



Black Atlas

GEOGRAPHY AND FLOW
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AFRICAN AMERICAN
LITERATURE

Judith Madera

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INTRODUCTION

ON MEANINGFUL WORLDS

Black Atlas is about the ways literature reflects and composes place. I begin from the position that places are sites we imbue with meaning. They are constituted by our ways of knowing. Just as importantly, they are imprints of feelings and attachments. The pages that follow look at the ways places are generated through processes of participation. They take the view that places are about how we use them, how we share them. I further argue that place resists the closure of any singular mode of representation. Place is something semiotic (between concept and symbol) and something material with real conditions. It exceeds any private experience. In making these claims, it is necessary to foreground the stakes of my argument—what a reinvigorated understanding of place means for more specific communities in time. I am particularly interested in what place means for those whose histories have been vernacularized, or simply overwritten in the dominant records of a culture. *Black Atlas* is about these kinds of communities and about their stories.

This book takes up with African American literature from the volatile period between 1849 and 1900, an era of massive national expansion and hemispheric ambition. The period encompasses the radical abolitionist movement, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow. From an artistic perspective, it might be called “the rise of the black novel period,” because the decade of the 1850s alone launched the first generation of black novelists, including William Wells Brown, Frank J. Webb, Harriet Wilson, and Martin Delany.¹ But to limit the story of black place aesthetics to this midcentury literary surge is to hem a complex record of print expression into a too-narrow scope of periodicity and genre. Late-

century literature gains its projection in relation to earlier writing. And the range of midcentury textualities considered here actually comes into relief against later, post-Reconstruction fiction in a variety of ways that do not align with imposed historicizations.

Black Atlas thus begins with the supposition that place pushes against assimilable forms. Place unsettles sweeps of development-based histories. It also interrupts ideas of black history as a march of progress, or a story of protest within a national frame. Thus, to better attend to the complexities of literary place aesthetics, I extend this rise of the black novel, as I am calling it, to a longer view of literature. I start with the first novel to be published by an African American author, William Wells Brown's 1853 *Clotel*, and close with the end-of-century literature by authors like Pauline Hopkins and Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Theirs was the kind of fiction that tied the specters of the past to the flows of a new black cultural history, poised at an uncertain but impending modernity. Across this expanse, these pages consider the ways literature stages the processes of place as a discursive struggle.

I should state, too, that the readings that follow are not sequenced around a series of symbolic spaces. (Here I think of Melvin Dixon's *Ride out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature* [1987], which reads modernist black narratives as quests for belonging in relation to the mythico-real spaces of wilderness, underground, and mountaintop.) Nor do I organize *Black Atlas* as a collection of topical sites in black history, which I then examine through the lens of literature. Instead, what I keep at the center of my discussion is how African American literature itself arranges geographic meaning. I go on to argue that discourses about place can effectively produce experiences of space, and that what African American literature does with a lucidity and richness is make place into a theatre of deliberation. Place in African American literature is a complex of meaning that cues different worlds of necessity and possibility.

This book brings into focus a group of authors, all from the critical half-century, beginning with William Wells Brown, Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, James Beckwourth, and Frances E. W. Harper and extending to Pauline Hopkins and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, among others. It encompasses political editorials from black serials (the *North Star*, *Anglo-African*, and *New Orleans Daily Creole*), detailed travel writing and exploratory accounts, and midcentury national maps of hemisphere.

Yet the authors I look at here are unified less by the worlds they inhabited than by the worlds they invented. Most centrally, they are united by the prominence of geography—*geo* (world) and *graphia* (writing)—in their literature. Their writings, I argue, reflect not just the times, but the processes of place. That is, their work is about the complexities of place—and place has a valence outside of fiction. In terms of organization, I have tried to select texts that most clearly illustrate my claims about the relations of the literary to the geographic. However, my argument is less about patching together any synthetic canon than it is about the centrality of territorial relationships and geographic materiality to meaningful correlations between race politics and black literary aesthetics. I especially arrange the chapters to locate and historicize something that African American literature showcases in respect to other narrative traditions in the Americas: the highly interstitial scope of placement blacks worked through—both materially and perceptually—in the United States.

I further argue that although nineteenth-century African American authors did write about scenes and sites frequently inaccessible to white U.S. and British readers, they did more than present stories about how the other half lives, or make “peculiar” witness for popular print commodity. Instead, to gain representation in the symbolic structures of white territorialization, black authors had to write over white principles of containment. They had to dismantle dominant organizational codes of place. They did this by revealing the contingencies of dominant discourses and the different fabrications that took the form of geographic fact. They also got close to something I think of as parallel invention. As the following pages consider, nineteenth-century African American literature produces subject mappings. It creates worlds and effects sensibilities and relations to those worlds. So what I try to attend to are the ways literature stages place and simultaneously breaks with scales of geography that abrogate the local as a function of the national, or that collapse hemisphere into nationalist paradigms of influence. As I will describe shortly, literature confounds the logic of scale.

Finally, I suggest that what animates the literature I look at here is its engagement with deterritorialization. Deterritorialization, as a dislodging of geographic contexts and descriptors, takes different forms in each of the following chapters. It can be about presenting a world and presenting how to undo it. It can also be about posturing in one world and

moving an agenda forward in another, or passing through the codes of a given space outside the modalities that systemize control. Regardless, it is a leading mode of representative practice in the literature I consider here. Deterritorialization partitions territory. It moves boundaries. And so it has the potential to be generative since, by realigning territories, it can alter the overall map. The approach to deterritorialization I pursue in *Black Atlas* connects to the ways literature configures black flow (the currencies that traverse space—be they speech acts or the movements of cultures and capital) in nearly all of these texts. It also connects to what I suggest is the creative potential of deterritorialization. This is an important consideration in the subsequent chapters. African American authors and intellectuals understood that it was only through decoding dominant registers of power that they could find openings for different forms of actualization. The authors I examine used their writing to interrupt racist ordering systems. They used it to make contours for spaces of dissension. That is, they used it to yield new forms.

Spaces of Dissension

The term “spaces of dissension” is influenced by Michel Foucault’s early archaeological-styled work on discourse formation and the accidents or contradictions that keep a dominant discourse from ever being fully self-contained. These contradictions pose certain openings whereby new discourses can emerge.² As Foucault contends, spaces of dissension are always in subtle negotiation with the agendas of power. They belong to no specific domain, and they reconstitute in different places. In my treatments here, I read spaces of dissension and discursive deterritorialization as modes of a similar thing: I take them both to be interactive forms of a black aesthetic that is always in negotiation with other circulating discourses. But additionally, the body of literature I examine prompts a further recognition. African American literature shows that spaces of dissension are more than reactive, rhetorical gestures toward a real “out there.” They are not just declamatory expressions against a backdrop of material history. Rather, they are fields of invention that mediate different worlds.³ So instead of taking the production of such spaces to be inevitable cracks in the coherence of some pervasive ideology, or quasi-attached resistance acts that defy the sense of a system (as Foucault would suggest), I look at them as deliberate narrative strategies.

I say “narrative” because that is how they reach the modern reader—through the records of writing. But they could be constituted by any variety of practices: life practices, escape acts, performances. What African American literature shows is that spaces of dissension are produced on purpose, to effect new modes of figural representation: they are aesthetic figurations of a process. And this process is the business of feeling out the normative organizational codes that cohere in oppressive power systems, and then finding disruptions in, contradictions to, and corridors through these codes. This is what black flow is about. Its forms are virtually endless because it does as it makes.

Black Atlas traces a portion of this deterritorializing work geographically through nineteenth-century black literature since the literature itself is so invested in gauging and reformulating different exercises of power. It is literature that narrativizes different schemes of possibility for black positioning. For example, dispersed through the plotlines of Martin Delany’s serially released novel *Blake* (1859–62) is an instructional counter-atlas. In chapter after chapter, the author illustrates devices for black escape via land knowledge (moss growing on the north side of tree bark), river knowledge (crossing sites and the names of steamer captains), basic astronomy and navigational technology (lodestone and compass), and an array of performances in the gaps of white custom. All constitute the material of black passage out of slavery. All feed a black counter-discourse of place that takes shape against other cartographies.

Literature, I argue, serves as an important vehicle for those interested in understanding the operations of place as creative strategies for living. It gives purchase to places that fall outside of historiographical landscape accounts, spaces termed obsolescent, nonproductive, or generally removed from the scenes on which real modern action is believed to transpire. It also confers shape on spaces that go unrepresented in traditional cartography. Fiction poses questions about what is mappable and which sites cast shadows; it opens dwellings and it opens the spaces of memory. It writes not just known spaces or the negative aesthetics of dislocation. It makes a relationship between scenes of experience and worlds that can be imagined.

In writing this book, I have also had occasion to reflect on the ways space is about stories. Our stories are constantly augmented by the spaces we inhabit. The scales and vantages espoused in narratives are, in effect, maps of times embedded in space. Thadious Davis understands

this when at the beginning of *Southscapes* she writes, “approaching space as a site of struggle over value and meaning necessarily involves engagement with the structures underpinning and driving narration itself.”⁴ Geographical knowledge is produced through narrative, and as this book illustrates, narratives negotiate geographies of power. Moreover, stories yield insight into the ways users design their environment—even as these environments seem to determine them. Stories, I claim, are archives of movement and spatial representation. They are a circulating commons. “Every story,” Michel de Certeau writes, “is a travel story—a spatial practice.”⁵

And insofar as the readings that follow connect stories to spatial practice, I think it is necessary to consider, at least briefly, what space means in relation to place, especially because space is so frequently equated with freedom and place with enclosure. I mean that for all the possibility space ostensibly hosts, we associate it with emptiness. Space suggests extension—without a set course.⁶ Humanist geographers tend to interpret space as something abstracted from the particular.⁷ It is a framework for configurations shaped by time and somehow subject to scientific law. Computer scientist Paul Dourish argues that despite major gaps of legibility, space has come to be seen “as a natural fact—a collection of properties that define the essential reality of settings of action.”⁸ Processes flow through space, but it evades our scope of causality and ideas about closure. Its range makes it largely unmeasurable.

By contrast, place has a rather different set of associations. Place is attached to our sense of values, *genius loci*, and our experiences of boundedness. In terms influenced by Martin Heidegger, place constitutes the boundaries through which presencing can begin. Without such boundaries for presencing, there can be no being, no identity or identification.⁹ This distinguishes place from space’s infinite extension: place is closer to us and closer to our connections. From Henri Lefebvre to Fredric Jameson, space represents surface and synchronicity, a kind of vertical history. Place, on the other hand, contains times as practices; it spans a horizontal axis of forward experience and backward recollection. Sociologist Anthony Giddens argues that places reveal time by tradition (a point we will return to in the later chapters dealing with region).¹⁰ And Yi-Fu Tuan, whose work perhaps best defines the turn to humanistic geography beginning in the 1970s, emphasizes the ways individuals and people bond to settings, calling place “a center of felt value.”¹¹ Though geogra-

phers on the whole recognize place to be one of the field's most contested concepts, certain understandings come together as convention. Political geographers Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires state this paraphrastically: "Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed."¹² We superimpose our frameworks for meaning on place, and space, ostensibly, lays its claims on us.

Yet the literary histories I will examine here turn on an understanding that rejects the dominant dualism of space and place—namely, the presupposition of an absolute space from which place can be particularized, and the primacy of space over place. As I argue, such divisions tend toward a succession of reductions. This is particularly the case when it comes to examining represented spaces (spaces in discourse, spaces in art) because, among other things, spaces become legible to us by the ways they orient the human subject. We can read spaces if they enable structures of meaning, or if they present a world of sensations. Thus, we know space like we know place: by the practices it "presences." But my main concern is more simply that the division proves misleading. It unnecessarily foreshortens our views into the ways actual life spaces work, how they are made and get into circulation. And it leads to the equation of place with representation, which is actually another kind of closure, much like making time the particularization of historical occurrence.¹³

This leads to the issue of periodicity, something I do not want to leave aside in this preliminary discussion about geographical approaches. One point I should make at the outset is that I take the foregrounding of place as process to be part of the generative, critical work I see that is bringing forward a newer set of benchmarks for the organization of African American literature. These benchmarks are more geographically inferential than they are sequential. For example, recent scholarship in black diaspora and hemispheric studies has gone quite a distance to expose the kinds of exceptionalisms inherent in the project of containing literary aesthetics and discourse circulations in national forms (Carr, Gruesser, Gruesz, Kazanjian, Levander, Levine, Nwankwo).¹⁴ From another angle, works like Stephen Knadler's *Remapping Citizenship and Nation in African American Literature* and Ivy Wilson's *Specters of Democracy* trace within the aesthetics of citizenship a foundational reflexivity, a spatial indeterminacy that lies at the base of any projection of the national. Knadler, for example, looks at the border spaces between comparative cultures for alternative contexts to the meaning of democratic self-making. And

Wilson follows a pervasive shadow presence, an undercurrent that comes alive in the echoes and recesses of national form. For Robert S. Levine in *Dislocating Race and Nation*, an attention to the conspicuously fictive, provisional qualities of a national culture—what Levine aptly calls an “unknowingness” undergirding a culture’s assemblages—is just as valuable an opening for the modern critic as the forms of consensus that inform any “rising national literature” paradigm.¹⁵ And in the project of expanding an expressly African American frame of reference, Eric Gardner’s *Unexpected Places* illustrates the breadth of frequently overlooked textualities from the black periodical press that can be recovered (just as Gardner himself archivally recovers) by extending our views of a literary landscape to a much broader range of print publication venues.

In contrast, a sequentially driven, horizontal analysis of cultural history is generally configured to obscure from view events and scenes that do not point toward a given conclusion. Indeed, such arrangements hold together long-standing chronologies of African American aesthetics—whether it means the culmination of black agitation after slavery into a proto-civil rights movement, or a staging of the Harlem Renaissance as the flowering of the Great Migration from the rural South. These older historiographies, which I see no need to single out here, are by no means poor conceptualizations. On the contrary, they offer organized and compelling frames for symbolizing African American national experience. And they remain valuable for their conductive role in bringing forward an African American literary tradition—which at the present time of writing, I suppose, we are no longer inclined to view as a somehow singular tradition.¹⁶ But place-based histories frequently prove most interesting when they do not adhere to such chronographies—when they run aslant of temporal encapsulations. This is because geographical approaches can provide a wider aperture for inspecting counter-histories or counter-movements that do not directly lead to a given historical junction. Thick descriptions of place may be less valuable as an organizing motif for sequential-axis histories because of their inclusive nature. Yet the point remains that many paths in cultural expression do not work as designs leading to some determined end.

And so I begin from the claim that nineteenth-century African American literature is starkly geographic. The readings that follow intervene in major period debates about free soil, regionalist scales of production, Indian deterritorialization, internal diasporas, color line spatial-

ities, pan-American expansionism, and hemispheric circuitry. They do so because the literature I examine did so first. I also argue that African American literature reconfigures geographic contexts by intensifying sites of identification and sites of defamiliarization. It manipulates the signification of different geographies in ways that make openings for black aesthetic emergences.

Having previously addressed periodicity, I should also make a claim for genre. Most basically, the generic category of novel in the black rise of the novel begs qualification. (This is discussed in detail in the first chapter of this book.) The nineteenth-century black novel did not exist in any bracketed specificity. There was not an integrated sense of readership for it. Nor was there a more unified or nationalized commercial market to tap, as was the case during the rise of the novel in eighteenth-century England. Nineteenth-century black authors targeted multiple publics. For instance, Brown's first edition of *Clotel* was directed to a white, primarily British, antislavery readership, while Delany's *Blake*, published just a few years later, was written for a literate, largely urban, black magazine subscription base. And in as much as it appealed to different constituencies, the black novel borrowed from many conventions. It was, in fact, something closely intertwined with parallel innovations in other narrative forms, including autobiography, serial fiction, natural history, and political theory. *Black Atlas* takes all these genres to be constitutive of nineteenth-century African American literature. But it keeps in focus the era's most incisive and developed writing about place, writing found in the radical genre-bending work of a number of the period's important authors.

Finally, I think it is important to describe how I mobilize the subject of geography in this book: I pursue a characterization of place as something both material and invented, which is actually indicative of geography's reach. That is, the literary analyses that follow do not have to subtend geography's disciplinary function in some way, since geography is a practice already attached to both writing and human apportioning of landscape. As geographic historians have argued, geography is a compound field of study. What separates geography from related domains like geology or topography is that geography is about places as interconnected, interactive phenomena. It poses questions about the nature of places and the ways they are organized, not as contiguous sites but as interwoven spatial forms. Geographer Michael Curry argues that the his-

tory of geography as a scientific discourse predates printed English, and that since its earliest traceable appearance, it was a compound branch of learning. Accordingly, geography from the time of Ptolemy (born approximately 100 CE) joined together topography (the writing about discrete places), chorography (the writing about region), and geography (the study of the earth as a whole).¹⁷

The point of this genealogy is not to identify the perhaps obvious scalar movement from *topos* to *choros* to *geos*, an arrangement from small to large. Nor is it that contemporary practices of geography have somehow swallowed other traditions of thinking about space (although that might be an interesting arena of philological debate). Rather, it is that geography shares in the articulation of spaces as multimodal. Geography is about places as limit situations and places as possibility. In addition, geography is at the intersection of both place and text: it describes worlds out of sites; its purview is interactive place. African American literature reflects this multiplicity of modes, and it does so in a way that is amplified by the strikingly interstitial relationship to places that African Americans in the United States historically experienced.

The Land Stakes

Throughout the first decade of the African American novel, the black population in the United States existed without political representation in a nation whose very federal structure appeared to be on the brink of dissolution. The vast western land accessions of the 1840s and the growing competition between federal and state claims for primacy created a broad-based uncertainty about the status of nation in the U.S. popular imagination. Slavery had already made the vast Nebraska Territory slave country. It was a decisive issue in carving out from the Mexican Cession of 1848 the slave territories of Utah and New Mexico. In 1853, the same year that the first African American novel—Brown's *Clotel*—was published, President Franklin Pierce authorized the Gadsden Purchase, buying from Mexico the southern corners of what are now New Mexico and Arizona to make a route for a transcontinental railroad across the South. It was territory that was conspicuously opened to slavery. Slavery was also deeply implicated in designs for the movement of capital, as thousands of miles of railroads and hemispheric steamboat routes reshaped national pathways. As figures like the black explorer, author,

and journalist Martin Delany feared, slavery had the potential to shape the country's seemingly voracious future growth. In 1849 Delany wrote: "That the question of Free Soil is henceforth to become the great leading political topic of this country, is now admitted by all."¹⁸ Little was more pressing than the subject of national geography for midcentury African Americans. Slavery made the lands stakes very high.

At the same time, the African American authors I examine saw beyond the spatial teleologies of Northern freedom and Southern bondage. From Brown and Delany to Harper, Hopkins, and Dunbar-Nelson, they wrote about the webs of wider hemispheric geographies and how they came together in known worlds. Even authors like Sutton Griggs, whose best-known novel *Imperium in Imperio* (1899) described an intra-national black breakaway republic, secretly headquartered in Waco, Texas, were fascinated by the wider arc of black territorial imagination. He described the anticipation with which midcentury African Americans greeted news of black revolt in Cuba: "In proportion as the Cubans drew near to their freedom the fever of hope correspondingly rose in the veins of the Imperium."¹⁹ Writing for the *North Star*, both Douglass and Delany scrutinized technologies of connection between nation and hemisphere. They closely followed the transit and communication spreads (submarine telegraphs, steamer hubs, and capital flows) linking proslavery U.S. nationals and Caribbean landholders. Such circuitry reflected what Delany called, "the Southern Confederacy of America."²⁰ This was a confederacy that did not simply concentrate itself along North-South or industry-agriculture polarizations. Viewed on a map, it was not the other half of the Missouri Compromise or the proslavery side of the Mason-Dixon Line. Finally, it was not the Southern landscape purveyed by some of the most proslavery of Democratic legislators, figures like South Carolina's John C. Calhoun, who in an 1850 Senate address depicted it as a grounded, agrarian space of quiet that maintained a national equilibrium.²¹ Rather, it was an expansive vision of slavery's alliances as an "Axis Americanus," a capitalist network that swelled beyond national structures. Slavery's topographies were designs on land and water. They went over and under the 36°30' latitude lines thought to contain slavery. As David Kazanjian has observed, U.S. imperialism is itself a circuit that stages nationalist vistas: "The entrenchment of racial formations depends on the enhancement of U.S. imperialism."²²

And as the following chapters describe, the story of black placeles-

ness in national schemes of affiliation does not end with the abolition of slavery or postbellum reunification. The Civil War brought little in the way of resolution to black experiences of internment in white models of underdevelopment. By the second half of the nineteenth century, concerns about black figuration in national representation proliferated as some of the most written about and publicly debated issues in African American life. For blacks, it was about getting through jurisdictions, through the relation of law to land. And it was about survival when as late as 1896, John Marshall Harlan—the only dissenting Supreme Court justice in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision—conceded that what national law was now bestowing on African Americans, this “large class of our fellow citizens, our equals before the law,” was “a brand of servitude and degradation.”²³ Chapters 4 and 5 address the ways African American authors had to develop geographic literacies to move through coded restrictions after Reconstruction. Late-century authors like Charles Chesnutt and Alice Dunbar-Nelson described these adapted forms of movement in their literature. They both knew firsthand what it meant to be outsiders from American plenitude. They knew about social stratification and racial difference under the banner of a free nation, and their stories certainly reflect this.

Yet African American authors took seriously the idea that systems of meaning, just like the ordinances that determined their own national lives, were dynamic and fluid. They knew that power could be manipulated and subversively reappropriated in different contexts. Ways of knowing, their writings demonstrate, might be ways of reading material places in their configurations and their phrasings. Black geographical literature, I argue, is the textual reclaiming and reconstituting of actual places. In fact, although it has been little examined, geographical inquiry into the ways places were organized as overlapping sites of access and sites of surveillance reads as a persistent subtext in the African American novel. Writing about the United States as a fugitive in England, William Wells Brown addressed the spaces of the slaveholding household from Missouri to New Orleans, as well as the conflation of domestic production (slavery and industrialization alike) and planter politics in both the national capital and the capital of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia. Martin Delany extensively researched the presence of internal diasporas, situated within the spaces of some thirteen slave states and the Choctaw Indian Nation in Arkansas. His writings insist that the dimensions of

black diaspora, from the Guinea Coast in West Africa to the Niger Valley and colonial Cuba, absolutely mattered for slaves on U.S. plantations. James Beckwourth's travel literature cartographically illuminates questions about frontier and Crow Indian border knowledges vis-à-vis statist territorializations in the lands of the North American West. Pauline Hopkins fashioned a black public sphere within the urban geography of Boston at the end of the nineteenth century in relation to interracial legacies from postcolonial Bermuda. And Alice Dunbar-Nelson looked to regional space to remap the locales of late-century New Orleans. She wrote a regionalism that was consciously creolized and transnational.

But even in outlining the sites that were meaningful (or most made to mean) in literature, another point of consideration looms large. Black geographic literature is more than representation and more than taking apart dominant spatial coding. It is literature that produces subject mappings. So whereas the texts I look at here do challenge normative representations of places, they are further suggestive for their engagement with something closer to nonrepresentational geographies. Nonrepresentational geographies are deliberations about the ways places get produced rather than the outcomes of that production. Put another way, they are about the relations that come together to make place. These might be thought of as scenes of flow or mediation, or the ways places can be constituted by interruption. More theoretically, they can be described in terms of deployment, as "processes of delegation or translation." Bruno Latour calls the processes of nonrepresentative theory "traceable associations."²⁴ For Latour, it is about flattening the social to get at its movements and interactions, to get at its makings. For black authors in the nineteenth century, it was also about unfolding space—to get across. To be clear, relating nonrepresentational theory to nineteenth-century textualities is not about dubbing some anachronous sensibility onto earlier constructions of space. It is more a way to think alongside projects that question the making and enforcement of dominant geographies. And it is no less a way to do justice to the multiple material and semiotic relations and experiential depth recorded in African American literature. For nineteenth-century African American authors, print representation was already the work of thinking around dominant geographies.

David Harvey has noted that the history of geography, at least from the eighteenth century onward, reads primarily as a tool of domination of the powerful over the weak. He writes, “retrospectively we see how geographical dynamics have proven central in the quest to dominate nature and other peoples, to build and perpetuate distinctive power structures (such as a capitalist class or imperialist systems) or social identities (such as the nation state).”²⁵ Harvey’s thinking recalls the observation of cartographer and historian J. B. Harley that the social history of geographical information and maps exhibits “few genuinely popular, alternative, or subversive modes of expression” and rather reads more as “a language of power not of protest.”²⁶ Indeed, like other discourses, geography is reproduced through narratives that give coherence to places by sequencing them according to scales of development and underdevelopment, inclusion and exclusion. Geographer Doreen Massey summarily observes that “not only under modernity was space conceived as divided into bounded places but that system of differentiation was also organized in a particular way. In brief, spatial difference was convened into temporal sequence. Different ‘places’ were interpreted as different stages in a single temporal development.”²⁷ Massey’s broader argument shows that one major outcome of this process is the reduction of space to a dimension that could display a particularization of time.²⁸ A second outcome is the diminishing of the flow that is space and time to something more like sliced historical occurrences. These could be popular periodicities or some version of what Susan Gillman critiques as “forced chronologies,” the kinds of frameworks frequently pinned to national histories.²⁹ Forced chronologies take different shapes, and one could conceivably argue that all chronologies are, at best, approximations of some collective experience. But what I want to draw attention to is the ways such readings amplify time and conduct space through its chambers. They make place the realm of receivership for history’s outworkings.

From another converging angle, colonial historian Walter Mignolo makes clear the presumptions underlying dominant geographic discourses. Writing from a perspective that tries to encompass the coloniality of modern history, dated loosely from the European Age of Discovery and the beginning of Indo-European contact in the Americas in the long sixteenth century, Mignolo claims that by linking geographical boundar-

ies to temporal hierarchies, colonialism's outside—its “others”—could be exteriorized and denied a “co-evalness.” He writes that “at the end of the nineteenth century, savages and cannibals in space were converted into primitives and exotic Orientals in time.”³⁰ Mignolo's work is particularly suggestive when it comes to the residual epistemes of colonial encounters. He argues that subjective projections of time (as calendars, as histories) have consequences for space. For example, the colonialist Atlantic imaginary he constantly circles—so as to keep in sight—is described as a story about sequencing, about world history that began with Europe. Applied via different regimes of conquest, it made the Americas a place without a history before the present, before the colonial encounter. Such an imagination of space, for Mignolo, produced “the formation and transformation of the modern/colonial world system.”³¹

What bringing together accounts by Harvey, Massey, and Mignolo focalizes for this discussion are the more starkly geographic dimensions—indeed, geographic consequences—of official histories. These histories generate normative temporalities, productions of time and space. They are produced and exercised by those in power. And they influence what gets told and how.³² So one reason why dominant discourses play the role of antagonist (or, more accurately, secondary subject) in *Black Atlas* is because they are discourses that inter space into modes of temporality. As the work here dealing with cartography especially considers, such mobilizations were often invisible, even during U.S. slavery, and blended into matters of fact or presented as the terms of the debate. Yet I also want to argue that African American literature deploys its own vibrant counter-discourses, which reassemble these dominant discourses. It shows them to be fictions that can neither correspond to material space nor cohere as systems of order. If the written literatures, records of civilizations, political documents, and narratives of development in U.S. history are at the same time records of offsetting others into static chronologies of placement, then it is through an attention to heterogeneous counter-discourses that we can read beneath dominant institutionalized knowledges. African American literature is one site among others where the particularity of the local and, at the same time, its imbrications into wider patterns of geographical uneven development, can be narrativized and reimagined. It is literature that is preoccupied with generating what I describe as panic cartographies and side sites in contention with official discourses.

Thus, in framing this discussion about African American geographies, I have found it useful to draw on the work of geographers influenced by compositional, nonrepresentational approaches to space. Although such writing frequently treats debates related to market and labor dynamics, and is more likely to address the spatial structures of global finance rather than those of the novel, “process geography,” as it can be called, helps open the terms of analysis for the study of place in literature. Such an approach might read place in terms of its connection to movement, to something geographers Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift call “space as process and in process.”³³ Process geography looks at place as transient network systems. And it makes geography as much about the coproduction of meaning as it is about any topographical domain. Further, thinking of space as process is potentially significant for new critical studies in literature. A more concentrated focus on flow, migration, and the interlaced networks of relations that constitute location can offer valuable insight into the ways discourses lend shape to place.

Actually, one challenge that process geography poses for readers of literary texts is its insistence on understanding place as dialectical, not merely a backdrop on which historical causality can unfold toward a conclusion. In *Postmodern Geographies*, Edward W. Soja argues that in literary studies the tendency is that an “already-made geography sets the stage, while the willful making of history dictates the action and defines the story line.”³⁴ This is a common figuration in both literary criticism and the literature classroom alike. For example, character dynamism takes shape against a static backdrop of representation; development is temporal action. Place is the background. If it does not support structures of character ambition or movement, it is an obstacle. But in its recognition that landscape is a composition of ideas and struggle for meaning, process geography might be modeled as a way of reading. In the same sense that we tend to think of setting in the novel as scripted place, it is the practice of cultural geography to examine the means (be they mechanisms or imaginaries) by which places come into being—essentially how spaces are scripted.

The subsequent chapters are in keeping with the suggestion that place not be thought of as the closure of representation, but rather something closer to an actor itself. For this reason, they approach literary geographies in a number of different modes. Moreover, all of these modes are deliberately sewn through with openings for spaces of dissension. For every posited form, there is an attention to disruptive openings or sites for new emergence. So the first chapter looks at geographies of nation. It also probes the sorts of subnational ruptures that break through the frontpieces of national symbolism. The second is about intra-national territory and also the deterritorialization of landscape. The third chapter considers cartography and mapping as spatial syntaxes. It assesses hemispheric geographies as taking shape through the terms of the connection, and it reads black counter-maps designed to undo world metropole maps. The fourth chapter looks at civic geographies and the subsites of gendered organization via a late-century print public sphere. The final chapter considers the complexities of hemispheric regionalism under the surface of a national membrane. In my inquiries I am deliberate not to impose a geographical scaffold or some scalar hierarchy onto nineteenth-century literature. Rather, I try to delineate the forms that literature makes most suggestive.

To be more specific, chapter 1 considers the ways African American literature both posits and destabilizes foundational fictions of a national *geografia*, an account of national coming together. It looks at the performative qualities of national geographies through a historicized reading of Brown's body of literature, including his midcentury slave narratives, European travel narratives, American traveling catalogue, *Original Panoramic Views* (1850), and the four editions of *Clotel* published between 1853 and 1867.³⁵ The chapter further examines the ways Brown's literature both formally and thematically presents challenges to the validity of a national republic as exemplary landscape, something that can underwrite social contract and natural law. His panorama and blended fiction, I claim, can be read as counters to the influential Jeffersonian-influenced vision of land usage and territoriality, a model of agrarianism that claimed the natural landscape as a corollary of Enlightenment fulfillment. I also illustrate the ways that *Clotel* knits disparate landscapes together into a larger, knottier amalgam, to give new literary form to

a crisis-prone nation. Brown's literary topographies are particularly interesting, too, because they are arranged as sites of intensity and convergences of crisis. They are textual outworkings of a rhizomatic geography from beneath the expanse of national landscape. And they play out against geometries of order like the public squares and street plans of Washington, D.C. that Jefferson had overseen as president in 1801. Chapter 1 thus describes the ways the black novel form facilitated something that exceeded earlier forays into the popular, but more narrowly framed, first-person slave autobiographies. The novel gave authors like Brown a way to approach a deeply disjunctive, antebellum national space as a malleable field of knowledge. This was a major development for black literature.

The second chapter moves from tracing the geographies of nation to an examination of one of the most debated concerns in nineteenth-century African American print records: issues of territory. Two mid-century authors are particularly suggestive for their investigations of territory: One is Delany, whose writings constitute the most in-depth study of black diaspora by any nineteenth-century intellectual. (The chapter looks at a number of Delany's major texts published between 1851 and 1862, his most pivotal years as writer.) The other figure remains relatively unknown in a climate of postnationalist American studies. But James Beckwourth's *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth: Mountaineer, Scout and Pioneer, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians* (1856) reveals a geography of tensions embedded in frontier quests. An early nineteenth-century black explorer in the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada ranges, Beckwourth's expeditions opened the North American West to the mappings of famed national figures like "the Pathfinder," John Charles Frémont. Beckwourth's extended ruminations of a life on the make are particularly compelling for the ways they frame concerns about intra-national Indian territory during a period of rapid U.S. expansionism as issues of deterritorialization.

The chapter explores how blacks politicized the idea of territory as a way to get out from behind white ownership—from being the object of property. It further reveals different dimensions of deterritorialization, including the ways territory can be unmoored from its significations, and the ways print discourses can functionally strip meanings from a particular landscape and rearrange spaces of identification. Drawing upon the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I argue that Dela-

ny's literature enacts a kind of positive deterritorialization; it multiplies forms for black spatial production (travel technologies, flightlines, and star atlases). It also advocates for new spaces of recognition in the folds of dominant cultures. Beckwourth's life and travels, though, lead to negative deterritorializations. At the end of his tales, he is left with legalistic invocations to land claims, but without the flows of emigrants or capital he envisioned. In his *Adventures* he even offers his knowledge of Indian lands to the War Department for contract work, and for first rights to discovery. Negative deterritorialization is revealed to be a vicious circle of captures and closures.

Perhaps most suggestively, the chapter's comparative approach brings into relief questions about territory, not just as a theatre of contest, but as a scope for affiliation. I move from the argument that literature itself produces territorial identification to an assertion that a major, but underexamined, interest of both authors is the intersection of black and American Indian epistemes in Indian lands, for example, the ways stories themselves produce land affects frequently in contention with land-to-law jurisdictions. For example, under midcentury federal policy, African Americans were denied ownership of their labor and the land they worked, while Indians were offered incorporation through land cession, incorporation by ceasing their labors. I argue that both Beckwourth and Delany knew that the very exclusionary constructions of citizenship made available to Indians were made with wider goals of geographic dispossession, and that their texts pose questions about the layered, ancestral geographies subject to erasure in the march of progress.

Whereas chapter 2 is framed by a processual account of territory (territory as process), the chapter that follows is an elaboration on how process geographies can function as spatial grammars, or structured language relations. Chapter 3, "This House of Gathering," makes process geography a critical methodology and puts it to the task of reading spatial representations. This chapter examines the cartographic qualities of mid-nineteenth-century African American literature alongside the textualities of leading period maps. It is concerned with the ways African American authors interpreted and rewrote hemispheric cartographies during the precipitous 1850s, during a period of heightened U.S. ambitions for an American archipelago, or what I call an Axis Americanus, in the Caribbean. To illustrate the spatial qualities of this axis, I look at the ways premier midcentury U.S. mapmakers/atlas affiliates

(J. H. Colton, D. G. Johnson, and A. J. Johnson, and others) print-produced hemispheric space as national space across a number of separate national maps during the 1849–59 decade. Through a number of cartographic devices (transport trails, transposed imagery, perceptual groupings), their maps gave form to contemporary U.S. expansionist drives into the Caribbean—radiating from the scripted spaces of a U.S. nation. At the same time, these leading maps presented a picture of a magnetically holistic nation, gathering in its hemispheric neighbor, especially what was then the richest colony in the world, Cuba. I further assert that that U.S. possession claims were naturalized into expansionist rhetoric after President James Polk (1845–49) revitalized the Monroe Doctrine to sponsor U.S. acquisitions in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico.

Yet, black journalistic discourse tells a parallel story about black hemisphere, and it presents important counter-mappings. The chapter assesses the ways authors such as Douglass and Delany engaged directly with visual representations of the Caribbean in order to challenge the gridded logic of national form. For Delany, Cuba was a plane of projection for African American initiative. For Douglass, it was a site of human traffic and the ambit of empire. Both used their writing to de-territorialize space, to unmask the terms of its making. Delany specifically deployed the languages of mapping to pull apart imperialist codes and to show “white gaps” or contours for black passage. In an era when international propaganda campaigns and violent filibusterism received near-constant coverage in such African American papers as the *North Star*, *Anglo-African*, and *New Orleans Daily Creole*, black discourses about the Caribbean were starkly geographic, and conversant with leading cartographies. This chapter on the whole is an attempt to broaden our understanding of cartographic literacies and to locate textual records of black geography in nineteenth-century literature.

If chapter 3 is about the intersection of cartography and discourse, chapter 4 is about geographic genres in literature. The fourth chapter identifies three waves of literary place aesthetics in the black nineteenth-century novel: 1850s-era fugitive spatialities, color line geographies, and turn-of-the-century black public sphere. This is a critical genealogy to traverse because it informs the book’s wider shift from the macro theatre of hemispheric cartographies to what I call practice geographies. Practice geographies, I contend, are those that privilege sites of interaction and the forms that participation takes. They operate in terms of context.

The chapter works out from a broadly New Historicist premise (that texts respond to the conditions of their production, and that literature is itself embedded in culture) to examine Hopkins's literature alongside the geographies it records. It focuses on *Contending Forces*, Hopkins's most enduring effort to vivify the dynamics of black civic space. I claim that this text adjudicates two expressly masculinist, black civic platforms (those I attach to her contemporary rivals, Booker T. Washington and Massachusetts's own W. E. B. Du Bois) and that Hopkins ultimately argues for a protofeminist black women's deliberative arena. In this context, the work of feminist geographers and public-sphere debates by Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler are important for their explicit challenges to normative publics in the work of civic self-fashioning.

Additionally, a major focus within chapter 4 is the position of the black church (as a structure and network) in the formation of literary civic geographies. I argue that although *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) has been credited as the first Afro-anthropological examination of the black church, Hopkins—three years earlier and in careful detail—portrayed the church's geographic specificity as a kind of civic circuitry in the pages of *Contending Forces*. I further claim that Hopkins inverts state into church to make an embodied black counter-public in a way that parallels Puritan lease-taking on the spaces of a new nation. I thus compare Hopkins's black civic hagiography, a kind of apostolic procession of black church leaders, to Cotton Mather's corporatization (body making) of an emblematic Puritan citizenry. What these ecclesiastic, geographic processes localize (both embody and make proximate) is the work of fiction: Print produces spaces of identification. It produces a rhetorical New England. And readers of Hopkins's turn-of-the-century fiction encounter more than ethnic spaces, unified by common race experiences or a common inherited ethnicity. They encounter intentional communities that share the same aims as the novel: the joint work of demographic self-fashioning and protofeminist civic organization. Using devices associated with regionalist expression, Hopkins portrayed black Boston as a counter-public, a setting within a setting that could be transformed into a route for black participation.

The final chapter extends the treatment of literature geographically, to the idea of region as matrix, and generically, to the short story. It considers the work of black regionalist authors within the genre of late-century regionalist writing, and it accords particular attention to the