photographs able to capture the individual subjectivities of strangers—they also provide us with unique directions for viewing and reading the photographs included in their books and elsewhere. As we will see, however, the photographs do not always support the authors' pedagogical rhetoric when considered outside of the frame that Wright and Welty have established for them. If we consider the photographs separately, we can find the political in Welty and the sentimental in Wright. We can also recognize the reproduction of some of the more typical FSA strategies that the authors are trying to resist, such as constrictive captioning and language and photographic strategies that attempt to make types of individuals, in both their works.

By putting *One Time, One Place* and *12 Million Black Voices* side by side, we are beginning to depart from their largely separate critical traditions, which makes this a prime moment for revisiting the photo-texts. By placing Welty's work alongside the canon of Depression-era photo-texts like Wright's, I wish to examine the ways in which her insistence on a "personal" perspective and quotidian situations both disrupts and participates in practices of

representation, appropriation, and captioning common in the specific social moment in which the photos were taken. Pairing her work with Wright's, which utilizes the exact opposite narrative strategy, has the potential to shed new light onto the complications inherent in Welty's own narrative strategy. Both authors are, in a sense, writing *for* their subjects under the pretense of writing *as* them, and placing their voices side by side can help to reveal the issues of representation that each finds objectionable about the other's strategy. From Wright's perspective, Welty's photo-text may contain too much romantic individualism, and from Welty's, Wright's may contain too much of the polemic. But the authors share the strategy of positioning their projects in opposition to documentary practices they found exploitative and of fully representing their subjects' humanity within a harsh economic and racial climate.

Both Wright and Welty seek to navigate the complications of representation by both exposing their subjects for the purpose of their own narratives and attempting to shield them from potentially exploitative scrutiny. My reading will highlight a convergence of narrative techniques that reveal Welty's unintentional typifying of her subjects and Wright's perhaps unintended sentimentalization of his own. Finally, it will provide a lens into reading the authors' fiction in new ways and establish a model for their shared vision that can be traced into "visual" moments in their fiction and further break the critical barrier that has existed for so long between Wright and Welty, thereby perhaps also providing a model for constructing new contexts for comparison between and among fictional works by other authors that critics have failed to consider together because of their positioning on the opposite poles of "regional" or "sentimental" fiction and "national" or "polemic" work.

After positioning the authors solidly within the context of the Depression-era photo-text, we can also acknowledge how both are subverting and revising the standards of this form. By

“undermin[ing]” the “illusion or appearance of isolation or autonomy which a printed text projects” (Jameson 85), we can write Welty and Wright, both of whom are attempting to represent even more “marginalized voices” than the majority of their contemporaries, into a dialogical relationship with the unified, “hegemonic voice” that is often allowed to speak for the form as a whole (Jameson 85). Jameson writes that “only an ultimate rewriting of these [non-hegemonic] utterances in terms of their essentially polemic and subversive strategies restores them to their proper place in the dialogical system” (86), and it is one of the goals of this thesis to begin that work for Welty’s and Wright’s photo-texts. In outlining what their photo-texts will and will not do, the authors are already in conversation with one another, implicitly and explicitly commenting on and critiquing each other’s techniques, and we will find more of this dialogue occurring in chapter two, when I will turn to the photo-texts themselves to read the photographs more closely both within and against the authors’ directives. We will also continue to uncover the extent to which Wright and Welty are also involved in a much broader conversation within the genre or “form” as they revise and reconfigure Depression-era documentation practices. Finally, in chapter three, I will demonstrate that the authors’ shared vision extends into their fiction, in which they use similarly “stilled” or “photographic” moments to reveal how visual representation produces ideologies of race and class that politically impact their individual characters’ lives.

II. "WE ARE NOT WHAT WE SEEM": READING THE PHOTO-TEXTS THROUGH, AROUND, AND AGAINST ESTABLISHED PEDAGOGIES

Now that we have established the ways in which the authors and their critics have attempted to construct our readings and responses to their photo-texts, I wish to turn to a discussion of what the body of the photo-texts, and the photographs in particular, can tell us about the authors' goals. Just as Wright's and Welty's introductions and broader body of work attempt to direct readers and viewers of their photo-texts to consider their work and their position in relation to it in specific, sometimes exclusionary ways, so, too, do the photographs themselves and the ways they are composed, arranged, captioned, and otherwise organized aid in and even disrupt this directive process. Moving forward, then, we might ask: How do the authors' pedagogical strategies shape our readings of the photographs? And how do isolated readings of the photographs themselves undermine these strategies and demonstrate the authors' less conscious or overt agendas?

As established earlier, Wright is interested in creating a broad and extended narrative of African American experience, and his selection of photographs and placement of them within that narrative in a largely subordinate relationship to the text is illustrative of that goal. Welty, contrastingly, attempts to skirt the impulse to create a dominant narrative, which is reflected in her collection's relative lack of text; the only words used to direct our reading of the photographs are straightforward descriptions of the people and places featured in them, and the only overt

indicators of an organizational process are the days of the week that title the sections into which the photographs are divided. In this seemingly loose arrangement, however, Welty is still providing directions for her readers, directing their thoughts away from how her subjects' lives might fit into the type of politically and historically informed narrative that Wright attempts to create by presenting them as engaged in everyday, quotidian acts in the private sphere. As we shall see, however, the photographs do not always support the structures the authors have established for them; from time to time, there is slippage that calls our attention to the structure itself and thus allows us to look beyond the authors' established pedagogies of reading and seeing.

Wright begins his first chapter, "Our Strange Birth," with an image that sets the tone for the rest of the photo-text. The photograph, taken by Dorothea Lange and entitled "Sharecropper's hands," depicts the torso of a man in tattered clothing, holding a hoe. As the title indicates, the focus is on the man's hands, which are dirty and calloused. His head is cut out of the picture, effectively eliminating his individuality and positioning him as a representative of the sharecropper type and of the "we" voice that narrates the text (9). The text on the next page perhaps provides some insight into why Wright has chosen to begin with such an apparently dehumanizing image: "Each day when you see us black folk upon the dusty land of the farms or upon the hard pavement of the city streets," he writes, "you usually take us for granted and think you know us, but our history is far stranger than you suspect, and we are not what we seem" (10). Here, Wright establishes a "we-you" discourse that, though attempting to capture the reality of "our" (the African Americans masses') experience, questions—or denies outright—"your" ("Lords of the Land," "Bosses of the Buildings," and perhaps white people altogether) ability to ever fully "know us."

While part of Wright's project is to pull back the "outward guise" to reveal the "uneasily tied knot of pain and hope whose snarled strands converge from many points of time and space" that it covers (11), the photographs he selects, along with the continued "we-you" dynamic of the written narrative, at once create a typified portrait of the collective the photo-text claims to represent and alert the reader to the veiled aspect of that type of representation, making us aware of the subjects' individual subjectivities but also of our inability to fully "know" them. It takes Wright's text to make the viewer look beyond the sharecropper's physical body to his subjectivity, however. The image itself, in fact, makes every effort to focus on the body and the work that it performs, revealing a representational strategy focused on capturing a "known" entity—the sharecropper's physical labor and subsequent hardship—rather than alerting the reader to the subject's "unknown" qualities.

Later, in the second section, "Inheritors of Slavery," we are again presented with an image of a portion of the body—this time the legs—cut off from the rest. The subjects are identified in the title of the photograph, "Cotton pickers' feet," not by their names or any individualized descriptors, but by the type of labor they perform and the body parts that are on display. The narrative focus in this section of the photo-text is indicated by the caption below the photo: "The laws of Queen Cotton rule our lives." "If we black folk had only to work to feed the Lords of the Land, to supply delicacies for their tables...our degradation upon the plantations would not have been the harshest form of human servitude the world has ever known," Wright writes. "But we had to raise cotton to clothe the world... To plant vegetables for our tables was often forbidden... The world demanded cotton, and the Lords of the Land ordered more acres to be planted—planted right up to our doorsteps!—and the ritual of Queen Cotton became brutal and bloody" (38-39). Here, Wright is arguing that cotton picking has become even more

dehumanizing than basic servitude in that the growth of cotton takes priority over and directly compromises the survival of those who are charged with growing it. It takes up the space that would otherwise be used to grow food for the sharecroppers' sustenance. Russell Lee's photograph is therefore reflective of the priorities of the "Lords of the Land" that are established in the surrounding text: the worth of the subjects is only understood in terms of the economic value they can provide through the physical labor their bodies perform in their capacity as "cotton pickers."

Wright makes this argument in a highly polemic tone, which seeks to override the aesthetic composition and subsequent message of the photograph itself. The composition of the photograph mirrors the focus of the "Lords of the Land"—on the body, rather than the subjects as individuals—but it also draws our attention to the suffering that such a value system creates. Again, we are directed to focus on clothing that is tattered and torn, on the shoes that are falling apart to such an extent that one of the subjects' feet can be seen clearly through the holes, and on the burlap pads tied to the subjects' knees to protect them from the hard, desiccated land when they kneel to pick cotton. Wright's strategy of choosing an image in which the subjects' individualizing features are completely cut out is dehumanizing in that he uses these men's bodies as exhibits for his own narrative goals without attempting to consider their individual situations. Indeed, as we saw earlier, many critics, including Nicholas Natanson, accused Wright and Roskam of doing just that. But the preservation of the subject's anonymity is also a more subversive gesture that disallows white viewers from conceiving the photograph as a complete representation of African Americans and thus from thinking that they can "know" them simply by "seeing their faces."

Though the aforementioned photographs are the only two in the collection out of which subjects' faces are entirely cropped, the subjects in the overwhelming majority of the photographs are similarly inscrutable, whether because of shadowing, turned faces and backs, or distance from the camera. There are a few instances of subjects looking directly into the camera, in a style reminiscent of that which Walker Evans made so recognizable in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Jack Delano's "Sharecropper and wife," the image at the beginning of the "Inheritors of Slavery" section, for example, shows a man and a woman sitting face-forward and staring directly into the camera's lens (29). But the majority of the photographs that initially seem to be capturing subjects directly are revealed on second glance to be resisting that direct gaze. Jack Delano's "Sharecropper," the second image in the photo-text, zooms in on the subject's face, which is framed on all sides only by his hair and beard. But the man's eyes are shadowed and appear to be looking slightly up and away from the photographer. Again, the process of recognizing this aspect of the image is directly reflective of the text, quoted earlier, that is placed directly below it: you, the reader and the viewer of the photograph, "think you know us, but...we are not what we seem" (10). This inscrutability draws our attention to the complexity of Wright's project. As Foley noted, Wright is writing to a diverse audience, and part of that audience is white. He therefore does not want to fully expose his subjects to his readers in a way that could make them susceptible to misunderstanding or exploitative readings.

This strategy of subverting a direct gaze is repeated to varying degrees throughout the photo-text: "The black maid," a subject categorized as an easily identifiable type by the caption, has her back turned to us as she cleans a set of stairs (18); "The black industrial worker" on the opposite page has his eyes and head turned slightly to the side and away from the photographer attempting to capture him (19); and, most disturbingly, in the photo of a lynching, a dead man,

still hanging from a rope as his white murderers *do* look directly into the camera, is depicted with his eyes closed and his head slumped to the side (45). The effect of these directions of the viewers' gaze away from the faces and eyes of the subjects and towards their bodies is not only to confirm Wright's overt project of presenting these men and women as synecdochally representative of the "masses," but also to challenge the idea—presented in *You Have Seen Their Faces*, in which Caldwell and Bourke-White's unspoken thesis is that allowing the rest of the country to "see the faces" of poor southern tenant farmers would allow them to somehow understand them, and perhaps held more broadly by Depression-era whites who purported to "know" black people based on stereotyped images and assumptions—that the people in these photographs are in any way knowable or that their inner subjectivities are in any way accessible to us through the simple but powerfully loaded act of looking.

This is, of course, a complicated dynamic, for the whole purpose of using photographs in a photo-text like *12 Million Black Voices* is to some extent to show the viewer "how things are," at least according to the narrative to which the photographs are subjugated. And the dynamic is further complicated by the collapse of the viewed/viewer binary at the end of the photo-text, when Wright addresses the reader whom he has previously kept at a distance and says, "Look at us and know us and you will know yourselves, for *we* are *you*, looking back at you from the dark mirror of our lives!" Here, with the goal of bringing the races together so that "black folk" can "share in the upward march of American life," Wright ignores the fact that the people "looking back at you" (the reader) from the photographs, which he positions as a "dark mirror of our lives," are looking askance (146). In the interest of narrative coherence, of bringing together the "we" and "you" that have thus far been positioned as separated by a gulf of differing experiences, Wright implies that unity and empathy *can* result from "seeing their faces."

However, when one attempts to look at the “reflection” that the images contained in the photo-text “mirror” for us, the turned backs, averted eyes, and lifeless hanging head refuse to “look back” and confirm the image Wright is attempting to construct through his narrative. Though the young boy lying on his bed in Russell Lee’s “Sharecropper’s son” (77) may be daydreaming, as Wright’s text seems to imply, of one day “fulfill[ing] the sense of happiness that sleeps in [his] heart” (75), he is not looking to the photographer or the white viewer of the photo-text for that fulfillment, but, the composition of the photo leads us to believe, to something else outside of the photographer’s lens entirely.

Also complicated are some of Wright’s and Roskam’s more obvious efforts to repurpose photographs to better fit the text’s tone and message. The opening photograph of the photo-text showing the sharecropper’s hands even further elides viewers’ “knowing” of its subject because he is not, in fact, actually a part of Wright’s African American collective. As Natanson observes, the photograph’s “subject was, in fact, a tanned *white* sharecropper.” The recognition of this fact for many undermines the “perfect image of past and present” labor that the use of a photograph of a sharecropper to “introduce...an account of slave origins” can otherwise be read to represent (251). And it certainly is deeply problematic for Wright, in his attempt to advocate for increased recognition of African American subjectivity—a project already compromised for some by his consolidation of a large array of black experiences into an essentialized “we”—to apparently demonstrate such little awareness of and regard for the subjects he and Roskam chose to include in his photo-text.

Though it is impossible to know how conscious Wright was of what he was doing by including this photograph or how purposeful of a decision it was, it is tempting to read this photographic manipulation as another attempt at confusing the reader’s sense of the

“knowability” of his subjects. The use of this photograph in some ways diverts the potential exploitation inherent in photographic representation from a black man’s body to a white man’s. And, once viewers recognize the initial mistake in perception, it has the potential to alert them both to the constructedness of race and to the ways in which grand narratives of the exact type that Wright is creating here shape our modes of seeing and understanding the people involved in them. Whether or not Wright meant for this message to result from the photographic selection, the photo-text creates space out of which it can be derived.

Less potentially subversive is Wright and Rosskam’s erasing of a girl’s tongue in Russell Lee’s “Kitchenette apartment” to make the photograph a better fit for the “desperate mood” of the surrounding text and of the photo-text as a whole. As Natanson notes, including a picture of a little girl defiantly sticking out her tongue at the photographer would not as effectively support the image of children living in Chicago’s tenements as “victims” who are “blind...to hope” as the rather somber-looking edited photograph of the girl sitting sedately in the crowded tenement with the rest of her family (Wright 110, Natanson 251). This manipulated photograph also makes manifest the larger issue of the photo-text’s lack of representation of any positive aspects of its subjects’ lives and of any agency or subversive potential. Though it could potentially compromise Wright’s message if he were to represent the “black masses” in times of happiness—and, if he were to only present such images, even problematize the project in the opposite way—it is nonetheless striking that he has edited out the only depiction of playfulness and defiance. Though the fact that few subjects are looking directly at the camera elides their easy categorization, it also keeps them from “speaking back” in the way that the girl’s stuck-out tongue decidedly had the potential to do. Though resisting the gaze, Wright’s subjects are nonetheless largely passive elements used to bolster his controlling narrative.

Wright's writing is polemic, but his text erases visual subversion in order to create a visual narrative more in keeping with the historical narrative of African American suppression that Wright is attempting to trace. Though often unsettling, the visual narrative ultimately does not disrupt white views of African Americans as completely as it could by showing them in more directly confrontational or subversive poses or gestures. Of course, this lack of subversion is likely also a result of the lack of such representation in the body of FSA photography from which Wright and Roskam selected the photographs, but we can see with this example that a representational lack of agency is not entirely to blame. Wright's and Roskam's erasure of subversion in this photograph is just as potentially sentimentalizing of African American life as Welty's photographs have been accused of being, in that it reflects an impulse to remove any kind of representation that does not contribute to a unified narrative of suffering.

There is one photograph that Wright does use in a way that creates dialog with traditional documentary forms, however, and further illustrates the extent to which Wright uses images to depict the impenetrability of black life. As Goodwin writes in his analysis of Wright's and others' Depression-era photo-texts, "Mere depiction or description of appearances does nothing to lift the veil" that W. E. B. Du Bois argues "screens the black world from the white one" (279). "Rather than visual representation," he continues, "it is the poetry and melody of the sorrow songs that provide heritage and foundation for a new consciousness of black American selfhood" (280). This explains why Wright's images are often overwhelmed by the surrounding text and aligns with his declaration at the end of *Black Boy* that he "would hurl words into the darkness and wait for an echo" in his attempt to "build a bridge of words between me and that world outside, that world which was so distant and elusive that it seemed unreal" (384). Though Wright is not interested in delving into his subjects' individual lives, in some ways his refusal to

do so and impulse instead to “hurl words” to effect understanding constitutes a greater appreciation of his subjects’ interiority, in that he does not purport to speak for or fully understand them as individuals based solely on an image. Welty, too, in spite of her claim that she can read her subjects’ stories in their faces, ultimately concludes that through writing, not photography, she can reach a “fuller awareness...about people and their lives” and strive to “part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other’s presence, each other’s wonder, each other’s human plight” (12). As we will see in the next chapter, both authors move their visual representational strategies into their fictional works later in a way reflective of the distrust of photography to fully convey meaning seen here. But Wright also represents this tension within his photo-text, through his use of photographs and text that reveal the continued presence of the veil in images taken and used by white photographers and authors.

At the beginning of section two of the photo-text, Wright uses Dorothea Lange’s photograph of a white plantation owner who is standing with his foot placed on a car in a conquering, powerful position while four black men sit and stand hunched on the steps of a store behind him (30). Underneath the image, Wright begins the text of the second section, writing,

The word “Negro,” the term by which, orally or in print, we black folk in the United States are usually designated, is not really a name at all or a description, but a psychological island whose objective form is the most unanimous fiat in all American history; a fiat buttressed by popular and national tradition, and written down in many state and city statutes; a fiat which artificially and arbitrarily defines, regulates, and limits in scope of meaning the vital contours of our lives, and the lives of our children and our children’s children. This island, within

whose confines we live, is anchored in the feelings of millions of people, and is situated in the midst of the sea of white faces we meet each day. (30)

This passage directs us to read the stances of the plantation owner and the black men behind him in a very particular way. Wright asks us to notice the plantation owner's confidence in his own power, indicated here by his placement in front of the black men and above the car, a signifier of industrialization. The black men seem more reserved and introspective. Only one man smiles, while another holds his hand over his mouth and, like another man sitting behind him, closes off his body by crossing his legs and resting his arms atop them, in direct contrast with the white man's open, domineering posture. Wright attempts to pull back the veil to reveal why the men close themselves off to the photographer in his discussion of the psychological difficulty of living "in the midst of the sea of white faces." They constantly attempt to navigate from their "psychological island" the "fiat which artificially and arbitrarily defines, regulates, and limits" them. Indeed, after reading this passage, we can see that the white man "limits" them in the photograph, turning his back to them and relegating them to a position behind him. Lange, too, as much as her photograph reveals this dynamic, also "defines, regulates, and limits" them by capturing them with her camera and distributing this image through the FSA to be used by other white people for their own purposes, like that, for instance, of Archibald MacLeish.

Though this combination of photograph and text is powerful in its own right, its message is deepened when one views MacLeish's use of the image in his book *The Land of the Free* (1938). In this text, MacLeish crops out the black men altogether, leaving only the white plantation owner, whom he celebrates in poetic verse on the accompanying page: "We told ourselves we were free because we were free. / We were free because we were that kind. / We were Americans. / All you needed for freedom was being American... / We told ourselves we

were free because we said so. / We were free because of the Battle of Bunker Hill / And the constitution adopted at Philadelphia” (qtd. in Levine 25). MacLeish’s cropping and poetic captioning completely revise the message of the image, changing it from a commentary on the white plantation owner’s regulation of the black men to a championing of his freedom. Though both images emphasize the white man’s freedom and power, MacLeish attempts to rid his version of any signifier contradictory to his message, which means that the black men, who were not freed by the Battle of Bunker Hill and who remain constrained and controlled even though they are American (which MacLeish maintains was “all you needed for freedom”), must be removed.

As Levine notes, the fact that MacLeish is able to use the image in this way “underlines the essential ambiguity present in Lange’s picture to begin with: it captured the image of a man who exemplified the exploitative, racist, undemocratic features of southern plantation life even while he doubtless represented many of the qualities that built the type of individualistic freedom that has characterized America throughout so much of its history” (24). MacLeish removes this “essential ambiguity” by erasing the people who remind us of the white man’s exploitation. Wright, who likely knew of MacLeish’s earlier use of the photograph but at the very least must have been aware of that “ambiguity,” also makes clear to his reader how he would like the photograph to be read, not by distorting the original image but by accompanying it with words that, though they do not directly address the photograph, make it impossible to ignore the “racist, undemocratic features of southern plantation life” that the white man encapsulates. Though Wright is himself at times guilty of similarly editing others’ photographs to more neatly fit into his own message, here we see that he is aware of the exploitative potential of such manipulations as he pushes the margins of the photograph back out to reveal the individuals whose labor,

suffering, and containment facilitate the “freedom” and prosperity that the white plantation owner enjoys. Though the men in the picture are confined and self-contained, Wright provides them a dialogical space in his narrative that complicates the type of narrative that MacLeish and others are otherwise able to propagate through their erasure.

The consideration of individual experiences that can in moments like this be pulled out of the otherwise collective political framework that Wright creates in his photo-text is the type of impulse upon which Welty’s *One Time, One Place* is largely focused. She writes in the introduction of the “snapshots that resulted in portraits” as the photographs that “come first” in her estimation and asserts proudly that “here the subjects were altogether knowing and they look back at the camera.” In contrast to the impression given by Wright’s editing out of the potentially playful, defiant aspect of one of his selected photographs, Welty writes that she does not think of her subjects as “symbols of a bad time” and sought to capture “simple high spirits and the joy of being alive” in her images (10). Her value of the portrait in which the subject “look[s] back” is demonstrated by her decision to include such a portrait as the first image in the photo-text, appearing even before the preface. Describing the black woman pictured as having a “heroic face,” Welty writes, “what I respond to now is not the Depression, not the Black, not the South, not even the perennially sorry state of the whole world, but the story of her life in her face” (11). With this beginning, Welty seems to immediately set her project in opposition to Wright’s; he wants us to see the “sorry state” of the Depression, and she asks us to do the complete opposite—to look at the woman as an individual and to understand her, not as representative of some group, struggle, or historical moment, but as, somehow, herself.

The impulse to focus on the individual is reflected in the composition of the photograph, which focuses only on the woman pictured, causing the background and the building and land

within it to be hazy and nearly unreadable. We cannot really tell what the woman's house looks like or if the fields behind her are growing some kind of crop that she tends. In stark contrast to Wright's introductory picture, the work she does is not the focus, nor is her body; her head, arms, and legs are covered with a buttoned sweater and long skirt, and her hands are almost hidden, as well, with one tucked behind her back and another lying close to her side. All of these compositional elements direct us to look at her face and to understand the expression on it as an example of Welty's belief that her photographs capture "the moment in which people reveal themselves" (12).

Welty's directive to view her photographs in terms of these moments of individual self-revelation can be most easily obeyed in the final section of the photo-text, titled "Portraits," in which she includes the images in which the subjects were similarly "knowing" of her presence and therefore able to "look back." The section includes images of a variety of subjects, black and white, young and old, in pairs and by themselves, and many of them do adhere to the standard portrait composition, with the subjects sitting or standing while facing the camera and looking directly into it. Interestingly, though, some of the portraits, mainly those taken of black people, include subjects who, like the people in Wright's photographs, are either shadowed or looking away from the camera altogether. "Yard man," for instance, depicts a black man looking straight into the camera, but his eyes are covered by the shadow from his hat (113). Though he is able to look directly at Welty and her camera, neither she nor the viewers of her photograph are able to look back and fully see him. If the "yard man" is revealing himself here, it seems to be in a different sense from the way the opening photograph works; we cannot see his story because part of his face is hidden from view and therefore from our scrutiny.

In “Mother and child,” a black woman is holding her daughter in her lap, and the photograph captures the two of them in a moment of physical and, the photograph leads us to believe, emotional connection. The woman has a hand on her child’s stomach, and the child is placing a hand on her mother’s chest. Mother and child look at each other, not the camera (114). The photograph is in keeping with Welty’s directive to view her photo-text as a private “family album” rather than a public and political document, and there is obvious personal feeling and perhaps even the sense of joy Welty alluded to in the introduction. This is also a photograph that humanizes its subjects, allowing them their private moments and attempting to capture their feelings without using them to support some larger narrative, an impulse that itself is highly political and subversive for Depression-era representation of African Americans. But Welty’s feeling, expressed in the preface, that in capturing this portrait we are able to understand them and that there is an “intimacy” here between photographer and subjects (10) rings a bit false when presented with two people who seem so wholly separate from camera and photographer. Their gazes are directed towards each other, and, though intimacy is represented here, it does not seem to be an intimacy in which the photographer or viewer can share. Even though they allow Welty to witness and capture this moment, which implies a certain level of trust between photographer and subjects, the ultimate effect of the mother and child’s body language is to close photographer and viewer out of this moment, thereby confounding the sense that a photograph can allow full intimacy and revelation.

Interestingly, though Welty emphasizes the individuality of her subjects in the “Portraits” through continued use of unfocused backgrounds and by filling most of the frame with the people she is photographing, her descriptive titles actually have a homogenizing effect. These titles create the likely unintended sense that the photographs are depicting types rather than

individuals, a technique that echoes Wright's captioning style. There are two images described as "Mother and child," a strange choice for a feature of the photo-text that is ostensibly meant to name and allow viewers to refer to and differentiate between the various photographs. Both were also taken in Hinds County, which is the only other written information that accompanies them. In this instance Welty's strategy of using as few words as possible and captioning her images in their most basic terms has backfired, representing, at least on a textual level, the two very different images of a mother and her child as interchangeable. This problem also arises with her categorization of the "yard man." Though likely only intended as a means of differentiating him from the other men in the photo-text in what seems to be an innocuous strategy of identifying him by his profession, the description almost directly parallels the types of purposeful captions that Wright includes in his photo-text in order to identify his subjects as types. There is a key difference between Wright's identification of the woman cleaning the stairs, for instance, as "*The black maid*" and Welty's "A village pet" or her lack of inclusion of an article altogether, but her captions nonetheless threaten to do the exact opposite of what they are intended to do and label her subjects as representative rather than individual.

This problem points to the contradictions inherent in Welty's project of creating a personal "family album" with photographs of people whom she only really "knows" in terms of their publicly observable roles. She desires to highlight and demonstrate respect for the individual, but, in order to do so, she must sometimes make moves that effectively undermine their individuality in order to protect their privacy. She does identify Ida M'Toy, the only one of her subjects she knew before she began her project, by name and provides us with a bit of her history in the introduction (10). The overall lack of specific naming and background throughout the rest of the collection, however, highlights the fact that Welty either does not know or does

not feel comfortable revealing the names of her other subjects. This lack of familiarity calls into question the intimacy Welty claims to share with her subjects. There is a distance here, at the very least between her viewers and her subjects (and likely between Welty and her subjects, as well), that she attempts to cover with the rhetoric of family and inherent human connection but that is at times revealed through the less than personal ways her chosen form requires her to categorize the people in her photographs.

The tension between representing individuals and maintaining privacy is further compounded in the rest of the photo-text, in large part because, as Welty acknowledges in the introduction, “the majority of them were snapped without the awareness of the subjects or with only their peripheral awareness.” Welty betrays some ambivalence about these photographs, noting that they “ought to be the best” but concluding that she is “not sure that they are” (9). Here again, Welty appears to be wrestling with certain political implications of her project (though she likely would not frame it in that term). She seems to feel that lack of awareness should make for the most “real” representation; at the same time, she feels discomfort with the fact that these subjects are not necessarily aware of her presence and do not “look back” like the subjects in what seem to be her favorite photographs, the portraits, supposedly do.

The subjects’ lack of awareness is represented quite often through their turned backs and their distance from the camera. Unlike the portraits, many of these photographs include more of the background and are less centered on the subjects, ostensibly because Welty had to snap them quickly, or from afar. In “Strollers,” for instance, we see three African American women walking down the street in Grenada, their backs turned to us. Though they appear unaware of Welty’s presence, the white man leaning against the store nearby appears to be fully cognizant and even to be looking back, either at Welty herself or the group of “strolling” women. There is

almost a triangulated gaze at work here, with Welty and the white man looking purposefully and the black women serving as unknowing bearers of the gaze of both the camera and the white man and woman (60). Again, this photograph exposes the “intimacy” to which Welty lays claim as in some ways predicated on power, as both she and the white man possess the power of the look, which is facilitated by the power their whiteness confers upon them in Depression-era Mississippi.

Welty also takes snapshots of white men with their backs turned to her, but in these images, the men’s conversations are contextualized by the accompanying captions, which reveal them to be discussing business in “Farmers in town” (61); memories of war in “Confederate veterans meeting in the park” (65); or politics in “Political speech” (71). In each of the images, the effect is to make the viewer feel excluded from the discussions the men are having. In “Farmers in town,” one of the men has his hands on his hips, which causes his elbows to block off the other two men and effectively closes the circle they are making. In “Confederate veterans” the photograph is taken at quite a distance from the two men, implying that their conversation is too private for the photographer to move closer. And in political speech the men with their backs to us block the faces of the men sitting across from them. Again, the men form a circle, creating a sense of insularity. While Marrs and Pollack, referencing Peggy Prenshaw, read a similar photograph of a political gathering as a rejection of the “rhetoric and posturing of candidates” in favor of “private conversation” (226), these images also represent visually certain types of conversation to which only white men have access. The distance here feels different from that in the image of the strollers; in these images, conversations with public implications are occurring among private groups, and the men seem aware of the people surrounding them and, through their body language, to be shielding themselves from intrusion.

Welty's white subjects are not the only ones who at times appear to be shielding themselves from her camera's gaze; in "Making a date," which seems to be a snapshot of which Welty did not intend to make her subjects aware, the young black woman being photographed has noticed her and is looking directly at the camera. She does not appear particularly pleased that Welty is photographing this private moment: her arms are crossed, and one of her hands is partially covering her face. Her head is slightly bowed, and her expression is wary (67). Again, there is a tension here between Welty's attempt to capture her subjects' everyday lives and their apparent lack of interest in being photographed. In order to capture the personal, Welty makes private moments such as the request for a date into public, shared property, and her subjects are not always entirely open to having their personal lives captured by a stranger.

The most overt example of resistance to Welty's photographic gaze is the "bootlegger," who, Welty tells us, is merely "pretend[ing] to drive customers away with her ice pick." The photo depicts a black woman sitting in a chair, wearing a hat, and holding up an ice pick in her right hand. Though she is smiling, her body language looks as though she is perched to rise from her chair, with the ice pick poised to strike (69). Welty uses one of her longest captions, quoted above, to classify the woman's behavior as unthreatening and includes a similar explanation in her preface, in which she asserts again, as support for her claim that she could not "remember ever being met with a demurrer stronger than amusement," that the "lady bootlegger...was only pretending to drive [her] away—it was a joke" (9). Here we see one of the few times where Welty's attempt to conscribe her photographs in order to maintain a coherent narrative becomes visible. She is almost too defensive in her insistence that there is no malice intended in the "bootlegger's" pose, and, though there is no reason to think that the woman did intend Welty actual physical harm or that she was not herself representing the posturing as a joke, Welty's

apparent concern that we might get the wrong idea indicates that there is certainly potential for the photograph to be read a different way from what Welty prescribes. Though she does not go so far as Wright does and edit the subversive gesture out of the photograph altogether, she does echo Wright's attempt to contain such subversion through her captioning.

As in "Yard man," the woman's eyes are shadowed by her hat, and her house behind her is also in shadows. As these shadows indicate, neither Welty nor we can fully access the meaning behind the woman's performance; it is both playful and menacing, again reflecting the complexities of Welty's project. It is potentially dangerous for the "bootlegger" to even be photographed and especially to actually threaten Welty, not only because of the racial tension of the time, but also because she is engaged in illegal activity. Welty again acknowledges her power in the situation by discounting it, asserting that the woman "knew I hadn't come to turn her in" (9), but, just as Welty cannot be entirely sure that the woman is playing, the "bootlegger," too, cannot be certain that she will not turn her over to the authorities. Even in moments of apparent playfulness and "intimacy" between the two women, they remain inscrutable to one another and interact in ways layered with meaning and influenced by their differing races, as much as Welty attempts to disavow the extent to which that difference informed her and her subjects' lives.

As we can already begin to see, Wright's and Welty's photo-texts are similarly complicated by an impulse to at once shield and expose their subjects, to fit them neatly within their respective narratives while avoiding the exploitative pitfalls of other photo-texts of which they were no doubt aware. Though they point our readings in opposite directions, veering from general and political to specific and personal, both authors at times struggle to keep their photographs on message, revealing cracks in the structures they have created that alert us to the

extent to which they have been meticulously constructed. These cracks create space in which a dialogue between the two texts can be generated, thereby exposing shared goals and methods of two apparently oppositional projects and authors.

While Wright and Welty are at once directing their readers' gazes through specific, controlled lenses of their own construction, both are also simultaneously negotiating and undermining the traditional prescriptions for seeing and reading images established by popular FSA photography and photo-texts. This attempt to subvert and reconstruct popular ways of looking at and consuming photographs—and, by extension, ways of understanding individuals, groups, and nation—is a key point of comparison that reveals most clearly the connection between the authors' overall projects and philosophies. In order to fully investigate the ways in which Welty and Wright subvert typical strategies of representation and seeing, it is necessary to consider the context out of and against which they are working. Such an understanding necessitates a turn from discussion of Wright's and Welty's production of photo-texts for others' consumption to their depictions of how their own subjects consume ideologies perpetuated by popular culture through such media as magazines, toys, and advertisements.

In his essay "Ways of Seeing," John Berger analyzes the visual rhetoric of advertising through the lens of traditional art. He writes of the importance of the invention of photography in "translat[ing] the language of oil painting," with its "vague historical or poetic or moral references," into "publicity clichés":

Colour photography is to the spectator-buyer what oil paint was to the spectator-owner. Both media use similar, highly tactile means to play upon the spectator's sense of acquiring the real thing which the image shows. In both cases his feeling

that he can almost touch what is in the image reminds him of how he might or does possess the real thing. (459)

Though both painting and photograph present their subjects as the “real,” however, their purposes are fundamentally different. As indicated by his title, the “spectator-owner” already owns that which his painting represents, while the spectator-buyer is induced to desire that which the photograph depicts. As a result, the culture of photographic advertising causes “those who lack the power to spend money [to] become literally faceless. Those who have the power become lovable” (459).

Both Wright and Welty draw our attention to the ways in which lack of power causes people to become “faceless” and “unlovable.” Berger notes that “the publicity image steals [the viewer’s] love of herself as she is and offers it back to her for the price of a product” (456). If she cannot afford that product, then self-love is always out of reach. Welty and Wright show us, however, that for their African American subjects, achieving that “self-love” is even more difficult because of a lack of opportunities and because, often, even if one is able to acquire the product, one may not find oneself accurately reflected in it.

We can see Wright depicting the negative effects of this type of consumption near the end of the second section of *12 Million Black Voices*, when he includes the previously mentioned photograph by Russell Lee of a black sharecropper’s son lying on his tattered bed and gazing off into the distance above the text, “There are times when we doubt our songs” (77). Here Wright is referring to an earlier passage, in which he writes of the inability of hymns and spirituality to “unify our fragile folk lives in this competitive world.” He continues, “As our children grow older, they leave us to fulfill the sense of happiness that sleeps in their hearts. Unlike us, they have been influenced by the movies, magazines, and glimpses of town life, and they lack the

patience to wait for the consummation of God's promise as we do" (75). Here Wright's voice shifts from entirely collective to mark a generational distinction. He uses the image of the young boy to show us the younger generation's longing to "fulfill the sense of happiness that sleeps in their hearts" and notes that they have been influenced by the dominant culture's media and thus aspire to achieve the level of contentment that these sources promise. We will see later in his fiction that this is a frustration that some of his characters, namely Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, also feel, and the difficulty for black people of achieving those hopes that America and its popular culture inspire is depicted both in those fictional accounts and here, in the image of the sharecropper's son. Because they lack economic and political power, they do not see themselves reflected in the movies and magazines they read and, though those media serve as advertisements for how life could be, they do not provide a model for African Americans to access that way of life.

Similarly, Welty includes an image in her book of two young black girls holding white dolls (50). As Marrs and Pollack note, this "photo frames a racial predicament that Welty, with a political vision ahead of her time, could see in the 1930s" and that "Toni Morrison helped all the rest of us to see in 1970...in her novel *The Bluest Eye*" (232). In the novel Claudia "could not love" the "big, blue-eyed Baby Doll" that adults were always giving her, though it "represented what they thought of as [her] fondest wish": to be "blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned" like the doll (Morrison qtd. in Marrs and Pollack 232). She similarly hates Shirley Temple, another component of white culture who sent the message that blonde hair and blue eyes were beautiful and perfect and whom Claudia also "could not love." Claudia's friend Pecola, however, does buy into the values of white culture and ends the novel psychologically damaged by these images and wishing she had the "bluest eyes in the whole world" (Morrison 203). Though Welty's

image does not make this message as explicit as Morrison does through writing, her image, like Wright's use of the photograph of the sharecropper's son, testifies to the extent to which white culture pervades black experience, providing models of being for children to which they cannot aspire. The "publicity image" has established the white, blonde, blue-eyed doll as the product that the viewer should aspire to have, but that product does not look like Pecola or the girls in the photograph and therefore cannot fully fulfill its promise. By including these images and, in Wright's case, the surrounding text, the authors both draw our attention to the damaging effects of consuming the representations available through popular media. In response, they create a different kind of representation in which their subjects are no longer rendered invisible.

In addition to highlighting the damaging effects of mainstream racial representation for their young African American subjects, Wright and Welty also resist creating a similar "publicity image" within their own works by differentiating their work from that of more typical Depression-era photo-texts. While the relationship between Depression-era photographs and advertisement may not be immediately apparent, it is important to note, as Michael L. Carlebach does in his article "Documentary and Propaganda: The Photographs of the Farm Security Administration," that the "FSA photography project was...the first systematic use of photography by the government for partisan purposes" (8), specifically the purposes of "persuad[ing] Americans that change needed to be made in the agricultural sector, and that New Deal programs were effective" (10). Though Carlebach goes on to highlight the fact that the photographs were "used effectively" and beneficially "in support of government programs designed to succor the rural poor" (11), the fact remains that they were used as a type of advertisement for the federal government, which marks them as bearers of the "ways of seeing" that Berger describes.

In these photographs viewers are being sold an image of the “*real thing*” to which Berger refers, but here that “thing” is not an item that the viewer is being urged to buy but rather a political philosophy that he or she is being urged to buy into. In order to present an argument for this philosophy, photographers use the faces and bodies of Southern tenant farmers as signifiers, thus offering them up for consumption by the public. Because they are poor and politically disfranchised and because they are made to stand in for and advertise national ideas and objectives rather than simply represent themselves, they are effectively rendered invisible, at least as far as their individual subjectivities are concerned.

As Carlebach notes, the FSA project had on a broader scope the objective of “explain[ing] America to Americans” (17), but the Americans it was trying to reach were not those depicted in the photographs but middle- and upper-class whites living in urban areas—people who enjoyed the economic and political power to which the subjects of the photographs did not have access. In its attempt to create a connection between the signifying faces of the photographs and their urban audience, the FSA project was sketching the bounds of the nation, which Benedict Anderson identifies as an “imagined community.” He writes that, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). This “fraternity” is understood as “*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Though “all communities...are imagined,” Anderson tells us, they “can be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6).

In FSA photographs, as noted earlier, the national community is imagined as a kind of “comradeship” between poor rural workers and the urban middle and upper classes. But, though

the purpose may be to create a horizontal sense of unity and identification, it ultimately results in a hierarchy in which the people whose faces are being used to represent this understanding of the nation are depicted as being not fully part of the imagined idea of the United States because of their economic hardship and relative invisibility. The fact that they need to be made visible—that urban Americans need to be made to “see their faces”—indicates that they have not yet gained access into the national imagination of what an American looks like. Though Depression-era photographers are attempting to make their faces a recognizable part of the American imagination, in so doing they are also marking them as currently separate from the imagined community of the nation.

Wright and Welty respond to this difficulty by creating different “styles” in which to imagine the communities of their subjects. I have already discussed some of the differences that separate the authors’ photo-texts from those of their FSA and other Depression-era peers, but those differences can best be encapsulated in terms of the communities they imagine as alternatives to the nation. Welty attempts to do away with the need to “imagine” by creating the closest thing she can to a “‘true’ community”: a collection of people for whom “face-to-face contact” and actually knowing one another is a possibility. The people in her photographs all live in Mississippi, in “one time” and “one place.” Therefore, the imagination does not have to stretch as far to create a “comradeship” for them, for they all ostensibly have some idea of who the person on the next page is and what his or her life is like. Anderson cautions us against reading this construction of community as wholly “truthful” and without elements of construction (6). Welty’s imagination of a community in which black and white subjects experience “horizontal comradeship” is a significant political gesture, but this equating gesture also threatens to gloss over the differences in their experiences, rights, and opportunities.

Ultimately, by imagining her subjects' community in this "style," Welty attempts to avoid making them the bearers of meaning with national political implications. Though the effect, as I have discussed, is still political, it is a more localized, individualized politics that results, which allows for the subjects to "speak back" through their depicted gazes, poses, and evasions rather than carry a master narrative.

Wright also creates an alternative "imagined community" to combat the erasure of African Americans from the nation imagined by most Depression-era photo-texts. Often in other works, the imagined "comradeship" is between rural and urban whites. Because racism is "outside history"—"nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations," Anderson tells us (149)—black people do not often make an appearance in imaginations of such "historical destinies." In response to this national invisibility, Wright constructs his own nation, comprised of the "twelve million black voices" of the

countless black millions who endured the physical and spiritual ravages of serfdom; those legions of nameless blacks who felt the shock and hope of sudden emancipation; those terrified black folk who withstood the brutal wrath of the Ku Klux Klan, and who fled the cotton and tobacco plantations to seek refuge in northern and southern cities coincident with the decline of the cotton culture in the Old South. (xxi)

Here we see Wright imagining a community predicated on a "style" that Anderson identifies: an understanding of "the 'journey,' between times, statuses and places, as a meaning-creating experience" (53). He stretches back in history to the original journey of black slaves from various locations to the United States by slave ship and traces a shared trajectory from that point that binds them together as an imagined community or nation.

As Wright acknowledges in his preface, this type of imagining requires that he leave certain black Americans—including himself—out of the community: the “talented tenth,” the “isolated islands of mulatto leadership which are still to be found in many parts of the South,” and the “growing and influential Negro middle-class professional and business men of the North” (xx). But his photo-text nonetheless sketches an imagined nation in which African Americans are asked to recognize themselves and that speaks directly to the nation as imagined elsewhere, which largely excludes them and their experiences from its representation. Both Wright and Welty, in imagining these alternative constructions of community in opposition to the popularly imagined nation, resist the effacement of their subjects and claim a space for them as participants rather than simply bearers of meaning within national conversations about race, class, and identity.

They also avoid depicting their subjects simply as advertisements for public consumption. Welty avoids constructing a written argument altogether, encouraging her audience to look to her subjects as bearers of their own meaning. Wright speaks both to the nation as typically imagined and to his own imagined nation, involving them in the conversation rather than simply presenting their images to advertise his message. He ultimately is attempting to reach out and create a shared community, as is indicated in the final pages of the photo-text, when he writes, “The differences between black folk and white folk are not blood or color, and the ties that bind us are deeper than those that separate us. The common road of hope which we have all traveled has brought us into a stronger kinship than any words, laws, or legal claims” (146). Again, he is attempting to sketch an imagined community between white and black people through the model of the shared journey, but it is necessary that the black community’s

experiences be first acknowledged as a part of that larger national journey and that they have a place in imagining and sketching its future trajectory.

The authors' alternative imaginations of community lead to similar investigations of influential forces in their subjects' lives. One such force that appears repeatedly in both photo-texts is religion. In the "Inheritors of Slavery" section, Wright asserts that for black tenant farmers, "Sunday is always a glad day" (67). Church is not only a space of happiness, however; it is also space that allows for subversion of the societal regulations that exist outside of it and for expansion of consciousness, more so even than the schools that are "open for only six months a year, and allow our children to progress only to the sixth grade" (66). Wright describes a typical church service, in which "[w]hat we have not dared feel in the presence of the Lords of the Land, we now feel" (68). As the preacher preaches, the people "become absorbed in a vision" (68) of the second coming, when God will return "bringing not peace but a sword to rout the powers of darkness and build a new Jerusalem" (72). This vision, Wright tells us, brings with it "a heightening of consciousness that the Lords of the Land would rather keep from us, filling us with a sense of hope that is treasonable to the rule of Queen Cotton..., until, drunk with our enchanted vision, our senses lifted to the burning skies, we do not know who we are, what we are, or where we are...." (73).

Here Wright establishes religion as both a transformative and a potentially limiting power. It works against the system that places poor, black workers squarely at the bottom of the hierarchy formed in the national imagination, but Wright's description of its impact on African American believers also indicates his ambivalence about its potentially anesthetizing qualities. No longer do Wright's black subjects "know their place" after hearing such a sermon, but that "knowledge" is placed with a highly romanticized "enchanted vision" whose influence is equated

with drunkenness. The prescriptions for who they are and how they must live their lives are no longer dominant, and they are presented with a clean slate upon which to inscribe their own dreams and desires, but Wright illustrates the difficulty of keeping alive these dreams through the picture of the young boy who “doubts his songs.” Wright’s photo-text highlights these possibilities by presenting an alternative vision of identity and community reflective of that which the space of the church creates on a local, individual level, while also hinting at the potential to “become absorbed in a vision” that keeps those absorbed in it from making it a reality. Wright complements this message with images of preachers and congregations, almost all of whom have their eyes closed and appear to be lost in the “enchanted vision,” not of “who [they] are, what [they] are, or where [they] are,” but of what they could be. Again, their closed eyes and averted faces serve to distance the viewer from this vision, indicating that this is a dream that is not accessible to white viewers even as they show us very clearly that it exists nonetheless.

Welty, too, emphasizes the importance of church within her imagined community, devoting an entire section of her photo-text to Sunday, a section that, interestingly, includes only images of black subjects. This is perhaps a coincidence, but it is nonetheless significant that “Sunday” is the only section of the photo-text that does not include white people. Though Welty describes the process of asking for permission to photograph at the Holiness Church, she does not explain why she chose that church in particular, or why she did not ask permission to attend and photograph any white church services. Perhaps, being more familiar with white services, she did not find them interesting enough to attempt to capture them, or perhaps she felt less comfortable imposing herself and her camera on a white church. She makes clear, however, that she did not feel herself to be an imposition at the Holiness Church, which once again underlines

the privilege of access that her whiteness bestows upon her. She writes that, though she was seated “on the front row of the congregation,” she felt confident that, “once the tambourines were sounded and the singing and dancing began, they wouldn’t have noticed the unqualified presence of the Angel Gabriel” (9).

It seems highly unlikely that Welty’s presence went unnoticed by the congregation, but they likely could not have comfortably questioned her about why she was there. Her photographs of the church service do, like Wright’s depiction of church-goers, depict an experience from which both she and her readers are distanced. In “Speaking in the Unknown Tongue,” church members are shown kneeling at the altar, with their backs turned to the camera and their heads bowed. The only person who is facing the camera is a woman with her eyes closed, mouth open, and hand raised, who is ostensibly speaking in the “unknown tongue” to which Welty refers in the title (89). By highlighting her lack of understanding in that brief caption and depicting once again a group of black people who are turned away from us, Welty presents a similar message about spirituality as that found in Wright’s photo-text. No matter how close she is sitting to the action, there is still a distance between the white viewer and the black people whose religious experience she is representing. Perhaps unintentionally, Welty also once again alerts us to the complications of her project. Though she may not be able to access her subjects’ private thoughts and religious experiences, or to understand them when they speak in tongues, she is nonetheless able to access the space that facilitates these thoughts and experiences, which, as Wright tells us, is generally free of the constrictions that social interactions with white people impose upon black people in Depression-era Mississippi. Her ability to enter that space underscores the dynamics of power from which religion offers hope of escaping.

That Welty does not include white subjects in this section is perhaps in part an attempt to foreclose any further intrusion by white people into the potentially subversive space of the black church. In the photographs “Sunday School” and “Preacher and leaders of Holiness Church,” the composition of the photographs presents the Sunday school teacher, preacher, and other church leaders as powerful and almost angelic: clothed all in white and looking straight into the camera, the subjects glow in the surrounding light (86, 87). Although Welty attributes the lighting in the photographs to her “ignorance about interior exposures under weak, naked light bulbs” (9), she nonetheless selected these photographs depicting African Americans in positions of religious leadership and endowed with what reads as a kind of “spiritual light” in her photo-text and chose not to undermine that sense of power and anointment by juxtaposing them with images of white subjects. Here, for whatever reason, Welty’s imagined community does not include white people at all, allowing, aside from her own presence (and that of the photographs’ viewers), for her black subjects’ religious experiences to speak (or refuse to speak) for themselves. Though Wright might not approve of Welty’s methods of capturing the photographs, in these sections both authors are claiming a subversive power for the black church within their respective imagined communities.

Finally, though they achieve this objective in atypical ways (and though Welty never directly acknowledges it as an objective), both authors succeed in the typical Depression-era goal of depicting the hardships of workers in the rural South. Welty avoids creating the typical “advertisement” for public consumption both by waiting forty years to publish the photographs and by insisting upon the value of such work in spite of its hardships. In “Workday,” she shows people doing hard manual labor, such as the woman in “Chopping the field,” who is hoeing land that appears to be rather desiccated. This first image in the actual body of the photo-text draws

clear attention to the difficulties of living and working in rural Mississippi, but the image is also beautiful, and the woman's motion is graceful. Her hoe is blurry, the end almost disappearing into the white background, drawing our attention to the woman herself rather than principally to the work she is doing (15).

Similarly, in the photographs "Hog-killing time," "Boiling pot," and "Making cane syrup," Welty's subjects are shown in unpleasant environments, bending over steaming pots and ovens and preparing to slaughter a hog (17-19). Nevertheless, these images depict people working and surviving in the Depression era, a stark contrast to, for instance, Walker Evans's photographs of poor tenant farmers sitting on their porches and staring grimly into the distance, no doubt at their barren fields. And though the work appears difficult, the workers do not appear as defeated as they do in other contemporary photographs; the men making the cane syrup, for example, appear to have a sense of camaraderie as they work together.

Welty also departs from typical FSA tropes by depicting subjects who work in fields other than farming. She depicts tomato packers (21), washwomen (23), a nurse (26), a weaver (27), and a schoolteacher (28). As Angela M. Thompson notes, Welty even shows workers outside of their work contexts, with the tomato packers depicted taking a break from their jobs, the nurse captured at home, and the schoolteacher shown on a Friday afternoon off. By shifting the focus from labor, Welty "suggests...that 'parting the curtain' during private, personal moments reveals that impoverished people in depression-era Mississippi were more than victims of hard times and evidence of 'cultural decay' as suggested by the FSA photographs" (Thompson 87). Welty is thereby able to allow the reader to see the difficulties occasioned by such a situation without losing sight of her subjects as individuals and causing them to become stand-ins for her own belief or cause.

Though Wright does use his selected FSA photographs in more typical ways—including, for instance, Jack Delano’s “Migrant potato picker,” an image of a black man in tattered overalls on his knees with his hands buried in the desiccated soil—his goal is not so much to sentimentalize and thereby stir empathy for all tenant farmers as it is to demonstrate the struggles of and impetus for another step in his imagined community’s journey. After describing the hardship of working as a black tenant farmer in a time of severe racial oppression, Wright writes that “a call is made to us to come north and help turn the wheels of industry” and “hundreds of thousands of us get on the move once more” (86). Although the industrial labor conditions in the North, where African Americans are subject to the rule of the “Bosses of the Buildings” rather than the “Lords of the Lands,” are not significantly better, what is key in Wright’s writing and in his depiction of poverty and labor is his insistence that the narrative move forward. This movement may not be to a more positive place, but he does not force his subjects to remain stagnant, forever locked into one static representation of their lives. “As our consciousness changes,” he writes in the final chapter, “as we come of age, as we shed our folk swaddling-clothes, so run our lives in a hundred directions” (143), and, even as he attempts to craft a master narrative that encapsulates everyone within his imagined community, he is insistent that we acknowledge this multiplicity and not allow one image to stand in for an entire group of people and their experiences.

In this sense he, like Welty (although through very different methods), is able to agitate for the recognition of his subjects’ individual identities, hopes, and journeys, while at the same time showing us the damaging effects of the Depression and, more importantly for Wright, of racism on their ability to achieve a better quality of life wherever they may go and whatever they may do. Through their depictions of their African American subjects’ often unachievable

economic and spiritual desires, Wright and Welty draw attention to the limitations imposed by their position within the nation, agitating for better conditions and treatment while simultaneously celebrating their daily, individual subversions and strivings. Ultimately, Wright and Welty are engaged in a similar conversation about the racial relations, politics, and popular culture of a shared space, and in these instances, they can even be seen reaching points of agreement about what that “one time” and “one place” looks like and does to those who live within it. In the next chapter, we will find that Wright’s and Welty’s fictional works also share “times” and “places” and that the authors infuse a similar visual politics into their written work.

III. "STILL MOMENTS": PHOTOGRAPHIC AND CINEMATOGRAPHIC "STILLS" IN WRIGHT'S AND WELTY'S FICTION

As we have seen, Wright's and Welty's photo-texts reveal certain pedagogies of seeing that align with the pedagogies of reading found in their autobiographies. The ways in which the authors direct us to understand their work—Wright's as political and general, Welty's as personal and particular—have largely been followed by critics, but their use of images often serves to disrupt these directed readings in spite of the authors' best intentions to adhere to their own narratives surrounding their work. Ultimately, they can be brought into conversation with one another by examining their mutual interest in the ways an image can be used to agitate for the humanity of and reveal the complex physical, psychological, and emotional realities of its subject. This conversation extends, finally, into their fiction, in which distilled, frozen, and photographic images abound, and this thesis will conclude by exploring examples from each author's work that illustrate a shared vision of the national and political implications of individual lives and experiences.

Welty ends her preface to *One Time, One Place* by noting that, though she appreciates what photography allowed her to learn about herself and others, "Insight doesn't happen often on the click of the moment, like a lucky snapshot, but comes in its own time and more slowly and from nowhere but within... In my own case, a fuller awareness of what I needed to find out about people and their lives had to be sought for through another way, through writing stories"

(12). Wright, in his unwillingness to allow the photographs in *12 Million Black Voices* speak for themselves, preferring to surround them with text to direct the reader's viewing, seems to similarly distrust the "snapshot's" ability to convey a "fuller awareness." This turn to fiction, however, did not cause the authors to abandon their photographic sensibilities. Welty "repeatedly described her stories in visual terms" (Martin 17), remarking, "I see things in pictures... The only talent I have...is quite visual" and explaining that, while "'a snapshot is a moment's glimpse,' a story 'may be a long look, a growing contemplation'" (qtd. in Martin 17). In the course of this "growing contemplation," we are able to see a character or situation with "new eyes" (Martin 17). And, though Wright does not himself describe his writing in such photographic language, there are key moments in his fictional works in which he again inserts a pedagogy of reading, this time by freezing the narration to draw our attention to moments that visually relate the extreme psychological impact of racism on his characters' lives.

Critics have often addressed Welty's story "A Still Moment" from *A Curtain of Green* (1941) when dealing with such issues in her fiction, for in the story three men's courses are temporarily arrested as they meet on the Natchez Trace and watch a bird seemingly hanging in the air for a "still moment" until one of the men shoots it and time surges back forward. Paul Binding adopts this idea of the "still moment" as the unifying concept for his 1994 book on Welty's writing. In his chapter on "A Still Moment," Binding writes the following of the arrested moment when all three men are looking at the heron, which is seemingly suspended, unmoving, in the air, before they are brought back to reality when it is shot: "In identifying the heron with a moment of Time that is outside clock Time, and the killing of it with the reinstatement of the latter in all its restrictiveness, the whole story can be seen as a confrontation by temporal, spatial humanity of the non-temporal, non-spatial dimension behind existence" (157). This sense of the

"tension between our intimations of transcendental truths and earthbound reality," Binding argues, is demonstrated by the juxtaposition of the stilled, timeless, photographic moment and the narrative that insists upon moving beyond that moment (158).

Interestingly, critic W.J.T. Mitchell employs similar language in his book *Picture Theory* (1942). Mitchell does not deal directly with Welty's photographic or fictional work in his analysis, but his chapter on "textual pictures," which includes a discussion of "ekphrasis" and of the "still moment" (a term he borrows from Murray Krieger), is instructive for reading the photographic moments found in Welty's and Wright's fiction. Mitchell defines ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of visual representation." Though ekphrasis is often used to refer to a specific genre—"poems which describe works of visual art"—it is useful here for its more general definition (152). Welty's aforementioned comments about the ability of fiction to capture a "fuller awareness" of her subjects' lives than photography is implicitly questioned here by the complications inherent in the very concept of ekphrasis. Just as critics have often alerted us to the deceptive qualities of photographs that pose as "real" and "unbiased" depictions of their subjects' lives, so, too, do "textual pictures" fail to fully represent their subjects: "A verbal representation cannot represent—that is, make present—its object in the same way a visual representation can," Mitchell cautions. "It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can 'cite,' but never 'sight' their objects" (152). Wright's choice to both "cite" and "sight" his subjects through a combination of words and text in his photo-text indicates his awareness of these complications, but it is clear from the focus of their careers that both he and Welty found fiction to ultimately be the preferable way of representing their subjects' lives.

This preference reveals what Mitchell refers to as "ekphrastic hope," or "the phase when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination and metaphor, when we discover a 'sense' in which language can do what so many writers have wanted it to do: 'to make us see'" (152). It is this hope from which the "still moment"—and from which ultimately all oral or verbal expression—arises. This expansion of the understanding of ekphrasis threatens to collapse the specific type of moment that I wish to discuss here, however; there is a difference between the still, "photographic" moments such as that which Binding identifies in "A Still Moment" and the "general application that includes any 'set description intended to bring person, place, picture, etc. before the mind's eye'" (Saintsbury qtd. in Mitchell 153). In Wright's and Welty's fiction, there are moments that go beyond simple description and arrive at an almost photographic or even cinematographic level of textual representation. Not content to merely describe their characters or setting in visual terms, Wright and Welty both freeze and frame visual stills throughout their fiction to draw our attention to the very processes and ideologies of representation itself.

Mitchell also speaks of the "ekphrastic fear" that the "textual picture" will become too close to the "actual" image, collapsing the difference between "cite" and "sight" and creating a situation in which "the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually" (154). This "fear" points to the necessity of keeping the imaginings and constructions of textual representations visible. We saw with their photo-texts that both Wright and Welty recognize the complications inherent in attempting to position a representation as completely factual or representative, and the same is true for their textual "photographs": collapsing the separation between the represented and the real would belie the authors' purpose of drawing the readers' attention to the tension that Binding identified between constrictive, chronological

existence and "the non-temporal, non-spatial dimension behind existence." As we will see, highlighting this separation allows for the authors to separate these dimensions and make visible the ways in which they work upon each other to shape individual and national understandings of race, violence, and poverty. It is therefore important that these moments not be condensed as pure representation or pure reality, for the authors' goal is to draw our attention to the ways in which these aspects of the subject interact to create or impose meaning.

Katherine Henninger extends this conversation from simple visual representation in fiction to authors' inclusion and analysis of actual photographs in Southern women's fiction through her discussion of what she calls "fictional photographs" in her book *Ordering the Façade: Photography and Contemporary Southern Women's Writing* (2007). Welty's writing fits much more neatly into the context that Henninger establishes for her analysis (in addition to fitting into the category of "contemporary Southern woman writer," Welty is also mentioned directly in Henninger's book, and one of her photographs from *One Time, One Place* appears on the title page). Henninger does not, however, discuss Welty's use of "fictional photographs" extensively; instead, she limits most of her analysis of Welty's work to her actual photographs. Nevertheless, her concept of "fictional photographs" is instructive in my readings of both Welty's and Wright's use of textual images in their fictional works.

In her introduction, Henninger argues for the primacy of language over photographs in capturing the "'what-where-and-when' of southern ideologies as they affect and are affected by women." She cautions, "If a few photographs can supplant thousands of words, it is only because thousands of words have trained us to 'read' photographs. Only when words identified the first photograph of a southern woman as a 'southern woman' could photographs begin to show a visible 'truth' of southern womanhood, to become the 'natural' evidence supporting more

words" (1). "Real" visual representation, then, has always been preceded by the imposition of meaning through language, and southern women's use of "fictional photographs" therefore constitutes an attempt to separate image from interpretation or to make use of such politically loaded images in order to make visible their always already constructed nature. Henninger writes of her own project, "Analyzing fictional photographs in a specific gendered and regional context reveals the crucial role of culture in ostensibly natural technologies of vision, a connection between envisioning and power that 'objective' technologies like photography are meant to disguise, but that southern women writers, for example, have noted since they became 'southern women'" (2). Henninger's acknowledges here that Southern women are just one "example" of writers who find themselves both represented through such "'objective' technologies" and able to see through and past such claims to objectivity. But, of course, there are other groups of individuals and writers, including African Americans, who often find themselves subject to and express criticism of such insidious and constrictive representations.

In a later chapter entitled "Cameras and the Racial Real: Photographs as Evidence and Assertion in African American Southern Fiction," Henninger addresses African Americans as another such group. Although her focus remains largely on women writers, Henninger writes of the "long-standing debates within African American culture over 'positive' and 'negative' images of African Americans," a debate that certainly applies to both female and male subjects and authors. "At the root of these debates," she writes, "are an anxiety about technologies of 'realism' that have worked to naturalize and reinforce derogatory stereotypes of African American men and women, a wariness born of the historic power of visual representations to evidence the 'real' of race, and a fear of potential audience misinterpretation or misuse of these representations" (114). This history complicates attempts to make African Americans more "visible" in fiction—

attempts to bring African American women, for instance, to the forefront rather than allowing them to continue being represented as the "negative space" that confirms "a positive southern white female identity"—because a visible image of African American subjectivity often merely confirms the "'real' of race" that white viewers have been taught to see in images of African American subjects (113). Stuart Burrows presents a similar argument in his discussion of Wright's *Native Son* in his book *A Familiar Strangeness: American Fiction and the Language of Photography, 1839-1945*, noting that Wright allows his character Bigger Thomas to embody racist stereotypes in order to draw attention to "the ways in which the emergence into visibility of the black subject is also the process by which he is rendered invisible" (171); being visible as a black man would render him a stereotype (violent, murderous, rapist) in the dominant white culture's eyes regardless of his actual actions.

As is evident from Burrows's example and as will become more evident as we delve into readings of the fictional texts, both Wright and Welty attempt to negotiate this complicated territory with their own "fictional stills," the term that I will use for the remainder of the chapter. By using this term, I seek to combine Henninger's notion of "fictional photographs," which invokes the representational issues I wish to discuss but is a bit too limiting in its confinement to fictional descriptions of actual photographs, and Mitchell's definition of the textual, "ekphrastic" image, which is a more general term encompassing descriptive passages that do not quite possess the "photographic" qualities of the moments I wish to discuss. The term "fictional still," as it is used in this thesis, can be defined as an arrested or frozen fictional moment that visually renders the subject in "photographic" or slow-motion "cinematographic" terms to draw the reader's attention to the politics of representation or looking. It may be a moment in which the authors are invoking and critiquing the black and white photographs used in their photo-texts or a slow-

motion sequence of events in which the authors freeze and unfreeze the action in order to direct our viewing through their chosen pedagogical lens. We will see the authors rendering African American characters visible in stilled moments and thereby representing at once the ways in which their images would typically be read as representative of culturally-imposed stereotypes about race (and gender and class) and their actual feelings and intents in these violent-laden moments. As in the photo-texts, we will see both authors struggling both to represent their characters honestly and respectfully while also highlighting the presence of the "veil" or "mask," which keeps us from ever fully knowing them. This double move belies our ability to fit them into the neat, stereotypical boxes that so many images facilitate. We will ultimately discover in the authors' fiction a shared vision and critique of the general political conflicts with race, class, and gender in which individual characters find themselves personally enmeshed.

My turn to the authors' "fictional stills" departs from previous analyses of Wright's and Welty's works. Henninger has only engaged Welty's actual photography in the scope of her project on "photographic" elements of Southern women's writing. Angela M. Thompson has written of both Wright's and Welty's fiction in relation to their Depression-era photo-texts in her dissertation "Ethics of Seeing and Politics of Place: FSA Photography and Literature of the American South," but she does not consider the way their photographic visions translate into fiction. Thompson's assertions, that Welty's stories "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "The Key" represent her Depression-era subjects in similar ways as her photographs by showing us "fully realized human beings" rather than stereotypical victims of economic hardship (101), and that Wright's short story "Fire and Cloud" "illustrates the resistance and rebellion that develop in a black community that has been denied government aid promised by Roosevelt's New Deal relief programs" in a way that reflects his shifting of Depression-era representation to black

subjects and their particular experiences in *12 Million Black Voices* (181), are significant. But Thompson does not fully address the implications of the shared authorial vision present in the authors' Depression-era texts, which calls for a rethinking of the ways in which we normally categorize and, consequently, separate them as authors. I wish to build upon Thompson's and others' claims by finding moments elsewhere in the authors' fiction that demonstrate not only that the authors have extended their responses to the Depression era into their fiction, but also that these fictional representations are filtered through a specifically *photographic* lens. In making these claims, I also hope to demonstrate that Wright and Welty are at times looking through the same lens.

Both Welty and Wright employ the technique of a "fictional still" in moments of heightened racial conflict. Wright's "Big Boy Leaves Home" (1936) and Welty's *Moon Lake* (1949) both depict a paused photographic "still" of a young black boy and a white woman or girl threatening to come into physical contact with one another. And both also take place at a lake, a setting that may initially seem innocuous but whose dark, dirty, and murky waters reflect the fears of racial contamination held by the white characters. Though the risks of such contact in the Jim Crow South are made clear by the events that follow the "fictional stills" once the narrative is no longer arrested and moves forward into threats of lynching and implications of tainted purity, the authors' freezing of the moment before the spiraling of these horrific events illustrates at once the moment's importance and its triviality: it changes the characters' lives forever, occasioning a violent rite of passage into adulthood, but these changes are based on the simplest, most meaningless of actions that a national racist culture has overloaded with meaning. By lingering on the moments that threaten interracial contact, the authors show us just how constructed and destructive racist ideological production can be.

Though Welty's story is not as securely located within the Great Depression context, her descriptions of her characters in *The Golden Apples* more generally and in "Moon Lake" specifically are reflective of the representational strategies and of the themes that can be derived from those strategies found in her photo-text. Geoffrey A. Wright provides a precedent for this comparison of Welty's visual strategies in her photo-text and fiction in his comparison of the ways of looking demonstrated in *One Time, One Place* to Cassie Morrison's experience of looking at Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey in "June Recital." Wright notes, "Like Welty, Cassie imagines herself parting the veil of social indifference by constructing a sense of common humanity between the viewer and the viewed" (66). We see this construction in action as Cassie attempts to put herself in the shoes of the two socially ostracized women, but in "Moon Lake," this empathetic viewing works a bit differently. Though, in "Moon Lake," Welty similarly draws our attention to the shared humanity of viewer and viewed, she also alerts us to the extent to which the viewers attempt to distinguish themselves against and in opposition to those whom they are viewing and at times even ignore the other characters' humanity altogether. I will turn to three specific instances in the short story to illustrate how Welty uses "fictional stills" to both "construct a sense of common humanity" between Easter and the "Morgana girls" and illustrate how the girls ultimately come to define themselves *against* a static image of Easter as a contaminated woman—an image that Welty captures for us through a "photographic still" depicting Easter's "contamination" on the precipice of her literal and figurative "fall."

In the story Easter, a white girl marked by the ring of "pure dirt" around her neck, is "dominant" among her fellow orphans, not because she is "bad" like some of the others, but because of "what she was in herself—for the way she held still, sometimes" (417). Already Easter's ability to "hold still" invokes photographic language and marks her as the bearer of the

other girls' gaze. She is someone in relation to whom they attempt to establish their own understandings of self. Laura Mulvey defines this gaze in the context of cinema, arguing that there are

two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation. The first, scopophilic, arises from the pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. Thus, in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands the identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his [or here, her] like.

(1175)

In "Moon Lake," both aspects of "pleasurable structures" are at work: the "Morgana girls" at once see Easter as a sexual object—both appealing and threatening—and as their "like." Though ultimately they will find it necessary to define themselves in opposition to Easter's threatening sexuality as they view her contaminating fall into Moon Lake as though they are spectators in a theater, initially they—especially Nina Carmichael—gaze upon her from a place of identification.

The first "fictional still" illustrates this identification. The girls sneak away from the rest of the camp and attempt to take a boat out into the lake. While the other girls are working to detach the boat from the shore, Easter sits immobile at the end of the boat: "If this was their ship, she was their figure-head, turned on its back, sky-facing." Though the passage continues to say that Easter "wouldn't be their passenger" (429), which bestows upon her a certain agency,

she is nonetheless presented here as a static symbol for the other girls as they attempt to work out who they are and how far from the shore—from their familiar, safe lives—they will be able to venture. What separates this moment from simple description is not only Easter's stillness, but also the extent to which she is visibly fixed by the other girls' gaze. She is no longer simply herself but a stilled "figure-head" that Nina and Jinny Love use to represent their own experiences with maturation and self-definition.

The second "fictional still" is captured in a similar moment of (attempted) identification. During the last night of camp, Nina gazes upon Easter as she sleeps and seeks to gauge who she is in comparison to this mysterious orphan and to attempt to fashion her own sense of self in relation to her. "The orphan!" she thinks to herself. "The other way to live... Easter's hand hung down, opened outward. Come here, night, Easter might say, tender to a giant, to such a dark thing... Nina let her own arm stretch forward opposite Easter's. Her hand too opened, of itself... Its gesture was like Easter's, but Easter's hand slept and her own hand knew—shrank and knew, yet offered still. 'Instead...me instead...'" (435-6). When Nina wakes in the morning she finds that she has fallen asleep on top of her hand; though she has tried to identify with and even offer herself up to the "dark" forces that she believes shape Easter's life, she is ultimately unable to fully open herself to that type of existence. Her gaze is removed from Easter and ultimately cannot breach the gap between the two. Like Welty's subjects in *One Time, One Place*, Easter, though stilled and visually available for Nina's consumption, cannot be fully knowable to Nina, even as she tries to extract the essence of her life by looking at her. Ultimately, seeing can only take her so far, and she cannot truly understand or access "the other way to live."

The final “fictional still” firmly and finally delineates this gulf in understanding. On the girls’ last day at camp, Easter is lightly tapped by Exum, a twelve-year-old black boy who works at the camp and whom the girls have not even tried to truly see or know, and sent plunging from a diving board into the lake below. This action is initially captured quickly in a sentence that reflects the instantaneousness of Easter’s fall: “She dropped like one hit in the head by a stone from a sling” (437). But Welty then shifts the story to the onlookers’ perspective; she halts the narrative as they replay the scene in their heads, as if rewinding a video clip to watch it in slow motion:

Her body, never turning, seemed to languish upright for a moment, then descend.

It went to meet and was received by blue air. It dropped as if handed down all the way and was let into the brown water almost on Miss Moody’s crown, and went out of the sight at once. There was something so positive about its disappearance that only the instinct of caution made them give it a moment to come up again; it didn’t come up. Then Exum let loose a girlish howl and clung to the ladder as though a fire had been lighted under it. (437)

Exum’s “girlish howl” returns the onlookers—and the readers with them—to the current action of the story. The previous passage has been slow and soundless, steeped in the visual experience of watching Easter fall. In this “still moment,” we are able to see the onlookers’ “growing contemplation” of the importance of this image, and its stillness and visual emphasis signal to us as readers that we should also pay attention. The interaction between black boy and white girl takes on symbolic importance to the young white girls who watch it. It is an image that has been conjured up numerous times within the stereotypical Southern imagination: one of white female “descent” at the hands of a black male. But Welty slows it down not only to show us its import

and its effect on Easter but also to demonstrate its effect on the viewers: though Exum does hardly anything to cause Easter's fall, using a "green willow switch" to give her "the tenderest obscurest little brush, with something of nigger persuasion about it" (437), Welty shows us that slight touch is enough to make Easter's "disappearance" "so positive" in the racist society in which the characters live.

This "fictional still" once again turns Easter into an object of the girls' gaze. Welty establishes her as an example of the literal and figurative downfall that comes as the result of a simple touch by a black male. Earlier, Nina tried to make herself open to a figurative "blackness" by reaching her hand out into the night. But, when she sees in Easter's stilled body, a concrete image of the social implications of such a fall, she is horrified. Easter is unconscious when Boy Scout Loch Morrison finally extracts her from the dark water. As Loch attempts to revive Easter, he thrusts on top of her body and "goug[es] out her mouth with his hand"; as "a dark stain" trickles down Easter's cheek, the girls realize that "[l]ife-saving was much worse than they had dreamed. Worse still was the carelessness of Easter's body" (441). Nina separates her imagined sense of Easter's subjectivity, derived from her earlier, idealized gazing upon the sleeping orphan's body, from the reality of the concrete situation that has occasioned Easter to lie unconscious before her. "It's I that's thinking," she thinks to herself, as she begins once again to ascribe feelings to Easter:

Easter's not thinking at all. And while not thinking, she is not dead, but unconscious, which is even harder to be. Easter had come among them and held herself untouchable and intact. Of course, for one little touch could smirch her, make her fall so far, so deep.—Except by that time they were all saying the nigger deliberately poked her off in the water, meant her to drown. (444)

Here Welty again demonstrates through Nina both the inability of the viewer to fully know the object of her gaze—a realization that Nina herself is beginning to have—and the ways in which Southern understandings of purity and racial contamination are constructed. Nina becomes fully aware of the power of just “one little touch” to “smirch” a white woman and “make her fall so far,” and Welty demonstrates how the white community immediately blames black people—in this case, Exum—for intentionally and willfully effecting that contamination, despite a complete absence of evidence to suggest any malicious intent whatsoever.

Welty gives us the “fictional still” of the moment of touch to show us both how incidental it was and to highlight the ways in which representations of black people are often distorted. Once he is caught in the “frame” of the “fictional still” and seen touching a white woman, Exum’s individual subjectivity is cast aside by the viewers, and in its place they conjure a stereotype of black male aggression to fit the narrative they have constructed for the image: one of white female degradation at the hands of a black man. Using this “fictional still” allows Welty to flesh out the various viewers’ experiences of looking and to demonstrate how the ways in which we look are influenced by commonly held social stereotypes and mores. As in *One Time, One Place*, we are not allowed full access to the subjects’ lives; both Easter and Exum fade into the background of the story, and we are largely left with the viewers’ reactions to their experiences. What is different in “Moon Lake” is that Welty acknowledges this impossibility of full understanding, causing Nina to distinguish her own imposition of meaning onto Easter’s stilled body from what Easter is actually feeling or thinking. Also distinct is Welty’s highlighting of the ways the audience responds to such images by distancing themselves from and positioning themselves in opposition to the narrative of racial contamination that they read into those stilled moments.

Wright presents us with a similar moment in "Big Boy Leaves Home." He makes visible the imbalance of power inherent in racially charged situations by "stilling" a key moment much like Welty does. The story begins with a jovial tone, as Big Boy and his three friends, Bobo, Lester, and Buck, joke and play in the woods near their homes. The story takes a turn, however, when the boys begin to walk "t the creek fer a swim" (20). Big Boy is initially resistant to this idea, referencing directly the very real danger at which Welty's depiction of Exum only hints: "N git lynched?" Big Boy responds to his friends, "Hell naw!" Immediately, questions of surveillance become key to the boys' discussion of the risks involved in swimming in the creek. The danger of the look is one of which Big Boy is highly conscious, and bell hooks's "The Oppositional Gaze" makes clear the reasons for his anxiety: in contrast to the general cinematographic gaze that Mulvey discusses, there were "real life public circumstances wherein black men were murdered/lynched for looking at white womanhood, where the black male gaze was always subject to control and/or punishment by the powerful white Other" (118). Big Boy is aware of this danger, and he is only convinced to go to the lake once one of his friends assures him that he will not be subject to the look of the white Other: "He ain gonna see us," one of the other boys asserts, referring to the white owner of the land where the creek is located (20).

With this declaration, the tone turns idyllic once more, with the boys chanting rhymes about pie and bread, but it quickly turns violent once again when Bobo, Lester, and Buck surround Big Boy and attack him. Though this is also a somewhat playful moment among friends, the language used to describe the attack has undertones of lynching: Big Boy "encircle[s] the neck of Bobo with his left arm" and almost chokes him, an act that mimics a lynching rope (21), and the mob mentality of the "ganga guys" that "jump on" Big Boy is also reflective of the mobs of white men who commit lynchings. Though Big Boy is big enough and

smart enough to evade his friends' attack, he realizes quickly that there is a very different distribution of power at work in an actual lynching.

When the boys arrive at the creek, Big Boy is once again hesitant to go in, and with good reason. Not only does "ol man Harvey" not "erllow no niggers to swim in this hole," Lester informs us that "jus las year he took a shot at Bob for swimmin in here." Again, the boys disregard these warnings and the "NO TRESPASSIN" sign because they do not believe that they register in the white man's vision: "Shucks, ol man Harvey ain't studyin bout us niggers," Big Boy decides (27). Though the look of the white man is perhaps not an immediate threat, Big Boy and his friends are reminded of the threat whites fear African American male gazes signify when a white woman appears long enough for them to see her before disappearing back again into the woods. Here, visibility again becomes an issue; their mutual invisibility is keeping the boys safe, but in order to retrieve their clothes, they must emerge from the lake and risk placing their naked bodies in view of the white woman.

Big Boy and Bobo decide to try to retrieve the clothes, and it is here that Wright freezes the action into a "fictional still" that demonstrates not only the precariousness of their immediate situation but also that of relationships between Southern black and white people more generally. The boys climb over the embankment to find the woman with "one hand over her mouth." Like Welty, Wright intermittently freezes the action before allowing it to continue in slow motion, directing the readers to watch the confrontation between the African American boys and white woman closely. He first arrests Bigger when he realizes that his presence before the white woman is causing her to be afraid: "Big Boy stopped, puzzled. He looked at the woman. He looked at the bundle of clothes. Then he looked at Buck and Lester. 'C mon, les git our cloes!'" (30). Here Wright pauses the action to show us that Big Boy is not the fearful aggressor that the

white woman imagines him to be. While his black, naked body is clearly evoking stereotypical images of sexual aggression in the woman's mind, Wright slows the escalation of the scene to demonstrate that this is the *woman's* vision of Big Boy—and that of the dominant culture she represents. Big Boy himself is simply a confused boy, arrested by the conflicting impulses—both arising from his desire to defuse the situation and erase the image of brutality the white woman has conjured—to step back to indicate that he does not pose a threat and to go forward to retrieve his clothes and cover his naked body.

Although his uncertainty initially freezes him, Big Boy ultimately makes the decision to try to get his clothes, and Wright restarts the narration before it is quickly arrested again by the white woman's reaction: "He made a step. 'Jim!' the woman screamed. Big Boy stopped and looked around. His hands hung loosely at his sides." Again, Wright shows us through his description of Big Boy that he is not an aggressor in this situation; his hands are "at his sides," so he is clearly not intending to cause the woman any harm. The woman, however, is blinded by her own culturally-informed understanding of what Big Boy's actions mean and is unable to read his body as anything but threatening. The action restarts, demonstrating her complete inability to understand the situation; "her eyes wide, her hand over her mouth," she "backed away to the tree where their clothes lay in a heap" (30). Her covering of her mouth indicates her inability or unwillingness to communicate, and her movement towards the clothes demonstrates that she has completely misread the situation and further complicates the boys' attempt to retrieve their clothes and go home.

After pausing again to consider his options, Big Boy attempts to communicate with the woman, saying, "Lady, we wanna git our cloes." Again, Wright stills the narrative to allow time for this to sink in, both for the readers and for the woman. It is only after another moment of

indecision that Big Boy finally takes significant action and “[runs] toward the tree.” Even though Big Boy has explained the situation, though, the woman still reacts with fear, calling again for Jim and causing Big Boy to stop again, “black and naked” and “three feet from her” (30). As he draws closer and closer to her, Big Boy seems simply to further confirm her static, unchanging image of who he is and what he wants from her. Again, Wright fills this stilled moment with language, an attempt to bridge the chasm between Big Boy himself and the woman’s understanding of him: “We wanna git our cloes,” Big Boy repeats, and again he gets no response from the woman until he “ma[kes] a motion,” and then it is only to tell him to “go away.” Wright stops the motion of the scene one more time to provide us with a final “fictional still” of Big Boy, who stands before the white woman, frozen by the impossibility of the situation, “afraid” (30). This is not a brutal rapist, Wright is showing us; it’s a scared boy who simply wants to get his clothes back and leave. But, in the white characters’ eyes, that distinction is undetectable. When Big Boy’s friend Bobo finally runs to get the clothes and the boys are attempting to leave, Jim arrives on the scene and kills Buck and Lester and threatens to do the same to Big Boy and Bobo before Big Boy is finally able to wrest his gun away from him and, in an action of self-defense, kills him.

Violence and death erupt out of Wright’s “fictional still” that freezes the boys in mid-action. The authors have chosen similar moments to still and share the goal of revealing the distortions at work in white representations of black violence. In this moment, in which the boys are frozen by the fear of what might happen if they do something as simple as retrieve their clothes to cover themselves, Wright demonstrates clearly that they have no interest in harming or harassing the white woman; in fact, they make every effort to make her aware of their intentions and try as hard as they can not to scare her. Unfortunately, she cannot seem to understand them

outside of the established narrative she has for reading their appearance, and when Jim arrives on the scene, he does not even stop to try to find out the boys' intentions but shoots without hesitation. The white characters see four black, naked, male bodies, and, rather than attempt to understand their situation, they immediately impose violent meaning upon their presence. Apparently, the only way they know to respond to such a presence is murder.

Wright also makes clear that Big Boy and his friends are not the ones to initiate the violence. Instead, the minute Jim arrives on the scene, he sees the "fictional still" that Wright has been carefully capturing for us and takes no time to consider alternative narratives from the dominant one of black male aggression that his culture has fed him. His immediate response to such an image is indiscriminate violence, which causes the narrative to start once again and leads Big Boy to murder him in self-defense. While the moment is "stilled," there are many possible outcomes to the story and many different ways to interpret the boys' actions. But once the white man enters the scene and makes an immediate judgment, Big Boy is forced into the stereotypical position that Jim and the white woman already assumed he embodied, and Buck and Lester are reduced to dead, frozen bodies whose actions and intents the white people are free to define for them. Once they have written Big Boy into this narrative, it seems, he does not have the power to write himself out of it, or to refuse to play the part established for him. Here we see this "fictional still" working in similar ways to the actual photographs in Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*. As in the photograph of the black men sitting on the steps behind the white plantation owner, this "fictional still" demonstrates the constraints placed upon black subjectivity and agency by a power structure disproportionately imbalanced towards whites. There are only two options for the remaining boys now: death or escape from that structure by leaving the South altogether.

Big Boy's remaining friend, Bobo, falls victim to the former outcome. While Big Boy is hiding from the lynch mob that he knows will soon be coming after him, he sees a group of white men and women, and among them there is "a long dark spot" that he knows must be Bobo. Not far from where Big Boy is hiding, they tar and feather Bobo and set him on fire. Here, as in his photo-text, in which he includes an image of a black man who has been lynched by the white men who smile as they surround his corpse, Wright refuses to let the reader look away from the horrific outcome. Instead, he shows how this outcome is directly caused by whites' unwillingness to understand African Americans as anything but the static image they carry in their shared cultural imagination. These are the results, he shows us, of looking at an image of a human being through a racist lens and refusing to look any deeper in order to achieve empathy or understanding. When Big Boy is making his escape to Chicago, "it all seem[s] unreal now" (60), for the white people's actions, though very real themselves, are based on "unreal" readings of black boys whose actions they have not even tried to understand.

As in *12 Million Black Voices*, Wright also demonstrates the effects that such experiences have on African American youth, in particular. Wright asserts in the photo-text that racist structures keep African Americans from reaching the goals that the ideal of America advertises to them and cause them to "doubt their songs." Big Boy is robbed of his innocence and even of his ability to feel or hope. "Big Boy had no feelings now. He was waiting," Wright writes when Big Boy is in hiding. Later, after Bobo is lynched, Wright again notes, "He had no feelings now, no fears. He was numb, empty, as though all blood had been drawn from him" (57). And at the end of the story, we are left with the image of Big Boy "turned on his side and sle[eping]" (61). It is almost as though, after being forced to be a participant in the white people's narrative of him as a violent aggressor, Big Boy has been turned into the signifier that they have made him. He is

no longer able to think or feel; he has, in some ways, become a stock image rather than an individual subject.

Wright also uses Big Boy as representative of the migration of black Southerners to the North, a narrative that he also traces in *12 Million Black Voices*. Wright's goal of the broad representation of a national narrative and the subjects' individual stories, personalities, experiences, and desires form a tension. Through Big Boy's experiences, we are meant to draw conclusions about all "boys" like him, and, while this is an important political message for Wright to communicate, it also threatens to subjugate the individual to the polemic messages he seeks to convey.

These tensions are also present in Welty's "Flowers for Marjorie," published in her short story collection *A Curtain of Green* in 1941, and Wright's *Native Son* (1941). Both narratives provide "fictional stills" of men struggling with the erasure of their own desires and personalities as dominant images reflective of Depression-era ideologies of race and class are imposed upon them. Angela M. Thompson argues that there is a "public discussion" occurring in the stories of *A Curtain of Green* "about the ethical responsibilities involved in representing poverty." She writes that "the representations of rural, depression-era poverty in these stories are in dialogue with those federally-sanctioned images produced by the FSA photographers and with Welty's own photographs" (100). Whereas Thompson engages the representations of rural poverty, I wish here to focus on urban poverty in Welty's and Wright's Depression-era work.

Jan Norby Gretlund addresses the influence of Welty's Depression-era photography on the story, noting in a piece for the *Eudora Welty Newsletter* that "Flowers for Marjorie" appears to use a few of Welty's actual photographs for inspiration. In the story, Welty includes images of idle men, a cat in front of a barbershop, and a group of men looking at a machine behind a

window, all of which are also subjects of her “New York in the Depression” photographs. Although these photographs are not included in *One Time, One Place*, they were taken during the same time period, and Welty’s almost direct replication of them in her fiction indicates, as Gretlund notes, that Welty may have “refresh[ed] her memory of details about New York by studying her own photos” (5). She would have most certainly also refreshed her memory of the politics of representation at work in Depression-era photography against which she would later define her own photo-text.

Native Son, too, is often read within its Depression-era context and reveals Wright’s continued interest in depicting the complex relationship between African Americans’ self-presentation and their representation by white photographers and viewers. Aime Ellis, in the article “Where Is Bigger’s Humanity? Black Male Community in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*,” presents the text as one that engages “poor urban black life during the Great Depression of the 1930s,” and “depicts Chicago as a site of extreme racial and political violence” (23). *12 Million Black Voices* shares this interest in representing the racial and political conflict present in Northern urban spaces like Chicago after the Great Migration of African American workers from the South. Wright’s inclusion of images of the dilapidated kitchenette, which he argues “fills our black boys with longing and restlessness, urging them to run off from home, to join together with other restless black boys in gangs” (111), finds its fictional counterpart in his description of Bigger’s family’s rat-infested apartment, in which there is no privacy even to dress (3). Like the “black boys” Wright discusses in *12 Million Black Voices*, Bigger, too, seeks escape from this space of “blackness,” represented by the rat, and confinement through gang activity. Both Welty and Wright use these urban spaces to work through issues of identity, poverty, confinement, and representation similar to those they address in their photo-texts.

Wright and Welty also share in these texts an interest in demonstrating the violence that erupts from the desperate social situations wrought generally by the Depression and, on a more personal level, by the inability of a white woman to see beyond an idealized or stereotypical “image” of the protagonist. Wright is in his typical wheelhouse with *Native Son*, which has become his most recognized and celebrated work, but Welty departs a bit from her usual settings and situations in “Flowers for Marjorie.” Although she still does not go so far as to make the story explicitly political, couching Howard’s struggles in terms of his personal experience and specifically his private relationship with Marjorie, Welty’s work nonetheless references the text’s particular historical moment through Howard’s struggle to find employment. She even places him along a similar trajectory to many of Wright’s characters, with his move from Mississippi to New York in search of employment and a better life.

Of course, Howard and Bigger Thomas are very different characters, not least because of their racial difference, but this story is the closest Welty comes to engaging the Northern, urban space in which so many of Wright’s characters operate. Though their narratives in these spaces take very different courses in ways that correspond to the writers’ differing pedagogies of writing and seeing—*Native Son* ends in a long, polemic discussion of Communism and racial politics whereas “Flowers for Marjorie’s” political argument remains filtered through a personal, domestic lens—ultimately, both authors ask the reader not only to recognize the desperation caused by the instability and economic struggle experienced in Depression-era urban settings, but also, as in their photo-texts, to question the typical representations of such experiences. The writers demonstrate that, if white viewers or readers share the perspective of characters like Mary Dalton and Marjorie that they can fully know or understand characters like Bigger and Howard through the lens of static, photographic representation, then they are in some ways

participating in their oppression by failing to consider them as individuals and within their own terms of self-presentation.

Interestingly, in all four texts included in this chapter, women are the ones who freeze the characters within their gazes and seem unable to see beyond them. In “Moon Lake,” Nina Carmichael and, to a lesser extent, Jinny Love Stark fasten Easter as “orphan” in their imaginations and are unable to see past that understanding of her. Although Easter’s fall into “Moon Lake” disrupts the more fanciful aspects of that vision by causing the girls to view her as tarnished and sexually impure by virtue of Exum’s touch and her fall into the dark, contaminating lake, rather than allowing the girls to know Easter as an individual, this disruption merely adds another layer of representation—of Easter as “fallen Southern woman.” Similarly, in “Big Boy Leaves Home,” the white woman who finds the boys at the lake is unable to get past her vision of them standing in front of her, naked, to understand their actual intentions. Even as the boys tell her that they simply want to get their clothes and leave, the impact of the image of black male sexuality in the cultural imagination bars any potential for productive communication and ultimately turns into a self-confirming vision. When Big Boy’s friends are shot or lynched and he is forced to leave town to escape a similar fate, the white people are left to craft their own story of the black boys they have expelled or murdered.

Similarly, in *Native Son*, as Burrows wrote, " the emergence into visibility of the black subject is also the process by which he is rendered invisible" (171). Being recognized by white people, for both Big Boy and Bigger, simply allows them to be written into the narrative the dominant culture has prepared for them, thus rendering any individual understanding or “seeing” impossible. This is made most clear in *Native Son* through Mrs. Dalton’s blindness; though Mr. Dalton, and Mary attempt to help Bigger in their own ways, believing that they understand his

situation and needs, they look so hard for the image they expect to see that they miss Bigger himself. Their purported “color blindness” is actually an extreme consciousness of his color, which ultimately causes them all to be just as blind as Mrs. Dalton. This perception keeps the “veil” separating Bigger’s existence from theirs intact.

W. E. B. Du Bois explains his concept of the “veil” and of the resulting “double consciousness” it creates for African Americans in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). He writes:

From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth century while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century,—from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism. (127)

Like the subjects of the photographs that Wright uses in *12 Million Black Voices*, Bigger is at least subconsciously aware of living within two worlds that are separated only by a “Veil of Color,” and he displays a constant anxiety and “bewilderment” while navigating the white-dominated world in which he works. At least initially, Bigger keeps the veil intact, presenting himself as a sort of photographic still of the type the Daltons envision him to be rather than

crossing over into the “revolt” or “radicalism” that Du Bois establishes as an alternative and to which Bigger ultimately seems to turn at the end of the novel.

As Precoda and Polanah note in their article “In the Vortex of Modernity: Writing Blackness, Blindness, and Insight,” this resistance to pulling back the veil is in part a reflection of Bigger’s “deliberate misreading of his own, most personal text” (34), a misreading that the authors note is underlined in the novel when Wright writes, “He knew that the moment he allowed what his life meant to enter fully into his consciousness, he would either kill himself or someone else” (9). Acknowledging the full implications of his racist environment would be too much knowledge for Bigger to continue to exist peacefully within such a restrictive society, and, as Precoda and Polanah observe, he attempts to drown out this knowledge through immersion in the values of the dominant culture through exposure to mass media (movies, magazines, etc.) and through “violence, up to this point, only against other blacks” (34).

As noted earlier, this turn away from acknowledging the full implications of his blackness is reflective of Wright’s description of black boys’ attempts to escape from the kitchenette through violence and gang activity. Here, Wright individualizes the general message presented in *12 Million Black Voices*, demonstrating the extent to which politics and social forces shape the life of an individual. Here we see a particular, personal example of the “warped personalities” that arise from the type of living situation dictated by a combination of racism and economic hardship during the Depression. Throw “desperate and unhappy people into an unbearable closeness of association, thereby increasing latent friction, giving birth to never-ending quarrels of recrimination, accusation, and vindictiveness” (*12MBV* 108), and the result, Wright tells us, is Bigger.

Though Precoda and Polanah focus mainly on Bigger's inability to "read" himself as the text of the "Black Other" (35), his determined refusal to "read" his text points to his knowledge of its existence, which makes his rejection of it at least somewhat conscious. It is not particularly transgressive to disavow his personal "text" or "image" within a society dominated by white racism by distracting himself through such socially endorsed actions as violence against other black people, but Bigger's rejection of this stock image of black subjectivity is in some ways an attempt to construct his own self-image. That the Daltons try to "read" him as part of a social and racial text that he has thus far refused to acknowledge himself threatens to disrupt that carefully constructed self-understanding. They are not content to see him as he presents himself to them but insist upon adding extra layers of representation that they believe humanize him but that actually serve to render him more invisible. Though, by the end of the novel, Bigger develops the "will to authorship" and moves "toward making texts himself rather than being made by them," acquiring "genuine insights that manifest a historical or political consciousness illuminating the material ground of his existence" (Precoda and Polanah 32), the price for such authorship is death, and Bigger, if not the Daltons, seems at least tangentially aware of this reality from the beginning of the novel.

Mr. Dalton and Mary, however, can only see their competing visions of Bigger. From his initial arrival in their house, when both appear to be attempting to craft an image of who Bigger is, he tries to maintain the "veil" and present himself as the person they would have him be. Bigger's first time in the house is entirely characterized by people staring at him, and he feels disoriented and is unable to look back. When Peggy, the maid, answers the door and ushers him into the house to wait for Mr. Dalton, Bigger notices her "staring at him" and "look[s] away in confusion" (45). He resents her staring, thinking, "I'm just like she is," but he immediately

becomes highly conscious of his body, actions, and appearance, analyzing the way he sits in his chair (46), and, once the Daltons arrive in the room, he fears that he will get in trouble if he is seen “staring at the woman” (47). As with Big Boy in “Big Boy Leaves Home,” Bigger is both frozen into a static image by those who gaze upon him and unable to control the others’ interpretations of him. This combination renders him practically immobile, and Wright uses “fictional stills” to express his confinement.

Bigger is repeatedly arrested by dilemmas over seemingly simple decisions, such as whether or not to knock on the front door (44) or whether to pick up a dropped hat or find his note from the relief when Mr. Dalton asks for it: “For a moment his impulses were deadlocked; he did not know if he should pick up his cap and then find the paper, or find the paper and then pick up his cap” (47). Though the stilled moment does not last long here, it clearly demonstrates the extreme anxieties and psychological burden of constantly attempting to navigate the contradictory expectations of white people who have the power over his job, person, and livelihood. In some ways, this “fictional still” of Bigger frozen in the Daltons’ home reveals much more about the political forces that shape Bigger’s life than the more removed, guarded, impersonal photographs Wright presents in his photo-text. Both, however, show the “pressure and tension” that poverty and racism “inject” into “individual personalities” (*12MBV* 109).

Bigger goes on to attempt to position himself in a way that aligns with Mr. Dalton’s image of a trustworthy black man, even as he recognizes his utter powerlessness:

He had not raised his eyes to the level of Mr. Dalton’s face once since he had been in the house. He stood with his knees slightly bent, his lips partly open, his shoulders stooped; and his eyes held a look that went only to the surface of things. There was an organic conviction in him that this was the way white folks wanted

him to be when in their presence; none had ever told him that in so many words, but their manner had made him feel that they did. He laid the cap down, noticing that Mr. Dalton was watching him closely. Maybe he was not acting right?

Goddamn! (47-48)

Here we see Bigger, conscious of Mr. Dalton's gaze, fashioning himself into the image he believes Mr. Dalton expects. Although it makes him "hate...himself" to do so, the economic imperative of attaining employment and the social imperative of not doing anything to offend the white man in whose power he finds himself override his more natural impulse of anger at being so obviously sized up. Interestingly, Bigger's body language here is similar to that displayed by many of the subjects of the FSA photographs contained in Wright's photo-text. Like the photographic subjects, Bigger does not make eye contact and stands in an otherwise submissive yet contained posture, with his shoulders slumped and knees bent. This image is reminiscent of the black men sitting behind the plantation owner in Dorothea Lange's photograph, and again, Wright draws attention to the white liberal viewer's position of power. Even though Lange saw herself as presenting the dynamics of power at work in a way sympathetic to her black subjects and in spite of Dalton's presentation of himself as a friend to the black community through his South Side Real Estate Company, his wife's "very deep interest in colored people" (47), and his support of the NAACP (53), ultimately, both are still exercising white privilege. In fact, the Daltons own the housing projects from which Bigger is trying to escape, a fact that Wright uses to expose white charity and "good will" as a front for their own interests.

Wright constricts the frame of his "fictional still" even more when Mary enters the scene. Immediately upon her entrance into the room, Bigger once again becomes concerned with looking; he notes that she is "looking at him" and remembers seeing an image of her in a

newsreel about “America’s leading families” (31), in which the announcer talked of her “shock[ing] society by... accepting the attentions of a well-known radical while on her recent winter vacation in Florida” (32). But whereas in the theater Bigger was able to look at her freely, in real life, he finds that Mary is “not a bit the way he had imagined she would be” (52) and that he is now the bearer of her look. Again, he is anxious about behaving or looking inappropriately; when Mary says hello to him, he looks at Mr. Dalton and then decides “that he should not have looked” before returning the greeting (51). Unlike the stabilized space of the movie theater, where Bigger is allowed to look at images that are being carefully constructed for his consumption, the Daltons’ house is a space whose codes he attempts to negotiate and in which he becomes the projected image. He is contained, frozen, stilled—a black and white photograph for the Daltons’ consumption.

The instability of the situation is highlighted when Mary, much to Bigger and her father’s dismay, asks if he is part of a union and, later, when she and Jan attempt to treat him as an equal by asking him to call them by their first names (66), eating with him in a restaurant on the South Side (72), and attempting to talk to him about Communism. What they understand as kindness, however, Bigger believes to be a kind of punishment, and their actions serve only to further frame and constrict him. He is in anguish and again becomes paralyzed and “frozen” because the “guarded feeling of freedom he had while listening to her” talk to him “as if he were human” becomes “tangled with the hard fact that she was white and rich, a part of the world of people who told him what he could and could not do” (65). The crisis Mary and Jan’s actions create in Bigger’s consciousness is highlighted in another of Wright’s “fictional stills” while Bigger and Jan are shaking hands; once again, the narrative stops to frame how this simple action affects Bigger’s understanding of himself:

What could they get out of this? Maybe they did not despise him? But they made him feel his black skin just by standing there looking at him, one holding his hand and the other smiling. He felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to a black skin. It was a shadowy region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. He felt naked, transparent; he felt that this white man, having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused. At that moment he felt toward Mary and Jan a dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate. (67)

Though Bigger's feelings are highlighted in this particular "fictional still" rather than the moment being simply visually rendered, I still categorize it as such because Wright pauses the narrative to provide a snapshot of Bigger's interiority. He freezes the act of the handshake and zooms in on Bigger's reaction to the simple gesture, condensing a broad message about how racism works on African Americans' consciousnesses and subjectivities into a brief, frozen, and carefully framed moment. This is a moment that, when only visually represented, appears innocuous. An image of a black man and a white man shaking hands, if presented without this insight into Bigger's feelings, could send a message to the viewer of racial harmony or equality—the message that Jan clearly intends to send through what he envisions to be a highly symbolic gesture. To Bigger, though, it is simply another act of domination, of forcing him to look at himself as Jan and Mary see him—as a representative black man—and thus to confront the impact that categorization has on his life. By looking at him in this way, Mary and Jan make only his blackness visible, causing Bigger himself to feel "transparent" while his "black skin" is held up for display and inspection. We need a combination of image and text in able to fully

understand this “fictional still”—a combination directly reflective of Wright’s narrative strategy in *12 Million Black Voices*.

This fear of transparency upon close inspection is perhaps why Wright refuses to totally lift the “veil” between his subjects and his white readers in his photo-text and instead includes photographs in which his African American subjects are constantly looking away and down. This posture in some ways serves as a protection from whites’ misreadings or at least allows the photographic subjects to control the ways in which they are misread rather than presenting them as open to scrutiny that threatens make them feel, like Bigger, that white viewers, “having helped to put [them] down..., held [them] up now to look at [them] and be amused.” We can already see how Bigger’s “double consciousness” constricts his every move, and venturing into the “No Man’s Land” between the “white world and the black” threatens to totally elide Bigger’s sense of self when it becomes clear that even those who want to know and help him cannot see beyond his blackness. The whole scene is like a black and white photograph in a frame that continues Wright’s work in *12 Million Black Voices* of freezing the psychological and social anxieties of starkly segregated environments so that the constant anxieties and negotiations that result from the “double consciousness” that characterizes the lives of Bigger and the subjects of the photographs become visible, even as the individual subjects remain “veiled” to white viewers who are still unable to fully understand them.

Like Wright, Welty also uses fictional moments reflective of the black and white photographic vision captured in her photo-text and demonstrates the gulf in understanding that acceptance of static representations of Depression-era masculinity can create. In “Flowers for Marjorie,” Welty represents this disconnect between Howard and his wife, Marjorie. Though racial difference is not the reason for separation that exists between Howard and her, Marjorie is

similarly unable to see him as he wishes to be seen. Like Bigger, Howard is attempting to find work in an urban space during the Great Depression. And just as Mary fails to understand Bigger's fear that his economic livelihood will be threatened by her talk of unions and Communism, Marjorie also seems to fail to understand the economic pressures that Howard feels as an unemployed man. While Marjorie is able to find happiness in their sparse urban apartment—a space reflective of the stark Chicago kitchenettes represented in Wright's photo-text and novel—and in her anticipation of the birth of their child, Howard is struck by his failure to provide economically for his family and becomes increasingly distraught by Marjorie's inability to fully understand their predicament.

Like Bigger, Howard avoids eye contact. The story begins with a description of him as “one of the modest, the shy, the sandy haired—one of those who would always have preferred waiting to one side.” This description evokes FSA photographs of “modest” men who are reluctant to be captured by cameras documenting the misery of breadlines and the forced idleness of unemployment. Walker Evans's photographs of Floyd Burroughs, which he took while working for the FSA in Hale County, Alabama, directly correspond to this textual description of Howard. Although Burroughs does sometimes look directly at the camera, Stuart Kidd notes that he is “generally detached and distanced even when accompanied by members of his own family” and that his image is therefore ultimately “as much his own construct as it is that of Evans” (32). Though Burroughs is a Southern tenant farmer, he and Howard—who is also from the South—appear to share an impulse to be off “to the side” of a frame rather than to allow themselves to be visually captured and rendered static. Like Bigger, who projects a particular image of himself to the Daltons, and Burroughs, who crafts his own contained, impassible look in Evans's

photographs, Howard, too, defends himself against others' interpretations of himself or judgments of his poverty.

We can see why Howard might attempt to avoid others' gazes. He looks down at the feet of the men sitting around him and does not look up, even as a voice speaks; he simply lifts his eyes high enough to see the speaker's knees (119). Unemployed in this urban space, Howard has lost his ability to connect with other people; they are all simply bodies—their feet and legs are visible, but Howard cannot meet their eyes and faces. Like the subjects in the FSA photographs that Wright uses, in which images of worn hands and tattered overalls covering bent knees work to signify the tenant worker, here seated legs and idle feet stand in for the men who have found themselves out of work as a result of the Depression. At least in representational terms, the urban poor have lost their individuality.

This personal disconnect is continued in Howard's remembrance of Victory, Mississippi, the town from which he and Marjorie came to the city, where "all girls were like Marjorie," soft and hopeful rather than "dark" and "nervous" like the city women (120). Howard has lost his connection to home and to Marjorie along with his work: "Work?" he responds, when Marjorie mentions her continued belief that he will find a job. "When did I ever work? A year ago...six months...back in Mississippi...I've forgotten! Time isn't as easy to count up as you think! I wouldn't know what to do now if they did give me work. I've forgotten! It's all past now...And I don't believe it any more—they won't give me work now—they never will—" (122). Here Welty engages most directly the psychological effects of unemployment during the Great Depression. Unlike in her photo-text, in which she insists, "Trouble, even to the point of disaster, has its pale, and these defiant things of the spirit repeatedly go beyond it, joy the same as courage" (10), here, for Howard, there is no going beyond his trouble.

This becomes clear when he tells Marjorie that her having a baby will not help him find work or keep them from starving. He concludes, “You may not know it, but you’re the only thing left in the world that hasn’t stopped!” His purse, which he is holding in front of her, “like a little pendulum, slow[s] down in his hand” and eventually stops, a symbol that his inability to earn money has frozen him as completely as an FSA photograph, fixing him as another body sitting and waiting for work. Marjorie, like Mary in *Native Son* or a viewer of a Depression-era photo-text, can only see him from a distance and therefore cannot fully understand the extent of his despair; she is in her own “world of sureness and fruitfulness and comfort, grown forever apart, safe and hopeful in pregnancy,” and he thinks it “strange that this world, too, should not suffer” (123). Like Bigger and Mary, though for very different reasons, Howard and Marjorie exist on opposite sides of an apparently impassible divide, and Marjorie’s inability to recognize that separation from what Howard understands to be a privileged position is infuriating to him.

We find later that the government institutions put in place to help people like Howard are also failing not only to provide work, but also to address the psychological damage caused by the feeling that his life has been stopped. He goes to the WPA office to attempt to find Miss Ferguson, wishing that he could tell her “everything, everything in his life!... Then it would come clear, and Miss Ferguson would write a note on a little card and hand it to him, tell him exactly where he could go and what he could do” (126). But Miss Ferguson will not listen to him or look at him; she sees him merely as an unemployed drunk and sends him home. Though he looks to it as a possible source for making sense and order out of his confusion, the WPA cannot or will not recognize his individuality; they only see a typical victim of the Depression rather than an individual experiencing a specific, personal trauma. Though Welty was herself employed by the WPA, here she makes evident the limitations of looking at individual experiences through an

impersonal, bureaucratic lens. Much more is happening to Howard than can be captured in an FSA photograph or on a WPA “note on a little card.”

Both Howard and Bigger respond with violence against the women who are attempting, if unsuccessfully, to be kind to and help them. Bigger kills Mary in a scene caused by his enforced stillness. He is returning her to her room after she passes out from drinking when Mrs. Dalton arrives on the scene. Believing that, if he is found in Mary’s room, it will be assumed that he has intentions of raping her or worse, his fear becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. Wright presents a “fictional still” of Bigger with a pillow over Mary’s mouth to stop her mumbling, an act (or inaction) that kills her:

He clenched his teeth and held his breath, intimidated to the core by the awesome white blur [Mrs. Dalton] floating toward him. His muscles flexed taut as steel and he pressed the pillow, feeling the bed give slowly, evenly, but silently. Then suddenly her fingernails did not bite into his wrists. Mary’s fingers loosened. He did not feel her surging and heaving against him. Her body was still. (86)

The image of black violence that he knows the blind Mrs. Dalton will “see” if she becomes aware of his presence arrests Bigger to such an extent that he basically becomes that image. Though he does not mean to kill Mary, he has nevertheless stepped into that role by virtue of his being completely frozen in horror of discovery (albeit not enough to keep him from pressing down the pillow) by his attempt to avoid being categorized as the very stereotype that his murder of Mary ensures he will now be considered by the Daltons and the white public at large: a brutal rapist and murderer. Wright’s message is clear, here and in “Big Boy Leaves Home”: the options for black men are either to allow one’s image to be imposed or to become so frozen in one’s attempts to avoid making any kind of move that would allow for such categorization that the

individual is rendered invisible through inaction and effectively captured as that same stock image, anyway. Wright highlights the stillness of this moment—the fact that Bigger becomes a murderer almost through inaction. He captures a “fictional still” of the ways in which the “awesome white blur” has the power to frame dominant perceptions of black masculinity without really seeing. Similarly, Bigger’s economic hardship renders him incapable of leaving the house to escape being literally and figuratively “captured.” As Andrew Warnes notes, his “conflicting impulses for satiety and flight” affect his behavior and again freeze him in an unfavorable position (126).

Bigger kills one of the people in his life who most threatened to disrupt that image, albeit by replacing it with another image that was perhaps just as static. And Howard, too, kills Marjorie, the one person with the potential to see him as just another unemployed body, in order to make her stop like everything else in his life. Unlike Bigger, however, Howard is decisive and active in his murder of Marjorie. He takes his knife and quickly thrusts it into her breast, throws the clock out of the window, and leaves the apartment. It is only when he returns, though, to find a “fictional still” of the broken clock on the ground and Marjorie still sitting, dead, in the apartment, that he realizes the full effects of his actions: “Then Howard knew for a fact that everything had stopped. It was just as he had feared, just as he had dreamed. He had a dream to come true” (128). For Howard, such a complete stopping of life is at once feared and desired. With everything stopped, he is no longer the only one who cannot move forward; Welty has used him to turn Marjorie into a “fictional still,” a grotesque version of his own arrested status. And the violence and grotesqueness provide insight into his own position. He understands himself as detached from time and, if he understands Marjorie to now be like him, from life itself. His situation has frozen him to such an extent that the only action he can think to take is to stop all

forward progress in his life—Marjorie’s hope for the future, the ticking time bomb that the baby represents. Welty captures in her fiction the fixed image of the Depression-era subject. In “Flowers for Marjorie,” she reveals such representation to be limiting and confining; it provides no representations of other, more productive outlets than simply staying still in that position.

Like Mary with Bigger, Marjorie was disruptive of and disconnected from the sense of self in terms of which Howard defined himself, but both women were some of the few potential regenerative forces in the men’s lives, as well. The ideas that Mary espouses are ultimately the same ones that Jan and Max use to encourage Bigger to gain control over and understanding of his own narrative, and Marjorie represents Howard’s only connection to time, both past (in her relation to his home) and future (in her belief that their situation will improve). Removing the women from the picture effectively freezes the men within the frames already designated for them in the national imagination—Bigger as brutal, black killer and Howard as a desperate, ineffectual one. Welty and Wright appear to be looking through similar lenses as they present their male characters’ internalization of their stereotypical representation. These characters act on behalf of the dominant culture to rid it of potential disruptions and effectively perform the work of self-containment.

In these texts, both Wright and Welty can be seen engaging such questions of the impact of nationally held and distributed representations on individual lives. For people like Big Boy, Easter, Bigger, and Howard, their individual experiences with self-definition, both inwardly and outwardly imposed by ideology, can best be seen not simply visually or textually, but through a combination of both, by framing a “fictional still” and showing how the many layers of representation and impositions of the gaze work to bestow constructed meaning without full understanding and then to allow the reader the closest access possible to that understanding by

demonstrating how these impositions work upon the psyche of the photograph's subject, who may ultimately become so entwined in the dominant way of looking that he or she becomes complicit in his or her own "capturing." Though Wright and Welty may direct our attention to these issues through different styles or levels of engagement with the polemic, those positions shift in these fictional works, with Wright zooming in on Bigger's individual experience before returning to a polemic argument about the nation's problems in the end and Welty presenting generalized, stock images from FSA photography of Depression-era masculinity before focusing on how such images affect the Howard's individual psychology.

Ultimately, both authors are looking beyond static representations of violence or economic hardship to provide a shared directive to the reader to look with them at how national ideologies of race and class become inscribed upon individual bodies and consciousnesses through black and white photographic representation. Comparing Welty's and Wright's fictional uses of such photographs to illustrate how they narrow and contain characters' visions has allowed us to see the proximity of the authors' political agendas. Both reveal the impossibility for African Americans and poor whites to navigate a world in which their identities are already fixed in the eyes of the dominant culture; in such a context, communication collapses, ideologies are left unquestioned, and, consequently, violence is constantly erupting. Wright and Welty therefore pose a new vision for seeing race and class—one that looks closely at how general representations frame individual lives and situations and attempts to break society out of such frames by demonstrating how damaging they can be to individuals, communities, and the nation at large.

CONCLUSION

I began this work questioning critics' unwillingness to write Eudora Welty and Richard Wright into a critical space beyond the historical "one time" and "one place" they shared in their early lives. After analyzing both their photo-texts and their fiction, I hope to have made clear that Wright and Welty share more than a biographical "time" and "place"; they also devote textual space to a shared political vision of, at least, the "time" of the Great Depression and the "places" of the rural Southern farm, the contaminated lake in the Southern wilderness, and the stark kitchenette of the urban North. I hope that this work of marking shared spaces and tracing shared visions in Wright's and Welty's work can serve as a starting point for continued emancipation from the critical constraints and authorial pedagogies that have for so long kept the authors separate.

Though Wright and Welty will continue to stand back to back as marble statues in Jackson, Mississippi, in this thesis, at least, they stand side by side, looking at and representing a shared vision of Depression-era race and class politics. Though, as I have established, Wright and Welty direct their readers away from their similarities through often apparently oppositional pedagogical directives, this thesis has shown that they in fact share key goals, themes, strategies, and visual politics in their photographic and fictional projects. In *One Time, One Place* and *12 Million Black Voices*, Welty and Wright both create "imagined communities" that revise and restructure the dominant "imagined community" established by FSA photographers as part of the New Deal effort and of the "imagined community" of nation more generally. Though their

communities on the surface take very different shapes, they both seek to make African Americans and their individual lives, struggles, labors, hopes, and constraints a more visible part of Depression-era representation. Though Welty does this by writing African Americans into the Southern “family,” while Wright sketches a history of African American nationhood stretching back to the Middle Passage, the authors ultimately depict their subjects as participating in labor, church meetings, and other such important daily experiences in similar ways.

Wright and Welty also reveal a shared vision in their selection or capturing of the photographs contained in their photo-texts. Both include images of subjects with shadowed eyes and faces turned away from the camera. Both also use images in which the viewer is excluded from the subjects’ interiority or interactions with other people. Such inclusions reveal the extent to which the authors share a tension between at once revealing and protecting their African American subjects from the appropriative, generalizing gazes of white audiences. Their awareness of the potential for such depersonalizing generalization does not keep them from making such gestures themselves, however. Wright and Welty both caption their photographs in ways that present their subjects as types, and they each attempt to “edit out” potentially subversive photographic moments, whether by explaining the subversion away through captioning or literally editing it out of the photograph. Ultimately, they both participate in and revise traditional Depression-era documentary techniques and demonstrate how political forces—even those that are attempting to help their impoverished subjects like the politicized representations produced by the FSA—constrict and impose their ideologies upon individual lives.

In their fiction, Wright and Welty share a strategy of using “fictional stills” to further highlight these effects. In “Moon Lake” and “Big Boy Leaves Home,” they freeze moments in

which the touch of an African American male is read by the white characters as a threat to white female purity to demonstrate how destructive static representations of race can be. In *Native Son* and “Flowers for Marjorie,” they launch a shared critique of urban alienation for Southern characters and capture in “fictional stills” the panic and terror of the Depression years.

Throughout these examples they share a vision of raced and gendered representations as already firmly set in the national imagination. By drawing attention to these static images and the horrifying effects they have on the lives of people on whom such images are imposed, Wright and Welty attempt to loosen their hold on national visions of race and class and substitute them with their own, much more fully realized and nuanced “fictional stills” of individual experience within racist and impoverished communities.

Throughout their fictional work and, to varying degrees, within their photo-texts, Wright and Welty share a message that internalized ideological representations create actual violent and deathly situations. There are real stakes at work in the decoding of representational politics, and Wright and Welty are both seeking to dismantle the photographic scaffolding that supports racist and classist ideologies. Entering them into a critical conversation about Depression-era visual politics has revealed the extent to which Wright and Welty are both enmeshed in a shared, highly political project of making visible the complications, distortions, and exploitations that other Depression-era photography alternately participated in, overlooked, and engaged. Though neither writer’s project entirely escapes such complications and, perhaps as a result, both writers ultimately turn to fiction as the ultimate outlet for critiques of the damaging ideologies produced by such representations, they generate their shared political vision in their photo-texts, creating a dialogic space in which Wright’s and Welty’s texts may finally “speak” to one another.

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