

María Eugenia Cotera

Native Speakers



ELLA DELORIA, ZORA NEALE HURSTON, JOVITA GONZÁLEZ
and the Poetics of Culture

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MARÍA EUGENIA COTERA

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Introduction

Writing in the Margins of the Twentieth Century

In the spring of 1935 *Tejana* folklorist Jovita González sat down in her South Texas study and wrote a short story: a fact not astonishing in itself, but unexpected nonetheless, given the resources necessary for the creation of fiction—a quiet room, time, repose—none of which were usually available to Mexican American women in Texas circa 1935. Miss González (for at that particular moment she was still a “Miss”) didn’t write about romantic love, a subject that might well have been on her mind since she was planning her wedding at the time, or even about the folk traditions of Texas Mexicans, her central scholarly preoccupation during this period. Instead she turned away from these personal and professional concerns and crafted a story about two women in dialogue—and not just *any* two women. In a literary gesture that might have been considered audacious by some of her Anglo friends in the English Department at the University of Texas, Miss González imagined a conversation between two foundational figures in American letters: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Anne Bradstreet.

She set this imaginary dialogue within the “close and smoky” confines of her own study and titled it “Shades of the Tenth Muse,” a historically appropriate choice given that both Bradstreet and Sor Juana were celebrated as the “Tenth Muse” of the Americas, Bradstreet in England and Sor Juana in Spain. While their parallel titles suggest the two traditions from which González drew her uniquely gendered vision of American literature, Sor Juana and Anne Bradstreet share the space of González’s study in uneasy and frequently conflictual relation, debating questions of race, nation, and history, while acknowledging key points of connection, in particular their social location as “women who like knowing” (as Bradstreet puts it) within colonial cultures dominated by patriarchy. As such, their dialogue suggests a shared epistemological orientation that traverses the boundaries

of the nation-state and gestures towards a transnational feminist imaginary, potentially rewriting the foundational narratives of both Mexico and the United States.¹

“Shades of the Tenth Muse” offers a revealing glimpse into the complex and sometimes contradictory feminist/nationalist poetics that Jovita González articulated in her other work, but it also offers a productive metaphor for my own work. In her story, Jovita González imagined what might transpire if two long-dead female poets representing radically divergent religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions occupied a shared space for one evening. In this book, I bring the “shades” of Dakota ethnologist Ella Cara Deloria, African American folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, and *Tejana* folklorist Jovita González into conversation with one another in order to illuminate a multicultural feminist imaginary. Two of my subjects, Ella Deloria and Jovita González, are relatively unknown; the third, Zora Neale Hurston, though celebrated, remains in many ways a cipher to the anthropologists, literary critics, and cultural historians who have explored her writerly legacy. Although they had much in common, including an intellectual milieu—both Deloria and Hurston worked on projects with Franz Boas in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and González was deeply influenced by the brand of literary and regional folklore that Hurston helped to popularize—and a deep and abiding interest in the future of their communities, they apparently never met. I am correcting this accident of history by bringing them together in this book, because, willful like my foremother, I believe that if these women occupied the same “close and smoky” room, their conversation would reveal something about the politics and the poetics of women writing culture.

Conjuring up imaginary conversations between “real” historical persons can be risky business, so I feel it only prudent to temper González’s useful metaphor with a cautionary reminder that the space in which both she—and I—imagine these conversations is by no means a neutral zone. The setting of González’s short story is, after all, *her* study, and her own interests and preoccupations naturally shape the contours of Sor Juana and Bradstreet’s dialogue. And while their conversation does reveal something about the political preoccupations of women in colonial America, what it reveals is necessarily mediated by González’s own particular take on politics and poetics, her theoretical standpoint. Which is to say that it is not simply the dialogue between Sor Juana and Anne Bradstreet that produces meaning, but González’s willful insistence that they converse in the first place, and that their conversation take place within her intellectual domain. Likewise, bringing González, Deloria, and Hurston into dialogue is fundamentally

a theoretical gesture, one that is shaped by my own political preoccupations as a woman of color in the (post)modern Americas. This book, like González's short story, is therefore not simply an exercise in comparison, but an invitation to see the world refracted through the lives of women of color in dialogue, they with one another, and I with their legacies.

I believe that this dialogue is fruitful—necessary, even—for a number of reasons. First of all, even the most cursory review of Deloria, Hurston, and González's lives and writing reveals striking similarities that illuminate the complicated intersection of race, class, and gender in the United States. As young women, the three were no doubt shaped by the continuous though ever-changing mechanisms of empire and colonialism, as well as by the utopian promise of the anticolonial and antiracist political and cultural movements that emerged in the opening decades of the twentieth century. And each, in her turn, addressed these challenges and possibilities through writing.

Ella Deloria was born on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in the middle of a driving snowstorm in the winter of 1889. The blizzard that accompanied Deloria's birth was portentous: the following winter would bring not only another bitter storm but also the final, devastating blow to Sioux armed resistance against U.S. intrusion into their territories, the Massacre at Wounded Knee, and the decades following would lead to dramatic and painful changes in Sioux lifeways. Native intellectuals sought to address the impact of these historical transformations through a variety of responses, both political and cultural. While some advocated citizenship and assimilation to "modern" American economic and social values, others countered the push toward acculturation with retrenchment and calls for an uncompromising return to the linguistic and cultural practices of a generation before. Ella Deloria came of age in a generation marked by these debates and became a passionate advocate for establishing a middle ground between these two positions, noting that Indian people had always responded to historical transformations with creativity and resourcefulness, even as she carefully documented Dakota culture before and after Wounded Knee in an attempt to retain (and in some cases recover) cultural and linguistic values that were key to the survival of her people.

Jovita González was born into an equally transformative maelstrom in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. In 1904, the year of her birth in Roma, Texas, the Saint Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway was completed, connecting South Texas to the rest of the United States and bringing a flood of mostly Anglo American immigrants into the region. The economic, political, and cultural changes that accompanied the transformation of the

borderlands from a ranching culture to an agrarian economy were felt most keenly by previously isolated Mexican ranching communities, a group with whom González shared both familial and political ties. Like Deloria, González came of age in an historical moment marked by a profound and sometimes painful break with the past, one that elicited its own reactionary debates around whether and to what degree Mexican Americans ought to accommodate the rising Anglo economic and social order. Like Deloria, González responded to these debates by carving out a middle ground that embraced “progress”—particularly with regard to gender freedoms—but also stressed the importance of documenting and celebrating the vanishing cultural traditions of her community.

Zora Neale Hurston’s life was both unique and in some ways emblematic of the African American experience in the early twentieth century. Born in Alabama in 1891, but raised in Eatonville, Florida—according to her, the first incorporated all-Black town in the United States—Hurston’s early years were steeped in the folklore of southern Black culture. After the death of her mother, Hurston lived with family in Jacksonville, Florida, then slowly made her way up to Baltimore, then Washington, and finally to New York City, following a migration pattern set into motion by a depression in the South and a booming wartime economy in the North, as well as an alarming post-Reconstruction upsurge in the violent repression of Black communities throughout the South. Like many of her contemporaries, Hurston was drawn to the “New Negro Mecca” of Harlem in the 1920s and became one of its most infamous figures. But unlike most of her contemporaries in the early years of the Harlem Renaissance—many of whom hailed from the cosmopolitan drawing rooms and salons of the East Coast—Hurston was from the Deep South, a place she identified with “authentic Negro folklore.” As a folklorist and a writer, Hurston turned away from the cosmopolitan and urban themes so ubiquitous in early Harlem Renaissance writing and focused her considerable creative energies on documenting the lives and the linguistic artistry of the “Negro farthest down.”

Although Ella Deloria, Jovita González, and Zora Neale Hurston emerged from distinct historical conditions and regional locations, their personal and professional trajectories were strikingly similar. All three achieved some measure of renown in the related fields of folklore studies and anthropology during the 1920s and 1930s, and each collaborated with leading intellectuals in these fields. Ella Deloria became one of the foremost experts on Plains Indian ethnology, working closely with Franz Boas, the “father” of modern anthropology, on numerous foundational texts on Sioux language and culture. Deloria also worked with Ruth Benedict,

under whose guidance she most likely developed her interest in the gendered dimensions of culture. Like Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston worked for a time with both Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, as well as with Melville Herskovits. She was a member of the American Philosophical Society and the American Folklore Society and a contributor to the *Journal of American Folklore*. Even though most of her ethnographic research was carried out under the watchful and controlling eye of her benefactor, Charlotte Osgood Mason, Hurston still looked to “Papa Franz” for guidance and advice.

Jovita González also rose to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s as an expert in Mexican American folklore and culture in Texas under the tutelage of the dean of Texas folklore studies, J. Frank Dobie. In her relatively short professional career as a folklorist, González produced numerous articles on the folklore of Texas-Mexican communities for the journal Dobie edited, *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society*. With the support of Dobie, González was elected vice president and president (for two terms) of the Texas Folklore Society, a largely Anglo, mostly male academic organization based at the University of Texas.

All three women were also actively engaged in the cultural and political movements launched by their respective communities, and in their heyday were recognized as national experts on those communities. Deloria labored tirelessly to transform public opinion and public policy regarding the Dakota and Indian people in general, and for over half a century supported Indian youth as an educator and public spokesperson. Like Deloria, Jovita González worked to change public perceptions of the much-maligned Mexican population in Texas. Through her scholarly work, González tried to bring to life the heroic beauty and proud past of *Mexicano* ranching culture. As an educational and political activist, she was involved in the ground war over the segregationist policies in South Texas that kept her people on the losing side of its regional economic boom. For her part, Hurston rarely missed an opportunity to share her iconoclastic brand of nationalism with the reading public, a tendency that brought her notoriety and the increasing criticism of her African American colleagues. Though Hurston’s politics often ran afoul of the ideologies of the “Talented Tenth,” she remained to the end committed to the belief that Black people needn’t look to Anglo American culture for models of beauty, political citizenship, or identity, a sentiment vividly expressed in her works of folklore, drama, and creative fiction.

But perhaps the most provocative point of connection between Hurston, Deloria, and González is the fact that each, at different points in their respective careers, broke from the discursive boundaries of their chosen disci-

plines to explore the political and poetic possibilities of fiction. Indeed, even as they labored on ethnographic research destined for publication in academic forums like the *Journal of American Folklore* and the *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society*, they were also working on their own creative projects: novels that focused on the lives and legacies of women of color.

The idea for *Waterlily*, Ella Deloria's detailed fictional account of Dakota culture in the early nineteenth century, most likely emerged while she was collecting and translating Sioux stories and legends for Franz Boas and conducting directed ethnographic research for Ruth Benedict. In *Waterlily*, Deloria sought not only to humanize Boasian data on the complex kinship relations that bound the Dakotas, but also to shift the focus of that research to the lives of women in Dakota culture. Similarly, Jovita González first began collecting the ethnographic data that served as the foundation for *Caballero*, her novel documenting life on a hacienda on the Texas-Mexico border in 1848, after receiving a Rockefeller grant in 1934 to conduct research on the folk traditions of South Texas. In *Caballero*, González, along with her literary collaborator, Margaret Eimer, documented the lives of women in *Mexicano* culture and explored the multiple and divergent strategies for survival initiated by men and women in the borderlands in response to U.S. imperialism. Although both Deloria and González actively pursued publishers, neither of their novels was published until well after their deaths (*Waterlily* in 1988, *Caballero* in 1996).

According to the account in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the fall of 1936 while conducting ethnographic research in Haiti under a Guggenheim fellowship. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston offered both a sensitive exploration of Black female consciousness and perhaps the most sophisticated and fully elaborated use of Black idiom in literary language to date. Although *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was published to some critical acclaim in 1937, the tepid and sometimes hostile reviews it received from the African American intelligentsia consigned the novel to a kind of literary purgatory out of which it did not emerge until Alice Walker and other Black feminist writers rescued it from the canonical margins in the 1970s.

Given these shared historical contexts, and especially the tantalizing parallels of each woman's writerly turn from "science" to "fiction," a comparative analysis of the three seems not only sensible but necessary. However, in this book I press beyond the obvious—beyond a generalized, three-pronged bio-bibliographic comparison—to examine the ways in which Deloria, Hurston, and González each represent particular case studies in the complex negotiations of race, gender, and colonial/class relations that char-

acterized the historical experiences of women of color intellectuals in the early twentieth century. I want to think about the ways in which their work gives voice to these negotiations, since this voice might represent a tentative and fleeting step in an intellectual tradition that has itself been subject to multiple erasures: what feminist critic Chela Sandoval has termed “U.S.–Third World feminism.”

In tracing this history, I also want to push against some of the methodological norms of comparativist practice, in particular the deeply ingrained assumption that comparison must necessarily involve a search for sameness. This search for sameness is especially evident in feminist scholarship and in the ways in which the terminological cluster “women of color” has been deployed to suggest likeness of experience, identity, and epistemic standpoint, in spite of the fact that women of color have been contentiously foregrounding their difference from White women, White men, brown men, heterosexuals, and one another at least since the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* in 1981. Notwithstanding the attention paid to difference by feminists of color—indeed, its *centrality* in their theorizations—they are still often grouped together in a kind discursive corral that diminishes the key insights of their theorizations.² Feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty has suggested that this critical tendency represents a form of “discursive colonization” that erases the historical and the ideological differences between women of color in the interests of promoting a liberal vision of feminism.³ In this book I offer an alternative to this tendency through a comparative approach to the writing of women of color that explores the borderlands of difference. In so doing, I hope to elaborate a more complex and more suitable practice of comparison: one that honors the particularities of Deloria, Hurston, and González’s historical experiences as well as their similar yet distinct strategies of engagement with neocolonial forms of meaning making.

While placing difference at the center of a comparative project may seem an odd, even contradictory, critical gesture, it is one that arises in response to the growing body of feminist scholarship that has sought to uncover the many points of connection between Ella Deloria and Zora Neale Hurston. This scholarship is by no means voluminous, but the scattered essays, book chapters, and reviews that have taken a comparativist approach to Deloria and Hurston’s writing have frequently underplayed their real differences in an attempt to draw them into the feminist fold. Often, key points of comparison, such as their involvements with emergent practices of ethnographic meaning making, and in particular, their status as cultural mediators or “insider-outsiders” are highlighted to the exclusion of other com-

plicating—differentiating—factors in their biographies. What results is a unidimensional vision of their contributions to cultural politics.

For example, in her fascinating study of women in the modernist milieu, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism and Difference*, cultural historian Alice Gambrell devotes two chapters to Zora Neale Hurston and Ella Deloria. In these chapters Gambrell skillfully draws out Hurston's complex relationship to the methodological and theoretical norms of Boasian anthropology, and then offers a comparative reading of *Waterlily* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. While Gambrell's attention to Deloria and Hurston is a welcome intervention against cultural histories that have marginalized and even ignored these writers' significant contributions to mid-century debates on race, identity, and culture, the power of her comparative framework is undermined by the urge to bring Deloria and Hurston too tightly into the embrace of feminist discourse. Gambrell begins by astutely noting that Deloria and Hurston were "insider-outsider" figures in *both* the anthropological establishment and their so-called home communities and that their contradictory relationships to these heterogeneous audiences structured the representational strategies that each pursued in their ethnographic texts and creative fiction.

Unfortunately, this important insight is obscured by Gambrell's admittedly speculative approach to untangling the discursive web that bound their representational practices. Indeed, Gambrell suggests that Ella Deloria was not only familiar with Hurston's published writing (despite the fact that Deloria never mentioned Hurston in her copious correspondence), but also utilized Hurston's work as a kind of theoretical optic for her own feminist interventions. What follows this assertion is a deep textual analysis of the "points of contact" between Hurston's *Mules and Men* and Deloria's *Speaking of Indians*—one that unmoors these texts from their historical particularities and figures Deloria as "revising" Hurston's gendered strategies of description. Gambrell then moves on to a comparative analysis of *Waterlily* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, claiming that Deloria's ethnographic novel offers "one of the earliest feminist readings of voice in *Their Eyes*."⁴

Refracting *Waterlily* and Deloria's other texts through what she imagines to be Hurston's central critical concerns, Gambrell discovers—unsurprisingly—that at the heart of *Waterlily* is a meditation on "the relation between female eloquence and feminine sexuality, and the disruptive role that both play in processes of cultural description."⁵ *Waterlily* is thus recovered as a feminist novel that rewrites "modesty" and "reticence" as forms of feminist "eloquence." Although this reading of *Waterlily* is provocative and—in the context of Gambrell's comparative analysis—convincing, it

does not take into account the historical specificity of Deloria's social location as an Indigenous woman. In Gambrell's reading, *Waterlily* becomes, not a woman-centered account of Dakota customs (with serious feminist implications for the decolonization of knowledge about Indigenous communities), but a critical meditation on gender (unmoored from the questions of "nation"), and in particular on the function of gender, voice, and silence in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. While it makes for a neat dialogic analysis of Hurston and Deloria's texts, I suspect that this reading of *Waterlily* would seem entirely alien to most American Indian women. In fact, Gambrell nullifies the nationalist valences of Deloria's textual interventions by subsuming them under a rhetoric of influence that circumscribes and even reverses the emancipatory possibilities of her own comparative critical gesture. In effect, Gambrell's reading of Deloria, though sensitive and nuanced, renders Hurston's interventions more visible while erasing Deloria's unique, tribally based approach to representational politics.

My digression into Gambrell's attempts to bring Hurston and Deloria into conversation with one another is not intended to undermine the efforts of other feminist scholars engaged in the recovery of key figures in our shared history, an impulse that I wholeheartedly support. It is simply a cautionary reminder that we must approach our explorations of the interconnections between Deloria, Hurston, and González with a good measure of respect for the distinctiveness of their historical experiences and social locations. Too often comparativist work replicates a form of erasure that obscures and even diminishes the political force of interventions by women of color. If such critical gestures, however well-intentioned, frequently result in the privileging of some experiences over others, then what tools (feminist or otherwise) might be brought to bear upon these texts of women of color to make their feminist interventions visible to contemporary readers without rendering their more subtle community-centered interventions invisible? In other words, is it possible to avoid the colonizing gesture in comparative analysis?

I think so, but it requires that we break with the "habitual formations" of "convergent thinking" (to paraphrase Gloria Anzaldúa)—the tendency of Western thinking to use "rationality to move toward a single goal"—and embrace a form of "divergent thinking" that can reveal the ways in which similarities inhabit difference. Deloria, Hurston, and González need not have thought about culture, history, identity, and gender in exactly the same way; what is important, and ultimately more interesting, is that they pondered the questions of identity, history, and culture through the lens of their particular (yet interconnected) experiences as gendered and

racialized subjects whose status, class, and cultural positioning constituted a unique epistemic vantage point on the mechanics of social life. Indeed, as Mohanty observes, women of color are not connected through a “natural bond” based on “color or racial identifications,” but rather a “common context of struggle” and a shared “oppositional political relation to sexist, racist, and imperialistic structures.” Following Mohanty, I propose that we reframe our comparative analyses of the intellectual history of women of color in a manner that can illuminate their divergent approaches to unmasking the “relations of rule” that have shaped both colonial and anticolonial discourses in the twentieth century.⁶

Women of color have developed practical and theoretical models for illuminating productive commonalities across difference. These models reveal both the convergences and the divergences in the historical experiences of women of color, even as they give voice to the counterdiscursive representational practices that they have developed to rewrite history. These models also provide a useful lens through which to reconsider an intellectual history that has been subject to multiple erasures, an intellectual history that is the primary terrain of this book. In short, I am less interested in applying a totalizing theoretical model (feminist, literary, or ethnic nationalist) to a comparative analysis of Deloria, Hurston, and González than I am in bringing them together to examine the ways in which their “unexplored *affinities inside of difference* attract, combine, and relate new constituencies into a coalition of resistance.”⁷

The comparative lens that I propose then, is less a search for sameness than a critical process that answers Ella Shohat’s call for a “relational” approach to feminist analysis that places “diverse gendered/sexed histories and geographies in dialogical relation” to one another to illuminate the “tensions and overlappings that take place ‘within’ and ‘between’ cultures, ethnicities, nations.”⁸ Such an approach is activated by the coalitional ethos of projects like *This Bridge Called My Back*, and hinges on a series of methodological questions that might best be described as ethical rules of engagement: How do we elaborate a mode of comparative analysis across race, nation, and historical context that does not assimilate the experiences of “others” to our own? How might we respect the particularities of different historical experiences even as we mine the similarities of these experiences for key points of connection that reveal the systemic workings of patriarchal, heteronormative, colonialist, racist, and classist networks of power? How do we strike a balance between a respect for difference and a search for meaningful similarity that allows for a coherent account of the historical experiences of women of color? Finally, and perhaps most

importantly, what knowledges and perspectives do we need to mobilize to do such work? That these rules of engagement take the form of questions rather than statements of purpose suggests just how tenuous the path toward responsible and truly illuminating comparativist scholarship can be.⁹ Indeed, comparative work is difficult precisely because it requires that we move beyond our own spaces of epistemic privilege and, by extension, our comfort zones, but it is necessary work, and in the long run, crucial to the continued growth—survival, even—of feminist theorizing.

Cultural Poetics at the Crossroads

In the summer of 1941 Ella Cara Deloria wrote a revealing letter to Ruth Benedict seeking advice on her ethnographic monograph, *The Dakota Way of Life*. In this letter, Deloria complained to Benedict of the difficulties she faced in trying to mold her ethnographic notes into a text that would satisfy not only the American Philosophical Society, which had funded the work, but also a whole array of other potential readers, including social workers and church officials who fancied themselves “friends of the Indian” and Benedict herself. But Deloria had a more pressing concern as well: “I found I can’t possibly say everything frankly, knowing it could get out to Dakota country. I know it must sound silly; but it won’t to you. Ruth, I am a virgin; as such, I am not supposed to talk frankly on things I must, to be really helpful. The place I have with the Dakotas is important to me; I can not afford to jeopardize it by what would certainly leave me open to suspicion and you can’t know what that would mean.”¹⁰

Deloria’s invocation of her “virginity” was not an appeal to Victorian gender standards, but rather an allusion to her unique status as both a single woman and a native ethnographer among the Dakota. As she explained to Benedict, in Dakota society, unmarried women were suspect unless they were recognized “perpetual virgins,” women who had decided to forego marriage and dedicate themselves to other community-nurturing tasks, such as maintaining the artistic and literary traditions of the tribe. Deloria adopted this culturally appropriate role in order to account for her unmarried status and at the same time situate herself among her informants as a “keeper of tradition.” Deloria’s status as perpetual virgin allowed her greater flexibility in her research among the Dakota, especially since the label gave her ethnographic inquiry a respectable cast.

However, this status also limited what she could publicly reveal about the lives of men and women in Dakota culture, because with the position

of perpetual virgin came a good deal of responsibility for oneself and one's community. To write about lovemaking, marriage, and childbirth—subjects of particular interest to feminist ethnographers such as Benedict—would signify that Deloria possessed knowledge beyond her ken as a perpetual virgin and would have raised questions regarding her trustworthiness as someone with whom her informants might share tribal information. Such a revelation would damage not only her reputation (and that of her kinship group) in Dakota country, but also her ability to gather information in the future.

Deloria's reluctance to speak of the intimacies of Dakota family life was not simply a matter of maintaining good relations with her ethnographic informants, it was also, as she noted in her letter, "a practical demonstration of some of the cross-currents and underneath influences of Dakota thinking and life," a life which was still central to her identity. "It trips even anyone as apparently removed as I am," she admitted, "because I have a place among the people. And *I have* to keep it."¹¹ Such restrictions plagued other native ethnographers of Deloria's generation, and continue to do so, but what makes this letter so revealing is the way in which Deloria openly addresses the particular constraints of gender on her ethnographic practice. Indeed, this letter serves as a particularly illuminating introduction to the multiple contexts that framed Deloria's writing, even as it describes in especially painful ways the difficult narrative choices that she was forced to make in bringing her vision of Dakota life to text. "I wish I could pick my audience," she confided in a later letter to Benedict. And one can only wonder what that audience might have looked like: neither missionary, nor social worker, nor Indian, nor ethnologist, but somehow all of the above, that audience would have looked an awful lot like Ella Deloria herself.

Deloria's concerns about audience speak to the tense internal negotiations that scholars of color—particularly native ethnographers—face when they "represent" their cultures to both academic and popular audiences. Zora Neale Hurston and Jovita González encountered similar dilemmas when they decided to write about African American and *Tejano* communities. By all accounts they too were acutely aware of the ways in which their ethnographic and literary representations might be deployed to ends not confined to the scientific or aesthetic realms. When they put pen to paper to transcribe what they remembered from childhood and what they learned from their forays into the field as adults, they surely realized that to do so would mean writing against a history of discourse about the Other that had been constructed through both scientific and aesthetic texts over decades of continued asymmetrical colonial and imperial encounters.

This book takes as its primary archive the letters, essays, and manuscripts that document the difficult terrain Deloria, Hurston, and González navigated between the communities that they called home and the academic spaces and metropolitan locales in which they steadfastly worked. These documents chart a course that seems intimately familiar to contemporary women of color living and working in institutional sites of struggle. Indeed, anthropologist and literary critic José Limón has noted, “There is in González’s career a particularly anticipatory experience pertinent only to Mexican women in the United States.” For Limón, the channels through which González traveled; the movement from her place of origin, South Texas, to what was at the time the center of knowledge production about that place, the University of Texas; and the role gender and race played in “her daily negotiations with Dobie about her published work” are reminiscent of the narratives of contemporary Chicana intellectuals. Moreover, Limón adds, González’s “eschewal of a unified singular subject of history; the genre mix of literature, popular culture, history, and ethnography; her clear commitment to a complicated assessment of political and cultural contradictions; her critique of several orders of domination beyond but not excluding race, especially gender, . . . make her a more familiar voice to us in the present moment.”¹²

Similarly, Deloria’s life, lived quite literally in her secondhand car as she traveled between Indian country and New York City, shuttling ethnographic information to and from her community and Columbia University, the center of knowledge production on tribal life and customs, maps a familiar topography for contemporary Native women writers as well. And like Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston traveled between the exclusive academic domains of Columbia and Barnard and the rather more worldly domain of Harlem, a route freighted with contradictions. This route was triangulated by her frequent research excursions into the Deep South: in particular, Florida, a place she always identified as her true home. Thinking about Hurston’s routes/roots in this way reveals that Harlem, the New Negro Mecca, represented a space every bit as cosmopolitan (and even alienating) to Hurston as Columbia University.

Hurston, Deloria, and González’s travels along these routes stretching to and from metropolitan centers of culture and their respective “homes”—Florida, South Dakota, and South Texas, all spaces typically identified as peripheral to the metropole—offer a useful spatial metaphor for thinking through the psychosocial implications of their engagements with cosmopolitan forms of discourse. As Paula Gunn Allen has noted, the decision to engage publicly with dominant forms of knowledge production often

requires that women of color transcend established disciplinary, discursive, and geographical boundaries.

The process of living on the border, of crossing and recrossing boundaries of consciousness, is most clearly delineated in work by writers who are citizens of more than one community, whose experiences and languages require that they live within worlds that are as markedly different from one another as Chinatown, Los Angeles and Malibu; El Paso and Manhattan's arts and intellectuals' districts, Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico and literary London's Hamstead Heath. It is not merely biculturalism that forms the foundation of our lives and work in their multiplicity, aesthetic largeness, and wide-ranging potential; rather, it is the multiculturalism, multilinguality, and dizzying class-crossing from the fields to the salons, from the factory to the academy, or from galleries and the groves of academe to the neighborhoods and reservations.¹³

Allen refers to these mobile, border crossing subjects as "*las desaparecidas*" [sic], "the disappeared," a metaphor that also ironically encapsulates Deloria, Hurston, and González's invisibility in anthropological, ethnic nationalist, and feminist literary canons.

Indeed, Paula Gunn Allen's assessment of women of color writers as *desaparecidas* carries particular weight when one considers the palimpsestic publication history that Deloria, Hurston, and González share. While both Deloria and González gathered reams of ethnographic and folkloric material about their native communities and produced several sizable manuscripts, their work was not published until well after their deaths (the single exception being Deloria's *Speaking of Indians*, which had the unhappy fate of reaching publication in 1944 at the dawn of the termination era, when interest in American Indian affairs was at an all time low). What scant materials they were able to publish in their lifetimes generally conformed to the ideological, disciplinary, and rhetorical norms of the institutional locations in which they worked. Because they occupied at a best a marginal status within those institutional frameworks, both women have remained largely unrecognized in the histories documenting the development of American anthropology and regional folklore. Conversely, because most of their more experimental work on race and gender remained unpublished until quite recently, Deloria and González have also occupied a somewhat marginal position within the intellectual histories of Chicana/o studies, American Indian studies, and women's studies.¹⁴

Since the 1970s when Alice Walker initiated the recuperation of Hurston's work and reputation with a series of essays beginning with "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" (published in *Ms. Magazine*), Hurston has stood as an iconic literary foremother for Black women writers. But before Walker's recuperation, Hurston's stock was less golden. Indeed, toward the end of her life, she held increasingly contentious political positions that contributed to her isolation from the African American intelligentsia. Given this isolation from the very group that might have preserved her legacy, it is not surprising that by the 1970s all of Hurston's major works were out of print. It took the hard work and pugnaciousness of Black feminists to restore Hurston's literary reputation and establish her preeminence in the tradition of African American letters.

Hurston was also "disappeared" from the other intellectual milieu that might have preserved her memory: anthropology. Unlike Deloria and González, Hurston's ethnographic work was widely published and received a good deal of critical acclaim during her lifetime. Even though she was a contributor to the *Journal of American Folklore* and worked closely with Boas and Melville Herskovits for several years, Hurston's interest in African American vernacular culture was nonetheless deemed too "aesthetic" to be truly "scientific." Although many anthropologists fancied themselves creative writers in their spare time, few were willing to step into the breach that divided poetry and science in their scholarly work. Among the anthropological luminaries of her day, Hurston was inevitably viewed as a "journalistic" folklorist at best, and more often than not, as a popularizer, especially after the enormous success of her earliest fusions of folklore and fiction: *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Mules and Men* (1935).

According to Allen, the intellectual contributions of women like Deloria, Hurston, and González have been "disappeared" from our national imaginary because the "border texts" produced in their travels in and between different sites of struggle challenge the disciplinary, aesthetic, and ideological norms of both dominant and counterhegemonic canons. Because their texts straddle multiple discursive domains and speak simultaneously to a variety of audiences and experiences, they do not fit comfortably within any one disciplinary, formal, or even ideological space. Their ethnographic novels offer particularly striking examples of the ways in which border texts surpass the disciplinary and ideological frameworks that constitute canons. Indeed, *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* remained invisible for so many years precisely because, as both formal experiments and ideological artifacts, they tested the conventional disciplinary and con-

ceptual boundaries of the very institutional formations within which they might have found a home. Too literary to be considered authoritative ethnographic texts and too wedded to ethnographic realism to conform to the aesthetic norms of literary modernism, these ethnographic novels have been exiled from both the history of anthropology and classical accounts of early twentieth-century American writing.

Until recently, the prospect of recuperating *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* within either ethnic or feminist literary canons seemed tenuous as well. Critical approaches to literary studies that arose in the 1970s alongside the establishment of ethnic studies programs generally ignored the implications of gender in their analyses of resistance narratives, and all too often relied on reductive binary readings of “resistance” and “oppression” that erased the complex and sometimes contradictory discursive and political locations of women of color.¹⁵ On the other hand, mainstream Anglo-feminist critical practices have all too often located “oppression” and “resistance” along an exclusively gendered axis, ignoring the effects of colonialism and racism on the lives of women of color. *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* challenge these ideological frameworks because they refuse oppositional binaries that center on either race or gender and thus undermine conventional notions of resistance. While each undoubtedly illuminates difference—ethnic, racial, or tribal—this illumination is complicated by a simultaneous attention to another order of difference, namely gender. On the other hand, though gendered experience is central to each of these novels, they do not follow the common emancipatory scripts that we have come to desire from feminist literature.

Allen argues that because neither “mainstream feminist scholarship” nor “the preponderance of ‘ethnic’ or ‘minority’ scholarship,” is fitted to the analysis of the complex discursive interventions of “border texts,” critics should allow such texts to speak their own theory. She suggests a methodological approach that starts with acknowledgment of the complex historical experience of U.S. women of color and goes on to explore the ways in which women’s texts embody (in both form and content) the particularities of this experience. For Allen, then, the contemporary critical practices elaborated by U.S. feminists of color offer a revolutionary theoretical optic that can more adequately address the complexities of border texts and simultaneously “open before us new possibilities for inquiry.”¹⁶

This seems an entirely suitable approach to the recuperation of Deloria, Hurston, and González’s literary legacies, given that their multivalent texts seem to mirror so many of the concerns that have preoccupied con-

temporary feminists of color. For example, their representations of gender relations, though often critical, are not uncomplicated denunciations of patriarchy, but rather statements on the importance of women to the political, social, and spiritual survival of their people. Whether in the woman-centered vision of sovereignty and cultural survival offered in *Waterlily*, the exploration of gender, race, and the limits of community in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, or the critique of the patriarchal dimensions of oppositional thinking found in *Caballero*, ideologies of nationalism and feminism are intimately intertwined in these novels, prefiguring the work of contemporary women of color.

While Deloria, Hurston, and González's particular discursive interventions are products of their own historical moment and thus exhibit the contradictions and demurrals that typified the politics of their generation, their writing nevertheless illuminates the complex social locations that they (and other women of color intellectuals) occupied in the early twentieth century—social locations, which in the final analysis, are not so different from our own. Indeed, like contemporary feminists of color, Deloria, Hurston, and González found themselves drifting in the borderlands between multiple discourses, ideologies, and allegiances. Their multidisciplinary texts embody this “in-between” status and reveal the decolonizing mechanics of a feminist consciousness located at the crossroads.

Chela Sandoval has argued that this decolonizing feminist optic, what she calls “differential consciousness,” connects the resistance strategies of contemporary women of color because it arises from the shared history of “a life lived at the ‘crossroads’ between races, nations, languages, genders, sexualities, and cultures.” This shared experience produces a “method of consciousness in opposition to U.S. social hierarchy” that mobilizes a variety of discourses and ideologies in its battles to undo the power of hegemonic discursive regimes. Sandoval identifies this mode of differential consciousness with the “*consciencia de la mestiza*” and the trickster, a form of “oppositional praxis” that strategically deploys resistant ideologies in fundamentally new ways and moves in and between different subject positions in its efforts to transform dominant discourse. According to Sandoval:

[T]he cruising mobilities required in this effort demand of the differential practitioner commitment to the process of metamorphosis itself: This is the activity of the trickster who practices subjectivity-as-masquerade, the oppositional agent who accesses differing identity, ideological, aesthetic, and political positions. *Such nomadic ‘morphing’ is not performed only for survival’s sake, as in earlier modernist times.* It is a set of *principled conver-*

sions, informed by the skill of “la facultad,” that requires differential movement through, over, and within any dominant system of resistance, identity, race, gender, sex, class or national meanings (emphasis added).¹⁷

Sandoval names this oppositional subjectivity, claiming its wandering theoretical, ideological, and disciplinary modalities as a legitimate critical methodology and praxis, but she also moors its emergence to a specific historical moment (post-1968) and suggests that the mobile strategies and subjectivities of earlier “modernist” women of color were simply acts of individual survival. Notwithstanding this presentist assertion, Sandoval notes that the women of color who emerged in the post-1968 moment imagined themselves as both “*inheritors* and creators of this unexplored decolonizing and feminist subjectivity,” which suggests a possible mode of entry into the complex decolonizing textual subversions embodied in the work of Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González.¹⁸

I want to claim the “cruising mobilities” of the differential practitioner for Deloria, Hurston, and González in the service of something other than just survival, though survival always remained a key objective for the communities from which they emerged. I would like to suggest that their movement in and between differing and sometimes competing discourses (anthropology, folklore, literature, emergent discourses of cultural nationalism and feminism), their telling and retelling of the same set of stories in these different discursive modes, and their physical mobility between metropolitan institutions and locales and the places each called home (all sites of troubling contradictions) demonstrates a form of strategic political mobility that contemporary women of color have embraced as their own.

Indeed, if U.S.–third world feminism is to be defined as a critical apparatus that not only speaks *for* a particular social experience, but is also generated *from* that experience, then it is important to develop an understanding of the ways in which the complex interactions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and colonialism have inflected the discursive interventions of women of color at different moments in history. Although, as Sandoval suggests, coming to consciousness of a “shared oppression” across the divides of race and nation is certainly a central element of contemporary praxis for women of color, so too is critical analysis of the connections between experience, subjectivity, and theory. After all, before the realization of a shared oppression must come the realization that one’s particular social location—as “woman, native, other”—is not only similar to those of other gendered subjects of colonialism, but also somehow *different* from that of

the colonizer, the male colonized subject, and the White female living under patriarchy.¹⁹

In short, by exploring Deloria, Hurston, and González's theoretical affinities with contemporary women of color, I hope to historicize U.S.-third world feminist practice within a much older genealogy than has previously been imagined. By suggesting that contemporary feminist theory opens up a space for thinking about the writing of women like Deloria, Hurston, and González, it is not my intent to anachronistically lay postmodern readings over modern texts of the early twentieth century. Rather, I wish to demonstrate that so much of what we consider the primary terrain of contemporary writing by women of color—the genre crossing, the complex readings of subjectivity, and the critique of both racism and patriarchy—may well have its origins not only in the emergent alliances of the post-1960s moment, but also in the continuous historical contradictions of life at the crossroads between gender, race, and nation.

Mapping the Margins of Intellectual History

In her essay, “Chicana/o Studies as Oppositional Ethnography,” Angie Chabram Dernerseian calls for a theoretically-informed and self-reflexive ethnographic examination of Chicana/o critical practices, past and present. Inviting Chicana/o critics to reflect on the intellectuals who came before them, Dernerseian asks: “What was their script? semblance? ethnographic project? institutional practice? social and political context? institutional struggle? How were they constructed? What relationship did they have to their community? How was this textualized? What were the silences in the constructions of their intellectual articulations? How did they represent themselves? Why were they omitted from mainstream texts? How does their condition differ from that of the contemporary Chicana/o intellectual?”²⁰ In what follows, I will conduct my own “oppositional ethnography” of women of color intellectuals informed by the probing questions Dernerseian poses, one that I hope will reveal important connections (as well as a few discontinuities) between their work and our own. Like Dernerseian, I unabashedly hope that “the answers to these questions will furnish the subject matter for [a] grand narrative which has yet to be written.”²¹

I ask these questions with an admittedly partial view of the points of connection between Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González: partial, because it focuses almost exclusively on their engagements with early

twentieth-century ethnographic practices and their subsequent transformation into feminist writers. Many other points of comparison exist—their common interest in performance as a strategy for cultural affirmation, their interest in the politics of pedagogy, their complex public engagements with racial, ethnic, and tribal political formations—but I focus on the contact zone between ethnography and literature, because it offers readers a useful conceptual map upon which to trace Deloria, Hurston, and González’s parallel movements in and between different modes of cultural description.

If, as Michael Elliot has suggested in his book, *The Culture Concept*, anthropological discourse and realist fiction seemed on a collision course at the turn of the century, by the 1920s, when Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González “discovered” ethnography, this collision had birthed a brood of ethnographic projects that ranged from the strictly scientific methodologies of Boasian anthropology to the literary excesses of folklore-inspired romantic regionalism. In Part One of this book I explore this complex terrain and contextualize Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González’s ethnographic writing within its shifting and sometimes treacherous methodological and theoretical landscape. Indeed, if it was through what Hurston deliciously termed “the spy-glass of anthropology” that each woman found new ways of seeing the communities that they called home, this spy-glass had its limits. Navigating these limits and contending with both the discursive regimes of ethnographic meaning making and the ideological stakes of self-representation proved to be quite challenging for Deloria, Hurston, and González, early entrants to the field of “native ethnography.”

How are the distinctions between observer and observed undermined when the observer is also one of the observed? What does it mean to be a woman engaged in a “science of man”? How did Deloria, Hurston, and González “cope with, resist, or contest anthropology’s ideological and institutional racism” and in particular its “racially specific sexism”?²² These are some of the questions that are at the heart of the first part of this book, just as they were at the heart of Deloria, Hurston, and González’s ethnographic practice. While these questions made ethnographic writing an unavoidably contradictory endeavor for female native ethnographers of the 1920s and 1930s, they were also generative of new approaches to ethnographic practice and new ways of writing about cultural difference.

In Part Two, I focus on Deloria, Hurston, and González’s turn to fiction and explore how their shift from the ethnographic mode of cultural description to a storytelling mode of meaning making opened up a space for the emergence of new kinds of theoretical subjects and political imagi-

naries. Tracing Deloria, Hurston, and González's transformations from transcribers of their communities' histories, myths, and stories into self-conscious women of color writers, I argue that this process of transformation suggests the emergence of a new kind of storytelling practice that fully and formally incorporates their experiences as women of color working at the margins of mainstream institutions, feminist imaginings, and nationalist/tribal politics. This storytelling practice moves beyond the counterdiscursive rhetoric of their ethnographic work—which after all, was still structured and constrained by the discursive norms of ethnographic meaning making—and gestures toward what Emma Perez has called a “decolonial imaginary,” in which storytelling, and language itself, becomes a vehicle for decolonization.

Through the innovative storytelling practices in their novels, Deloria, Hurston, and González remap the cartography of identity, calling into question both the demoralizing racist depictions of colonized Others in scientific and popular discourse and the romantic visions of radical difference promoted in emergent (masculinist) American Indian, African American, and Mexican American intellectual traditions. As such, their storytelling carves out a space for a new form of gendered and racialized consciousness that stands both apart from and within multiple imagined communities. Though the feminist visions that are produced in these departures share a great deal, they also intersect with particular histories of and interactions with colonialism, imperialism, and the nation-state, and thus express distinct and sometimes divergent feminist positionings. This result is important to note, because it speaks to the ways in which the historical differences between women of color have produced different feminist imaginaries that continue to demarcate and complicate contemporary gestures of solidarity among women of color.

The project of uncovering the work of women of color intellectuals, of rethinking history from their perspective, and of reconceptualizing comparative work by mobilizing the successful ways in which they have envisioned such projects is long overdue. Feminist ethnographers, historians, and literary critics like Ruth Behar, Kamala Visweswaran, Paula Gunn Allen, Vicki Ruiz, and Barbara Christian, among others, have for some time now noted the lack of historical material on the contributions of women of color to the production of knowledge in the early twentieth century, an absence that in no way reflects their real importance to fields like anthropology, history, and social science. This book responds to this gap in our collective knowledge by offering an intellectual history that is itself situated in the borderlands between conventional accounts of anthropology,

women's history, and Native American, African American, and Mexican American intellectual genealogies. But at its core is also a general meditation on what it means to draw women—from disparate though nevertheless interconnected histories of marginalization—into dialogue with one another and to create both a mode of reading and a critical methodology that can reveal their points of connection even as it acknowledges their very real differences. The comparativist model I propose in this study is therefore governed by a coalitional ethos. Transitory, situational, and always mediated by difference, it brings Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González into my own “close and smoky” room and invites them to speak across their differences and discover the ways in which both their experiences and their expressions converge. I believe that this convergence has the power to produce new ways of thinking about history, identity, and indeed dialogue itself.

Ethnographic Meaning Making and the Politics of Difference

The moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at.

TRINH T. MINH-HA, *NOT YOU/LIKE YOU*

Arrival Scenes

In the summer of 1925, Jovita González discovered J. Frank Dobie, the “father” of Texas folklore studies, at the University of Texas where she briefly enrolled as a Spanish student. Before that moment of discovery, she recalled, “the legends and stories of the border were interesting, so I thought, just to me. However he made me see their importance and encouraged me to write them.”¹ González found folklore studies at the very moment of its emergence as a regional scholarly practice, and she quickly rose to prominence in the field as one of its most charming and “authentic” scholarly voices. But folklore studies gave González something more than a high profile career: it supplied her with an analytic tool through which to reexamine the stories of her childhood, as well as the perspective or, perhaps more precisely, the intellectual distance from those stories that was

necessary for her to really *see* them and understand their significance within a broader social and historical context.

Zora Neale Hurston made a similar discovery in 1927, in the “marble halls” of Barnard College where she took introductory classes in anthropology with Gladys Reichard, and later with the “father” of modern anthropology, Franz Boas.² For Hurston, like González, this was a double discovery. She later recalled that it was the “spy-glass of anthropology” that helped her to see African American folklore in a new light. Before Hurston found anthropology, the folklore that she had heard “from the earliest rocking of [her] cradle” was, she famously wrote, “fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn’t see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment.”³

Remarkably, that same summer, Boas rediscovered Ella Cara Deloria, a Dakota Sioux whom he had initially met in 1915 while she was a student at Columbia’s Teachers College. Boas found in Deloria an ideal Native collaborator, and through Boas, Deloria was able to craft a professional career out of what, since childhood, had been her overriding passion: listening to the stories of her people. Anthropology gave Deloria not only the tools, but also the language to talk about the Dakota in a way that did not romanticize them or relegate them to some vanishing past. Anthropology also provided her with a powerful forum through which she hoped to challenge public perceptions of Indian peoples and thereby transform the public policies that had so deeply impacted their lives.

These scenes of discovery and rediscovery, clustered as they are within a few years of one another, suggest a provocative pattern of contact—a heretofore hidden history of the involvement of women of color in the project to identify and describe marginalized communities in the United States. But Deloria, Hurston, and González’s early involvement with the recognized fathers of anthropology and folklore studies also raises some questions with respect to the politics of knowledge production in the early twentieth century. How is it that three women of color from relatively remote social spaces and with little money or power came to play such central roles in the production of knowledge about their communities? To what extent did they collaborate with what Chandra Mohanty has termed the “fundamentally gendered and racial nature of the anthropological project”? And in what ways did they contest the “centrality of the white, Western masculinity of the anthropologist”? How did their own elaborations of ethnographic knowledge replicate or repudiate those of their White male and even their White female counterparts? And finally, if, as Mohanty has ob-

served, the “practice of scholarship” is not only a “form of rule,” but also, potentially, “a form of resistance,” then what form did this resistance take in their work?⁴

In what follows, I lay the groundwork for contextualizing Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González’s disparate engagements with the methodological norms of anthropology and folklore studies, and in particular with the conventions of writing about cultural difference that structured early twentieth-century ethnographic meaning making. These conventions influenced the ways in which many researchers imagined and wrote about culture and the ethnographic encounter and had serious implications for the generation of early native investigators whose ethnographic travels took them not to some “exotic” locale, but back home again. In laying out this terrain, I also hope to reveal how the discursive boundaries that were established in and through the varied methodologies of anthropology and folklore studies both enabled and restricted Deloria, Hurston, and González’s native ethnographic practice.

Understanding the differences at play in Deloria, Hurston, and González’s ethnographic work is key here, as I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, because their methodological interventions, and more importantly, their resistant rhetorical strategies, responded to the specific colonizing idioms of the institutional locations in which they found themselves. And though these institutional locations had much in common, they also had different rules of engagement for establishing ethnographic authority. Deloria, Hurston, and González shared a complicated and often contradictory location in the borderlands between “observer” and “observed,” but there were nevertheless real differences in their approaches to fieldwork. These differences also marked the ways in which their innovative native ethnographic methodologies and texts were received by their nonnative mentors and colleagues.

Although scholars often pair the two in comparative analyses of early native ethnographic writing, Ella Deloria and Zora Neale Hurston had quite different relationships with the leading anthropologists of their time. While Deloria’s training in anthropology was carried out on a strictly ad hoc basis and she was apparently never encouraged to pursue a PhD in the field, she was nevertheless recognized among anthropologists like Boas, Benedict, Ruth Bunzel, and Margaret Mead as the leading authority on Dakota language and culture. Deloria worked closely with Boas on the D/L/Nakota language stock throughout the 1930s, mastering his rigorous methodology of phonetic transcription and collaborating with him on several major articles and at least one book. As early as 1931, just five years

after Boas first met with Deloria to train her in his transcription methods, Ruth Benedict referred to her as “the outstanding authority on the language and religion of the [Dakotas].”⁵

In contrast, Hurston attended several classes in anthropology at Barnard with Franz Boas and even undertook graduate studies in the field, but she never quite achieved credibility as an anthropologist among the Boasians. Indeed, even though she helped to popularize the discipline in the 1930s by adopting the heroic identity of the “anthropologist” in texts like *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*, Hurston’s actual ethnographic approach was much more closely aligned to the work of folklorists like Benjamin Botkin. Less interested in the rigor of fieldwork methodologies and theoretical analysis than in the importance of folklore to the project of creating a new, pluralistic vision of national culture, Botkin was a driving force in the popularization of folklore, a trend that Boas and other anthropologists found more than a little alarming. Hurston’s methodologies, and especially her politics, corresponded more closely to the Botkinian model of folklore collecting than to the strict observational model promoted by Boas and his students.

Jovita González’s training in the methodologies of folklore studies was even more informal than Deloria and Hurston’s training in anthropology—partly due to the fact that at the time there was precious little agreement within the small community of scholars and amateurs interested in folklore as to just what kind of fieldwork methodologies folklorists ought to adopt. She was nevertheless recognized as an expert on the social relations and folklore of nineteenth-century Mexican ranching culture. Regardless of her expertise, González would have experienced the same difficulties that Hurston did had she tried to claim ethnographic authority among Boas and his colleagues, precisely because her approach to fieldwork and ethnographic writing was shaped by the norms of regional folklore studies, a not yet fully grown discipline whose methodologies varied wildly from rigorous Boasian-style participant observation to a more “sympathetic” approach that encouraged an organic melding of the fieldworker’s consciousness with that of her informants.

It is therefore less than useful, and perhaps even a little misleading, to assume that Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González faced identical professional dilemmas with regard to their specific ethnographic methodologies and, perhaps more significantly, their claims to “expertise” in the field. Indeed, while Ella Deloria hewed much more closely to the analytical framework promoted by Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, Zora Neale Hurston often vacillated between Botkin’s humanistic approach to folklore and the more “scientific” brand of cultural analysis promoted by the

Boasians, especially in her ethnographic self-representations, and González remained almost entirely within the intellectual domain of J. Frank Dobie's romantically infused brand of regionalist folklore studies. In this respect, Zora Neale Hurston stands as a key link between Ella Deloria's rather more theoretically rigorous musings on the linguistic and cultural traditions of her people, the Dakota, and Jovita González's efforts to craft a narrative out of her own experiences and the history of her people, the Mexicans of South Texas. In her own scholarly work, Hurston—like the “two-headed hoodoo doctors” she studied on her many excursions into the field—straddled at least two disciplinary domains. She had one foot in the scientific world of the Boasians, and the other in the humanistic world of the regional folklorists. Her self-reflexive ethnographic works are less failed monographs than they are textual embodiments of this in-between status.

Life in the Contact Zone: Charting the Borderlands of Ethnographic Meaning Making in the Early Twentieth Century

However divergent their approaches to ethnographic meaning making might have been, one thing is clear: when Deloria, Hurston, and González encountered the ethnographic project in the early part of the twentieth century, each discovered what was for them a startling new world. But this was a world still in the making. Indeed, their discovery of this new world coincided with key transformations in its discursive and methodological norms, transformations that would condition, and at times limit, their claims to ethnographic authority. With respect to the study of American Indian language and culture, this period of transformation was structured by the institutionalization of anthropology as an academic discipline, and perhaps more importantly, its legitimation as a supposedly objective science. For African American communities of the South and Mexican American communities in the Southwest, this period of transformation frequently involved a discursive process self-consciously linked to the more literary strains of regional folklore studies. In both anthropology and folklore studies this process initiated the transformation of subjugated communities from colonized Others (to be assimilated, controlled, or eliminated) into objects of knowledge that could be circulated via institutionalized discourses centered on cultural difference. Although these new relations of domination represented a bloodless form of appropriation—as opposed to the expropriation of land and human resources of the previous century—they nevertheless supported the changing exigencies of American imperial-

ism by enabling a revisioning of the colonial subject within modern power relations.⁶

Indeed, by the 1920s, when Deloria, Hurston, and González made their respective “discoveries,” the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University had become a center of dialogue and dissent around the questions of racial identity, politics, and the meanings of cultural “difference.” It was an institutional site rife with contradictions: while Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, Melville Herskovits, and other leading anthropologists became key figures in the scholarly assault on scientific racism, the discourses of cultural difference that they developed, as well as the fieldwork methodologies that existed in dialogical relation to those discourses, constituted a form of knowledge production that inevitably relegated the Others of the West to the status of objects and often erased or ignored the asymmetrical power relations that enabled this objectification.

Notwithstanding these neocolonialist underpinnings, modern anthropology and its disciplinary offshoot, folklore studies, did represent an institutional site of struggle that occasionally included the voices of native intellectuals. And while Deloria, Hurston, and González’s access to training in the theory and practices of ethnographic description was circumscribed by the unacknowledged colonialist and masculinist biases of their respective disciplines, they did possess enough cultural capital to engage with dominant discourse from within. Moving beyond the dependent model of production that characterized the ethnographic exchanges of a previous generation and toward a more independent “native ethnographic” model of production, their collaborations with mainstream scholars were of a different nature than those of the “native informants” of an earlier generation. They were, instead, *informed natives*: women who had come of age under the “rhetoric of dominance” that had defined their communities through political, aesthetic, and scientific discourses, who knew this rhetoric by heart, learned its language and methodologies, and in the end deployed its discourses (with varying degrees of success) to challenge the very representational practices that had served to normalize colonialist relations of rule.⁷ That they were able to do so was at least in part due to the altogether limited but more open dialogue between anthropology and its Others that emerged in the 1920s—a dialogue that reflected a general shift in the ideological orientation of Boas’s generation of anthropologists.

Franz Boas was deeply suspicious of the racial biases of the progressive evolutionary schemas that had come to dominate the human sciences in the late nineteenth century. And he, along with some of his students, initiated a shift away from nineteenth-century norms of cultural description

and toward a more scientific and value-free approach to the observation and analysis of cultural difference. Cultural anthropologist James Clifford has noted that during this period “a new conception of field research established itself as the norm for European and American anthropology. Intensive fieldwork, pursued by university-trained specialists, emerged as a privileged, sanctioned source of data about exotic peoples.” By the mid-1930s this new style of ethnographic research had become codified through both popular and scholarly texts and, as Clifford observes, the institutional consensus was that “valid anthropological abstractions were to be based, wherever possible, on intensive cultural description by qualified scholars.”⁸ The ethnographic fieldworker, the figure at the center of this new vision of anthropology, combined within his or her practice the objective, distanced stance of the scientist and the intense subjective experience of the participant in culture. These new scholars saw their fieldwork methods as a marked improvement over the accounts of exotic cultures produced by missionaries, travelers, government administrators, and military men a generation before, “whose knowledge of indigenous peoples, they argued, was not informed by the best scientific hypotheses or sufficient neutrality.”⁹

The new ethnographic practice of participant observation that Clifford describes sought to bring more accuracy to cross-cultural representations, but because it was founded on the deeply subjective experience of fieldwork it also presented a challenge to the boundaries of scientific objectivity. These boundaries were reconstituted in the implicit assumption that at the center of the fieldwork experience was an intracultural encounter with “radical difference,” which would test the personal and cultural expectations of the ethnographer.¹⁰ Dell Hymes observes that one of the most deeply ingrained assumptions of the anthropological establishment has been that “anthropologists [are] exclusively students of ‘distinctive others,’” and that the experience of “culture shock” in the field was central to “objectivity in the study of a culture very different from one’s own.”¹¹

This implicit linkage of difference with objectivity had dramatic effects on the way ethnographic knowledge was produced, circulated, and canonized. For example, as Hymes points out, “There was a strong resistance to publishing studies of acculturation in the *Journal of American Anthropology* in the 1930s, on the ground that they were ‘not anthropology,’” and that some anthropologists even “stopped studying Indians in the 1930s, because they had become just like any other minority group.”¹² The examples offered by Hymes represent only a few instances in which the unspoken norms of modern anthropology structured both the type of research that would be carried out and the kind of people that could legitimately

claim ethnographic authority. Ironically, while the intersubjective approach of participant observation sought to make the native perspective on “his world” a more central part of ethnographic study, it was the supposedly distanced, objective, and rational voice of the ethnographer that translated the utterances of the native informant into the coherent text of the ethnographic monograph. Although ethnographers claimed to have access to the cultural ethos of the communities they studied, they did not claim to speak as cultural insiders, but instead retained the natural scientist’s documentary, observational stance.

Clifford, Marcus and Fischer, and others¹³ have outlined the development of the classic norms of ethnographic fieldwork during this period, but perhaps the most succinct—and witty—description of the primary discursive elements of the fieldwork experience is found in *Culture and Truth*, in which Chicano anthropologist Renato Rosaldo offers his own ironic account of the “mythic tale about the birth of the anthropological concept of culture,” and its “embodiment in the classic ethnography.” “Once upon a time,” he begins:

The Lone Ethnographer rode off into the sunset in search of “his native.” After undergoing a series of trials, he encountered the object of his quest in a distant land. There, he underwent his rite of passage by enduring the ultimate ordeal of “fieldwork.” After collecting “the data,” the Lone Ethnographer returned home and wrote a “true” account of “the culture” . . .

. . . The Lone Ethnographer depicted the colonized as members of a harmonious, internally homogeneous, unchanging culture. When so described, the culture appeared to “need” progress, or economic and moral uplifting. In addition, the “timeless traditional culture” served as a self-congratulatory reference point against which Western civilization could measure its own progressive historical evolution.

. . . A strict division of labor separated the Lone Ethnographer from “his native” sidekick. By definition, the Lone Ethnographer was literate, and “his native” was not. In accord with fieldwork norms, “his native” spoke and the Lone Ethnographer recorded “utterances” in his “field-notes.” In accord with imperialist norms, “his native” provided the raw material (“the data”) for processing in the metropolis. After returning to the metropolitan center where he was schooled, the Lone Ethnographer wrote his definitive work.¹⁴

While Rosaldo’s intentionally hyperbolic account of the mythic Lone Ethnographer and his likewise mythic ethnographic text is, in his words, a

“caricature” intended to undermine the power of anthropology’s foundational narratives, it is not so very far from more straight-faced evaluations of the norms of modern ethnography.

Take, for example, James Clifford’s description of the intersubjective relations that structure participant observation, a process that, in his words, “obliges its practitioners to experience, at a bodily level as well as an intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation. It requires arduous language learning, some degree of direct involvement and conversation, and often a derangement of personal and cultural expectations.” For Clifford, the production of knowledge through this “intense, intersubjective engagement,” is what gives “the practice of ethnography . . . a certain exemplary status.”¹⁵ Of course, the processes of “alienation,” “translation,” and “intense intersubjective engagement,” which Clifford places at the very center of the ethnographic encounter, presuppose radical cultural, linguistic, and epistemological differences between the ethnographer and “his native.” Although Clifford does not include the presumption of difference in his summary of the norms of ethnographic representational practices (probably because it is so normative to the nonnative ethnographer as to be invisible), difference has always operated as an implicit, if invisible, guarantor of objectivity in the field. Anthropology, as Dell Hymes has observed, has been conceptualized in its barest form as the study of “distinctive others.”

Ironically, although participant observation was generally imagined as an engagement with radical difference during this period, it was nevertheless a methodological innovation that opened up a space for the reflexive and highly subjective native ethnographic interventions of Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González. In fact, both the relativistic perspective and the new fieldwork methodologies promoted by Boas and his students created an intellectual and professional milieu that proved to be much more hospitable to native ethnographers than were the scholarly societies that characterized nineteenth-century anthropology. Moreover, the growing respect for other perspectives and, perhaps more importantly, the real logistical limitations that accompanied new fieldwork methodologies (the increased need for native language proficiency and the increasing resistance of native informants to outsiders, among other difficulties) made the contributions of native ethnographers like Deloria, Hurston, and González increasingly important to the production and circulation of knowledge about colonized Others. Because they were cultural insiders whose intimate knowledge of the linguistic and cultural norms of their communities afforded them greater access to key ethnographic information, and at the same time scholars conversant with both the theoretical perspectives

and the methodological norms of ethnographic meaning making, Deloria, Hurston, and González were ideal collectors of the linguistic and folkloric data of their communities. However, their claims to ethnographic authority were often undermined by the very qualities that made them ideal fieldworkers, because as cultural insiders they were unwilling (and, in some cases, unable) to adopt the distanced observational stance of the participant observer.

Indeed, as I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, their status in the fields of anthropology and folklore studies was in many ways conditioned by the debates around methodology that eventually fractured these related disciplines into separate domains of knowledge. Deloria, Hurston, and González developed their ethnographic methodologies at a key moment of self-definition for these disciplines. They were consequently caught in the intellectual crossfire of a disciplinary debate in early twentieth-century ethnographic meaning making that centered on both the methodologies and the ultimate purpose of what Margaret Mead termed the “giant rescue operation” undertaken by anthropologists, folklorists, and artists eager to salvage what were imagined to be the last remnants of older “primitive” cultures quickly disappearing in the wake of the homogenizing forces of modern industrial culture.¹⁶

Ethnographic Meaning Making and the Uses of the “Folk”

If anthropology—in the by now canonical metaphor proffered by Claude Lévi-Strauss—was the “handmaiden of colonialism,” then in the first half of the twentieth century, folklore studies was—in the words of folklorist Wayland Hand—her “poor step-sister.”¹⁷ Indeed, like anthropology, early interest in the study of folklore was driven by an overriding ethos of rescue, recovery, and preservation, a point made startlingly clear in 1888 by American Folklore Society founder William Wells Newell’s open call for the formation of a society dedicated to the “collection of fast-vanishing remains of Folk-Lore.” However, as Hand’s familial metaphor suggests, folklore scholarship—while intimately connected to anthropology and unwaveringly disciplined by its “father,” Franz Boas—remained a somewhat unruly and marginal subfield for at least five decades after the founding of the American Folklore Society in 1888.

This unequal institutional relationship was exacerbated during these early years by continuing disagreements among folklorists themselves about the purpose and nature of folklore scholarship. For Boas and his students,

folklore—in particular the “tales and myths” of a bounded group—offered a synoptic picture into a given culture and thus was important to analyze because it constituted a form of expression that revealed something about the values and belief system of a given society. Local chapters of the American Folklore Society, however, frequently diverged from this view of folklore, forging their own visions of both the nature of folklore and its uses in contemporary society. During its early years, the Chicago Folklore Society articulated a distinctly humanistic and creative goal for folklore scholarship: “to enliven literary and artistic pursuits.”¹⁸ Under the editorial leadership of J. Frank Dobie, the Texas Folklore Society pursued this approach to folklore with particular zeal, focusing less on the importance of folklore to understanding “culture” than on its relevance to American literary culture, and in particular its value as a source for new literary traditions.¹⁹

Over the next fifty years, the sometimes radically divergent approaches to research among the numerous affiliated folklore organizations popping up around the country continued to be a source of tension within the American Folklore Society. During this period anthropologists—in particular, Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict—closely patrolled the disciplinary boundaries of the American Folklore Society, determining both the agenda and the locations of annual meetings, making editorial decisions for the *Journal of American Folklore* (the publishing arm of AFS), and insisting that more humanistic approaches to the study of the folk were, at best, of marginal importance to the maturing discipline.²⁰

Despite the best efforts of anthropologists to discipline its multiple and inherently unruly scholarly practices, debates about the intellectual domain of folklore studies—whether it ought to be a field of inquiry within literary studies or anthropology—continued to divide folklore scholars. Folklore historian Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt links these early debates about the proper disciplinary home for folklore studies to Boas’s efforts to bring a greater degree of objectivity and professionalism to the discipline of anthropology:

At the center of the conflict between the literary and the anthropological folklorists were concerns for professionalism, science and discipline. The core of the issue had to do not with theory, not with what the anthropological and the literary people did with folklore . . . but rather with professionalism. Folklore served the purpose of the anthropologists solely within the frame of a careful, scientific approach. Further, it could be used to strengthen their professional base, as a source for publication in the *Journal of American Folklore* and a means of organizational power in the

American Folklore Society. In truth, for a period of over half a century, the anthropologists formed a united front within the society; and the literary people either maintained a defensive stance, or withdrew from the society. For the literary folklorists, folklore reached its efflorescence in their courses and in their writings.²¹

The marginalization of humanistic approaches within the American Folklore Society had unforeseen effects. As Zumwalt points out, literary-minded folklorists like Benjamin Botkin and J. Frank Dobie retreated into English departments, built up regional folklore societies, and created their own folklore journals that—unlike the *Journal of American Folklore*—welcomed the contributions of scholars outside of the field, creative writers, and even amateur folklore collectors.

Eventually, folklore scholarship dispersed to the regions. While the discipline's national organization, the American Folklore Society, remained important, the relationship between the AFS and the many smaller regional folklore societies that cropped up over the first half of the twentieth century grew increasingly attenuated. In the end, Franz Boas and his students had little real institutional control over the actual methodological practices of folklore research carried out in the United States, with the exception of those studies they published in the *Journal of American Folklore*, which largely conformed to the methodological and descriptive norms of Boasian anthropology.

As popular interest in rural folk cultures increased in the 1920s—especially among a growing number of self-described “regionalists”—many writers, artists, and intellectuals began to look to the vast repository of folklore material gathered by the American Folklore Society since the late nineteenth century for cultural forms that might be used as a source of inspiration for a uniquely “American” art form. Regionalist writers in particular believed that by infusing popular culture with legends, stories, and songs of this “older America,” they might reinvigorate these traditions among the populace and forge a new national identity based on homegrown culture. By the early 1930s folklore collecting had become a veritable craze: a semi-scholarly pursuit combining the brio of the pioneer with the heroic overtones of the anthropological adventure. As John S. Wright observes:

Though the academic study of folklore would not be established in the United States until the 1940s, an interim throng of avid amateurs and bootlegging scholars trained in other fields—English literature, anthropology, sociology, musicology, history, and languages—began consolidating in the

twenties a vast repository of folklore and folksong which by the forties had tapped extensively the traditions of such occupational, regional, ethnic, and racial groups as Western cowboys, Nova Scotian sailors, Midwestern lumberjacks, Pennsylvania Germans, Southwest Mexican-Americans, Utah Mormons, and Ozark mountaineers.²²

Some folklorists, especially those scholars working in English departments at universities far from the metropolitan locales where the established centers of anthropological approaches to folklore were located, were quick to capitalize on the perceived importance of folklore—and, in particular, *regional* folklore—to the project of national cultural renewal. Folklorists of a more literary temper like Benjamin A. Botkin and J. Frank Dobie forged alliances with amateur folklore enthusiasts, poets, and novelists to explore not simply the origins of folklore, or even its function in culture, but its relevance to contemporary society.

For Botkin in particular, the question of the “uses” of folklore was of primary importance. Less interested in the scientific collection and classification of folk traditions than in the interpretation of folklore within the context of contemporary cultural politics, Botkin argued that the central academic concern of folklore studies should not be defining the “folk” or even “folklore,” but rather determining what folk and folklore might do “for our culture and literature.”²³ Botkin was the guiding intellectual force behind the development of applied folklore, a scholarly/political practice that explored the ways in which folklore scholarship might contribute to the “restoration to American life of a sense of community—a sense of thinking, feeling, and acting along similar, though not the same lines.” Less a scholarly activity than a social plan, applied folklore moved folklore scholarship from an account of cultural history to the development of a “cultural strategy,” with the ultimate end of

creating a favorable environment for the liberation of creative energies and the flourishing of the folk arts among other social, cooperative activities. In a time of increasing standardization it becomes an increasingly important function of the applied folklorist to discover and keep alive folk expressions that might otherwise be lost. And in a country of great regional diversity such as ours, the balanced utilization of regional as well as ethnic resources is vital to the enrichment and fulfillment of American life and expression. In this way the folklorist may outgrow the older “survival” theory of the “partial uselessness” of folklore and renew the continuity and survival values of folklore as the “germ-plasm of society.”²⁴

For Botkin, then, the folklorist should function as a conduit between the world of academic research and that of popular culture, essentially giving back to the people the folk traditions that had been stripped away from them by modernity and standardizing culture.

One venue for such an exchange was the immensely popular folklore treasuries he edited in the 1940s. He proposed other initiatives, including “reading folklore to children in elementary schools, writing new literature based on folklore, and the promotion of folk festivals.”²⁵ Following Botkin’s lead, a generation of folklore scholars trained in the less than cosmopolitan environs of Oklahoma, Texas, and North Carolina rejected the more “scientific” methodologies of anthropological approaches to folklore and opted instead to reveal the supposedly universal nature of folk themes through “vivid and methodologically blurred fiction, histories, and literary studies.”²⁶

Notwithstanding Botkin’s fabled dedication to pluralist principles, the wide tent he created for regional folklore studies contained a correspondingly wide range of ideological dispositions on the nature and purpose of folklore. Indeed, while regionalist writers and folklorists generally shared the anthropological establishment’s respect for the cultures of the Other, as Roger Dornan observes, they embraced the principles of cultural pluralism with a degree of ambivalence that was in large part conditioned by their particular cultural and political agendas.²⁷ More often than not, they celebrated the diversity of America’s regional folk cultures, while reinforcing racist and sexist stereotypes.

Certainly, in the case of the brand of folklore emerging from the Texas Folklore Society in the 1920s and 1930s, racial conflict was for the most part framed out of the idealized picture of Indian, Mexican, and “Negro” folk culture. The Texas Folklore Society was not an isolated case: regional folklorists all too often superimposed their own class, gender, and racial biases on their understanding of the significance of traditional ethnic and working-class folk practices. And in their creative appropriations of the legends, songs, and stories of their informants, regionalist writers and folklorists frequently pressed a dehistoricized image of the folk into service as an analgesic for the growing pains of modernity, through which they might painlessly explore America’s relationship with its marginalized communities.²⁸

Despite these limitations, regionalist folklore scholarship did contribute to “a liberating exploration of the boundaries which separated the various ‘folk’,” primarily because it recognized and even celebrated the plurality of regional folk traditions and created a discursive space within which non-

Anglo folklorists were able to elaborate their own (often counterhegemonic) readings of their native folk cultures.²⁹ Indeed, Botkin wisely encouraged folklorists of color to study their own communities, insisting, “The folk movement must come from below upward rather than from above downward. Otherwise it may be dismissed as a patronizing gesture, a nostalgic wish, an elegiac complaint, a sporadic and abortive revival—on the part of paternalistic aristocrats going slumming, dilettantish provincials going native, defeated sectionalists going back to the soil, and anybody and everybody who cares to go collecting.”³⁰

As Botkin’s pronouncement suggests, this vision of folklore scholarship diverged quite dramatically from the kind of research promoted at Columbia University, especially with respect to the ethnographic encounter. Indeed, folklore scholarship, particularly in the 1930s, accepted and even embraced a kind of native ethnographic practice that was scarcely imaginable at Columbia University. It is hardly surprising, then, that so many talented scholars of color turned to the field in the 1930s, including Sterling Brown, Arthur Campa, Aurelio Espinosa, J. Mason Brewer, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González.

However divergent their scholarly approaches might have been, the development of regional folklore scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century shared a great deal with that of anthropology. The two were linked institutionally for decades, and the leading intellectuals guiding the development of both anthropology and folklore studies were, for the most part, committed to the promotion of pluralistic and inclusive social values. Each was also guided by a deep sense of urgency that the social practices of “exotic” Others—the mountain men of Kentucky, the “Negroes” of the deep South, the Indians of the Plains, the Mexicans of the Southwest—might disappear under the standardizing influence of modern industrial culture. Both anthropologists and folklorists sought to intervene against this trend, if not reverse it entirely. More importantly, the methodological and theoretical interventions introduced in both Boasian anthropology and applied folklore scholarship opened up a space for the emergence of a new generation of native investigators. It was into this newly created institutional contact zone that Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González entered in the late 1920s.

They were able to carve out careers in this space by capitalizing on their intimate knowledge of the linguistic, cultural, and social norms of the communities that they studied, but they nevertheless remained troubling figures within an anthropological establishment that figured the ethnographic project as an encounter with radical cultural difference. The degree to which

this impacted their scholarship largely depended on the professional norms and methodological practices of the disciplines and institutional sites in which they worked, and these varied widely. Methodological differences notwithstanding, Deloria, Hurston, and González shared one key attribute: all three staked their claims to ethnographic authority on their status as cultural insiders, and this necessarily complicated their relationship to the representational politics of the ethnographic project.

Given this similar positioning, it is worth returning to the dilemma that Ella Deloria outlined in her 1941 letter to Ruth Benedict, namely the “cross-currents and underneath influences” that “trip up” ethnographers who choose to do research in their own communities. As Lila Abu-Lughod, a native anthropologist (or, as she terms it, a “halfie”) has observed, although the contradictions of these crosscurrents may not always make themselves evident in the field, they do matter when one takes pen to paper. Indeed, writing about cultural Others is always a potentially fraught process, but it is especially so for “halfies” because for them the dilemmas of representational politics “are even more extreme.”

As anthropologists, they write for other anthropologists, mostly Western. Identified also with communities outside the West or subcultures within it, they are called to account by educated members of those communities. More importantly—not just because they position themselves with reference to two communities, but because when they present the Other they are presenting themselves—they speak with complex awareness of and investment in reception. [They] are forced to confront squarely the politics and ethics of their representations. There are no easy solutions to their dilemmas.³¹

Despite their differences, Deloria, Hurston, and González each faced the dilemma of the “halfie” when they attempted to write authoritative ethnographic texts about the not-so-different Others that they studied. As such, questions of audience, the political impact of their work, and its real residual effects on the lives and well-being of their communities always remained central to their conceptualizations of ethnographic practice. On the other hand, their very presence within the institutional matrix of ethnographic discourse troubled the neat designations between “self” and “other,” and “observer” and “observed” that allowed anthropology to imagine itself as an objective human science. These dilemmas raise a number of critical questions about the complexities of what it meant to be an “insider-outsider” in the ethnographic context of the 1930s. For, as Deloria’s let-

ter reveals, it would surely be an oversimplification to imagine that she, Hurston, and González effortlessly bridged this divide.

What kind of mental operations are necessary to, as Trin-Minh-ha so eloquently puts it, “drift in and out” of at least two epistemological systems, to “stand in that undetermined threshold place” between them, to assert both one’s likeness and one’s difference in a single gesture?³² And what kind of identities and new ways of knowing are produced in this process—at once static and mobile—in which one asserts difference and sameness in a single stroke? No doubt Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González became keenly aware of these questions as they traveled and translated between the places they called home and the metropolitan sites of ethnographic meaning making that created texts out of those places.

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CHAPTER 1

Standing on the Middle Ground

Ella Deloria's Decolonizing Methodology

*The modern questor now takes up the search,
His quest the same; his methods only changed.
He studies records; carefully he weighs
Each point, for light upon his inquiry:
Whence came his people? Whither are they going?
What struggle have they known? What victories?
Out of his notes, he weaves an epic story.*

“THE MODERN QUESTOR,” ELLA CARA DELORIA

To me it seems like a religious duty to get everything as right as I possibly can, for future scholars. Perhaps this sounds silly; but I have an idea that this is my work, which none other can do. You see, I represent a middle era, in the development of my tribe. I lived the early years of my life in the heart of the Sitting Bull country, spoke the language and heard many myths as a child. I am related, according to the social kinship system of my tribe, with everyone in it. Then I was sent to school. I went on and on, and by one lucky break after another, I was a college graduate, in due time. With my college training, coupled with my Indian background lived in the days when it was a really Indian background, I stand on middle ground, and know both sides. I do not say I am the best educated Indian that ever will be; that is not so; but no matter how far a younger student should go, he could not know both sides, because that other, the Indian side, is gone. That is why I feel as though I have a mission.

ELLA CARA DELORIA TO JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER JR. (1934)

In a biographical sketch that she sent to anthropologist Margaret Mead in the 1950s, Ella Cara Deloria recalled her formative years as a “collector” of D/L/Nakota tales.¹ Telling her own artful story, Deloria remembered how she used to escape from her mission school, St. Elizabeth’s, to spend long hours absorbing the tales of the elder Hunkpapaya and Sihakapa Lakotas, who were there “to visit their children . . . and to draw rations at the substation.” Lingering at the Lakota encampments until her family had to “send out an alarm” to locate her, Deloria absorbed the details of a world that she would later document—a world under siege from both “friends” and enemies who wished to transform it. “I kept my eyes and ears open,” she recalled, “and [I] remember pretty much all I ever saw and heard of Teton life in the past. That was the foundation on which I based my subsequent interest in Dakota linguistics and ethnology.”²

By the 1930s, this curious and watchful young girl had become a pre-eminent expert on D/L/Nakota cultural, religious, and linguistic practices. The leading figures of anthropology—Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead—frequently acknowledged her as such in their letters of recommendation and in their proposals for funding. For example, in a letter to the American Philosophical Society, Benedict stressed Deloria’s “special qualifications,” which included her familiarity and facility with languages, her rigor and seriousness, and her insider’s understanding of Dakota cultural norms. For Benedict, these qualifications “counterbalanced her lack of academic status.” Noting that Boas had “never found another woman of her caliber” in all his years working with American Indian consultants, Benedict claimed that the “intense and personal training” Boas gave Deloria “outweighed the kind of training which often leads to a PhD degree.”³ However, as is evident in Benedict’s qualified praise, though Ella Deloria may have earned the respect of her colleagues in the anthropological establishment, she achieved neither a PhD in the field, nor ultimately the credit that was her due.

While Ella Deloria could have pursued any number of professional careers, she chose to dedicate herself to anthropology, a profession that she pursued with equal measures of enthusiasm and skepticism. Like Boas and his other students, Deloria recognized that nineteenth-century anthropological writing had contributed to the colonial project, but she also realized that Boasian anthropology—notwithstanding its reputed break with the poisonous racial ideologies of Victorian ethnology—still bore an uncomfortably close relationship to neocolonial relations of rule. Moreover, as the descendant of a long line of Indian leaders in the Episcopal Church, Deloria was surely aware that this new “science of man” was playing an increasingly

important role in the development of Indian policy, previously the domain of missionaries and “friends of the Indian.” Her self-described “mission,” to collect accurate linguistic and social information on the Dakota using the tools of anthropology, was therefore much more than simply a scholarly pursuit. It was also a spiritual quest in the interests of her people, to which she, a consummately “modern questor,” was ideally suited. In short, Deloria stood, as she so eloquently put it, in a “middle ground” between her “college training” and the knowledge she had gained from her “Indian background.” It was from this middle ground that she articulated both a methodological perspective and an ethnographic voice that blurred the “boundaries between belonging and difference.”⁴

But playing in the borderlands can be risky business. In a world defined by difference—by the neat boundary line that separates the insider from the outsider—identifying oneself as an “outsider within” may result in marginalization and even silencing. Indeed, while Deloria was celebrated among the Boasians for her intimate knowledge of the Dakota, her authority as an ethnographer was also frequently undermined among them by lingering doubts regarding her objectivity. And even though she was recognized as an expert on the Dakota within the Boasian milieu, she was often overlooked when it came to government jobs because she was considered “too educated” to be an authentic native voice.⁵

These contradictions were compounded by her social obligations to the Dakota, about whom she was often reluctant to reveal too much. Indeed, Deloria serially withheld key ethnographic information that she considered too sacred or personal to share with outsiders, often to the detriment of her professional advancement in the field of anthropology. Nevertheless, she artfully navigated these contradictions and labored tirelessly, often under financial duress, to bring the story of her people to life. A modern-day storyteller, Ella Deloria wove together what she had learned from her studies under Franz Boas and what she had seen and heard as a child into a stunningly complex story of her people. In the process, she developed a new way of doing ethnography and a new way of telling stories about not-so-different others.

The Making of a Modern Questor

That Deloria explored new modes for articulating the changing world she encountered as a Dakota woman is not surprising given that she lived through a period of great transformation for Indian people. In the decades



Figure 1.1. Portrait of Ella Deloria in traditional dress.
Courtesy of the Dakota Indian Foundation.

before her birth, the Dakota had been unwillingly confined to reservations, having tried violently to assert their independence in the 1860s, the 1870s, and finally, in the 1890s. Her birth at the White Swan (Yankton) community in 1889 was tragically bookended by two events that were to have devastating effects on the Dakota, events that reverberated in tribal communities across the country. Two years before her birth, Congress passed the General Allotment Act of 1887, designed to break apart the communal ties that held tribes together.⁶ One year after came the final military blow to Sioux resistance, the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee.

While Deloria was born at her mother's home on the Yankton Dakota reservation, she was raised among the Hunkpapaya and Sihasapa Lakota at Standing Rock, where her father, Phillip Deloria, served as an Episcopal deacon and later as a priest.⁷ It was there that Deloria first heard the stories of the elders and witnessed firsthand the grinding "day-to-day realities of violence and dispossession" that characterized early twentieth-century Dakota life.⁸ Deloria documented these devastations in *Speaking of Indians*, revealing how the allotment of land in severalty, along with the "total assimilation" educational policies that accompanied it, had particularly devastating effects on the Teton Dakota, who like other tribal communities, were effectively forced to choose between assimilation to American notions of individualism and self-interest and the very traditions that imparted a sense of cohesion and continuity to tribal existence:

It was as though, after being sucked without warning into a remorseless whirlpool and helplessly lashed and bruised by the wreckage pounding around them, the people had at last been thrown far off to one side and were sitting there, naked and forespent, dully watching their broken life being borne along, and lacking both the strength and the will to retrieve any of it. And what good was it now, anyway, in pieces? The sun dance—without its sacrificial core; festive war dances—without fresh war deeds to celebrate; the Hunka rite of blessing little children—without the tender Ring of Relatives to give it meaning—who would want such empty leavings?⁹

It was into this world of "empty leavings" that Ella Deloria was born, and it became her life's work to document the traditions of the Dakota people and to reveal the ways in which public policy and cultural misunderstanding had destroyed a "scheme of life that worked."¹⁰

Deloria's parents were "progressives" who stressed the importance of a traditional Christian religious education under the auspices of the Epis-

copal Church, but they also instilled in their children a deep and abiding respect for the “old ways” of their people. It was this dual heritage that provided Deloria with the linguistic tools and the psychic resilience that would sustain her as she embarked upon a professional career that took her to the very center of learning and knowledge production about her people.¹¹ This place was, of course, the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, where she landed after a peripatetic educational path that took her from St. Elizabeth’s to All Saints Preparatory School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to Oberlin College, and finally to Columbia University Teacher’s College.¹² There, Deloria first met Franz Boas, who hired her in 1914 as a consultant to his anthropology and linguistics students, a job she found both enjoyable and lucrative.¹³ Despite this early exposure to the emerging discipline of anthropology, Deloria initially chose to apply her talents to the field of education, taking a job at Saint Elizabeth’s upon her graduation from Teacher’s College in 1915. She later taught at another alma mater, All Saints, but left that position to work as a national health education secretary for the YWCA, a job she held until 1923, when she returned to teaching and became the girls’ physical education instructor at Haskell Institute in Kansas. At Haskell, Deloria was celebrated for developing an innovative curriculum that combined sports, physical activities, and pageantry.¹⁴

In April 1927, Boas renewed contact with Ella Deloria, offering her a part-time job as a research assistant. “I have thought of you very often,” he wrote, “and wished to have a few weeks time to continue the little work that we did years ago. . . . I am very anxious to get some good material on Dakota because what we have is not quite up to our modern scientific standards and I want your help.”¹⁵ That summer, Boas met with Deloria and trained her in his method of phonetic transcription, leaving her a number of texts to translate. Deloria must have enjoyed the work she did for Boas, because by the end of the year she had decided to resign from her teaching position at Haskell in order to devote herself to “Dakota work.”

Recognizing her value as a consultant, and intent on keeping her in his fold, Boas cast about for funding to hire Deloria as a full-time research associate, a job that would pay her the two hundred dollars per month that she had requested. He decided to assign her to a study of intelligence testing that he was working on with psychologist Otto Klineberg. The purpose of the study was twofold: first, to demonstrate that the “cultural conditions under which the individual grows and lives have a far reaching effect upon any kind of test that may be given,” and second, to develop culturally appropriate intelligence testing systems that might better reflect the real mental capabilities of individuals in different cultural contexts.¹⁶ The study

was to be carried out under the guidance of Boas and Klineberg, with the aid of researchers in the field. Her job, as stated in a letter from Boas, was to “study in the greatest detail the habits of action and thought that are present among Dakota children and among adults and to work out in cooperation with a psychologist a test that would fit the conditions of life of the Dakotas.”¹⁷

Boas offered to train Deloria in ethnological methods in advance of the study, so in February 1928 she traveled to New York and received her first and only formal training in the methodologies of Boasian ethnology. Deloria’s work on the Klineberg project drew her more deeply into the fold of students who researched, worked with, and admired Franz Boas—among them, Zora Neale Hurston, who was also hired to prepare the way for Klineberg with a series of ethnological studies in New Orleans. The Klineberg study represents the only documented collaboration between Hurston and Deloria, both of whom conducted preliminary ethnological investigations in the different communities Klineberg visited. Although there are no indications that Hurston and Deloria ever met, the Klineberg connection remains a tantalizing metaphor for their similar social locations (as field researchers laboring at the margins of the discipline) within the anthropological establishment.

During the months she spent in New York, Deloria helped Boas with a number of other projects, including his corroboration of a nineteenth-century Dakota dictionary based on the Santee dialect and compiled by Stephen Return Riggs. She also worked as an instructor and consultant for linguistics classes at Columbia. After this period of intensive training under Boas, Deloria divided her time between winters in New York and summers doing fieldwork in South Dakota, part of an emerging group of anthropologists like Ruth Landes, Ruth Bunzel, and Margaret Mead who spent increasing amounts of time in the field. Ella Deloria was particularly well suited for the challenges of participant observation because she possessed not only an appreciation for scientific rigor and careful observation, but also an insider’s knowledge of Dakota language and culture. And although Boas could be high-handed about her career and sometimes insensitive to the logistical difficulties she experienced in carrying out research in Indian country, he gradually came to trust Deloria’s personal and professional judgment. Indeed, Deloria’s correspondence with both Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, who took over as her primary intellectual mentor after Boas died in 1942, reveals her deep involvement in the production of ethnographic knowledge about the Sioux during the 1930s.

But even though she agreed with many of the premises of Boasian an-

thropology, Deloria's relationship with Franz Boas and later Ruth Benedict was by no means an uncomplicated collaboration. Tensions often arose—especially in her relationship with Boas—over her unconventional fieldwork methodologies, and in particular, her skeptical stance toward some of the nineteenth-century ethnological accounts of the Sioux that Boas had asked her to corroborate among her informants. Deloria also experienced difficulties related to her marginal professional status within the Boasian milieu. Indeed, while Boas managed to provide research support to Deloria (at a rate ranging from sixty-five to two hundred dollars per month) from 1932 to 1937, financial security always seemed to elude her. Deloria's tenuous economic situation was further complicated by the high cost of transportation and field expenses, which were not always reimbursed by Boas, and by her family obligations. Throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, Deloria often found herself covering hospital bills for her ailing father and tuition and other expenses for her younger siblings, Susan Mabel and Vine Victor, which seriously taxed the resources—both financial and emotional—that she might otherwise have dedicated to acquiring a PhD. This lack of accreditation was to haunt Deloria, especially in later years, when Depression-era cutbacks made funding for anthropological research difficult to obtain. During these years, Deloria discovered that no matter how talented and rigorous a researcher she proved to be, without the proper credentials she would never have job security as an anthropologist. Throughout her career, Deloria's unequal academic status consistently placed her at a disadvantage when it came to salary, funding, and publishing.¹⁸

Even though Deloria's status in the field of Plains anthropology was undercut by her lack of academic credentials, her collaboration with Franz Boas and later Ruth Benedict was certainly a fruitful one for the discipline. Deloria almost single-handedly collected the early twentieth-century linguistic and ethnographic material on the Dakota currently housed in the American Philosophical Society's archive: some thirty boxes of ethnographic reports, linguistic data, and story transcriptions. Deloria's ethnographic and linguistic research among Dakota communities was also used by several scholars to advance their own careers in anthropology: Jeanette Mirsky's article on the Dakota in *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* (1937) was written in consultation with Deloria and based almost entirely on her unpublished monograph "The Dakota Way of Life." Ruth Bunzel, a classmate of Deloria's at Columbia, relied heavily on Deloria's unpublished ethnographic reports in her 1938 article, "The Economic Organization of Primitive People." Franz Boas published several collabo-

rative articles on Dakota linguistics with Deloria, and Ruth Benedict used some of Deloria's reports from the field to think through her own comparative approach to culture and psychology.

Ella Deloria's research was not confined to source material for her better-known colleagues. She also published her own work: texts that are recognized to this day as foundational in the study of D/L/Nakota language and culture. In 1929 Deloria published "The Sundance of the Oglala Sioux" in the *Journal of American Folklore*, an article based on the ethnographic materials she had reviewed and translated for Boas, as well as some additional material she collected on her own.¹⁹ She followed this publication with *Dakota Texts*, a collection of her free translations of Teton-Dakota tales, edited by Franz Boas and published in 1932 by the American Ethnological Society.²⁰ Her most enduring contribution to the study of linguistics was *Dakota Grammar*, published in collaboration with Boas in 1941. Despite these important contributions to the fields of anthropology and linguistics, Deloria remained largely in the shadow of non-Indian anthropologists. And while less experienced and younger colleagues' careers were ascendant during this period, Deloria remained at the margins of the discipline, a contract worker for scholars who built their early reputations on her research. As Janet Finn notes, while Deloria "was able to earn wages translating Dakota texts and conducting ethnographic fieldwork, her labor was the anthropological equivalent of piecework, managing from contract to contract and depending on the patronage of established white scholars."²¹

"To go at it like a white man": Ella Deloria's Kinship Ethnography

Deloria's marginalization within the Boasian milieu has often been attributed to the difficulties she experienced in trying to strike a balance between her obligations to her work and to her family. Janet Finn notes that throughout her career, Deloria's "fieldwork and writing [was] tucked around the edges of [her] paid labor for others and [her] longtime commitments to the unpaid labors of love practiced by many women—family caregiving." Indeed, Deloria had assumed parental and financial responsibility for her two younger siblings after her mother's death, and by the 1930s was certainly feeling the stress of her family responsibilities and the "chronic vulnerability of [her] low economic status."²² However, Deloria's commitment to her kin was not simply an expression of bourgeois feminine self-sacrifice. It reflected an important cultural truth—both corporate and intensely personal—that distinguished Dakota people like Deloria from outsiders. As

she stated on numerous occasions, kinship was the very glue that held the Dakota people together; to abandon its responsibilities would be to abandon her connection with her people. Kinship, both familial and social, was consequently always at the heart of Deloria's ethnographic practice.

Indeed, Deloria believed that the strictures and limits of the kinship system structured not only internal tribal relations, but also the relations between anthropologists and Indians in the field, and she suspected that the strict rules governing concourse with outsiders had limited previous ethnographers' access to tribal knowledge in ways that had gone unnoticed by the anthropological community. Deloria scholar Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey (Teton/Yankton Dakota/Ottawa) corroborates this suspicion, noting that the Dakota people observe strict social rules regarding the transmission of tribal information and view both inquisitiveness and willingness to share information as aberrant social traits.²³ Deloria clearly realized that these social strictures, unbeknownst to non-Indian ethnographers, had shaped relations between Indian informants and non-Indian fieldworkers, and she suspected that they had led to much misinformation about the Sioux. Because she was raised in close proximity to traditional culture, Deloria was able to perceive the inconsistencies between ethnographic representations of her people and her personal experiences as a Dakota, and she sensed that the privileged informants that had provided information on the religious and cultural practices of the Dakota had either been intentionally misleading outsiders or were themselves marginal figures in Dakota society. She therefore understood that, to be an effective recorder of tribal history and culture, she would have to devise a model of fieldwork that was more culturally appropriate to the social conventions of her community.

While Deloria's Indian identity may have looked like a unique asset to her non-Indian colleagues, it did not necessarily grant her immediate entry into all native communities. Indeed, as a mixed-blood Yankton woman who had deep familial connections to the Episcopal Church, Ella Deloria had to overcome both linguistic and cultural divides when she sought information from her informants, many of whom were more traditionally minded full-blood elders from Teton (Lakota-speaking) communities. Lakota anthropologist Beatrice Medicine recalls that suspicious Teton elders often tested Deloria's linguistic skills, and notes that Deloria, who was raised in a Teton community (Standing Rock), was always able to respond to their artful inquiries in perfect Lakota.²⁴ Deloria understood, in other words, that regardless of her Indian identity, she too would have to prove herself as a trustworthy interlocutor, and she would have to do so in a way that made sense to the communities within which she worked.

Deloria was able to bridge the differences that divided her from her informants in Indian country by appealing to the social structure that she believed united all Dakotas across geographic and linguistic divides: kinship. As she notes in *The Dakota Way of Life*, her ethnographic monograph, the “kinship approach” was always the “open sesame” for a “two way flow of friendship. Without that, one dealt with the other in the dark since what his motives were toward one, whether sincere or sinister, were undeterminable. Of only relatives, who knew their proper roles, could one be sure. Therefore the solution was first to make the stranger a relative—thereby putting him on the spot—and then deal with him on that basis.”²⁵ According to Joyzelle Godfrey, Deloria applied this principle when she “went out to do the interviews,” because “she understood that following kinship law was necessary in order to get the information, that if you did not relate yourself in some way to the person you were interviewing you were not going to get accurate information.”²⁶

In short, Deloria crafted a methodology that embraced the rules of kinship and capitalized on her identity as a Dakota. Instead of approaching her informants as an outsider, she found a way to invoke the social kinship system during her interviews, asserting her *relatedness* (as a potential daughter, granddaughter, niece, or sister) to informants, and thus transformed the transmission of knowledge into a “family affair.” By respecting the social conventions that governed kinship relations between herself and her individual informants, Deloria was able to develop trusting and reciprocal relationships with them and gather ethnographic information generally withheld from outsiders. As Godfrey points out, “In the Dakota way, as an outsider you are not going to be allowed in to get the information that you’re looking for . . . Ella recognized that if you’re going to study a culture you can’t be an outsider.” Because Deloria approached her informants “as a relative,” she was able to get them “to tell her anything that she wanted to know. It is not acceptable to lie to a relative, where it is expected to lie to an outsider.”²⁷

While establishing social kinship ties gave Deloria the “open sesame” that she needed to break down barriers of mistrust and suspicion, it did not give her carte blanche to ask probing questions, nor did it explain away her anomalous position as a highly mobile, unmarried woman—with a car—who had, as Beatrice Medicine’s mother put it, “lived in the East and talked about Indians.”²⁸ In response to these dilemmas, Ella Deloria crafted an ethnographic identity that was in keeping with tribal gender norms. As her 1941 letter to Ruth Benedict reveals, Deloria circumvented suspicions regarding both her person and her intentions by adopting the role of the out-

sider within: the perpetual virgin. Godfrey points out that this position was appropriate for Deloria because perpetual virgins were not only “honored, but they were also considered repositories of tribal information,” so it was expected that they be recorders of tribal knowledge.²⁹ Deloria adopted this role to explain her unmarried status, while also situating herself among her informants as a “keeper of tradition.” Because overt inquisitiveness was an attribute frowned upon among most Dakota, Deloria deployed her status as a perpetual virgin to reframe her ethnographic inquiries in a socially acceptable manner. Deloria’s place as a perpetual virgin allowed her to ask probing—and in some contexts, “impolite”—questions without appearing to be merely curious, a negative trait amongst the Dakota.³⁰

For Deloria, then, kinship was not just a form of social organization to be studied alongside ceremonial and other discrete elements of Dakota culture: its conventions and restrictions constituted the founding principles of her ethnographic practice. More importantly, her kinship ethnography—a neologism that captures both the methodological aspects of her approach and its political dimensions—transformed the objectifying relations of the ethnographic encounter by foregrounding reciprocity, relatedness, and dialogue. Deloria outlined the workings of this methodology in a letter to Boas dated July 11, 1932, in which she requested an additional twenty-five dollar expense account to buy food and gifts for informants:

I cannot tell you how essential it is for me to take beef or some food each time I go to an informant—the moment I don’t, I take myself right out of the Dakota side and class myself with outsiders. If I go, bearing a gift, and gladden the hearts of my informants, with food, at which perhaps I arrange to have two or three informants, and eat with them, and call them by the correct social kinship terms, then later I can go back, and ask them all sorts of questions, and get my information, as one would get favors from a relative. It is hard to explain, but it is the only way I can work. To go at it like a white man, for me, an Indian, is to throw up an immediate barrier between myself and the people.³¹

While tearing down the barrier that divided her from the people she interviewed might have been an effective fieldwork strategy for Deloria, it was not necessarily the best strategy for claiming ethnographic authority among her own colleagues. Indeed, her approach to fieldwork unsettled the boundaries between insider and outsider that constituted the very ground rules for participant observation. This naturally rattled Boas, who had modeled his vision of anthropology on the scientific method, and thus had focused a

good deal of energy on injecting more emotional detachment into the ethnographic encounter. While both Boas and Benedict recognized the utility of Deloria's methods, lingering doubts regarding her objectivity often undercut her credibility as an anthropologist. Indeed, though he never clearly voiced his suspicions, Boas often implied in his letters to Deloria and to his colleagues that her research might be tainted by her personal biases.

This struggle reached crisis proportions in the late 1930s in a disagreement that Deloria and Boas had over a manuscript on which Boas had based much of his understanding of Siouan mythology. In September 1937 Boas sent Ella Deloria a copy of "Introduction to Legends of the Og.lala Sioux," by Dr. James R. Walker, requesting that she "verify and correct the mythological content" of the material. Walker's manuscript was based on several interviews with male tribal elders at the Pine Ridge Reservation where he was the agency physician from 1896 to 1914. Walker, who did not speak Lakota, had chosen George Sword, an elderly Lakota from the Pine Ridge Reservation, as his primary transcriber and informant because he was literate in Lakota and was a respected elder of the community. According to Walker, Sword helped break down the reserve of many Lakota elders, allowing him access to the last surviving "holy men" at Pine Ridge. It was from these men that Walker collected the tales that would form the nucleus of his manuscript.

Almost ten years earlier, in 1928, Boas had asked Ella Deloria to review an account of the Og.lala Sun Dance transcribed by Sword using Santee (Dakota) orthography, and no doubt he presumed that she would make short work of this new project. However, Walker's manuscript presented some immediate problems for Deloria. First of all, Walker was trained as a physician, not an ethnologist. Like Deloria, he labored under the supervision of an academically trained anthropologist, Clark Wissler, but he rarely followed Wissler's advice when it came to synthesizing the material he collected at Pine Ridge. In fact, Walker often described his Sioux mythology as a *literary* work, meant to convey the "essence" of Sioux belief systems to a White audience. As such, Walker's manuscript was mediated both by his own understanding of the literary form of classical mythology and a deep desire to convey the supposed universality of Sioux origin stories through this form. As Elaine Jahner notes, Walker essentially synthesized the stories he collected into a coherent literary epic that erased their Lakota-specific meanings in the interests of demonstrating the putative "correspondences between Lakota myth and Old World mythology."³²

Given the tone of the negative report that Deloria gave to Boas regarding the Walker manuscript, there can be little doubt that Walker's literary

pretensions deeply offended her sensibilities as an ethnologist. Moreover, as she noted in her report to Boas, Walker's account of the foundational myths of the Dakota people seemed utterly unrecognizable to her and to the other Dakotas with whom she had shared the manuscript. Deloria arrived at these conclusions after carefully reading the manuscript herself and conducting extensive interviews with elderly Oglalas, during which she read the manuscript to them in Lakota and assiduously recorded their reactions to it. After exhaustive cross-checking among the men and women on the Pine Ridge reservation, Deloria determined that most of the mythological material in the Walker manuscript was suspect.

She also cast doubt on Walker's assertion that he had joined a secret "cult of Medicine Men" and had thereby gained information not available to the community at large. In his introduction to the manuscript, Walker claimed that although no one other "than a full-blooded Oglala has ever been ordained as a Holy Man," the elders in this "cult of Medicine Men" had allowed him entrance into the order because they realized that "soon they would go from the world," and unless they allowed him to record and preserve their sacred lore in writing, "it would pass with them."³³ Deloria refuted these claims, noting in her report that even the eldest and most reliable of her informants had noted that "the so-called Holy Men's Society" was not the "very exclusive club" that Walker claimed it to be. "According to these informants, it was nothing of the sort. It was highly individual, the only occasion for their coming together being when they massed their medicines at a ritual." Walker's claims that the holy men's society spoke a secret language unknown to the rest of the community seemed entirely specious as well. "Nobody ever heard of a closed language, terms that nobody else used; had there been such a thing, even such a rumor as this: 'The Holy Men have a private language' would have got around; nothing like it ever did—because there wasn't any. One man . . . said, 'If they wanted a completely private language, they would not have mutilated words already in use, and abbreviated them in that silly way. They would have used figurative language, or borrowed from neighboring tongues, not the way this material says.'"³⁴

Deloria was clearly excited about her findings, as is evident in the letter that she included with her report on the Walker manuscript. Assuming that Boas would see the tremendous value of her discovery, Deloria requested that Boas extend her funding for another few months so that she might continue her research and finally set the record straight regarding the spiritual traditions of the Sioux. No doubt she was surprised and dismayed by Boas's negative reaction to her report: "I must confess that I am not quite

satisfied yet,” was his curt response. He suggested that she try and track down Walker’s original informant, “Fingers,” and verify Walker’s information with him. As to her request for funding, Boas ominously replied, “I am not going to answer your question about the next few months at the present time.”³⁵ A few days later Boas wrote that he was as yet unable to guarantee funding through the spring, but that he would pay for any additional time spent *corroborating* the Walker text, “I hope you will try and get as much information as possible in regard to these matters. I do not think it likely that Walker invented the whole mythology. I can well imagine that it was the interpretation of one particular individual rather than a general belief. Still there must be something behind it.”³⁶

On February 24, Deloria responded with a conciliatory letter to Boas, taking advantage of his suggestion that the stories in the Walker manuscript were possibly the product of an individual informant. While she continued to insist that nobody had heard of the stories, she assured Boas that she agreed with him “that Walker probably had some basis for them and also that it might have been the creation of one mind. I am sure there were such cases, of persons with *superior imaginations* inventing tales which were their very own—not folk lore. They might have been the beginnings of *fiction writers*—One woman used to weave such tales for us—some of those I wrote out last spring are that kind” [emphasis added].³⁷ Deloria’s conciliatory suggestion had the opposite of its intended effect; Boas was nettled by her intimation that the Walker manuscript—the material upon which so many non-Indian anthropologists (including himself) had based their scholarship on Sioux mythology—might be the product of an early Indian “fiction writer.” He responded on February 28, with a terse letter offering her only one month’s additional funding and issuing an unmistakable warning against what he believed to be a lack of objectivity in her fieldwork: “When you look after the Walker material, *please do not ask in such a way as to discourage people to tell anything they may know about a creation myth*. I think it would be very curious if you should not find some trace of what may be behind Walker’s information. . . . Please do make a serious effort to clear up this matter” [emphasis added].³⁸

Deloria was obviously offended by the suggestion that Boas trusted Walker’s information over her own (and that of her informants); and she was alarmed by the fact that he was holding her funding hostage until she produced corroborative data on Walker. Deloria normally sent Boas weekly progress reports on her research, but she did not respond to his letter of February 28 and remained out of communication with him for nearly a month. It was clearly Boas’s turn to be conciliatory, and on March 24, he

sent her a letter promising funding through June provided she continue her work on the Walker text and “undertake to clear up all these matters during the next few months. . . . I am very anxious to have this straightened out. Will you please let me know whether you can do that.”³⁹ Deloria sent him a report forthwith, but still had not received any payment by April, at which point she wrote to Boas demanding that he give “immediate attention” to the matter of her pay. She also reported that she had tracked down Walker’s interpreter, “an orphan white boy, Charley Nines,” who had been educated at a mission school with Indian children. While “old time white men say he talked like a native. . . . the old Indians didn’t think him so good.”⁴⁰ A few days later, she wrote to Boas to inform him that she had finally received the payment he promised and that she would be sending another report. She predicted, however, that he would most likely be dissatisfied with it, because she had “not found anything very definite as regards the Walker material,” even though she had followed his suggestion and tried “right along to induce it by giving every encouragement” in her questions.⁴¹ Deloria’s prediction proved correct: Boas responded upon receiving her report that he doubted she had made a “serious effort . . . to get the material I want. . . . On the whole I confess I am not well satisfied with what you got for me during the last few months.”⁴²

That summer Deloria sent a final report on the Walker materials to Boas, in which she offered a rather bleak overview of the research assignment. She suggested that Boas’s insistence that her data corroborate Walker’s and his refusal to provide her with adequate funding had unfairly limited the scope of her research. “I have on hand some more of the material which I took down,” she began, “but you won’t think it worth anything; it certainly has no bearing on what you wanted me to find. . . . But when I can not find any of it, what can I do?” She continued her letter with an item-by-item compendium of her Indian informants’ criticism of the Walker text. Deloria singled out Walker’s account of Sioux legends for particular criticism, claiming that his version of the origin myth:

[struck] no responsive chord anywhere. “That must be from another tribe” — “That may be from the Bible” — “Somebody made that up according to his fancy,” — “That’s not Dakota!” Not once, so far, has anybody said of this part that “Maybe it was so believed in the past.”

Deloria concluded in this report that, with a few exceptions, the Walker mythology was entirely spurious: either the invention of a creative Native storyteller or of a Western mind. “I have tried to investigate this as seriously

as I could, within my limitations. With more latitude and money, I could have seen more people, but I cannot say what the results might have been in that case.”⁴³

Deloria received her last check from Boas at the end of July and had to look for work elsewhere for the next year. She wrote a few letters to Boas after completing her work on Walker, updating him on her continuing and mostly unsatisfying search for employment. In these letters she consistently reminded him in apologetic tones that she had tried her level best to corroborate Walker and that she would very much like to work for him once more. Boas rarely responded to these appeals, and their relations had cooled to such an extent that by the spring of 1939, a third party, J. B. Reuter, intervened, writing to Boas on behalf of Deloria to request that he help her secure funding for “a line of study on Dakota ceremonials.”

Deloria followed Reuter’s letter with her own appeal to Boas in the summer of 1939. Bringing up the painful subject of the Walker fallout once again, Deloria confessed that she had continued investigating the Walker mythology on her own time, but had found “no trace” of the stories as he recorded them. She suggested again that Walker’s stories seemed more like “the fanciful weaving together of certain elements in the lore of the Dakotas into a fictionalized form,” than legitimate “myths,” but this time, she had a name to attach to the stories, one “Makula, an especially keen storyteller, with a skill for inventing his own tales.” Though Deloria could not verify her suspicions because Makula had died at least four years before she began investigating the Walker manuscript, he was known to have been one of Walker’s primary informants. Still, she insisted that the Sioux mythology that Walker developed—with its “scheme of fours” and “gods arranged in classes and hierarchies”—seemed like “the work of a systematic European mind.” And she reminded Boas that she had found no variants of the stories that Walker had supposedly recorded just a few decades earlier. “It does not seem probable or possible,” that if Walker’s stories “were ever told about in the tribe, currently as are our Iktomi tales even yet, they should disappear completely from the repertoires of all tribal story-tellers, save one! *That is still my opinion*” [emphasis added].⁴⁴

While Boas’s somewhat conciliatory reply—“I am glad to have the remarks you made about the Dakota stories. I can hardly imagine that everything should have disappeared since Walker’s time”—was not quite an acknowledgment that he had conceded to Deloria’s expertise on the subject, it did signal an eventual reconciliation between the two scholars. Their correspondence after this exchange was marked by a return of collegiality that must surely have been satisfying to both of them. In any case, Deloria

and Boas began working together again, on what was to be recognized as their most important collaborative effort, *Dakota Grammar*. And by the end of 1939, things were back to normal: they were corresponding on a regular basis, passing proofs of the *Dakota Grammar* back and forth between South Dakota and New York, and Boas was once again able to find funding for Deloria to continue her ethnographic work. Their relationship remained congenial until Boas's death in December 1942.

The disagreement over the Walker manuscript outlines the limits of Deloria's claims to ethnographic authority based on her insider understanding of Dakota culture. One can only imagine the frustration that Deloria must have felt when her knowledge of Dakota culture, which was based on both her personal experience and that of her informants, was deemed less authoritative than that of an agency physician. In a telling reversal, the very quality that Boas and his colleagues believed made Deloria an especially valuable investigator had rendered her meticulously gathered ethnographic information questionable. In her careful attempts to corroborate the Walker manuscript, Deloria followed all the rules of participant observation except one—perhaps the most important one. She had allowed her native informants to “talk back” to the anthropological establishment. Indeed, in allowing Dakota voices to be heard, Deloria undermined the unspoken power relations at the heart of the anthropological enterprise. Boas's refusal to accord her and her informants the authority to describe their own mythology, religion, and ceremonial life, and his faith in a literary account of these cultural practices—by an amateur ethnologist who didn't even speak Lakota—must surely have been galling to Deloria.⁴⁵ More troubling still must have been the realization that, because of his powerful position within the newly formed anthropological establishment, Boas had a veritable stranglehold on her livelihood and that when her findings did not align with his preconceptions, she was forced to find work outside the field. Still, with a degree of bravery that is remarkable, Deloria held her ground, and in the end, was begrudgingly vindicated.

Though the rift between Deloria and Boas had mended by the end of his life, their disagreement illuminates the darker side of Boas's revolutionary revisioning of anthropology as an objective science. Deloria was a talented observer and a brilliant scholar, but she was also a Dakota woman. Because of this, she spoke from the position of both an ethnographer and a native, a position that was irreconcilable within a discipline still burdened by colonial relations of power, and whose representational politics all too often reflected this burden. As Kamala Visweswaran has noted, “When the ‘other’ drops out of anthropology, becomes subject participant, and sole

author, not ‘object’,” then the boundaries upon which the anthropological enterprise is founded—between the Western self and the exotic other—are seriously undermined. “To accept ‘native’ authority is to give up the game,” something that Franz Boas was not prepared to do.⁴⁶

Ella Deloria’s relational approach to fieldwork also raised troubling questions about the nature of the ethnographic encounter—questions that contemporary native anthropologists have addressed in their own “home” work. Kirin Narayan has pointed out that in the current historical moment, anthropologists can no longer avoid interrogating the “quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views and dilemmas—people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise?”⁴⁷ Narayan suggests that these questions are linked to a particular postcolonial crisis of conscience in the human sciences, initiated by a historical moment when (to paraphrase Renato Rosaldo) “natives” are “talking back” to anthropologists—indeed *as* anthropologists.

It is useful to think of Ella Deloria’s relational practice in the context of this continuing struggle to decolonize anthropology. The decolonizing ethnographic methodology that Deloria developed—her “kinship ethnography”—might thus be refigured as a critique of the anthropological norms of her time. By reframing the process of participant observation to take into account the relationship between observer and observed, and by pointing to the ways in which this relationship structured the ethnographic encounter, Deloria demonstrated—before the “postcolonial crisis”—that “ethnographic truth was partial, perspectival, and embedded in social and material relations of power and obligation.”⁴⁸ This complex understanding of the intersubjective nature of ethnographic “truth” would return to trouble the waters as Deloria herself struggled to consolidate her copious ethnographic data into a coherent monograph documenting Dakota social life.

Writing Home: Gender and the Native Ethnographic Voice

Most of the published essays that address Ella Deloria’s ethnographic work, even those written by feminist ethnographers, focus on her relationship with the nominal father of modern anthropology, Franz Boas. However, Deloria’s most refined ethnographic writing emerged after Boas’s death,

under the tutelage of Ruth Benedict. Deloria's relationship with Benedict began in 1932, when Boas asked Benedict to design research plans for the ethnographic side of the linguistic investigations Deloria was carrying out for him. Although Deloria got off to a rocky start with Benedict, their relationship soon developed into a full-fledged and somewhat more equitable collaboration than the one she shared with Boas. More importantly, it was during her intense collaborative engagement with Benedict that Deloria turned her keen ethnographic gaze to the lives of women in Dakota society. Indeed, as Raymond DeMallie notes, it was likely Benedict who first suggested that Deloria "work on the family and tribal structures, and examine kinship and the role of women, recording women's autobiographies as a source of insight."⁴⁹ While Deloria's early reports to Boas had always included information from both male and female informants, it was under Benedict that she began to focus on women as interpreters of tribal custom, preservers of tribal history and tradition, and educators within tribal communities. Moreover, it was under Benedict's careful editorial hand that Deloria produced her monumental monograph on Dakota family life.

Judging from her correspondence with Benedict during this period, a major concern for Deloria was whether she could consolidate all of her knowledge about the Dakota into a single manuscript that would satisfy Indians, anthropologists, and the general public. She ultimately hit on a solution that seems unimaginable given the pressing economic and time constraints that she faced. Deloria decided to write *three* books: an anthropological monograph entitled *The Dakota Way of Life*; *Waterlily*, an ethnographic novel documenting the experiences of three generations of Dakota women; and *Speaking of Indians*, an analysis of Dakota history and culture geared toward a general readership. For the next seven years, supported by grants from the American Philosophical Society and the Missionary Education Movement of the National Council of Churches, Deloria labored on these three projects.

Only *Speaking of Indians* (1944) was published during her lifetime. Ruth Benedict worked with Deloria on *The Dakota Way of Life* and *Waterlily*, helping her to get both manuscripts into shape, but unfortunately, Benedict's untimely death in 1948 deprived Deloria of the institutional leverage needed to push them through to publication. Notwithstanding an enthusiastic letter of endorsement by Benedict's colleague and friend Margaret Mead, *The Dakota Way of Life* ended up in the archives of the American Philosophical Society. *Waterlily* also languished—in the files of the University of Oklahoma Press—never to see publication during Deloria's lifetime.⁵⁰ *The Dakota Way of Life* remained ensconced in the archive for over

fifty years, a truly unfortunate situation given its importance as a radically revisionary text both in terms of its ethnographic information and its style.⁵¹

Indeed, in *The Dakota Way of Life*, Deloria seems to write against the narrative tropes that shaped ethnographic authority in the texts of her contemporaries. In *The Predicament of Culture*, James Clifford examines these tropes and the changing rhetorical modes through which ethnographers have claimed textual authority. He notes that ethnographies of the “classic period” (when Deloria wrote her monograph) relied on representations of participant observation that at once foregrounded the “heroic” experience of the ethnographer entering into exotic cultures and erased the situational and dialogic aspects of this experience. In the classic monograph, ethnographic authority and the “logical coherence” of the ethnographic text was based on, as Lévi-Strauss put it, “the sincerity and honesty of whoever can say, like the explorer bird of the fable: ‘I was there, such a thing happened to me. You will believe that you were there yourself,’ and who, indeed, succeeds in communicating this conviction.”⁵²

Of course, not just any experience qualified as an “authentic” ethnographic experience. Because participant observation, the keystone of modern ethnographic practice, was predicated on an intense intersubjective encounter with difference, the coherence of “classic” ethnographic narratives relied on the ability to convey a certain kind of experience, that of “an outsider entering a culture, undergoing a kind of initiation leading to ‘rapport.’”⁵³ But what happens to authority in the ethnographic text when the essential framing narrative of the outsider penetrating exotic culture is absent from the narration of the ethnographic experience, or when the experience of the researcher does not follow the familiar path of alienation, acceptance, and the inevitable return home? What if “home” is the site where one engages in participant observation? And how are the gendered and colonialist terms of the anthropological conversation shifted when the investigator is a native woman?

This last question is of particular importance, especially since, as Trinh T. Minh-ha has noted, the colonialist conversation that underlies anthropological visions of encounter has historically marginalized native women from its imagined dialogue. The “conversation of man with man,” she notes, is

mainly a conversation of “us” with “us” about “them,” of the white man with the white man about the primitive-native man. The specificity of these three “man” grammatically leads to “men,” a logic reinforced by the

modern anthropologist who, while aiming at the generic “man” like all his colleagues, implies elsewhere that in this context, man’s mentality should be read as men’s mentalities.⁵⁴

Ella Deloria shifted the gender and racial terms of this classic anthropological conversation in *The Dakota Way of Life* by opening a space for multiple conversations between a native woman (herself) and other native men and women—a space in which the conversation frequently shifted from native “habits” and “customs” to the political processes and imperial policies that had transformed those customs. *The Dakota Way of Life* succeeded in transferring authorship and authority away from the supposedly objective anthropological observer and to the people themselves.

This shift posed particular narrative challenges for Deloria as she began to consolidate her notes into a coherent ethnographic text. By her own account, one of the most difficult aspects of writing an authoritative ethnography on the Dakota was establishing an authorial position that adequately reflected her own complex position as both native and ethnographer, yet still made sense to other anthropologists. Indeed, Deloria had a great deal of trouble conforming her vast knowledge of the Dakota—based both on the “objective” ethnographic data she had collected under Boas and Benedict and on her “subjective” personal experience as a Dakota woman—to the rhetorical norms of a classic monograph. In a February 1947 letter to Benedict, Deloria complained that her unruly text was “just awful! . . . I simply can not write it as a real investigator, hitting the high spots and drawing conclusions. There is too much I know . . . I think the most you can say for it is that it is a composite of Dakota information, and that I am the glorified (?) native mouthpiece.” Deloria clearly found it frustrating that she could not fulfill the expectations of her non-Indians colleagues and write in a “detached, professional manner.” “I try to keep out of it,” she complained, “but I am too much in it, and I know too many angles. If the outsider investigator is like a naturalist watching ants, and reporting what he sees, draws conclusions from that, I am one of the ants! I know what the fight is about, what all the other little ants are saying under their breath! I did think it would be such a cinch!”⁵⁵

If Deloria could not extricate herself from the internal dynamics of Dakota culture in order to describe it coherently, it was because from the very beginning of her career as an ethnographic investigator she had figured her research among the Dakota from the perspective of a cultural insider. When it came to writing an authoritative account of Dakota culture, however, Deloria faced a unique contradiction: while she was more effectively

placed to speak authoritatively about Dakota social norms than outsiders like James R. Walker, because of her familial, political, and social alliances to Dakota people, she could not assume the objective and distanced stance that would lend ethnographic authority to her text. Deloria eventually resolved these contradictions by self-consciously positioning herself within the text as a “native mouthpiece” for the Dakota people.

In the introduction to *The Dakota Way of Life*, Deloria states directly and with no apology that her textual description of the Dakota will represent a departure from the narrative norms of conventional ethnographies:

For one speaking out of the culture, the position of an outside investigator observing an alien, primitive society with cool detachment, did not seem altogether becoming or desirable. Such a pose might not be impossible to assume, and sustain all the way, though perhaps only with considerable artifice. But since the struggle to remain consistently objective would be too preoccupying, whereas my real duty was to make my material available somehow or other, I chose the less exalted role of plain mouthpiece for the many who gave it to me, with such care for accuracy; and have tried to pass it along with the same care.

It further seemed that if I was to make any peculiar contribution towards a deeper understanding of the Dakotas, it must consist not only in describing what went on in their life but also and more especially in explaining why it went on in that precise way; how and to what extent the character of Dakota education and social milieu shaped the people to react as they did in each given situation. In attempting to do this comprehensibly, I have given incidents out of even my own experience wherever I thought they might be of help. *This I have done with a total disregard and lack of Dakota reticence, for which I hope to be forgiven* [emphasis added].⁵⁶

In this passage, Deloria acknowledges that she is breaking with the discursive conventions of two communities—the Dakota and the anthropological establishment—and, significantly, begs forgiveness for her “disregard” of “Dakota reticence,” a plea that could have only been directed to her Dakota informants. Moreover, Deloria’s assertion that she would, on occasion, insert her own experience into the narrative signifies an important break with the conventions of ethnographic meaning making—a break that links her work to that of Zora Neale Hurston and Jovita González who also blurred the boundaries between their personal experiences and their ethnographic observations.

Through such innovative rhetorical strategies, Deloria, like Hurston and

González, claimed authority as a “native speaker,” a scholarly subject with obligations not only to the academic community (to produce a text that accurately represents a radically different social reality), but also to the community represented in the ethnographic text. Moreover, by rejecting the status of objective outsider in favor of that of subjective yet knowledgeable insider, Deloria reversed the ethnographer’s conventional claim to authority. By relinquishing this authority and instead positioning herself as a “plain native mouthpiece,” Deloria foregrounded her expertise as a Dakota and redistributed authoritative power, formerly the exclusive possession of the ethnographer, to her informants. This rhetorical gesture granted the Dakota themselves the agency to interpret their own histories and social realities.

By placing herself at the center of the ethnographic text along with her informants, Deloria at once reversed the direction of the ethnographic gaze, and transferred ethnographic authority from the anthropological community to the Dakota community (which, notably, included herself, an anthropologist). Setting herself against textual practices that would place the outsider anthropologist at the center of authority, Deloria privileged the expertise of her informants in *The Dakota Way of Life*. For example, in the first sentence of her introduction, she states: “This writing is about the Dakota-speaking Indians of the Plains and all its material comes directly from them.” While the rest of her introduction follows the standard format of an ethnographic monograph, offering a “background history” of the Dakotas, the authoritative sources for this history are not canonical nineteenth-century ethnologies on the Sioux (texts that she claimed were fraught with inaccuracies), but rather numerous elderly informants, tribal historians whom she acknowledges individually and by name. Throughout the remainder of *The Dakota Way of Life* Deloria follows this rhetorical strategy, giving voice to her native informants, referring to them by name, and citing them extensively.

But Deloria’s rejection of anthropology’s rhetorical norms moved beyond figuring natives as a key interpreter of their own reality. Indeed, one of the most striking ways she transgressed the ethnographic norms of her day was her absolute refusal to synthesize the heteroglossic discursive situations of her fieldwork experiences into an abstract account of the Dakota. James Clifford, Deborah Gordon, and others have noted that, in the process of creating a coherent narrative of the fieldwork experience, the ethnographic writer of the classic period typically reduced the polyphonic and dialogic realities of fieldwork to a unified, coherent picture of “a people.” In the process, individual interlocutors—and, indeed, the very dialogic conditions

of participant observation—were erased in place of narratives that posited a single author and an integrated portrait of “a society.” The specific contributions of individual informants were replaced, for example, by “the Sioux,” “the Trobrianders,” “the Nuer.” Clifford reminds us of “what has dropped out of sight. . . . The actuality of discursive situations and individual interlocutors is filtered out. . . . The dialogical, situational aspects of ethnographic interpretation tend to be banished from the final representative text.”⁵⁷

By contrast *The Dakota Way of Life* includes many beautifully written vignettes, exemplary stories that reveal not only both the dialogical and situational aspects of the ethnographic encounter, but also Deloria’s unique approach to participant observation. One particularly illuminating instance of this narrative strategy appears in a chapter on the social kinship system in which Deloria, using her own experience as an example, reveals how Dakotas establish relatedness outside the bonds of blood or marriage. In this chapter, Deloria recounts an experience that she had in a Santee community where she was engaged in a “field study.” As Deloria tells it, when she approached the “head man” of the Santee tribal community, she began to have deep misgivings. “I did not know these people and they did not know me. I, a Yankton, would have to feel my way with tact as a total stranger.” Deloria describes overcoming this initial awkwardness by mentioning the name of one of her father’s Santee colleagues in the ministry, a man who, as luck would have it, happened to be the head man’s brother. When Deloria informs the head man that his brother was “like a brother” to her own father, her relationship to him and the community within which he is a respected elder is instantly transformed by the rules of social kinship.

And then it happened! A new and wonderful light came into his eyes, a light of recognition. Here was no stranger! Here was someone he could place. A Dakota relative; his daughter. . . . And with that, all need of further parrying was gone. . . . We shook hands warmly . . . I acknowledged him. It was very good to be relatives and no longer strangers, to be linked in the great inter-relationship of the Dakotas, the *wicotakuye*, which may be invoked anywhere any time that two Dakotas meet who know how to establish kinship and feel the need of it.

. . . At that instant I was “in,” for I was automatically related to everyone in that small community through the head man, my father. His wife and her sisters and cousins were my mothers, their husbands were my fathers, his daughters were my sisters, their children were my children and their grandchildren were my grandchildren and so on.

. . . It was unspeakably comforting to belong. The old people, upon learning the purpose of my visit, volunteered much valuable information regarding their former life. And the eldest woman there, whose keen faculties belied her years, was a particularly rich source of knowledge of ancient customs no longer generally known.⁵⁸

This exemplary story achieves multiple rhetorical objectives. Clearly it is intended as an object lesson in the ways in which Dakotas (and Deloria herself) established relatedness beyond the boundaries of their particular *tiyospaye* group, but it also subtly draws the reader's attention to the different voices that comprise Ella Deloria's community of "informants." Indeed the passage moves—through a web of relations—from the "head man" to "the eldest woman there," a woman who, Deloria suggests, became her most important informant.

The passage thus also illustrates one of the most interesting interventions of Deloria's monograph: her commitment to including the voices of Dakota women in her depiction of the Dakota way of life. By recognizing women as conscious interpreters of tribal knowledge, Deloria subtly undermined the masculinist bent of ethnographic representations that had focused on male informants and typically represented gender relations among the Dakota as "unequal" in the best cases, and brutal in the worst. Indeed, in her letters to Benedict, Deloria acknowledged that her study defied the norms of ethnographic texts on the Sioux because it did not focus solely on men's activities. And when she submitted her monograph to the American Philosophical Society for final review, she worried that they would not consider it a truly comprehensive study of the Dakota because it did not include "male ceremonials" and war stories. Reminding Benedict that her stated purpose had been a study of Dakota family life—the domain of women—Deloria wondered nonetheless whether she ought to include more information on typically male activities. "But don't ask me to do anything on war, particularly. Religion, yes; ceremonial, yes. War—no! Anyway all the things that men have written have pointed war up so much, that if I omitted it, as a topic I mean, I don't think it would be missed. I talk mostly with women, you see. What I have gathered about war has been largely as an eavesdropper."⁵⁹

One of the most intriguing qualities of *The Dakota Way of Life* is that it offers the (Dakota) "women's point of view" on subjects as diverse as marriage, kinship, warfare, tribal history, and religion. Moreover, Deloria allows their critical perspective on both Dakota culture and "White" culture to emerge alongside more conventional ethnographic data. The monograph

abounds with such examples, but perhaps the most charming one may be found in Deloria's representation of the subtle negotiations of power in the marriage of two elderly Dakotas, "Mr. and Mrs. Brown Elk."

After a long married life they were in their latter years. Mr. Brown Elk was a friendly, genial, soft-spoken man with a rare sense of humor. Long since, he had worked out a philosophy for living with his wife, who, though well-meaning and likable—and as hospitable to his guests as he could wish—had the habit of snatching nearly every subject literally out of his mouth. When she did so, he let her have it, and settled back to relax. Seeming not to hear, he sat with eyes shut and a hint of a smile around his mouth while puffing leisurely on a long-stemmed pipe, as if to say, "There she goes again . . . and it is all right."

Only rarely he teased her by boasting of his good luck in not having to do more than select and introduce a subject. There his responsibility ended, for she at once bit into it and shook it to shreds and did not let go until she had it completely exhausted. He would say this in the presence of his brothers or male cousins because they were his wife's joking relatives. "It must be great to have so capable a wife," they would comment, "for it releases you for more important things—like smoking and meditating and taking your ease." Mrs. Brown Elk appeared neither to hear what he said nor to react to the good-natured "ribbing" of those joking relatives; and, there was no effect whatsoever on so fixed a habit . . .

. . . When there were men guests who sat with him in the honor place beyond the fire, he talked entertainingly and with more freedom because women did not properly interrupt such conversation. Nevertheless, from her own space near the entrance, Mrs. Brown Elk kept up a steady stream which I might liken to a running commentary down the margin of the printed page. From long and close association both knew the same facts and stories so that she did not need to correct a detail or ask a question about the subject of the moment. It was her interpretation and opinion—the "woman's angle"—that she volunteered, in an endless muttered accompaniment; just loud enough to excite interest in her version too. One was hard put to follow both "text" and "commentary" at once, though one tried. But despite this habit, which the old man was used to, as one grows used to a periodic noise until it no longer exists, the Brown Elks were a happy and congenial couple.⁶⁰

Here, Deloria's keen sense for the subtleties of Dakota humor and, as Margaret Mead noted, her "literary abilities, unfortunately too rare among eth-

nographers” work to render a scene that captures the artful use of language among the Dakota even as it offers an undeniably touching picture of the necessary negotiations of married life. But the scene also seems to suggest a metaphor for the practice of feminist ethnography. Mrs. Brown Elk’s “commentary”—“the woman’s angle”—running alongside her husband’s “text,” would surely be considered a distraction and a nuisance by a male anthropologist (like James R. Walker) focused on Mr. Brown Elk’s stories. Indeed, it would most likely be excised from a typical anthropological account of the scene. In Deloria’s text, however, Mrs. Brown Elk’s commentary openly competes for attention, and receives it. In fact, Mrs. Brown Elk seems like an anthropologist in her own right, “snatching the words” from her husband’s mouth, as she sits alongside him, offering her own “interpretation” of his text.

Mrs. Brown Elk’s insistence that her “commentary” on her husband’s “text” be heard also suggests a provocative metaphor for Deloria’s complicated relationship with the anthropological establishment of the 1930s and 1940s. While she believed that anthropology might offer an effective tool for transforming both public opinion and public policy with regard to Indian peoples, she resisted the methodological and rhetorical norms that granted anthropologists an authoritative voice in public discourse. In *The Dakota Way of Life* this complicated relationship is most evident. Indeed, in her monograph Deloria violated almost every ethnographic code of the “classic period”: she refused key rhetorical strategies for claiming ethnographic authority over her subjects, she included “ways of knowing that are conventionally placed on the margins of the fieldwork narrative,” and she rejected the push toward abstraction and generalization by allowing multiple perspectives on Dakota culture and history to emerge in the voices of her male and female informants.⁶¹ This repudiation of the norms of ethnographic writing may well have signaled a growing sense that an “authoritative” ethnographic account of the Dakota could not possibly tell the story of her people.

Deloria’s frustration with the impersonal, objective authorial voice of the standard ethnographic text was no doubt one of the reasons that she turned to the “blurred genre” formats that she explored throughout the 1940s. In texts like *Speaking of Indians* and *Waterlily*, Deloria translated her ethnographic data into rhetorical and aesthetic forms that freed her from the narrative strictures of the ethnographic monograph. However, *Waterlily*, unlike *Speaking of Indians*, offered a distinctly *gendered* vision of the Dakota social world that suggested a radical departure from typical representations of native life and culture. As Beatrice Medicine (Lakota)

has noted, most anthropological and sociological research on Indians has “glossed gender differences and presented a monolithic view of the indigenous peoples. These approaches have successfully covered the rich variation of gender differences in socialization patterns and actualization and continuation of native lifestyles which have been a part of the adaptive strategies of native peoples.”⁶² Deloria, too, recognized that, in creating a monolithic image of the Sioux that focused on male subjects and activities, both popular and scientific texts had erased a key tool in her people’s struggle to counteract the ravages of colonialism. In *Waterlily*, Deloria addressed this erasure by bringing her ethnographic research to life, even as she brought the lives of Indian women to the very center of a reimagined discourse on Indian survival. In effect, *Waterlily* allowed Mrs. Brown Elk’s voice to move from the margins of the ethnographic text to the center of the literary text.

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CHAPTER 2

“Lyin’ Up a Nation”

Zora Neale Hurston and the Literary Uses of the Folk

Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually underprivileged, are the shyest. They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, “Get out of here!” We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn’t know what he’s missing. The Indian resists curiosity by stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON, *MULES AND MEN* (1935)

My ultimate purpose as a student is to increase the general knowledge concerning my people, to advance science and the musical arts among my people, but in the Negro way and away from the white man’s way.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON, FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION,
JOHN SIMON GUGGENHEIM MEMORIAL FOUNDATION (1933)

In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), Zora Neale Hurston vividly recounts her earliest exposure to the folklore of her people. Lingered on the porch of Joe Clarke’s store, “the heart and spring” of her hometown of Eatonville, Florida, a young Hurston would often catch fragments of forbidden talk, the talk of men: “sly references to the physical condition of women, irregular love affairs, brags on male potency by the party of the first part, and the like.” Though she didn’t understand the implications of their talk until she “was out of college and doing research in

Anthropology,” Hurston absorbed every bit of it, especially the “‘lying’ sessions,” a kind of oral contest in which the men tried to outdo one another in the telling of folktales.

By her own account, she was drawn to the “menfolks’” lying sessions because they seemed to fit her particular inclinations as a child. Dreamy, imaginative, and given to “visions,” Hurston collected “glints and gleams” of what she heard “and stored it away to turn it to [her] own uses.” For example, under the influence of these flights of fancy, she transformed one “Mr. Pendir”—a perfectly ordinary old loner living apart from the rest of the community—into a shape-shifting alligator man: “In my imagination his work-a-day hands and feet became the reptilian claws of an alligator. A tough knotty hide crept over him, and his mouth became a huge snout with prong-toothed, powerful jaws.” Hurston goes on to describe her increasingly outlandish inventions regarding Mr. Pendir, who became in her imagination not only “the king of ’gators” but also a powerful, almost godlike hoodoo doctor. Commanding battalions of “subject-gators,” Mr. Pendir could walk on water and control other conjurers through his miraculous powers. Hurston even dragged a neighbor, poor “Mrs. Bronson,” into her epic, attributing her near-drowning to a humiliating defeat in a “conjure battle” with Mr. Pendir.¹

While Hurston conceded in her autobiography that Mr. Pendir’s actual life “had not agreed with [her] phantasy at any point,” this did not prevent her from including an account of his “conjure battle” with Mrs. Bronson in at least two other publications before *Dust Tracks on a Road*. The story appears in her ethnographic monograph “Hoodoo in America,” published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1931, and in her contribution to Nancy Cunard’s monumental collection of African and African American writing, *Negro: An Anthology* (1934). In the *JAF* monograph Hurston’s tone is subdued and scientific as she offers straightforward recitations of folklore ostensibly collected in Florida. Several of these tales describe the amazing conjure powers of one “Old Man Massey,” a South Florida hoodoo doctor. One of these accounts details his battle with a rival, “Aunt Judy Cox,” and closely mirrors the magical events that Hurston describes as her childhood inventions in *Dust Tracks on a Road*. In Cunard’s collection, her style is much more literary; “Old Man Massey” is now the more alliterative “Uncle Monday,” and her informants, many of whom are clearly recognizable in Hurston’s other works of folklore and fiction, now have personalities of their own and share their stories in their own voices. These are the characters that populate Joe Clarke’s iconic store porch and offer up juicy accounts of “Uncle Monday” walking on water, his ability to change

shape, and his battle with "Aunt Judy Bickerstaff." Of course, after reading Hurston's autobiography, we recognize these confabulations as products of a young girl's rich fantasy life.

What can we make of this collision between fact and fantasy over the course of Hurston's writing career? In effect, *Dust Tracks on a Road* offers an admission that Hurston's imagination was the root of the many iterations of the conjure tales about Old Man Massey/Uncle Monday, an admission that does not diminish their power as literary works, but does raise troubling questions about the truth-value of her ethnographic texts. Hurston certainly understood that making such an acknowledgment, even late in her career, would confirm lingering doubts about her reliability as a participant observer. Did she assume that readers would not notice the similarity between her childhood "phantasies" and the ethnographic accounts she published in the *Journal of American Folklore*? Or was she trying to say something about folklore itself: its origins as a creative act of the imagination, its tricky fusion of individual imagination and collective history into a "story" that can later be collected, transcribed, and circulated as "authentic" folk knowledge? Hurston often noted that new folklore was being created every day in the jokes, sermons, songs, and gorgeous "lies" of "Negroes." Did her admission in *Dust Tracks on a Road* offer a concrete intertextual example of an ongoing tradition of folklore making in African American communities—a tradition that she not only documented but also helped to produce?

Or perhaps Hurston's sly implication that she herself was the primary informant for one of her most evocative conjure stories can be traced to her complex and sometimes contradictory engagement with the Boasian anthropological establishment. Hurston, like Deloria, played in the borderlands between insider and outsider, a territory largely unexplored by Boas and his colleagues, despite their dedication to the scientific study of cultural difference. And like Deloria, she figured herself as a native mouthpiece of sorts, ventriloquizing the songs, sayings, and "lies" of her native Eatonville in her public persona and in her writing. This is not to say that her representations of the folk were unmediated. Indeed, the way she shaped the stories, practices, and songs that she collected into narratives—her self-consciously literary ethnographic writing—suggests an intervention against a mode of ethnographic meaning making that had claimed the power to "truthfully" and transparently describe cultural difference. In this sense, Hurston's ethnographic writing style is both masterfully subversive and reflective of her own complex location between multiple domains of meaning making. Directed simultaneously at Columbia, Harlem, and the hinter-

lands, her writing dodges and feints, moves in and out of discursive guises and narrative genres. Hurston doesn't simply rewrite any number of narrative norms; she writes *between* them, deploying key signifiers of authorship and authority from folklore scholarship, Boasian anthropology, literature, and the Black vernacular tradition, all the while engaging in a mode of narrative shape shifting not unlike Mr. Pendir's.

It is tempting, given their temporal proximity, to examine Ella Deloria and Zora Neale Hurston's involvement in the Boasian milieu with the same critical lens, especially since their careers in anthropology resonate so strikingly. Both Deloria and Hurston began working in their own native communities under Boas's guidance in 1927, both worked with psychologist Otto Klineberg (again, under Boas) in 1929–1930, and both conducted the vast majority of their ethnographic research during one intensely productive decade, from 1927 to 1937. Provocative as these points of connection may be, one should approach a comparative analysis of Hurston and Deloria's careers in anthropology with a good measure of caution. In fact, a deeper examination of their interactions with the anthropological establishment reveals that for every similarity, every point of connection, there is also a degree of difference.

Although both Deloria and Hurston worked closely with Franz Boas in the mid-1920s, by 1928 Hurston had distanced herself from Boas and Columbia University, seeking funding for her folklore research from a patron of the arts, amateur anthropologist Charlotte Osgood Mason. Even a cursory review of the correspondence between Boas and his two protégés during this period is most revealing. Whereas Deloria kept in almost weekly contact with Boas well into the late 1930s, sending him long letters, reports, and reams of ethnographic material, Hurston wrote him only eight letters from 1928 to 1932, the period of her most intense fieldwork. Given these differences in their respective professional relationships with “Papa Franz,” it is not surprising that Deloria's research methodologies generally conformed to Boas's directive—owing to her reliance upon him as a source of funding—while Hurston's fieldwork practices diverged quite markedly from Boasian methodological norms.

Hurston's rather more attenuated relationship to the anthropology department at Columbia in the late 1920s may have been due, in part, to the disciplinary biases of the profession during this period. When Hurston “discovered” anthropology, most ethnographic research centered on American Indians and other exotic “primitive” cultures figured by anthropologists of the period as disappearing in the wake of modernization and Western capitalist expansion.² Melville Herskovits, Boas's former student, was almost

entirely alone in his interest in African and African American culture, and even he was less interested in African American cultural forms as such than he was in tracing their linkages to older West African sources.³ Hurston fully realized that African Americans were not the research focus of the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, a fact made clear in a letter written to Edwin Embree of the Rosenwald Fund as part of her application for a scholarship to pursue a doctorate in anthropology in 1934. While Hurston wanted to study under Franz Boas, she complained that there were very few classes at Columbia related to her "special field," the African diaspora in the Americas, and that "most of the Anthropologists in America have specialized on Indians . . . for the present it hampers me in getting my own self trained."⁴ As a result, throughout the 1930s Hurston vacillated between her emerging career as a writer and her lingering desire to become a professional anthropologist.

Hurston's connections to the Boasian milieu in the 1920s and 1930s and her artful melding of folklore and creative writing have, not surprisingly, inspired many scholars to reclaim her as an anticipatory figure to the current experimental turn in ethnographic writing.⁵ However, it might be more productive—and more accurate—to read Hurston's approach to ethnographic meaning making within the context of the self-reflexive and self-consciously literary folklore texts that were gaining increasing public attention in the 1920s and 1930s through the efforts of popularizers like Benjamin Botkin, Alan Lomax (with whom Hurston worked in 1935), and J. Frank Dobie. This period was characterized by increasingly strained relations between some regional folklore scholars—who frequently rejected scientific approaches to the collection and analysis of folk-tales in favor of more subjective and outright literary appropriations of folklore—and members of the anthropological establishment at metropolitan centers of learning like Columbia (Boas), Chicago (Herskovits), and Berkeley (Alfred Kroeber). Although folklore scholarship and anthropology continued to share important institutional connections during the interwar years, they were deeply divided by persistent disagreements over both methodological practices and theoretical perspectives.

Nowhere were these differences more keenly felt than in the "field." Where anthropologists of the Boasian school prided themselves on their heroic abilities to penetrate and objectively describe radically "different" cultures (the Nuer, the Kwaiatul, Samoans, and so on), students of folklore set their sights closer to home—in some cases, *at home*. And as folklorists interested in the contours of regional, ethnic, and occupational "American" identity began to influence the developing discipline, ideas about the proper

domain of inquiry for the production of ethnographic knowledge began to shift quite precipitously. Benjamin Botkin perhaps best articulated this trend in his call for the collection of a “folk history . . . from the bottom up,” in which “the people, as participants or eye-witnesses, are their own historians.” Botkin’s claim that “everyone has in his repertoire an articulate body of family and community tradition” and that this personal knowledge made everyone a potential “folklorist as well as a folklore informant” represented a radical reconceptualization of the participant observation model of ethnographic work, one that may well have offered a more comfortable space for native ethnographers like Hurston to articulate their self-reflexive visions of fieldwork.⁶

There is, as well, a potential political reading of Hurston’s interest in folklore. While she was clearly drawn to Boas’s much-touted objectivity and his intellectually rigorous (and antiracist) methodologies for reading and writing difference, she was also fascinated and energized by the aesthetic revolution happening at Columbia’s doorstep in Harlem, where a group of “Younger Negro Artists” were breaking away from the bourgeois fetters of the “talented tenth” and creating an art form centered on Black vernacular culture. For this younger generation—writers like Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and Hurston—recovering the songs, art, and oral traditions of the Black “folk” was central to the project of rebuilding a Black identity that could stand apart from the cruel dialogics of American racism.

In his epilogue to the *Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, historian George Hutchinson notes that although the elder statesmen of the Harlem Renaissance—W. E. B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, and Alain Locke—had always expressed an interest in the artistic possibilities of folk forms, in particular spirituals, the new breed of Black writers who emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s began to press at the ideological and formal boundaries that governed the aesthetic use of folk materials among Harlem intellectuals. Taking their cue from James Weldon Johnson’s call to “find a form that will express the racial spirit by symbols from within rather than symbols from without,” Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes, among others, began developing a vernacular poetics inspired by popular forms like jazz music and the blues.

Hutchinson suggests that this trend was influenced as much by intellectual movements emanating from outside the Harlem milieu as it was by the aesthetic project first proffered in the pages of *The New Negro*. Indeed, Black artists’ explorations of the boundaries between highbrow and folk culture corresponded in quite striking ways with trends in literary folklore

scholarship emerging from regional folklore societies in the Southwest and Midwest: in particular, the push to reimagine national culture from the roots up with homegrown vernacular forms. For writers of the Harlem Renaissance, elevating vernacular culture to the level of art served as both a corrective gesture against local color and dialect literature (which had, in Sterling Brown's words, served as "a handmaiden to social policy") and a bid to engender a national literature unique to Black Americans.⁷

These ideas were developed and refined over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, but there can be little doubt—given Botkin's close professional interactions with Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, and Alain Locke in the late 1920s—that Hurston's own approach to the aesthetic uses of vernacular culture was, at least initially, informed by what Hutchinson describes as the "interplay between Midwestern vernacular literary movements, African American modernism, and cultural nationalism."⁸ It was this peculiar political and aesthetic ferment of the Harlem Renaissance, and in particular the increasing interest among a younger generation of writers in exploring the artistic use of Black vernacular forms, that led Hurston and her contemporaries to envision an aesthetic project centered on folklore.

Taking up the Spy-glass of Anthropology

Zora Neale Hurston arrived—almost simultaneously—on the Harlem literary scene and in the halls of Columbia University around 1926. As Hurston acknowledges in her autobiography, it was Harlem that brought her to Franz Boas. In 1925, after more than a decade of peregrinations that took her from her childhood home in Florida, through the Deep South, and finally to Howard University in Washington, D.C., Hurston landed in New York City, the "New Negro Mecca." She got there on the strength of her storytelling. It was the Black intelligentsia of Washington, D.C., centered at Howard University, who first nurtured Hurston's talent as a writer, and it was through this small circle of intellectuals that Hurston came to the notice of Charles S. Johnson, editor of *Opportunity*, the "Journal of Negro Life" published by the National Urban League.

With Johnson's encouragement, Hurston moved to New York City and took up her writing career in earnest, submitting two stories, "Black Death" and "Spunk," and a play, "Color Struck," to the Opportunity Awards, a literary contest sponsored by Johnson's journal. She took second place for both "Spunk" and "Color Struck," and perhaps more importantly, she made an impression on the literary luminaries (both White and Black) who

attended the Opportunity Awards dinner in May 1925. At this dinner she first met Langston Hughes, who had taken first prize for his poem “The Weary Blues.” The two would develop both a deep friendship and a short-lived collaborative relationship. Also among the evening’s honored guests was Annie Nathan Meyer, one of the founders of Barnard College, who was so struck by Hurston that she immediately arranged for her admission to Barnard.⁹

Although, like Deloria, Hurston had initially intended to work towards a degree in education, she switched her academic focus after enrolling in an elective course in anthropology with Dr. Gladys Reichard. In the class, Hurston wrote a paper that so impressed Reichard that she shared it with Franz Boas, who encouraged Hurston to take more classes in anthropology. According to Cheryl Wall, Boas inspired Hurston to “rechannel her ambitions” and to—at least temporarily—abandon “literature for science.” In the spring of 1926 she took classes in anthropology and anthropometry, and later that summer she began putting in time as an urban fieldworker for Franz Boas and Melville Herskovits, measuring skulls on Harlem streets in support of their efforts to disprove anthropometric theories of racial inferiority.

Dedicated as Hurston was to the man whom she came to call “Papa Franz,” she never entirely abandoned her literary aspirations. By day she honed her research skills and worked against scientific racism in the halls of Barnard College and Columbia University, and by night she burned the midnight oil, working out the contours of an aesthetic revolution in African American expressive culture in the company of an emerging cadre of African American writers and artists. By the fall of 1926, even as she was learning more about anthropology in classes taught by Gladys Reichard, Ruth Benedict, and Franz Boas, Hurston was also working in collaboration with Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, and Gwendolyn Bennett, among others, to produce *Fire!!*, a quarterly journal “dedicated to the younger Negro artists.” *Fire!!* made its first and only appearance in November 1926 and scandalized a good portion of the Harlem literati, many of whom saw it as a dangerous turn toward artistic decadence.

The publication of *Fire!!* marked a growing distance between the leading intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance and a younger generation of African American artists and writers who, in Langston Hughes’s memorable words, wished to give expression to their “individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.”¹⁰ Hughes, Hurston, and the other contributors to *Fire!!* self-consciously set them-

selves against an arts movement that they believed had become deracinated and ideologically watered down by a misguided representational politics focused on demonstrating that African Americans were just as cultured, intelligent, and emotionally restrained as Whites.

Ironically, despite their collective fascination with the linguistic and musical artistry of the "Negro farthest down," only Hurston, among her radical cohort of artists, actually had strong familial and personal connections to the folk subjects that were the object of so much aesthetic interest. Indeed, as Robert Hemenway notes, Hurston "embodied a closer association with racial roots than any other Renaissance writer. Where they were Los Angeles or Cleveland, she was Eatonville. She was the folk."¹¹ As is evident from accounts of her performances of jokes, songs, and tall tales at Harlem parties, as well as her simultaneously revealing and veiling correspondence, Hurston herself played into this image not only in her interactions with White patrons and friends, but also with her colleagues at Columbia, and even with her young compatriots in Harlem.

Hemenway has observed that this period of Hurston's life was structured by a kind of "vocational schizophrenia" in which she found herself "moving between art and science, fiction and anthropology," and searching for "an expressive instrument, an intellectual formula, that could accommodate the poetry of Eatonville, the theories of Morningside Heights, and the aesthetic revolt of *Fire!*"¹² While anthropology provided Hurston with both a "taxonomy for her childhood memories" and a theoretical standpoint (cultural relativism) through which she might celebrate African American difference without fear of providing fodder for racist discourse, the narrative conventions governing ethnographic monographs in the 1920s were neither suited to her contradictory position as a cultural insider nor entirely satisfying to her temperament as a writer. However, the brand of free-wheeling, humanistic folklore scholarship that emerged in the twenties finally provided Hurston with the narrative form through which she was able to capture the "essence" of her native Eatonville. Though she abandoned neither her theoretical allegiance to Boasian cultural relativism nor her deep respect for Boas himself, Hurston's path through the world of ethnographic meaning making took her increasingly into the realm of folklore and the borderlands between fact and fiction.

Hurston's first extended fieldwork experience may well have initiated this shift from anthropology to folklore. In February of 1927, having completed her full-time coursework at Barnard, Hurston departed for Florida to seek out and record "the songs, customs, tales, superstitions, lies, jokes, dances, games of Afro-American folklore."¹³ Like Deloria, she was expected

to send regular reports back to Franz Boas detailing her findings. However, the money to fund Hurston's six-month sojourn in the field (\$1,400) came not from a Columbia research account, but from Carter Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. This funding scheme was to become a model of sorts for Hurston's ethnographic research; in fact, her decision a year later to seek funding from a private source, Charlotte Osgood Mason, may well have been influenced by the sense that funding from Columbia University would not be forthcoming. Boas was somewhat ambivalent about Hurston's potential as a fieldworker, just as he had been with Deloria. On the one hand, he fretted that her larger-than-life personality and her strong sense of self might prove disruptive in the field. On the other hand, he was fairly certain that Hurston's closeness to informants would enable her to penetrate the Black folk milieu more deeply than previous collectors.¹⁴

Whatever Boas's fears and hopes for Hurston's 1927 research trip to Florida might have been, her "Florida expedition" stands as one of the most revealing failures in the history of ethnographic discourse. Indeed, her narrative account of this first experience with fieldwork offers an evocative and telling example of what Kamala Visweswaran has termed "feminist ethnography as failure." As Hurston tells it in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she embarked on her first ethnographic adventure "in a vehicle made out of Corona dust," eager to uncover the vast store of folk material she imagined to be simply waiting for her in Eatonville, her "native village." However, upon her arrival Hurston encountered a distressing and unexpected wall of feather-bed resistance. "My first six months were disappointing," she recalls:

I found out later that it was not because I had no talents for research, but because I did not have the right approach. The glamor of Barnard College was still upon me. I dwelt in the marble halls. I knew where the material was all right. But I went about asking, in carefully accented Barnardese, "Pardon me, but do you know of any folk-tales or folk-songs?" The men and women who had whole treasuries of material just seeping through their pores, looked at me and shook their heads. No, they had never heard of anything like that around there. Maybe it was over in the next county. Why didn't I try over there? I did, and got the self-same answer. Oh, I got a few little items. But compared with what I did later, not enough to make a flea a waltzing jacket. Considering the mood of my going south, I went back to New York with my heart beneath my knees and my knees in some lonesome valley.¹⁵

Hurston had good reason to fret over her failure upon her return from the field. While she was conducting research in Florida, Boas had responded with increasing dissatisfaction to her sporadic reports, complaining that the information she was sending him was "very largely repetition of the kind of material that has been collected so much." As he repeatedly stressed to Hurston, Boas was less interested in the actual stories and songs of Black Floridians than he was in the context in which they were given. What he wanted from Hurston was an ethnographic report, not a collection of folklore. He wanted her to use the "spy-glass of anthropology" to observe her informants surreptitiously as they shared their stories with her, to record their movements and verbal style in a detached, objectifying manner. "I asked you particularly to pay attention, not so much to content, but rather to the form of diction . . . the methods of dancing, habitual movements in telling tales, or in ordinary conversation; all this is material that would be essentially new."¹⁶ In other words Boas wanted Hurston to capitalize on her position as a cultural insider and do a bit of ethnographic spying.

If Boas had any hopes that Hurston would prove as reliable a collector of linguistic and cultural data as his other new protégé, Ella Deloria, he was certainly disappointed. Hurston seemed neither intellectually inclined nor personally suited for the kind of rigorous fieldwork methods that Boas expected of her. Upon her return from the field, she submitted a desultory final report on the Florida expedition that was a scant three pages and offered a vague and somewhat lackluster summation of storytelling and hoodoo customs. Hurston also submitted an article to Carter Woodson's *Journal of Negro History* (October 1927), putatively based on an interview with Cudjo Lewis, an elderly survivor of the last ship to bring slaves to the United States in 1859. Robert Hemenway has pointed out that a good deal of this article was lifted from an earlier account of Lewis's life written by a White woman, Emma Langdon Roche.

Noting that plagiarism is often an unconscious attempt at "academic suicide," Hemenway speculates that Hurston was attempting to scuttle her academic career because she simply didn't respect the kind of meticulous research and writing required of her by Boas and Woodson, the two men that directed her Florida expedition.¹⁷ bell hooks has suggested that this moment of ethnographic failure forced Hurston to reevaluate the research methodologies she had learned from academic study and to confront the issue of her position as a native ethnographer head on. According to hooks, while her college training had been fundamental in that it gave her the distance from the folk culture of her childhood necessary to envision it as

a potential object of analysis, when it came to doing research at home, Hurston simply could not maintain the stance of a distanced observer.¹⁸

What is extraordinary is not so much that Hurston faced these contradictions, but that in her autobiography—a text full of demurrals, obfuscations, and outright mistruths regarding her personal history—she chose to *foreground* this parable of ethnographic failure in her “Research” chapter. Visweswaran suggests that such narratives of failure represent not only a “moment of epistemological crisis,” but also a rhetorical strategy, “an epistemological construct” that “signals a project that may no longer be attempted, or at least not on the same terms.”¹⁹ Moreover, she argues, “a failed account” also “occasions new kinds of positionings,” and in particular, new ways of understanding both home and the field (in Hurston’s case one and the same place). In essence, Hurston’s first fieldwork experience—an event typically considered the classic rite of passage that all anthropologists must endure in the process of professionalization—produced the opposite of its intended effect. Instead of introducing a newly humbled and putatively more objective anthropologist to the discipline, the experience forced Hurston to reposition herself with respect to her “native informants” and to envision an ethnographic practice that would prove unbelievably fruitful precisely because of its *distance* from Boasian norms of description and its *closeness* to the norms of the “folk.”

“De Party Book”: Ethnographic Encounters and Aesthetic Exchanges

As Hurston recounted, she “stood before Papa Franz and cried salty tears” upon her return from the failed Florida expedition, but she did not mourn her failure to satisfy the father of anthropology for long. Just a few weeks after her return to New York, Alain Locke arranged a meeting between Hurston and Charlotte Osgood Mason, a wealthy patron of the arts who had a number of Harlem artists and writers on her payroll, including Hurston’s confidant, Langston Hughes. During this meeting, Hurston proposed that Mrs. Mason provide financial support for a project that she and Hughes had been tossing around since 1926: “an opera that would be the first authentic rendering of black folklife, presenting folksongs, dances, and tales, that Hurston would collect.”²⁰

Mason was clearly impressed by the idea and by Hurston herself. She agreed to fund Hurston’s field research while Hughes completed his studies at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, with the understanding that after one year Hurston and Hughes would come together to work collaboratively on



Figure 2.1. Portrait of Hurston as the heroic ethnographer. Photo taken in 1927 by Langston Hughes. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

a folk opera of such “power that it will halt all [of the] spurious efforts on the part of white writers.”²¹ In early December Hurston signed a one-year employment contract that provided her the financial resources to return to the field and collect folklore.²² The project that Hurston was to undertake in collaboration with Hughes involved the applied use of folklore materials in a work of art—a project that would have been scarcely imaginable had she remained at Columbia under Boas’s tutelage.

As Hurston set off on her second ethnographic expedition on December 14, 1928, she took with her the methodological tools and the heroic romanticism of the salvage ethnographer, but she was also increasingly devoted to an aesthetic mission that exceeded the disciplinary boundaries of Boasian anthropology. For the first time in her life, she had real financial support, two hundred dollars a month from her patron’s coffers, and a car. While Mason’s generous stipend was more money than Hurston had ever earned in the past, it came with a good many strings attached. Hurston was to provide a detailed monthly accounting of all expenditures (down to the purchase of “feminine products”), and she was prohibited from sharing her research findings with anyone other than Alain Locke, Mason’s emissary. Indeed, Mason would literally “own” Hurston’s findings, determining where and when they would be published. Annoying as these strictures were, Hurston accepted them because Mason demanded relatively little control over her actual research methodologies.

Though Hurston no longer had to answer to Boas or to Woodson, she did correspond regularly with Alain Locke, Mason’s representative, and more extensively with her collaborator, Langston Hughes, soliciting his advice and sending him regular reports on her fieldwork. Although Hughes’s influence on Hurston’s folklore research is rarely acknowledged, in some respects he took over as Hurston’s primary mentor during this, her most productive, research trip. Indeed, during the first few months of her fieldwork, Hurston thanked Hughes for his “timely and vital” letters corroborating her own growing antipathy to the notion of folklore as a “survival” of older oral traditions. “You answered a big question for me—the *age* of folk lore,” she wrote breathlessly. “I had collected several very good modern stories which I knew were good, but I was wondering if anyone else would see it that way.” Energized by their likeness of opinion on this score, Hurston went on to describe her latest finds. “I am collecting the expressions, similes, etc. as you suggested but that is another instance of our thoughts clicking.” With the help of Hughes, Hurston was clearly honing her keen literary ear for folk expression: “I am getting inside Negro art and

lore. I am beginning to *see* really and when you join me I shall point things out and see if you see them as I do."²³

During this folklore expedition Hurston and Hughes were using the tools of anthropology in the service of what was, in essence, a literary project. After all, the rationale for this particular research trip was not to collect folklore for a museum of dead or dying cultures, but to gather the building blocks for a new kind of literary expression that might fuse the utterances of the "folk" with the cosmopolitan aesthetic forms embraced by New Negro artists. It is worth noting that Hurston was not simply gathering folk materials for use in her collaborative work with Hughes, she was also sharing the cosmopolitan art forms of urban African Americans with her folk subjects. In fact, she regularly "broke the ice" with her informants by reading selections from Langston Hughes's poetry to them, initiating an exchange of verbal art that literally created new blends of poetry and vernacular expression in the interchange between ethnographer and informant. For example, in a letter dated March 8, 1928, she described a night spent reading Hughes's poetry to a group of rough lumber mill workers in Loughman, Florida: "By the way, I read from "Fine Clothes" to the group at Loughman and *they got the point* and enjoyed it *immensely*. So you *are* really a great poet for you truly represent your people."²⁴

Over the next year, Hurston's fieldwork methodology developed along these lines, which might be figured as a kind of ethnographic/aesthetic exchange between the songs and stories of her folk subjects and cosmopolitan forms of meaning making. Indeed, it seems that Hughes's poetry played a key role in the development of Hurston's methodological approach to participant observation during this period. As she described it in a letter written in the summer of 1928, "In every town I hold 1 or 2 story-telling contests, and at each I begin by telling them who you are and all, then I read poems from 'Fine Clothes.' Boy! they eat it up. Two or three of them are too subtle and they don't get it. 'Mulatto' for instance and 'Sport' but the others they *just eat up*."²⁵ Hurston's strategic use of Hughes's poetry to get the ball rolling with her informants reveals how far her thinking had come since that first failed research trip in 1927. At the end of the Florida expedition she had submitted a short report that displayed many of the biases of 1920s salvage ethnography. Complaining that the "bulk of the population now spends its leisure in the motion picture theaters or with the phonograph and its blues," Hurston clearly believed that commercial culture and commercialized folk forms like "race records" presented a real threat to "authentic" Black culture.²⁶

By the summer of 1928 she was reading Hughes's blues-inspired poetry to her folk subjects and celebrating the fact that they created *new* folk forms from it. "You are being quoted in R.R. camps, phosphate mines, Turpentine stills etc.," Hurston enthused. In fact, some of the folk forms she collected in rural Florida may well have been directly inspired by what her informants had begun to call "De Party Book." In one report from the field, Hurston describes coming upon a group of men playing a card game and singing Hughes's poem "Fine Clothes for a Jew," all the while inventing new lyrics that fit the cadence of the original. "So you see they are making it so much a part of themselves they go to improvising it," she wrote. "One man was giving the words out—lining them out as the preacher does a hymn and the others would take it up and sing. It was glorious!"²⁷ This letter was the first of many that chart Hurston's increasingly sophisticated understanding of folklore as a living form that carried within it the seeds of a great and evolving national literary tradition. "Negro folklore is *still* in the making," she insisted enthusiastically to Hughes; "a new kind is crowding out the old," and she and Hughes were clearly contributing to this process.²⁸

Though Hurston has been accused of deploying an ahistorical and nostalgic vision of the rural Black folk in her writing (most notably by Hazel Carby), both her letters to Hughes and her actual ethnographic practice suggest that she was less interested in documenting and preserving "authentic" folk forms than she was in exploring the ways in which Black vernacular idioms and styles might inform the nationalist literary project that she and other Harlem luminaries imagined as their legacy to American letters.²⁹ Indeed, Hurston may well have envisioned her own creative melding of folklore and literature as simply another step in an ever-evolving genealogy of what she later termed "negro expression." In her collaboration with Hughes, Hurston clearly hoped to blur the lines between high culture and folk culture and to demonstrate the linguistic, cultural, and philosophical connections between the rural folk and the urban masses. The choice of Langston Hughes as her collaborator thus seems less a result of their personal friendship than a calculated attempt to bring two seemingly divergent vernacular forms into dialogue with one another through their representative artists: Hughes, the bard of the Black urban masses, and Hurston, the documenter of rural folk traditions. In the literary world of late 1920s Harlem, such a consolidating cultural agenda seemed not only possible, but also necessary.

For the greater part of her 1928–1930 research trip, Hurston continued in this fashion, secretly taking her guidance from poet Langston Hughes, while remaining for the most part faithful to Mason's edict that she not

share her findings with anyone other than Alain Locke. However, when Franz Boas wrote to Hurston a year into her trip (in December 1928) and inquired about her research, she was careful to offer him just enough information to reignite his interest in her scholarly trajectory. "I have wanted to write to you," she assured him, "but a promise was exacted of me [by Mason] that I would write *no one*. Of course I have intended from the very beginning to show you what I have, but after I had returned. Thus I could keep my word and at the same time have your guidance. . . . It is unthinkable, of course, that I go past the collecting stage without consulting you, however I came by the money. I shall probably be in New York by the Fall."³⁰ Notwithstanding her implication that she still needed his "guidance," Hurston cagily invoked her contractual obligations to Mason in order to circumvent any attempt by Boas to once again control her research.

A few months later she reestablished contact with Boas, reporting to him that she was "through collecting" and ready to write up her findings, which included over "95,000 words of story material, a collection of children's games, conjure material, and religious material with a great number of photographs." She promised Boas that she would send him the carbons of her notes as soon as she finished typing them up. Hurston closed the letter with a barrage of broad theoretical questions ranging from whether the use of candles in the Catholic church was "a relic of fire worship" to whether or not "decoration in clothing" might be "an extension of the primitive application of paint (coloring) to the body."³¹ Such vague—though undeniably provocative—conjectures must have alarmed a thinker as methodical as Boas (whose own approach to cultural analysis was rather more reserved and certainly less speculative), and raised the old specter of her somewhat unruly and "unscientific" approach to analysis. "I am afraid I cannot answer all your questions," he demurred, "because they contain a great deal of very contentious matter in regard to which historical evidence is not very clear."³²

Despite his concerns about Hurston's tendency toward speculative generalizations about her research findings, Boas did recognize her real abilities in the field and was therefore enthusiastic about obtaining copies of her field notes. His inquiries were not entirely disinterested. Since January of 1928 Boas had been in regular correspondence with Ella Deloria and Otto Klineberg regarding their investigation into the "relation between the cultural, social, and educational backgrounds of various groups, and their 'intelligence' as measured by intelligence tests of various kinds."³³ Hurston had been in the field for more than a year and had already gathered reams of ethnographic data and identified a number of suitable informants in Afri-

can American communities in Florida, Alabama, and Louisiana, and Boas clearly hoped that she might assist Klineberg in the southern phase of his research for the project. In May 1929, Boas invited Hurston to join the study, offering to pay her a salary of one hundred fifty dollars a month and traveling expenses (“if these are not too high”) for up to four months.³⁴

Hurston vacillated. While she clearly wanted to work her way back into Papa Franz’s good graces, she also sensed that Mason would see her work with Klineberg as a distraction from her collaborative writing project with Hughes. Initially she agreed to be a part of the project, and then days before she was to meet Klineberg in New Orleans, she pulled out, writing to Klineberg that she was “restrained from leaving the employ” of her “present employers” and offering him the names of some of her best contacts in New Orleans.³⁵ Just a few days later she offered to work with Klineberg in an “unofficial” (and unpaid) capacity, keeping it a secret from Mason. For the next month, unbeknownst to Mason, Hurston worked steadily with Klineberg, all the while sending Boas carbon copies of the same material she sent to her benefactor through Alain Locke. Though he had exerted little control over her research methodologies, Boas was apparently impressed with Hurston’s results, especially her “conjure material.” “Are the people for whom you are working going to publish it?” he queried.³⁶ Hurston had managed to regain the respect of Papa Franz, not by conforming to his exacting ethnographic methods, but by sharing her findings with him—against the express wishes of her patron. Indeed, she rightly calculated that her results were the best evidence of the effectiveness of her methods. Had Boas the slightest inkling of how far those methods strayed from the accepted norm for anthropological research, he may well have questioned them more forcefully. For the moment, he was apparently anxious to publish the results of Hurston’s two-year research trip.

By the end of her first extended ethnographic journey, it was clear that Hurston, like Deloria, “had come to think of herself as a woman with a mission”: through the recovery of the oral artistry of her people, she meant to demonstrate that “‘the greatest cultural wealth of the continent’ lay in the Eatonvilles and Polk Counties of the Black South.”³⁷ Indeed, she had collected reams of material during her two-year foray into the field—stories, sayings, conjure practices and spells, songs, and children’s games—and was now ready to share this art with the world of New York, from the marble halls of Columbia to the literary salons and rowdy saloons of Harlem. Unfortunately, her much-anticipated return to New York held only disappointment and disillusionment. Her collaboration with Hughes ended in a bitter artistic disagreement over the plotline of their play, and their

friendship was seriously undermined by Hughes's claims that he had played the larger part in their collaboration.³⁸ Funding from Mason was coming to an end, and renewal of her support seemed unlikely in the hard economic times of the Great Depression. Though Hurston would manage to extend the funding until September 1932, it was clear that she would have to find another source of support.

While Hurston was rattled by the failure of her collaboration with Hughes and by the pall that the Depression had cast over Harlem, she still had reason to be hopeful about her professional career, and perhaps even imagined herself finally making a successful stab at becoming a fully accredited anthropologist. Indeed, during the months that she spent unsuccessfully hashing out the contours of a "real Negro theater" with Langston Hughes, she was also meeting regularly with Boas. With his help she was preparing two articles for publication in the *Journal of American Folklore* and working on two separate book projects: a collection of folktales and a book on conjure. In the fall of 1930 "Dance Songs and Tales from the Bahamas," Hurston's account of her research foray into the Caribbean (part of her 1928–1930 fieldwork), was published in the *JAF*. The following year (October 1931), some one hundred pages of the *JAF* were dedicated to her monograph "Hoodoo in America." Boas seemed committed to continuing his work with Hurston and had even encouraged her to seek support from her patron to pursue a doctorate in anthropology at Columbia. Mason was decidedly unenthusiastic. "The 'Angel' is cold toward the degrees," Hurston informed him. "I have broached the subject from several angles but it got chill blains no matter how I put it."³⁹

In the spring of 1932 Hurston returned to Eatonville to restore herself, save money, write, and cast about for a new source of funding. She made various veiled appeals for research funding through Columbia University to Benedict and Boas, with hardly an acknowledgment of her efforts, and finally decided to apply for a Guggenheim fellowship to continue her studies into the African origins of "hoodoo." Hurston had reason to believe her friends at Columbia would help her; she had shared her research with Boas, working closely with him on the two articles she had published in the *JAF*, and she had even sent Benedict a copy of her manuscript "Negro Tales from the Gulf States" to be published in a "Negro number" of the *JAF*.⁴⁰ Thus, when Hurston submitted her Guggenheim application in the summer of 1933, she naturally included both Benedict and Boas as references. Hurston stated in her application that she hoped to study the African origins of "American manifestations" of "hoodoo" and publish her findings "both scientifically and in a moderated form for the general public." She

claimed with confidence that the American Folklore Society would publish her research in the form of a monograph.⁴¹

Apparently, Hurston's faith in Boas and Benedict was unwarranted. In his terse letter of recommendation, Boas allowed that Hurston was a "very good observer . . . able to get the confidence of those people with whom she has been dealing," but insisted that her methodology was "more journalistic than scientific" and that he was not "under the impression" she was quite "the right caliber for a Guggenheim fellowship."⁴² Benedict corroborated his damning assessment with an equally negative evaluation, noting that Hurston had "neither the temperament nor the training to present this material in an orderly manner when it is gathered nor to draw valid historical conclusions from it." Both Benedict and Boas condescendingly suggested that Hurston might be able to find financial backing for her Africa trip from, in Benedict's words, "some patron of negro culture."⁴³ Once again, Hurston had cast her lot with anthropology, and once again her creative inclinations and multifaceted interests worked against her claims to ethnographic authority among the small circle of professionally trained anthropologists at Columbia. Though disappointing, the inevitable Guggenheim rejection forced Hurston to return to what she knew how to do best: storytelling.

Telling the "In-Between Story": Mules and Men and the Gendered Native Ethnographic Subject

Ruth Benedict reestablished contact with Zora Neale Hurston on June 25, 1934, writing to congratulate her on the critical success of her recently published novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. Benedict had finally found the time and resources to publish "Negro Tales from the Gulf States," Hurston's folktale collection, and wanted to do so in the upcoming number of the *Journal of American Folklore*. Benedict was too late—Hurston had already parlayed her success with *Jonah's Gourd Vine* into a book contract for "Negro Tales" with her newly acquired publisher, J. B. Lippincott & Co.⁴⁴ But the version of "Negro Tales" that she submitted to her publisher in the summer of 1934, now bearing the title *Mules and Men*, looked very different from the fairly conventional compendium of folktales that Benedict had wanted to publish in the *JAF*.

In "Negro Tales from the Gulf States," Hurston followed the exacting standards of the "scientific" folklore scholarship promoted by Ruth Benedict and Franz Boas in the pages of *JAF*. She had kept herself scrupulously

out of the narrative and had organized the unadorned tales into generalized divisions based on their content: "God Tales," "Preacher Tales," "Animal Tales," and so on. Indeed, in a letter written to Boas in 1929 as she drafted the first version of "Negro Tales" in the field, Hurston assured her mentor that her manuscript would conform to his rigorous standards for a folktale collection: "I have tried to be as exact as possible. Keep to the exact dialect as closely as I could, having the story teller tell it to me word for word as I write it. This after it has been told to me off hand until I know it myself. But the writing down from the lips is to insure the correct dialect and wording so that I shall not let myself creep in unconsciously."⁴⁵ However, in the version of "Negro Tales" that was now *Mules and Men*, Hurston's "self" had indeed "crept in," and with a vengeance.

The transformation of "Negro Tales from the Gulf States" into *Mules and Men* seems as much a result of the pressures of the publishing industry as it was of Hurston's own "will to adorn." While her editor, Bertram Lippincott, liked "Negro Tales," he had in mind something closer to her novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and he urged her to rework the unadorned version of the tales that Hurston initially sent him to appeal to a more general audience. Hurston accommodated Lippincott by weaving the discrete stories into a first-person narrative that followed the adventures of a folklorist, "Zora," as she traveled from the relative safety of her "native village" Eatonville into the more uncertain terrains of a rough and frequently violent migrant camp in Polk County.

While Hurston was willing to liven up "Negro Tales," she was nevertheless concerned that the changes she would have to make to increase the manuscript's popular appeal might damage her credibility among her colleagues in the small but influential circle of Columbia-trained anthropologists. This anxiety was especially apparent in a letter she wrote to Boas shortly before the publication of *Mules and Men*, requesting that he write an introduction to the book. While Hurston acknowledged that Papa Franz might not want to attach his name to a book that was not strictly "scholarly," she justified her break with the conventions of academic writing by insisting that she had "inserted the in-between story conversation and business" only after a series of publishers remarked that the original manuscript ("Negro Tales") was "too monotonous":

So I hope that the unscientific manner that must be there for the sake of the average reader will not keep you from writing the introduction. It so happens that the conversations and incidents are true. But of course I never would have set them down for scientists to read. I know that the learned

societies are interested in the story in many ways that would never interest the average mind. He needs no stimulation. But the man in the street is different.⁴⁶

Boas declined to write a full introduction, but he did agree to write a short and informal forward to the book. Though his contribution no doubt helped to shore up the credibility of the book as a legitimate work of folklore scholarship, it occupied the front matter in an undeniably equivocal mode, framing *Mules and Men* less as an authoritative account of the mores, manners, and history of a bounded culture group than as an important corrective to the tradition of literary appropriations of folktales in the manner of Joel Chandler Harris: “Ever since the time of Uncle Remus, Negro folklore has exerted a strong attraction upon the imagination of the American public. Negro tales, songs, and sayings without end, as well as descriptions of Negro magic and voodoo, have appeared, but in all of them the intimate setting in the social life of the Negro has been given very inadequately.”⁴⁷

Regardless of the care he took to differentiate Hurston’s contribution from the work of Joel Chandler Harris, Boas’s invocation of the Uncle Remus stories must surely have made Hurston wince. In comparing her work to Harris’s, he summoned up the specter of a tradition of literary minstrelsy that haunted the pages of her text even as she wrote against it.⁴⁸ Indeed reviews of the books consistently followed his lead; while White reviewers generally praised the book for its vivid evocation of an oral tradition disappearing from the modern world, Black reviewers balked at what they considered a too-romantic picture of the South. Indeed, as her biographer Robert Hemenway notes, the publication of *Mules and Men* “marked the start of an extended controversy over the nature and value of [Hurston’s] work.”

Some of Harlem’s leading intellectual figures, including Sterling Brown, who had also done field research in the South, found the vision of Black life presented in *Mules and Men* authentic, but nevertheless incomplete. Brown voiced a critique of the work that was, unfortunately, all too common, “*Mules and Men* should be more bitter,” he wrote; it would then be “nearer the total truth.”⁴⁹ Even Alain Locke, the man who had made her two-year research trip possible by arranging her contract with Mason, regretted Hurston’s “lack of social perspective and philosophy” and found her vision of life in the South “too Arcadian.” In the same review Locke noted the trend in African American fiction toward novels of social realism: “Our art is going proletarian,” he commented with just a whiff of regret. “Yesterday it was Beauty at all costs and local color with a vengeance;

today, it is Truth by all means and social justice at any price."⁵⁰ Hurston's melding of vernacular and literary art, it seems, had gone out of fashion among the intellectual elite of Harlem—at the very moment of its greatest success among the general public.

But this reading of Hurston's work as "apolitical" or as chiefly concerned with "art" to the exclusion of, in Locke's words, "the framework of contemporary life" seems a limited, even ungenerous view of the complex discursive politics at play in *Mules and Men*. As linguist Keith Walters has argued, such critical readings of *Mules and Men* either missed or purposely ignored the "barbed critiques" hidden within her presentation of "the tradition of verbal art of the African American community." While these critiques, cloaked in the vernacular tradition of "signifyin'," would have been invisible to White readers (and perhaps even to some of Hurston's "talented tenth" colleagues in Harlem), they would have been clearly "recognizable by those who read within the traditions that Hurston, a black woman from Eatonville, Florida, knew well and described."⁵¹ Following Walters' lead, I would like to suggest that it was through the "in-between story conversation and business" that Hurston was able to articulate a subtle critique of the anthropological establishment and at the same time communicate an entirely new, gendered vision of resistant subjectivity to the "man on the streets."

Mules and Men follows a narrative trajectory found in both scholarly ethnographic monographs and popular folklore books in that it offers a riveting account of an investigator venturing into alien and dangerous territory. But while Hurston presents *Mules and Men* as a transparent account of her adventures as a folklorist in the Deep South, she also uses the central protagonist of this adventure tale, "Zora, the folklorist" to articulate a vision of native ethnographic practice that calls into question the truth-value of ethnographic representation itself.

"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prodding with a purpose," she wrote in *Dust Tracks on a Road*; but curiosity—"scientific" or otherwise—is often unwelcome, especially when it comes in the form of a stranger. Hurston suggests as much in her introduction to *Mules and Men*, when she audaciously outlines the different strategies that the Others of anthropology have deployed to resist its intrusive gaze: "The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance." This "feather-bed resistance," a form of trickster dialogue that masks much more than it reveals, is a tactical act of subversion designed to undermine the production of knowledge about the Other: "The theory behind our tactics: 'The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's busi-

ness. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song."⁵²

In this passage Hurston strategically aligns herself with the community whose tactics of resistance she is describing. Her recitation of the "theory" behind "our tactics" (which suggests, through the artful use of colon and quotation marks, an utterance from one of her informants) could, in fact, refer to the material at hand. By bracketing the statement in quotation marks, Hurston distances herself from it, but the reference to "writing" invariably aligns her, as the author of the text, with the tactic and suggests that in *Mules and Men* she is engaging in her own brand of "feather-bed resistance." Thus while Hurston's explanation of "feather-bed resistance" works to consolidate her status as a privileged insider and an authoritative speaker on matters of the Black folk, it might also be read as a cautionary note to White readers: take this play toy in your hand, but don't believe for a minute that you can read the author's mind.

This double play—which provokes both trust and suspicion—is classic Hurston. To White readers, folklorists, and Boasian anthropologists it is a statement of her authority as an insider, a folklorist capable of (in Boas's words) penetrating "through the affected demeanor by which the Negro excludes the White observer effectively from participating in his true inner life."⁵³ To Black readers, and even to her informants, it sounds a note of secret solidarity with a writerly wink. Here, Hurston wryly introduces attentive readers not only to her text, but also to a complex dialectical critique of ethnographic meaning making embedded within it.

Critics, especially those who categorize the book as a work of anthropology, have often noted the lack of interpretation or analysis in *Mules and Men*. But this does not mean that the book does not engage in ethnographic theory-making—quite the contrary. What emerges in the "in-between story" of *Mules and Men* is a native ethnographic theory of practice that, like Ella Deloria's "kinship ethnography," capitalized on the native ethnographer's intimate knowledge of the social and linguistic conventions of her community. Deloria was able to carve out a native ethnographic position as a "keeper of tradition" within her community through her attentiveness to the conventions of exchange and reciprocity among kin. Hurston, like Deloria, eschewed the commonplace tactics of the outsider ethnographer, but in her native ethnographic practice she took a slightly different tack: she chose to establish her authority as a teller of tales within her community

through a mode of exchange that involved both mastery of existing folk forms and verbal virtuosity.

These ethnographic tactics are on full display in Hurston's account of how she averts the near failure of her expedition in a labor camp in Polk County, Florida, where, despite every effort to ingratiate herself, she encounters a distressing wall of reserve. While the men of the camp cautiously "look over the new addition to the quarters," they nevertheless suspiciously fend off her friendly overtures. Later, one of her informants, Cliffert Ulmer, reveals that the men suspect Hurston is a "revenue officer or a detective of some kind" because of her new Chevrolet. "The car made me look too prosperous. So they set me aside as different. And since most of them were fugitives from justice or had done plenty of time, a detective was just the last thing they felt they needed on the 'job'."⁵⁴ Another thing that sets Hurston apart is her physical appearance. "I mentally cursed the \$12.74 dress from Macy's that I had on among all the \$1.98 mail-order dresses. . . . I did look different and resolved to fix all that no later than the next morning."⁵⁵

Hurston responds to her outsider status in two ways. First, "to convince the 'job' that [she] was not 'an enemy in the person of the law,'" she invents an identity for herself that can account for her fancy clothes and her big car, claiming that she too is a "fugitive from justice," a bootlegger wanted in Jacksonville and Miami. Then, to prove that she was "their kind," Hurston offers a sampling of her own verbal virtuosity in the form of a classic work song, "John Henry." Here, Hurston's vision of ethnographic research as aesthetic exchange emerges most vividly. "I strolled over to James Presley and asked him if he knew how to play [John Henry]. . . . 'Ah'll play it if you sing it,' he countered. So he played and I started to sing the verses I knew. They put me on the table and everybody urged me to spread my jenk, so I did the best I could. Joe Willard knew two verses and sang them. Eugene Oliver knew one; Big Sweet knew one. And how James Presley can make his box cry out accompaniment!"⁵⁶ This scene recalls Hurston's breathless accounts in her correspondence with Langston Hughes of such exchanges during her research trip in the late 1920s. In those heady days, Hurston had recited Hughes's poetry to ease her way into the rough society of the work camps and lumber mills she visited, initiating an artistic exchange that seemed to open up endless possibilities for Black art. In this account, Hughes's poetry fades from view, replaced by a traditional work song, "John Henry."

Hurston's elision of Hughes's poetry suggests either a lack of generosity or, more likely, an unwillingness to take the theoretical and methodologi-

cal implications of her practice to their final, most challenging conclusion. In the 1930s, folklore scholarship, whether literary or anthropological in orientation, was understood as a practice of recovery, not exchange. And while Hurston clearly wished to disrupt the power relations invoked in this vision of ethnographic practice, she was not as willing to challenge the notions of authenticity that lay at the heart of it.

Regardless of this key omission, the anecdote makes clear the ways in which Hurston, as folklorist, strategically mobilized key signifiers of authority and authenticity from within her community of informants to open up an ethnographic exchange with them. In the first case, she tells her own “big ole lie”—that she is a bootlegger on the run—in order to explain her mobility (the car) and her cosmopolitan appearance (the \$12.74 Macy’s dress). In the second case, she offers her own verbal artistry—singing a few stanzas of “John Henry”—in an effort to prove that she has the skills and the knowledge to enter into an equal aesthetic exchange with them. Tellingly, Hurston does not maintain the charade. Once she has established a trusting and reciprocal relationship with the people of Polk County, she reveals her true intentions: “After that I got confidential and told them all what I wanted. At first they couldn’t conceive of anybody wanting to put down ‘lies.’ But when I got the idea over we held a lying contest and posted the notices at the Post Office and the commissary. I gave four prizes and some tall lying was done.”⁵⁷

Hurston does not offer readers a description of the contest that she took such great pains to bring about; instead the narrative veers into an account of the stories she collected in her less formal interactions with the men and women of Polk County as they made love and war. Indeed, unlike “Negro Tales from the Gulf States,” which presents a series of stories unburdened by the context in which they were given, in *Mules and Men*, Hurston embeds the stories she collected in Polk County within an ongoing drama of community conflict. Cheryl Wall has noted how this innovation—the presentation of folklore embedded in a context of conflict and contradiction—enabled Hurston to explore the ideological limits of folk knowledge and folk performance, particularly with respect to gender. As Wall observes, “What becomes clear in *Mules and Men* is the extent to which the most highly regarded types of performance in Afro-American culture, storytelling and sermonizing, for example, are in the main the province of men.”⁵⁸

Hurston could not have missed the erasure of Black women as interlocutors in the various collections of folktales and work songs that she read in preparation for her research. She was also no doubt keenly aware that to merely transcribe the folk forms that were, in Wall’s words, the “province

of men"—sermons, folktales, work songs, the blues—might replicate the erasure of Black women, and in some cases, their outright demonization.⁵⁹ Indeed, in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression," published just a year before *Mules and Men*, Hurston herself remarked on the demonization of Black women in vernacular cultural forms, particularly in song, but noted as well that "the black gal is still in power, men are still cutting and shooting their way to her pillow."⁶⁰ How she went about demonstrating the "black gal's" power was through a vivid evocation of the context in which it was articulated: in the playful banter, arguments, and insults through which community norms are negotiated. Like Ella Deloria, Hurston paid close attention to the voices that had been relegated to the margins of male texts.

In this manner, Hurston's "in-between story" allows for a counternostalgic vision of African American folk culture, represented in *Mules and Men* as an arena of conflict where differences of social class, race, and particularly gender are displayed and negotiated through verbal performance. From Joe Clarke's store porch to the swamps of Polk County, women insert themselves into this narrative by contesting the visions of history, culture, sexuality, and power offered in the tales men tell. Hurston sets the stage for this contentious vision of community in her account of a raucous session of storytelling on Joe Clark's porch. The session is intermittently disrupted by disagreements between two of the primary interlocutors, Gold and Gene, who argue over a variety of themes raised by the stories that are shared. George Thomas, another storyteller, finally intervenes to put a stop to their verbal sparring. "Don't you know you can't git the best of no woman in de talkin' game?" he chidingly reminds Gene. "Her tongue is all de weapon a woman got. . . . She could have had mo' sense but she told God no, she'd ruther take it out in the hips. So God gave her her ruthers. She got plenty hips, plenty mouf and no brains."

Hearing this, Mathilda Mosely comes to the defense of her sex, reminding the men that "women's is got sense too . . . But they got too much sense to go 'round braggin' about it like y'all do. De lady people always got de advantage of mens because God fixed it dat way." To support her contention, Mathilda tells a story about how in "de very first days" God made woman just as strong as man. But because "neither one could whip de other one" they were constantly locked in struggle. Finally, man makes a plea to God to make him stronger than woman so that he can better manage his affairs on earth. God grants his request, and when man returns to earth, he lords it over woman telling her, "Long as you obey me, Ah'll be good to yuh, but every time yuh rear up Ah'm gointer put plenty wood on yo' back and

plenty water in yo' eyes." Finding this situation intolerable, woman makes her own visit to Heaven and asks God to give her as much strength as man. But God is unable to restore her to equality with man owing to a technicality. He explains to woman that He cannot rescind what He has already freely given: "Ah give him mo' strength than you and no matter how much Ah give you, he'll have mo'."

Infuriated, woman goes directly to the devil, who cagily advises her to return to Heaven and ask God for "dat bunch of keys hangin' by de mantel-piece. Then you bring 'em to me and Ah'll show you what to do wid 'em." The woman asks God for the keys and hurries back to the devil who informs her that the keys

have mo' power in 'em than all de strength de man kin ever git if you handle 'em right. . . . Now dis first big key is to de do' of de kitchen, and you know a man always favors his stomach. Dis second one is de key to de bedroom and he don't like to be shut out from dat neither and dis last key is de key to de cradle and he don't want to be cut off from his generations at all. So now you take dese keys and go lock up everything and wait till he come to you. Then don't unlock nothin' until he use his strength for yo' benefit and yo' desires.

Relieved to finally have the keys to power over man, woman thanks the devil, telling him, "If it wasn't for you, Lawd knows what us po' women folks would do." When man discovers that he no longer has access to his "vittles," bed, and generations, he submits himself to woman and she opens the doors—provisionally—providing that man "mortgage his strength to her to live." Mathilda ends her account of the origins of female power triumphantly: "And dat's why de man makes and de woman takes. You men is still braggin' 'bout yo' strength and de woman is sittin' on de keys and lettin' you blow off till she git ready to put de bridle on you."⁶¹

This story, with its revelation of the "truth" behind man's seemingly greater power on earth and its recuperation of the domestic sphere as a locus of feminine power over men, offers an apt metaphor for the situation of women in Hurston's Eatonville. But for all of its ironic reversals and subversive intimations, the folktale relies on a vision of power and gender relations organized along strictly patriarchal and heteronormative lines. As Cheryl Wall has astutely observed, the resistance offered by Mathilda Mosely in her story of the origins of female power is ultimately "passive" in that it does not propose new visions of power that operate outside of the narrow confines of "vittles" and reproduction. Indeed, Hurston must cross

the line into Polk County, a place populated by marginal characters from across the South—fugitives from the law, seasonal workers, and vagrants—to find women who really flout conventional gender norms.

It is in Polk County that the folklorist discovers "Big Sweet," a woman who gives voice to an outlaw form of femininity apparently the norm in Polk County, where "Negro women" are occasionally "punished for killing men, but only if they exceed the quota."⁶² In Polk County Big Sweet reigns supreme, setting the terms for her sexual relationships with men, fighting other women when they threaten to breach those terms, and even challenging White bosses when they get in her way. When her lover, Joe Willard, complains about her tagging along for their fishing trip with Hurston, Big Sweet smartly responds: "Lemme tell *you* something, *any* time Ah shack up wid any man Ah gives myself de privilege to go wherever he might be, night or day. Ah got de law in my mouth."⁶³ Big Sweet's power is not confined to regulating the behavior of the men in her life. She also contests White supremacy in the form of the "Quarters Boss," who vainly attempts to prevent her from beating her chief rival, Ella Wall: "Ah'll kill her, law or no law. Don't you touch me, white folks!"

Taking the "law in her mouth," Big Sweet gives Hurston an affectionate nickname, "Little Bit," and becomes her guide, protector, and sometime informant in the dangerous domain of Polk County. As such, she plays a role in the narrative of *Mules and Men* that astute readers of anthropology and folklore texts might recognize as not entirely unconventional. Indeed, the trope of the "trustworthy native guide" cropped up quite frequently in folklore books of the period. But living up to her name, Big Sweet exceeds the boundaries that confine such conventional figures in other works of ethnographic fiction. As Joe Willard remarks after her confrontation with the Quarters Boss, she is a "whole woman and half a man," a personage of almost mythical strength and ability.

Indeed, her struggle with her rival, the infamous Ella Wall—a figure drawn directly from the blues songs that Hurston collected on her various folklore trips—places Big Sweet in the league of culture heroes like John Henry. In her victory over Ella Wall, Big Sweet replaces the sexualized blues persona articulated in male blues forms with an image of articulate female power that contests both gender and racial supremacy, an image that seems drawn from real-life blues women of Hurston's generation, like her friend Bessie Smith.⁶⁴ In her characterization of Big Sweet, Hurston, true to form, deploys the high-culture tools of ethnography and literature to generate an entirely new folkloric form. Like Bessie Smith, Big Sweet is a female culture hero in a male-centered tradition that all too often relegated women to ob-

jects of lust or scorn. In this way, Hurston's "in-between story" opens the ground for a complex multidirectional critique of culture—both high and low. While it registers a subtle deconstruction of anthropology—its presumptions of objectivity, its will to knowledge about the Other—Hurston's narrative also gives voice to women in her text, devalued both in dominant folklore scholarship on African Americans and within the very folk culture she studied.

Like Ella Deloria, Hurston understood that the production of knowledge was never a completely objective process. In a social system characterized by asymmetrical relations of power based on class, race, gender, and sexuality, the production of knowledge was an inherently political act that had real material effects on both institutions and subjects. In Hurston's case, however, it was not anthropology but folklore that constituted the primary terrain of struggle over the politics of knowledge production. To an extent this difference may be attributed to the conceptual limitations of Boasian anthropology, which for the most part neglected the study of Black culture in the United States. But Hurston's interest in folklore was also due to the aesthetic revolution happening at Columbia's doorstep and to the importance that writers like James Weldon Johnson, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, and Hurston herself accorded to the recuperation of Black cultural forms. They and others in their intellectual milieu understood that White appropriations of Black folklore had constituted a tradition of ethnographic meaning making that functioned, in Sterling Brown's words, as a "handmaiden to social policy." And, Hurston, like so many of her Harlem contemporaries turned to folklore to revise its racist codes of meaning and to recuperate the artistic ingenuity of the "Negro farthest down" as a source of artistic inspiration.

Hurston was also clearly aware of the ways in which both dominant and counterhegemonic recuperations of Black folklore erased the agency and artistic ingenuity of Black women, either by relegating them and their stories to the margins of folklore or by casting them as beasts of burden or objects of erotic desire.⁶⁵ In *Mules and Men* Hurston responded to this multiply layered discursive erasure by "signifyin'" on it with clever rhetorical gestures—notice the gendered erasure implicit in her chosen title—and by exploring the ways in which Black women contested patriarchal power and expressed their artistic ingenuity through verbal play and "talking back." But she also signified on the ideological limits of the aesthetic revolution proposed by younger Negro artists by creating her own folk hero, a "whole woman and half a man" who could take on not only any man or woman in her own community, but also White supremacy itself.

The singular Big Sweet and the questing folklorist who brought her voice to the public stand together at the center of the first half of *Mules and Men*, grounding the text in an erased tradition of female creativity, consciousness, and strength that we miss deeply once "Zora, the folklorist" moves on to New Orleans. Hurston returned to this terrain in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, placing at its narrative center a female storytelling persona who would meld the questing desire of the folklorist with the verbal virtuosity of her trusty companion, Big Sweet.

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A Romance of the Border

J. Frank Dobie, Jovita González, and the Study of the Folk in Texas

The air in the room is close and smoky. I can still smell the rosemary and lavender leaves I have just burnt in an incense burner to drive out the mosquitoes that have driven me insane with their monotonous droning music. For, in spite of the family's efforts to have me work in the house, I prefer my garage room with its screenless windows and door, its dizzy floor, the planks of which act like the keys of an old piano, and walls, hung with relics which I like to gather as I go from ranch to ranch in my quest for stories of the ranch folk. A faded Saint Teresa in a more faded niche, smiles her welcome every morning and a Virgin of Guadalupe reminds me daily that I am a descendant of a proud and stoic race. Back of the desk, a collection of ranch spits is witness to my ranching heritage; an old, crude treasure chest holds my only possession, a manuscript which will sometime be sold, if I am among the fortunate. Hanging from a nail above is a home-spun hand-woven coin bag, the very same which my grandfather was given by his mother on his wedding day with the admonition, "My son, may you and all who ever own it keep it filled with gold coins." It hangs there empty, for the descendant of that Don has never seen a gold coin, much less owned one.

JOVITA GONZÁLEZ, "SHADES OF THE TENTH MUSE"

The lies I tell are authentic.

J. FRANK DOBIE, *TIME* MAGAZINE, OCTOBER 13, 1947

Zora Neale Hurston was not the only folklorist returning to her home turf in the summer of 1929. That same year, Jovita González, a young Mexican American woman from the borderlands, returned to the place of her birth to conduct research into the social history of her people. Although she pursued her research rigorously—interview-

ing informants in the counties that bordered the Rio Grande and perusing government records on both sides of the border—in many ways González was uncovering a story she already knew. Indeed, González's discovery of ethnographic meaning making—like Hurston's and Ella Deloria's—signified both an introduction and a homecoming. González was, after all, something more than simply a researcher exploring the new discursive and methodological tools of folklore scholarship; she was also a native daughter of the borderlands and had thus been raised on a steady diet of the very stories that she was now collecting. And like Deloria and Hurston, González was well aware of just what was at stake in this return. As a young girl in South Texas, she witnessed the dramatic social, cultural, and economic changes that transformed the Rio Grande Valley: changes that led, eventually, to her family's forced departure from the region. When she returned to the borderlands in the summer of 1929, González encountered a community struggling to negotiate the brutal political and economic imperatives that accompanied the modernization of what was once an isolated region of Texas.

In part, her return signified an effort (one that reflected the anxieties of her Anglo colleagues in the Texas Folklore Society) to recover and record the last remnants of a culture that was rapidly disintegrating in the face of modernization. In order to understand these historical changes and what they signified for the traditions she knew so intimately, González, like Hurston, needed a methodological apparatus that would enable her to “stand off” and look at the “garment” of her culture, a “spy-glass” through which she could see herself and her own culture as “somebody else” might. González found this spy-glass in the approach to folklore studies developed under J. Frank Dobie at the University of Texas. However, despite these newly acquired scholarly (*in*)vestments, like Hurston and Deloria, González never truly stood apart from her culture. Indeed it was her deep and abiding commitment to that culture and her concern for the future of Mexican communities in Texas that drew her back to the borderlands armed with the tools of ethnographic meaning making.

In her academic research and in her teaching, Jovita González focused her considerable talents on the task of uncovering the vast historical legacy of Mexicans in Texas. In so doing, she hoped to bring Anglos and Mexicans to greater consciousness of their shared history in North America and to educate young Mexican Americans about their rich linguistic and cultural heritage.¹ But González's investment in what Chandra Mohanty has called “the practices of scholarship” went beyond mere enlightenment. Like Deloria and Hurston, González was keenly aware of the political dimensions



Figure 3.1. Portrait of Jovita González, San Antonio, Texas, 1931. Courtesy of the E. E. Mireles and Jovita G. Mireles Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Bell Library, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.

of the ethnographic project, and her polysemous folklore texts speak to the politics of community within an emergent *Tejano* political class even as they engage in a cross-cultural educational project directed squarely at Anglo readers. As such, her explorations of *Tejano* folklore—a tradition conceived of in only the most romantic and picturesque terms by the mostly Anglo intellectual milieu in which she circulated—took on both political and pedagogical dimensions. For González, folklore was something to be taken seriously.

An Education in Exile

Jovita González was born near the Texas-Mexico border on January 18, 1904, and, like Deloria and Hurston, her early years were spent listening to the stories and legends of the community that she would study as an adult. In her memoirs González vividly recalls scenes and people from her early life on her grandfather's ranch, *Las Viboras*, many of which she pressed into service—in Hurstonian fashion—for her later writing.² González remembered her Tia Lola with special fondness. Tia Lola was her mother's sister who came to live with them at *Las Viboras* as a young widow. The strong-willed aunt taught González and her siblings about their family's heritage in Texas and, González implies, ensured that their early education was rounded out with plenty of information about important women in history. As young girls, Jovita and her sister Tula memorized a poem in Spanish entitled "La Influencia de la Mujer" that charted a distinctly feminist historical heritage beginning with "Judith, the Old Testament heroine," and ending with "Doña Josefa Ortíz de Dominguez, the Mother of Mexico's Independence." The girls also learned about colonial poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and were familiar with her famous feminist poem "Hombres Necios" ("Foolish Men").

Despite the nostalgic tone of her reminiscences, the years that González and her family spent at *Las Viboras* were not easy ones for Mexicans in South Texas. Indeed, the year of Jovita González's birth also marked a turning point in the economic and political destiny of the border communities. On July 4, 1904, the rail line from Corpus Christi to Brownsville was completed. Financed largely by Anglo ranchers and businessmen, the Saint Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway opened up the Rio Grande Valley to massive land speculation, bringing South Texas firmly into the fold of the U.S. market economy and enabling wealthy Anglo ranchers to take part in the economic and social transformation taking place across the nation.

As historian David Montejano notes, “With the railroad came farmers, and behind them came land developers, irrigation engineers, and northern produce brokers. By 1907, the three-year-old railway was hauling about five hundred carloads of farm products from the Valley.”³ The railway was also hauling hundreds of Midwesterners into the region, latecomers to the promise of Westward expansion who were seeking to rebuild their lives in what was promoted as the “Magic Valley.” These Anglo immigrants brought with them not only the hope for a new start in an unexploited territory, but also an understanding of race relations that was often at odds with the accommodating social relations that characterized the Anglo-Mexican ranching community of the late nineteenth century.

In the years immediately following the U.S. Mexico War (1846–1848), relations between Anglos and Mexicans in the border region were marked by an ethos of relative tolerance for linguistic and cultural difference due to the small size of the Anglo population as well as the region’s isolation from the world beyond the Nueces River. However, the new racial order that accompanied increased Anglo immigration to the area supplanted these accommodative race relations with segregationist “Jim Crow” policies that regulated interracial contact and created a caste-like system separating Mexicans and Anglos in a variety of public spaces, including schools, theaters, and beaches. After the completion of the railroad and the attendant agricultural boom, it became clear to Texas Mexicans that social, political, and economic relations in South Texas would never be the same. Within fifteen years of the construction of the railway system, the *Tejanos* of the border region, with a few exceptions, had lost the world that Jovita González knew, “the world of cattle *hacendados* and *vaqueros*,” and would come to live in “a world of commercial farmers and migrant laborers.” By the mid-1920s horses and carts had been replaced by automobiles and highways; and segregated public parks, movie houses, and drugstores took precedence over the plazas, churches, and haciendas as places to meet and exchange news.⁴

Along with the economic and social changes that Anglo immigrants brought to the region, *Tejanos* in the borderlands also had to contend with the transnational impact of world historical social transformations happening at their very doorstep. The Mexican Revolution, much of which was waged from Mexico’s northern territories, had severe consequences for border communities. Border raids from both sides were a fairly common occurrence from 1910 until 1919, and revolutionary ideas sifting in from Mexico radicalized many disenfranchised and newly landless *Tejanos*. Moreover, the massive influx of Mexican refugees, most of whom

were working class, who accompanied the Revolution radically changed the stakes of the conversation between Anglos and Mexicans in Texas. Increasingly, the new Anglo ruling class deployed popular xenophobic discourse about the inherent barbarism and filth of working-class Mexican “foreigners” to describe all Mexican Americans—including those who had settled Texas hundreds of years earlier—and to further justify their disenfranchisement and dispossession.⁵

Tensions along the border reached their apex with the irredentist movement of 1915–1917, popularly known as the *Plan de San Diego*, which called for the unification of Mexicans, Indians, Blacks, and Japanese under a “Liberating Army for Races and People,” whose purpose was to throw off the yoke of “Yankee Tyranny” and reclaim the borderlands for a multicultural nation. During this time, quasi-military groups of twenty-five to a hundred men raided Anglo (and some *Mexicano*) ranches and farms, derailed trains carrying goods to and from the Valley, burned bridges, and sabotaged irrigation pumping plants. The *Plan de San Diego* was ruthlessly and brutally squashed by the Texas Rangers, informal deputized posses acting with the support of Anglo ranching and mercantile concerns. At the height of the insurrection, the U.S. military threatened to bombard and occupy the Mexican town of Matamoros, believed by many to be the center of Mexican organizing and the entry point of outside agitators and revolutionaries. After the “border troubles” came to a halt in 1917, it became clear that the insurrection had profoundly negative effects on the very population whose interests it had sought to protect; between five hundred and five thousand Mexicans were killed as a result of retaliatory violence following the insurrection, while only sixty-two Anglo civilians and sixty-four soldiers lost their lives during the struggle. The armed conflict of 1915–1917 represented the culmination of the decades-long struggle between the old *Mexicano* ranching culture and the new agrarian economy in South Texas. David Montejano notes, “Most of the guerrilla activity took place in the four counties where commercial agriculture had made the greatest inroads—Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy.” These counties would become the focus of Jovita González’s folklore research.⁶

In her memoirs, González recounts that her family moved to San Antonio in 1910 so that she and her siblings could receive an “education in English,” but there can be little doubt that the need for a more standardized education was precipitated by the dramatic economic and cultural changes taking place in the borderlands during this period. Despite the worsening conditions for *Mexicanos* in South Texas, things could hardly have been much better in San Antonio, where Anglos had come to dominate political and

economic life some fifty years earlier. Nevertheless, thanks to the informal schooling in English that she received at *Las Viboras* and her somewhat more thorough education in Spanish, González was able to advance to the fourth grade by the age of ten and, by attending school in the summer, finished her high school equivalency by the age of eighteen.

Like Ella Deloria and Zora Neale Hurston, González's circuitous path through higher education reveals the financial and institutional barriers limiting the professional aspirations of women of color of her generation. González's family, though middle class, was in no position to finance an expensive education at the University of Texas in Austin, so upon graduation from high school she decided to return to the borderlands to work as a teacher in order to save money for college. Though she enrolled at the University of Texas in 1922 and apparently completed a year of coursework there, she soon transferred to Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, where she could cover her tuition and boarding costs by working part time as a high school Spanish teacher. Over the next four years, González spent her summers in Austin taking courses in "advanced Spanish" at the University of Texas under Lilia Casis, the eminent teacher of Spanish language and literature. It was in 1925, during one of those summer terms, that Casis introduced González to J. Frank Dobie, the man who had put Texas folklore studies on the map.

Jovita González and the Texas Folklore Society

When Jovita González came to folklore studies in the late 1920s, she found a congenial community of scholars who were consumed by the giddy possibilities that the revolution in regionalist writing had created. These were boom years for Texas folklore studies; with public interest in regional traditions at an all-time high, the Texas chapter of the American Folklore Society was leading the way in the movement to popularize the study of the folk. In a letter dated June 20, 1927, Ruth Benedict wrote enthusiastically to J. Frank Dobie, congratulating him on his success in making the Texas Folklore Society "the most flourishing and successful of the Folklore organizations of the country."⁷ But the love affair between the Texas Folklore Society and its national parent, the American Folklore Society, was not long-lived. Under J. Frank Dobie's leadership (1922–1943) the style of folklore collection promoted by the Texas Folklore Society shifted away from the rigorous and standardized research methodologies practiced by anthropological folklorists to a more populist approach, in which amateur collec-

tors were allowed a great deal of flexibility in their *in situ* transcriptions of folk practices.⁸

In fact, the trajectory that the discipline of folklore studies followed under J. Frank Dobie's leadership stood in stark contrast to the one promoted by Boas and others who sought to standardize research practices and confine the collection of folklore to university-trained professionals. Dobie's correspondence with Boas and later Ruth Benedict, who took over as editor of the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1923, reflects his growing frustration with the more "scientific" scholarship of the Boasian school, which he believed destroyed the "flavor of the folk," and alienated the general reading public.⁹ Dobie's freewheeling approach to folklore studies frequently set him at odds with his colleagues in the Texas Folklore Society as well, especially Stith Thompson and Leonidas W. Payne, both of whom promoted literary approaches to folklore, but were much more deeply influenced by anthropological analyses of myth in folklore.¹⁰

Dobie's romantic investment in the folk of his region, and his antipathy to more scientific approaches to folklore studies not only reflected the general aesthetic temper of his period, but also his personal background. A native son of the Anglo ranching community, Dobie was fascinated by what he saw as a vanishing way of life. Born in 1888, Dobie, like González, had witnessed the wave of agricultural development that had consumed the open ranges of his childhood and transformed formerly sleepy Texas towns into booming mercantile centers, and he, too, recognized that the rugged ranch life that was the scene of his informal education was quickly disappearing in the wake of economic modernization. As a young man, Dobie had worked on his uncle's ranch in South Texas and had developed a deep interest in the *Mexicano vaqueros* who also worked the ranch. But Dobie's relationship to these *vaqueros* was ultimately ambivalent: on the one hand, because he had grown up on a ranch worked almost entirely by Mexicans, he idolized *vaqueros* for their "simplicity," their understanding of and proximity to the land, and their unabashed masculinity; on the other hand, he was also a product of the Anglo ranching elite, the very community that had (often violently) dispossessed the "freedom loving *vaquero*."¹¹

Dobie's experiences resulted in a unique brand of imperialist nostalgia that structured the production of knowledge about Mexicans in Texas for over thirty years. Under his direction, the society turned increasingly to the collection of the folklore of the dispossessed, with special attention to the folk traditions of Mexican populations. But, as folklore historian Charles McNutt notes, the brand of folklore that Dobie promoted within the Texas Folklore Society tended toward the ahistorical and apolitical—focusing, for

example, on plant and animal lore, *curanderismo*, and legends of lost treasure—the forms of cultural poetics that, in his estimation, offered his general readership the true “essence” of the folk. Francis Abernathy, longtime historian for the Texas Folklore Society, recalls that while Dobie’s focus on Mexican folkloric traditions during this period did raise awareness of Mexican culture, it rarely moved beyond the “appreciation” of Mexican arts, crafts, and narrative traditions:

Mexicans at that time were enough of a rarity, were geographically contained, were socially separated, and were objects of interest for tourists. Folklorists were interested in Mexican culture for the same reason that they were interested in Negro culture: it was something new and different. So while Mexicans (and Negroes) were denied Depression relief assistance in some of the Texas cities, they were still the objects of interest to scholars. We sang “South of the Border” and “Mexicali Rose,” built our houses in the Mexican style, and toured Mexico and brought back *sombreros* and *serapes* and *metates* to decorate our rooms with. I had lived in Texas all my life but saw my first Mexican in 1937 when we took a vacation trip to San Antonio and the Valley. Dobie’s attitude, and the attitude of most of the TFS writers, was that of a member of the dominant culture studying, enjoying, appreciating another culture.¹²

In Dobie’s vision of folklore, the beauty of Mexican culture was celebrated, even as the political and social valences at the heart of Mexican cultural poetics in Texas were left largely unexplored.¹³

In spite of the contradictions at the center of its formation—or perhaps because of them—the brand of romantic regionalism that Dobie developed and promoted through the Texas Folklore Society in the 1920s and 1930s did involve “a limited but important encouragement of collection by non-Anglo folklorists,” and thus ushered in a period of unprecedented dialogue between Anglo and “ethnic” public intellectuals about the nature and uses of Texas regional culture.¹⁴ Moreover, as McNutt notes, even though the Texas Folklore Society generally consigned “racial and ethnic conflict” to a romanticized past, the process of exploring culture across ethnic and racial lines inevitably resulted in increasing interaction between different racial groups, and a newfound respect for the cultural poetics of Mexican Americans in Texas. For the first time in the tradition of institutional knowledge production about culture and history in Texas, Mexicans were a part of the conversation, and a new generation of Mexican American scholars entered into this dialogue. People like Carlos E. Castañeda, Lilia Casis, and Jovita

González played instrumental roles in the organizational structure of the Texas Folklore Society and contributed significantly to the production of knowledge about their communities. Moreover, the flexibility that Dobie built into the research methodologies of the organization enabled a greater number of nonprofessional Mexican American folklorists (like Adina De Zavala) to collect material on the folk practices of their neighborhoods, towns, and ranches.

Dobie's rejection of the strict ethnographic fieldwork practices of professional folklorists also shifted the axis for claims of ethnographic authority in ways that had a significant impact on Jovita González's career as a folklorist. In almost direct opposition to the ethnographic norms promoted by Boas and anthropologically trained folklorists of the period, Dobie argued that to produce an authoritative account of the expressive traditions of folk communities one needn't necessarily be familiar with all of the scholarly research on Mexicans, Indians, or African Americans, nor did one, by necessity, have to master their language or even live among them; one merely had to render the "authentic" flavor of the folk through writing. Such an approach to the collection and dissemination of folklore was not founded on a strict division between observers and observed. If anything, Dobie's approach encouraged the artful erasure of that division through the transformation of authentic folk utterances into the tall tales and colorful anecdotes of the folklorist. As José Limón has noted:

It is as if these writers attempted to transfer the traditional folk storytelling contexts of their informants, first to the written page but then to the speaking context of the quasi-academic conferences that were the meetings of the Texas Folklore Society. There, standing at podiums, these second-hand, predominantly male raconteurs would usually just read the story they had recomposed in a more literary English, stories based on what they had heard or were told second-hand from the "field." In effect, both in their readings but also sometimes in their dress style and social interactions at the TFS gatherings, these writers would attempt to convert themselves into "folks" like those they knew in their real or imagined worlds beyond Austin, Dallas or San Antonio where the meetings were usually held.¹⁵

As Limón suggests, both the publications and the gatherings of the Texas Folklore Society were, more often than not, governed by an ethos of performative authenticity and suffused with a desire to recreate in body and speech—in the very persona of the folklorist—the "authentic" folk.

González was much more successful at claiming ethnographic authority than Deloria or even Hurston, because in many ways her mentor had already laid the groundwork for her to do so. For Dobie, González embodied the virtues of the ideal collector of folklore: her fine literary abilities in combination with her insider knowledge of the intimate customs of ranch life granted her a level of ethnographic authority within the field of Texas folklore studies that was unimaginable for native anthropologists like Ella Deloria. Testament to Dobie's high estimation of González's work is his suggestion in the introduction to *Man, Bird, and Beast* that her "charming stories" literally embodied his approach to the study of folklore:

I look for two things in folk-lore. I look for flavor and I look for an evaluation of the folk who nourished the lore. If the lore interests me, I want to know its history; unless it has something of flavor and fancy and smacks of the folk, then it is not likely to interest me. If a thing is interesting, that is all the excuse it needs for being. Some day, it is quite likely, Miss Jovita González will plunge in and trace her charming stories of the red bird, the paisano, the woodpecker, the cenizo bush and other objects back to the Middle Ages; but I hope she will not take time to do this until she has extracted all the dewy freshness that the Mexican folk of the Texas border put in their tales.¹⁶

On the occasion of her first contribution to the *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society*, an article entitled "Folklore of the Texas-Mexican Vaquero" (1927), Dobie played up Jovita González's personal connections to her subject, noting, somewhat hyperbolically, "Her great-grandfather was the richest land owner of the Texas border. . . . Thus she has an unusual heritage of intimacy with her subject."¹⁷ He clearly believed that his readers would appreciate González's contributions more if they knew that she was both a talented folklorist and an "authentic" folk subject, someone who had actually lived among the *rancheros* and *vaqueros* of South Texas and could speak of them with authority. Whereas Deloria's intimate connection with the Dakota sometimes undermined her ethnographic authority, and Hurston's adoption of a folk persona in her literary folklore undercut her credibility among academic anthropologists, in González's case, her "authenticity" as a daughter of *ranchero* culture constituted the very foundation of her ethnographic authority.

Like Ella Deloria and Zora Neale Hurston, González approached the collection of folklore through what might be characterized as a "familial" methodology. In fact, much of the material that would later appear in her

contributions to the *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society* was gathered on an ad hoc basis while visiting family and friends on the border, and some of it may well have been culled from her own memories of early twentieth-century life on the border. Nevertheless, González did undertake at least two organized research trips to South Texas with the support of regional and national grants.

The first of these trips took place in 1929. Just two years after completing her bachelor's degree at Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, González was granted a Lapham Scholarship in Texas History to conduct research along the border and complete a master's degree at the University of Texas.¹⁸ She spent the summer of 1929 traveling through Webb, Zapata, and Starr counties and collecting notes for what would become perhaps her most vocal native-born critique of ethnographic, sociological, and historical representations of Mexicans in South Texas, her master's thesis, "Social Life in Cameron, Starr and Zapata Counties."¹⁹ Her second major research trip was funded by a much more prestigious fellowship. In 1934, on the strength of letters of recommendation from Paul S. Taylor and J. Frank Dobie and her own growing national prominence in the field of folklore studies, González was awarded a Rockefeller grant to complete a book-length manuscript on the folklore of South Texas Mexicans at the turn of the century. Like Ella Deloria's monograph, the manuscript that resulted from this research, *Dew on the Thorn*, remained unpublished during González's lifetime.²⁰

González corresponded fairly regularly with her mentor during both of these research trips, but unlike the correspondence between Deloria and Boas, or even the Hurston-Hughes letters, González's communications with Dobie reveal little about her ethnographic methodology during this period. Nevertheless, a kind of ethnographic disposition, if not a fully-elaborated methodology, emerges in two sources: her short memoir and an interview conducted by Aida Barrera before González's death in 1983. In her memoir González offers a brief account of her preparations before embarking on her first research trip in 1929, noting that to facilitate her research she acquired "letters of introduction to the clergy in the border counties" from the presiding Catholic archbishop, as well as the Episcopal bishop. González also used her family connections to great effect. "Whenever anyone in Starr County asked who 'that strange young lady with long hair and a book full of notes was,'" she wrote, "the answer would be, 'She is Maestro Jacobo's daughter,' or 'She is Don Francisco Guerra's granddaughter from *Las Viboras* Ranch.' That was the open sesame. In the other counties, Archbishop Droessarts's letter was enough."²¹

As this passage suggests, González—like Deloria and Hurston—felt the need to account for her anomalous position as an unmarried woman traveling alone in fairly remote locales by adopting certain culturally specific signifiers. Chicana literary historian Leticia Garza-Falcón has pointed out that early twentieth-century codes of “decency” in South Texas would have limited González’s mobility as a folklorist in significant ways. “There exists among the *Mexicano* community a long-standing cultural norm by which a woman alone is viewed as ‘open game,’ while a woman accompanied by a relative, be it aunt, mother, sister or little brother, is to be respected as *familia*.”²² Among the mostly male informants in her hometown, González’s family connections functioned like an invisible *duenna* or chaperone, marking her not as an inquisitive outsider, but as a respectable daughter of the community. In surrounding communities, her letters of introduction from leaders of the Catholic and Episcopalian churches granted her a form of discursive patriarchal protection.

But González did not rely solely on her familial and ecclesiastical connections to achieve that “open sesame” among her informants. She also self-consciously adopted the outward signifiers of a “proper woman” by wearing conservative clothing, keeping her hair long and twisted into a tight bun (during a time when “flapper” styles were invading the borderlands and causing consternation and even alarm among her older male informants), and even exchanging the tools of an ethnographer—the classic pencil and pad—for a pair of knitting needles. As González recounts in her interview with Barrera, “[D]onde quiere que iba, llevaba mi hilo de tejer. Mientras que la gente estaba hablando, yo me ponía a tejer para que vieran que no era de las otras. (Wherever I went, I took my yarn and knitting needles. While people were talking, I would just sit there and knit, so that they could see that I was not one of those ‘other’ women)” [my translation].²³ The pose was not simply a signal to her informants that González—notwithstanding her education, mobility, and unmarried status—was a “decent” woman; it was also a mode of transforming the ethnographic encounter. Like Deloria, González understood the value of a passive approach among communities traditionally resistant to ethnographic inquiries. She was able to circumvent the intrusiveness of the ethnographic situation and create a less coercive exchange by allowing her informants’ stories to emerge while she sat there quietly knitting.

Jovita González’s ethnographic methods were remarkably fruitful. From the start, it was clear to Dobie that she was able to gather information that had been held back from the Anglo folklorists who came before her, and he quickly recognized her value as a folklore collector. For the next twenty

years, he nurtured González's scholarship and helped her professionally, "soliciting and editing her manuscripts, engaging her in sustained evening discussions of the subject [of Mexican folklore] in his home, underwriting bank loans for her field trips."²⁴ By 1928, with Dobie's support, González assumed the vice presidency of the Texas Folklore Society. She was elected president of the society in 1930 and again in 1931, an astounding achievement considering that it was an organization dominated by Anglo males of the "cowboy scholar" variety. She was also a regular contributor to the *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society* and offered lively presentations of her research at their annual meetings. She followed her first contribution in 1927 to *Texas and Southwestern Lore* with "Tales and Songs of the Texas-Mexicans" in *Man, Bird and Beast* (1930), "Among my People" in *Tone the Bell Easy* (1932), and "The Bullet-Swallower" in *Puro Mexicano* (1935). By the mid-1930s González was hailed as a star of folklore studies by both the leadership of the Texas Folklore Society and the regional and national press.²⁵ Ten years after her first encounter with J. Frank Dobie, González had become the leading national expert on the culture and history of Mexican American South Texas.

Why did J. Frank Dobie so enthusiastically embrace this young, untested Mexican American scholar from San Antonio? No doubt he and his colleagues were charmed by González's reportedly riveting public presentations in which she artfully flavored scholarly disquisitions on the folk traditions of Mexicans in Texas with a splash of theatricality.²⁶ Newspaper accounts of the 1927 meeting of the Texas Folklore Society, at which González made her debut, focus almost exclusively on her Saturday night dinner presentation on the "Lore of the Mexican Vaquero," consigning the addresses of other more established members of the society to brief asides. Reporters gushed over both the "delightful" setting for her presentation—a stage replete with cactus, transplanted mesquite thickets, and a campfire—and the "authenticity" of the Mexican singers who accompanied her presentation.²⁷ These performative details entranced scholars and amateur folklore enthusiasts alike, playing to their fascination with an exotic (and gendered) vision of the quaintness of Mexican culture.

But Dobie's professional interest in Jovita González's folklore career went deeper than mere appreciation of her undeniable charm as a storyteller. Indeed, for Dobie, Jovita González may well have represented a more sanitized version of his idealized *vaquero*. As an educated daughter of the *ranchero* elite, she was removed from the more violent contradictions of Anglo and Mexican ranching culture in at least two ways. Her gender relegated her to the feminized domestic space within the *ranch*—



Figure 3.2. Jovita González and J. Frank Dobie at the 1930 Texas Folklore Society Meeting in San Antonio, Texas. San Antonio Light Collection, UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures, #L-1498-A, Courtesy of the Hearst Corporation.

the world of plant lore, legends, and folk remedies—and her presumably elite status brought her in line with Dobie’s ideological vision. In her writings, however, González refused to remain within the cloistered walls of the hacienda. Indeed her first contributions to the *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society* focused on the songs and legends of the masculine world of the *vaqueros*, and though she sometimes adopted the “superior” tone of her Anglo colleagues with respect to the Mexican folk, her folklore writing also reveals a clear sense of admiration for Mexican folk figures who offer open resistance to Anglo domination.²⁸ As José Limón notes, “Within the body of her work . . . [we] find some key instances of a counter-competing vision on questions of race, class, and gender domination.”²⁹

**“If the history of Texas were written the way it actually was . . .”:
Rewriting the Story of Texas**

Though many scholars associate her exclusively with the disciplinary world of folklore scholarship, Jovita González wrote her first extended analysis of the history, social life, and customs of her native South Texas—her master’s thesis—under the watchful and sometimes disapproving gaze of Texas historian Eugene C. Barker. Indeed, González recalls in her memoirs that Barker was initially reluctant to approve the thesis, which he found “interesting,” but also “somewhat odd.” Barker’s initial resistance was not surprising, given that González’s thesis subverted in both form and content many of the norms of western and southwestern historiography that he had helped to establish.

In his lectures and his books, Barker, like other Texas historians of his generation, placed the Texas Revolution of 1836 at the center of Texas history, figuring it as a foundational moment of national formation. In her thesis, González displaced the Texas Revolution, decentering its historical significance by treating it as merely one instance in a long history of transnational conflict that had transformed the borderlands.³⁰ Indeed, for González, the foundational moment for Texas came almost a century before the Texas Revolution, with the founding of the first permanent Spanish settlements just north of the Rio Grande. Her refusal to follow the accepted story line of Texas history—especially her rejection of the Texas Revolution as a central moment in Texas history—placed González at odds with the version of history popularized by Barker, Walter Prescott Webb, and even J. Frank Dobie. It also suggests a subtle claim for the historical legitimacy of the region’s Mexican inhabitants. For González the “founding fathers” of

Texas were not the heroes of the Texas Revolution—Austin, Bowie, Houston—but the *criollo* and *mestizo* heads of families who established ranches along the Rio Grande in the eighteenth century. Her recovery of the story of their settlement of South Texas constituted an implicit argument for the historical rootedness of Mexicans in Texas, counteracting the rhetoric of dominance that sought to make them invisible.

Essentially what Jovita González presented to Eugene C. Barker in 1930 was a counterhistory, a narrative that offered a distinctly Mexican perspective on the history of Texas and contested negative representations of *Mexicano* culture and people. Her radical perspective might explain both her decision to take on the field of history for her thesis work and Barker's initial reluctance to approve the final results of her research. Indeed, although he claimed that the thesis lacked sufficient "historical references," Barker may well have been more alarmed by the strident counterdiscursive tone of González's account of social life on the Texas Mexican border.³¹ This tone, forcefully forecasted in her introduction, clearly represented a departure from "business as usual" in Texas history circles. González began her thesis with the following lines:

There exists in Texas a common tendency among Anglo-Americans, particularly among Americans of one or two generations' stay in the country, to look down upon the Mexicans of the border counties as interlopers, undesirable aliens, and a menace to the community. Those among the last group named who have this opinion should before making a definite stand consider the following: First, that the majority of these so-called undesirable aliens have been in the state long before Texas was Texas; second, that these people were here long before these new Americans crowded the deck of the immigrant ship; third, that a great number of the Mexican people in the border did not come as immigrants, but are the descendants of the *agraciados* who held grants from the Spanish crown.³²

As the disputatious tone of the opening lines of her thesis suggests, despite Jovita González's generally cordial relations with Dobie and her other colleagues in the Texas Folklore Society, González's involvement in the production of knowledge about the folk in Texas was not without its contradictions.

In fact, in a 1981 interview, González revealed that she avoided Dobie's folklore classes at the University of Texas because the two had such disparate views on Texas history: "You see, it was an agreement that we made, that I would not go into one of his classes because I would be mad at many

things. He would take the Anglo-Saxon side naturally. I would take the Spanish and Mexican side.” González acknowledged that many of her Mexican American colleagues at the University of Texas were careful not to openly contest the “official history” promoted by Dobie and his cohort: “Teachers couldn’t afford to get involved in a controversy between Mexico and the University of Texas . . . but if the history of Texas were written the way it actually was . . . because things, some of those things that happened on both sides were very bitter. So we just didn’t mention them. You just forget about it.”³³

González’s reference to the lingering bitterness between Anglos and Mexicans in Texas illustrates the limitations she experienced in speaking for the “Mexican side” in the public dialogue over Texas history. It also demonstrates that, while the contours of her argument with the mostly Anglo, largely male voice of Texas folklore studies shifted along with the changes in the discipline and the strengthening of her consciousness as a gendered subject wrestling with neocolonial forms of meaning making, it was from the start, and remained to the end, an argument against those scientific and popular discourses which had sought to describe, contain, and dispossess her people. While Jovita González’s master’s thesis was an undeniably counter-discursive opening salvo in this extended discursive struggle, her later text, *Dew on the Thorn* (1935) represented a shift in both tone and genre toward a more complex meta-textual revision of the imperialist nostalgia that characterized the study of the Mexican folk under Dobie. *Dew on the Thorn*, like “Social Life in Cameron, Starr and Zapata Counties,” is essentially a work of historical recovery, but its vision of history is complicated by an emergent gender critique that disrupts the nostalgic valences of González’s account of ranch life before the advent of the agricultural boom.

The Madwomen in the Hacienda: Rewriting the Folk in *Dew on the Thorn*

When Jovita González began work on *Dew on the Thorn* in the mid-1930s, she had every reason to believe that this, her first book-length folklore study, would be both a critical and a popular success. Indeed, public interest in the “life and lore” of the American Southwest was on the increase largely through the efforts of her mentor, J. Frank Dobie. Moreover, her own reputation had grown alongside that of Dobie and the Texas Folklore Society—so much so that by the mid-1930s her prestige in the field

doubtlessly helped González get a Rockefeller Foundation grant-in-aid of two thousand dollars to write about the “social and economic life of Texas Mexicans.”³⁴ As González sat down to work on her manuscript in the early spring of 1935, she frequently consulted with Dobie, who had recently returned from a research trip in northern Mexico (funded by a Guggenheim fellowship) and was also busy getting a manuscript into shape.

Not surprisingly, Dobie took a distinctly literary approach to his own folklore manuscript, writing what was essentially a novel inspired by his travels in Mexico and the lore he collected during those travels. He had called other folklorists to this task some years earlier—in his preface to *Texas and Southwestern Lore* (1927)—when he noted the importance of folklore as both a form of social history and the germ seed for a truly American literary tradition. “Will someone appear to weave [folklore] into fine ballads and novels, sift it and translate it into representative literature?” he queried.³⁵ Dobie answered his own call with the audacious text he completed in the spring of 1935, *Tongues of the Monte*, a compendium of ghost stories, legends, and folk beliefs from northern Mexico blended into an overarching narrative of adventure, crosscultural friendship, and romance.

In his examination of González’s *Dew on the Thorn*, José Limón surmises, “It is likely that [Dobie’s] *Tongues of the Monte* played some role in [González’s] decision to write *Dew on the Thorn* as an extended narrative incorporating some of the folklore in her earlier work and some new material based on the field research she carried out in 1934–35.”³⁶ Limón’s observation is borne out by Dobie and González’s correspondence during this period, which clearly indicates that they exchanged portions of their manuscripts and offered each other criticisms and encouragement during the writing process. Perhaps more precisely, González offered Dobie praise and encouragement, while Dobie’s estimation of González’s work appeared to be somewhat more restrained. In a letter dated April 8, 1935, González praised *The Five Wounds* (the title that Dobie had originally chosen for his manuscript), comparing it favorably to his enormously popular book *Coronado’s Children* (1930):

[I]f I were the *envidiosa* kind, I certainly would envy you *The Five Wounds*, but since I am not, I simply brag about it to people and really I can not help but puff up with pride when telling people that I have read the manuscript. In my *humilde* estimation it is a masterpiece of its kind and superior to *Coronado’s Children* and that is hard to best.

I have read your letter and suggestions many times, and I clearly see

what you mean. As I told you in Austin, these sketches have been written as the thing comes to me, with the idea of rearranging adding, subtracting, and changing as I saw necessary. Following your suggestions, I have rearranged the first chapter, *A Patriarch at Home* and have changed it to *The Stronghold of the Olivares*.³⁷

Though clearly intended as praise, González's description of *The Five Wounds* as a "masterpiece of its kind" offers a subtle note of qualification to her estimation of Dobie's manuscript. In fact, while both Dobie and González chose to incorporate their folklore research into an overarching fictional narrative, the picture of the folk that emerges in *Dew on the Thorn* is startlingly different from that of *Tongues of the Monte*. And though her manuscript embraces some of the key formal elements of *Tongues of the Monte*, it also rejects the ahistorical and romantic tone of Dobie's representation of the Mexican folk. More intriguingly, in *Dew on the Thorn* González engages in a subtle tropological critique of the fraught gender dynamics at the heart of *Tongues of the Monte*, a critique that is simultaneously directed inward, toward the Texas Mexican community, exposing the gendered contradictions of its folk practices.

In *Tongues of the Monte* we see Dobie's vision of folklore studies rendered in novelistic form. Under the cloak of presenting an authentic and engaging picture of Mexican folk traditions, the novel offers a fairly straightforward romantic quest narrative, in which the folklorist author, through his interaction with the land, the people, and the traditions of Mexico, comes to a greater understanding of his own place in the modern world. In his preface, Dobie states quite clearly that *Tongues of the Monte* is not intended to be an accurate account of his fieldwork in Mexico; rather it offers an impressionistic study of the people and places of Mexico culled equally from memory and imagination. Conceding that the characters in *Tongues of the Monte*, in particular his "old mozo and friend," Inocencio, are essentially compilations "patched up from realities" and that the situations he described are entirely invented, Dobie nevertheless claimed that the book is "truer . . . than a literal chronicle of what I saw, whom I heard, and where I rode or slept would have been."³⁸ As a highly impressionistic and romantic rendition of the Mexico of Dobie's imagination, *Tongues of the Monte* does not disappoint. Indeed, it provides a revealing glimpse into both the unspoken desires and the internal contradictions of his particular brand of folklore practice.

Tongues of the Monte focuses on the adventures of "Don Federico," Dobie's alter ego, and his trusty *mozo*, "Inocencio"—apparently a compen-

dium of the Texas Mexican men who inspired Dobie's interest in folklore—as they travel through the isolated landscape of northern Mexico. In these travels, Don Federico and Inocencio encounter dangers, love, and physical trials, eventually developing a profound connection that Inocencio seals by performing a ritual in which he draws his own blood and marks Don Federico's open palm with the sign of the cross. José Limón has suggested that *Tongues of the Monte* might be read as a comedy, a novel “whose plot structures hold out ‘for the temporary triumph of man over his world by the prospect of occasional reconciliations of the forces at play in the social and natural worlds.’” In Dobie's case, Limón suggests, these forces “ranged from the seemingly ‘personal’—his parental relationships, his manhood and sexuality, his disciplinary vocation—to his largest contradiction, his relationship and that of his people to the Mexicans of south Texas.”³⁹

But *Tongues of the Monte* also offers an obvious allegory for the practice of folklore, J. Frank Dobie-style. And one cannot help but notice its narrative similarities to Rosaldo's ironic “myth of the lone ethnographer.” Nor can one ignore the gendered dynamics of Dobie's humanistic exploration of the cultural and geographic borders that divide Mexico from the United States. Whether his travels bring him into contact with threatening *vaqueros* (whose voices are consistently linked in the novel with the howls of coyotes) or with more tractable male figures like Inocencio, Dobie's quest for innocence through folklore collapses the heteroglossic world of the folk into a one-sided dialogue between himself and an idealized male folk subject. While Mexican women are included in the narrative, they are consistently figured as intruders, either dangerous objects of eroticized desire—in at least one instance a *mestiza* who desires Don Federico is identified as an “onza,” a mythical shape-shifting beast—or meddling interlopers from the domestic sphere. In either case, they interrupt the bucolic relationship between Dobie's stand-in, Don Federico, and the masculinized folk subject as embodied in his trusty native sidekick, Inocencio. The gendered dimensions of Dobie's quest narrative could not have escaped González's keen critical eye when she reviewed his manuscript. And she must have understood that Dobie's representations of the women on the *rancho* effectively marginalized them from his analysis and created a one-dimensional, deeply masculine vision of the Mexican folk.

In her own manuscript Jovita González followed a radically different “trail to Mexico.” Like *Tongues of the Monte*, *Dew on the Thorn* is experimental in form, weaving discrete accounts of Mexican storytelling and folkloric traditions into an overarching narrative framework, but González departs from Dobie's project in significant ways. First, as Limón has ob-

served, *Dew on the Thorn* contests the ranging romanticism of *Tongues of the Monte* by centering its narrative on a specific geopolitical location, the borderlands of South Texas, and by examining social relations in transformation during a particular historical period, from 1904 to 1907.⁴⁰ In other words, *Dew on the Thorn* contextualizes folklore within the changing political and social realities of modernization, rather than depicting it as a timeless “survival” of an older mode of social relations. Second, the picture of ranch life presented in *Dew on the Thorn* tends toward the nostalgic, but it does not ignore the ideological contradictions of traditional culture, nor does it presuppose a homogenous folk community. Indeed, the community represented in *Dew on the Thorn* is populated by *rancheros*, *vaqueros*, *peones*, Indians, African Americans, Anglo entrepreneurs and politicians, and at least one exiled Southerner, suggesting a complex social space inhabited by a host of frequently discordant voices and agendas. In such a community, social contradictions are the norm, and *Dew on the Thorn* explores these contradictions with a critical eye.

Dew on the Thorn opens in 1904, the year of González’s birth, and documents the changing lives of *rancheros*, *vaqueros*, and *peones* during a three-year period. That González chose to document the years between 1904 and 1907 in her treatment of *Mexicano* communities in South Texas is significant for a number of reasons. Most obviously, the period correlates with her early childhood in South Texas, and thus offers an almost autobiographical narrative of a world she knew intimately. The primary figures of her childhood all appear as central protagonists in the text: the *pastor* (goatherd), Tío Patricio; the nursemaid, Nana Chita; her father as represented by the schoolmaster, Don Alberto; and Mamá Ramoncita, the beloved great-grandmother who, according to González’s memoir, cautioned her great-grandchildren to “never forget that Texas is our home.” By setting the manuscript in a time and place that corresponded with her childhood and populating the narrative with figures and experiences from her youth, González effectively blurred the dividing line between memory and “data,” and by extension, between “observer” and “observed.” In this respect, González’s text bears a striking resemblance to Hurston’s folklore work. Indeed, *Dew on the Thorn*, like *Mules and Men*, offers the reader both an inside and an outside view of the culture, as it is compiled from both the memories of youth and the observations of a fieldworker.

The historical setting of *Dew on the Thorn* is also significant in that it coincides with the decline of *Mexicano* social dominance in South Texas. González documented this historical process in her master’s thesis, locating its origins in the completion of the Saint Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico

Railway on July 4, 1904. González embedded in this landscape of social change the various tales, legends, and folk beliefs that she had gathered over the previous decade in part, I believe, to reveal the human cost of the industrialization and modernization of the borderlands, but also to allow the many old-timers she had interviewed for her master's thesis to voice their resistance to their subordinated status under the new order. González indicated this dual purpose in her 1934 grant application to the Rockefeller Foundation, in which she argued for the urgency of documenting the vanishing world she knew as a young girl: "I have seen the border transformed from a quaint and archaic community to the modern business center it is now. My people are being transformed. The old type *caballero* is now an American business man and the girl who lived in conventual seclusion has become the modern college girl. Customs considered sacred a few years ago are now considered ridiculous, and the growing generation, ashamed of their heritage, want to forget the traditions of their people."⁴¹ In her application González also suggested that her research would help to correct dominant misconceptions about "Latin-Americans" among the Anglo community.

As her comments suggest, González imagined herself speaking with pedagogical intent to multiple audiences through this "comprehensive presentation" of the social world of *Tejanos* in the early twentieth century.⁴² On the one hand, she hoped to appeal to white fascination with the more "romantic" and "quaint" aspects of Mexican culture, thus intervening against racist discourse by demonstrating the beauty and historical importance of *Tejano* culture. On the other hand, she hoped to instill a sense of pride and history among young Mexican Americans by reminding them that, in Mamá Ramoncita's words, "Texas is ours. Texas is our home." Indeed the last lines of *Dew on the Thorn* are uttered by the matriarch of the Olivares *rancho*, who urges her husband not to flee Texas in the face of increasing Anglo hostility towards *Tejanos*: "The *Americanos* may come. They may take the land, but our spirit, the spirit of the conquerors, will live forever. Texas is ours. We stay!"⁴³

José Limón has pointed out that this second "target audience" represented an "emerging 'middle-class' border Mexican society in south Texas and particularly San Antonio at this time, an influential group, becoming more and more English-fluent and engaging in an on-going debate about its political and cultural identity." This audience would surely have been receptive to a text that made claims for both the historical importance and the social value of *Tejano* culture.⁴⁴ In effect, through the skillful blending of folklore, rhetoric, and history, González hoped to transform the ways in

which both Anglos and Mexicans in Texas understood their past and their shared future.⁴⁵

Interestingly, González approached this complex and multivalent critical project by excising her voice from the narrative, a bold rhetorical gesture that reorients the role of the folklorist as narrator in significant ways. Whereas both folklorists and anthropologists of the 1920s and 1930s typically grounded their ethnographic authority on the ability to convey the sense that (in Lévi-Strauss's words) "I was there, such a thing happened to me. You will believe that you were there yourself,"⁴⁶ González eschewed this textual strategy, choosing instead to offer a picture of the folklore and history of Mexicans in South Texas from the perspective of the people themselves. In this she departed from Dobie's strategy in *Tongues of the Monte*, and for that matter, from Hurston, who deployed this standard device of ethnographic meaning making to great effect in *Mules and Men*. Instead González, like Ella Deloria, allowed her subjects to speak for themselves, without the overt mediating presence of the ethnographic narrator.

Although, like Hurston, González subtly wove her own autobiography into the text, the narrative voice never assumes the position of an observer. Instead, readers themselves are given the opportunity to witness folklore from the inside, unmediated by the observations of the folklorist, and are thus drawn into the internal logic of the world she sought to represent. This positioning orients the reader against the dominant discourse of Manifest Destiny and its underlying logic. For example, in the first chapter of *Dew on the Thorn*, González offers a Mexican perspective on one of the foundational fictions of Anglo Texas—the Battle of the Alamo—through the voice of Don Cesáreo, one of the founding fathers of *her* South Texas. Upon hearing of the massacre at the Alamo, Don Cesáreo offers a "few prayers for the repose" for the souls of the men who perished there, but concludes that they got what they deserved:

Why should they have come to a land that was not theirs? Did they not have a country of their own? Poor foolish men, these foreigners be, he mused, to think they could take anything away from Mexico. Mexicans were courageous and could fight! Hadn't they heard how the Mexicans had driven out the mighty armies of the king of Spain from their country? He shuddered at the mere thought of the approach of these Americans. These men who were heretics should not come to Christian territory. He had read in a history his father left him that the Americans were the same as the English, and the English had always been the enemies of Spain. One of his ancestors, if he remembered right, a captain of the Spanish galleon,

had been killed by the English pirate Drake. Not only were they enemies of Spain, but at one time the English had even dared to oppose the Pope, and all because he would not allow their king to have more than one wife. And if history was true the king's lawful wife had been a Spanish princess. Ah! these *Americanos* had a deathly heritage. They were the born enemies of everything Spanish, and consequently they were the enemies of the Mexicans. Certainly, thought Don Cesáreo, God, who was Catholic, could not allow these people who were His enemies to take the land away from them!⁴⁷

Through Don Cesáreo's internal monologue, González defamiliarizes the ideology of Manifest Destiny by presenting it in reverse. For Don Cesáreo, the "English" have their own *Black Legend*, a "deathly heritage" of heresy, piracy, and lawlessness. The Protestant ethos behind the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny is also reversed through Don Cesáreo's claim that God, "a Catholic," is on *his* side of history. Leticia Garza-Falcón notes that González employs Don Cesáreo's slanted understanding of history as a device to parody the limitations of the one-sided and xenophobic vision of history presented by Texas historians like Walter Prescott Webb. By offering a parallel yet equally slanted version of the history of the Americas through the consciousness of one of her primary characters, González proposes "a more nuanced picture of historical experience than that afforded by the official histories that present only a single view of the past."⁴⁸

But we should not forget that Don Cesáreo's view of history is partial as well: even as it functions as a parody of the one-dimensional historical perspective of the Anglo ideologues who "invaded" the border towns during González's childhood, it also suggests a skepticism on the part of the author that any single historical narrative can ever offer a true vision of history. In a complex double gesture, González simultaneously presents her readers with a resistant form of "subjugated knowledge" and undermines its claims to truth. This double gesture is carried over into González's literary exploration of the function of folklore within the tightly-knit *Tejano* community of South Texas. And here her departure from Dobie and the Texas Folklore Society is most marked, because even as she offers up the "quaint and archaic" customs of this community to her readers for their polite consumption, she also speaks (if obliquely) to the social contradictions that cherished custom so often hides.

As González makes clear in *Dew on the Thorn*, folklore must not be uncritically consumed as an aesthetic form, an antidote to the alienation of modern industrial culture, or even a potentially counterdiscursive form of

subjugated knowledge. González instead articulates a sophisticated reading of folklore as a form of community ideology that has both positive and negative material effects. On the one hand, folk wisdom offers its constituents a vital and organic connection to the traditions of the past. On the other hand, it can be mobilized to mystify social contradictions and normalize structural inequality, especially in a social system founded upon patriarchal privilege.

One particularly telling example of the multiple uses of folklore may be found in González's account of the Aguilar family. Don Ramón Aguilar and his wife, Doña Rita, are trapped in an unhappy (and possibly abusive) marriage. While Don Ramón fantasizes about returning to the dalliances of his youth, Doña Rita slips into an increasingly neurotic state. Her sickness is described by the women of the *rancho* as a "strange malady; she turned yellow and would neither sleep, talk, nor eat. She just laid in bed staring at the ceiling of the room. What she saw there, if she saw anything, must have been terrible for occasionally she screamed out fearful words and shook her fists at the beams." The local *curandera* is convinced that Doña Rita is bewitched and suggests that Don Ramón consult with Tío Anselmo, the "witch healer" who prescribes a rather violent cure for her ailment. Don Ramón is to enclose Doña Rita in a room filled with the smoke of chili peppers so that the "suffocating vapors" might "choke or drive the evil spirit away." After this punishing ordeal, he must whip her with a "rawhide rope . . . made from the hide of a black steer."

Don Ramón dutifully administers this "cure"—which very nearly kills Doña Rita—unaware that his young son Cristóbal "had entered the room, hidden by the darkness. His little pale face streaked with tears as he watched his mother writhe in agony under the cruel blows of his father." Cristóbal is traumatized by the incident, and as he nurses his mother back to health, he himself takes on many of her symptoms: "a certain sadness, a certain indescribable melancholy permeated [his] spirit which should have been young."⁴⁹ The women of the *rancho* suspect that the devil that was successfully beaten out of Doña Rita has taken residence in Cristóbal, but it is clear that at least in this instance a folkloric reading of both Doña Rita's and Cristóbal's mental illness misses the point, especially since Cristóbal's melancholia is manifested, in anti-Oedipal fashion, as an intense hatred for his father and an equally intense identification with his mother.

Cristóbal is eventually able to find solace and healing through what amounts to a folkloric talking cure administered by a goatherd, Tío Patricio, a pastoral quasi-mystical figure who shares folktales that essentially function as object lessons in the contradictions of patriarchal culture. Tío

Patricio's stories enable Cristóbal to see beyond the particular instance of brutality that had so traumatized him and develop a critical understanding of gender relations.⁵⁰ Contextualized as they are within an overarching narrative documenting gendered oppression in the borderlands, Tío Patricio's stories suggest a critical view of folklore as something more than a mere "survival" of traditional culture. Folklore in *Dew on the Thorn* becomes a shared text wherein community conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality are established, negotiated, and, at times, contested.

Doña Rita is not the only woman who suffers from the more oppressive manifestations of *Tejano* folk culture. Indeed, cases of mental illness among women abound in the world of *Dew on the Thorn*, and in every instance, these "madwomen" are defined by the *Tejano* folk as bewitched, bedeviled, or suffering from some form of divine punishment for transgressive behavior. For example, during a discussion about the potency of a love potion, the "powder of *La Madre Celestina*," Martiniano, a *vaquero*, relates the story of Lucita, one of Don Francisco's nieces. Lucita was quite beautiful and courted by many young *rancheros*, but she had higher aspirations: "She did not want to marry. She wanted to go away to school, college I think they call it, and learn all that is found in books." One of Lucita's older and more aggressive suitors ignored her wishes and asked her parents directly for her hand in marriage. Though he was rebuffed, as Martiniano recounts, he swore that he would "have her some way or another." Before Lucita left for school, he sent her a letter laced with the powder of *La Madre Celestina*. Lucita was driven mad by the powder's effects and had to be brought home in a straitjacket. In the end, Martiniano notes sadly, "she became like a wild beast, could not walk like a human being but crouched on the floor and lapped her food the same as an animal. She jumped on all fours about the padded room and dashed her body against the walls."⁵¹ Of course, readers suspect that the psychological strain initiated by Lucita's transgressions of the gendered norms of her community might be the root cause of her distress. González allows this suspicion to linger without recourse to narrative commentary. But by relating this story through the *vaqueros*, she demonstrates the power of folk "wisdom" to allow its subjects an interpretive loophole through which they may conveniently avoid coming to terms with the more devastating contradictions of their lived reality.

In another instance, Don Francisco, the progressive patriarch of the Olivareño ranch, encounters a madwoman when he makes a trip to town to register to vote. While waiting to meet his old friend Father José María, Don Francisco spies a woman in black moving furtively through the plaza. As she passes through the town, the townspeople close their windows and

doors, shouting after her, “*Maldita, maldita.*” Don Francisco follows the woman to her desolate *jacal*, determined to uncover the story behind her marginalization from the community. He learns from her that she is a “*desalmada*,” a “woman without a soul.” Her name is Carmen, and once she was the beautiful daughter of a wealthy *hacendado*, but she fell in love with Julio, a man betrothed to her best friend, Rosario. Upon discovering the illicit affair, Rosario committed suicide, and with her dying breath cursed Carmen to life without a soul. “My parents, disgraced because of the shame that had befallen them through my bad behavior, disowned me and I was shunned by our former friends as unclean.”⁵²

Deserted by her parents and shunned by her friends, Carmen is left to make her way through the world “without a soul” and in desolate poverty. Living alone and rejected by the community, Carmen slips into an increasingly neurotic state, which manifests itself in a terror of frogs, the creatures that she believes to have possession of her soul. More progressive than his peers, Don Francisco decides to take the young women to his *rancho* and nurse her back to health with the help of his wife, Doña Margarita, and his daughter, Rosita. Eventually, with the support of the men and women of the Olivareño, Carmen recovers, and in an interesting closing note, we are told of her lover Julio’s tragic end. While living in exile in Mexico, Julio had sought his fortunes in the Mines of Mapimí. He had become very wealthy, but perished while trying to save the lives of his coworkers during a mine collapse. He left his entire fortune to a “home for unprotected women.”⁵³ Julio’s testament serves to subtly reorient the communal reading of the source of Carmen’s anxiety: as his legacy implies, Carmen has been driven mad not because she has “lost her soul” as a result of divine retribution, but because of her marginalization from family and community. Like the other dubious madwomen who populate the world of *Dew on the Thorn*, Carmen is a victim of folklore in that she has internalized the system of beliefs that normalize the double standards of patriarchal culture. Indeed, as is suggested throughout *Dew on the Thorn*, it is the patriarchal order that makes these women sick, and folkloric traditions frequently mystify rather than reveal the true cause of their maladies.

For González, the oppression of women was merely one of the “thorns” beneath the “dew” of folkloric culture in the borderlands, and as José Limón has observed, González did not “shrink from delineating [other] internal cultural contradictions” at the heart of *Tejano* folk practices. Nonetheless, as her choice of title implies, folklore also carries with it potentially regenerative cultural possibilities. In fact, beneath *Dew on the Thorn*’s critical treatment of folk culture lies an implicit argument for a strategic

political relationship to tradition. Like many of the progressive Mexican American thinkers of her generation, González viewed folklore and tradition as something like a toolbox from which one selects certain sustaining cultural practices, and abandons others. While she believed that knowing about one's culture and history helped to foster "racial pride" in an era when dominant discourse sought to erase the Mexican historical presence in Texas, she would not—indeed, could not—ignore the internal contradictions of patriarchal culture in South Texas.

In *Dew on the Thorn* Jovita González rejects the romantic pastoral vision of *Mexicanos* offered in popular folklore texts like *Tongues on the Monte* by pointing to the violent history of Anglo-American imperialism that Dobie ignores, but she also refuses to invoke a nostalgic prelapsarian vision of *Tejano* culture before the invasion of "fortune-seeking Americanos." In this she parts company with Américo Paredes, her most celebrated Mexican American successor in the contested world of Texas folklore studies, whom many consider to be one of the founding scholarly voices in Chicano studies. In his classic treatise on Texas-Mexican resistance, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, Paredes presented late nineteenth-century South Texas as a premodern class utopia in which *peon*, *vaquero*, and *ranchero* coexisted in relative harmony. Noting that much had "been written about the democratizing influence of horse culture," Paredes argued that the pastoral simplicity of ranch life "led by most Border people fostered a natural equality among men."⁵⁴ We may presume, given his focus on the masculine domains of ranch culture, that Paredes spent little time investigating whether or not the "democratizing influence of horse culture" was felt *inside* the hacienda, among the women, both servants and mistresses, who helped to sustain the hierarchical system of the *rancho*.

Indeed, an undeniably elegiac and masculinist tone suffuses Paredes's depiction of ranch life in the late nineteenth century, which is replete with uncritical evocations of patriarchal power and the rights of primogeniture and an unequivocally admiring stance toward its male-centered "code of honor," the very elements of late nineteenth-century *rancho* life that González obliquely critiques in *Dew on the Thorn*. As ethnographer Renato Rosaldo has noted, "If taken literally," Paredes's "idealization of primordial patriarchy" seems "both pre-feminist" and "implausible." Rosaldo continues, "How could any human society . . . function without inconsistencies or contradictions? Did patriarchal authority engender neither resentment nor dissent?"⁵⁵ In *Dew on the Thorn* González unpacks the workings of "patriarchal authority" to demonstrate how and why it engendered not only "resentment" and "dissent," but also, tellingly, madness.

Contemporary critics might argue that Paredes was merely reflecting the gendered assumptions of his time in these evocations, but this is only partially true. In fact, the masculinist utopia evoked in the first few pages of *With His Pistol in His Hand* serves an important rhetorical purpose: it adds a heroic dimension to what is essentially a counterhegemonic reading of social banditry. Rosaldo suggests that we read Paredes's "idealization of primordial patriarchy" not as a transparent representation of late nineteenth-century *rancho* life, but as a "poetic vision" that "establishes the terms for verbally constructing the warrior hero as a figure of resistance. It enables Paredes to develop a conception of manhood rhetorically endowed with the mythic capacity to combat Anglo-Texan anti-Mexican prejudice."⁵⁶ Indeed, Paredes's vision of the borderlands as a patriarchal utopia forms the very foundation upon which his narrative of loss, resistance, and revenge is built. For her part, González chose to stake her rhetorical claims on different grounds, refusing to invoke a heroic past in her own narrative of loss and resistance. Instead she offered a poetic examination of the oppressive ideologies and social contradictions that fractured the *Tejano* community along race, gender, and class lines even before the influx of Anglos and the agricultural boom.

This is, perhaps, the most important contribution that González makes in *Dew on the Thorn*. Her complex vision of social history—ever attendant to the racial, class, and especially gendered dimensions of historical experience—problematizes the heroic masculinist narrative that Chicana/o scholars and activists inherited from *With His Pistol in His Hand*. Through an analysis of the gendered dimensions of the heroic narratives of folklore—and folklore studies—*Dew on the Thorn* initiates a theoretical process that, like the "borderlands" feminism of Gloria Anzaldúa, acknowledges the "complications and intersections of the multiple systems of exploitation: capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy" in the construction of border subjects.⁵⁷ This intervention made *Dew on The Thorn* unique in the field of folklore studies in the 1930s, and is no doubt one of the reasons that it was never published during González's lifetime. By 1938, it appears that González gave up trying to see *Dew on the Thorn* through to publication and moved on to other projects: teaching, politics, and, most intriguingly, fiction writing. It was during this time that she began her epic work, *Caballero*, a collaborative historical novel that would examine border subjectivity at the crossroads between U.S. imperialism and traditional *Tejano* patriarchy. This novel, coauthored with Margaret Eimer, an Anglo woman, would offer perhaps the earliest textual articulation of borderlands feminism in the twentieth century.

PART TWO

Re-Writing Culture

Storytelling and the Decolonial Imagination

With the loss of Ethnographic Authority, the subjects about whom we write now write back, and in so doing pose us as anthropological fictions.

KAMALA VISWESWARAN, *FICCTIONS OF FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY*

I write fiction not only because I have a passion for literature, but also because I am frustrated with history's texts and archives.

EMMA PEREZ, "QUEERING THE BORDERLANDS"

The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story. As a research tool . . . story telling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the "diversities of truth" within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control.

LINDA TUHIWAI SMITH, *DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES*

In the winter of 1936, Zora Neale Hurston was in Haiti conducting research for her blurred-genre ethnography, *Tell My Horse*. Funded by a Guggenheim fellowship, she spent her days traveling across the country interviewing politicians, workers, and voodoo priests. Her nights were spent in an artistic fever, writing a story that had been "dammed up" inside of her since her final departure from New York earlier that year. She worked on the project intensely, often writing late into the night after a full day of collecting. At the end of seven weeks, she had completed her second novel and perhaps her greatest contribution to Black letters, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston covered some familiar ground in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, returning to the scene of her first ethnographic adventure, Eatonville. But this time she ventured beyond Joe Clarke's storefront

porch—the backdrop for men’s talk—and into the store itself, examining the hidden consciousness of the woman behind its counter.

That same year, thousands of miles away in Del Rio, Texas, Jovita González was putting the finishing touches on what was to be her last major piece of institutional scholarship. The year before she had been commissioned to design a special display of photographs, short biographical narratives, and material culture for the Texas centennial celebration in Dallas. The historical display she created, titled “Catholic Heroines of Texas,” highlighted the role of *Mexicanas* in the founding of Texas. By the end of 1936, González was considering writing a history of Catholic women in Texas and was collecting information from sources across the state.¹ It was perhaps her research on this subject, as well as the triumphalist mood of the centennial year, that inspired González to reach across the divide that separated Anglos from Mexicans in Texas and begin working on a collaborative novel with her friend Margaret Eimer. *Caballero*, the historical novel that they wrote together, traces the lives of a *ranchero* family during the U.S.-Mexico War (1846–1848) and offers a feminist re-articulation of Texas history centered on the complexities of life in the borderlands.

Just a few years later, in 1940, Ella Deloria found herself in North Carolina studying a mixed-race community in Robeson County. The community, known at the time as the “Su-ons,” claimed Native heritage but had lost most of the linguistic and cultural traditions that might have connected them to the other Native communities with whom they sought kinship through shared history. Deloria’s work among this community crystallized her thinking about the importance of Indigenous women to kinship and cultural survival, a theme that emerged through the intricate web of social and familial relations that she documented in *Waterlily*, a novel that she began just six months after her work in Robeson County was finished. Deloria wrote *Waterlily* alongside two other manuscripts she produced during this period: *Speaking of Indians* (1944), her nonfiction book geared toward missionaries working in Indian country, and *The Dakota Way of Life*, the ethnographic monograph that she wrote for the American Philosophical Society. While she focused a good deal of energy on all three projects, it was *Waterlily*—a novel that centered on the lives of women in Dakota culture—that spoke intimately and eloquently to Indian people themselves.

That Hurston, González, and Deloria each chose to reformulate their ethnographic research into novels suggests a shared dissatisfaction with the limitations of ethnographic modes of meaning making, both in terms of narrative and audience. But it also suggests a dialectical approach to imagining history—an approach that operates both as a critical apparatus and a

potential source for new “decolonizing” narratives. This approach, to paraphrase Ruth Behar, has the potential to inscribe different endings onto the tragic narratives of colonialism and imperialism. Indeed, feminist anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran has cogently argued that these early works of ethnographic fiction by women of color function as decolonizing texts in that they simultaneously employ and subvert ethnographic discourse in an effort to call its descriptive power into question.

By self-consciously identifying as “fiction” while clearly drawing from ethnographic and historical “facts” for their subject matter, ethnographic fictions problematize ethnography’s claims to mimetic truth telling. For example, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* recalls the scenes of Hurston’s popular folklore book *Mules and Men*—Joe Clarke’s storefront porch in Eatonville and a rowdy migrant camp in Polk County—deploying these real fieldwork sites as backdrops for a fictional account of a Black woman’s coming to consciousness, an account that resembles, curiously enough, an emerging ethnographic form, the life history. Similarly, *Waterlily* presents a vision of Dakota communal life through a mode of historical realism that mimics the “realist” ethnographies and life history narratives of the Boasian generation but does so from the inside out, centering on the perspectives of three generations of native women. Though *Waterlily*, like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, suggests the life history in its *bildungsroman* form, it revises the individualist ethos of this ethnographic form in an effort to tell a collective “story of a people.” Finally, *Caballero* incorporates dense folkloric detail into an overarching historical romance narrative, a combination that slyly signifies on both the actual narrative practices and the ideological orientation of the discourses on Texas folklore and history in the 1920s and 1930s. Just as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Waterlily* call into question the epistemological limits of Western knowingness in their representation of ethnographic “data” as the stuff of fiction, *Caballero*’s figuration of history and folklore as romance threatens to expose the realist grounds of Texas history and folklore studies “as a constructed referent rather than as a ‘natural’ state of existence.”²

Given the subtle evocations of ethnographic meaning making in these novels, feminist anthropologists like Louise Lamphere, Ruth Behar, and Visweswaran have argued for the inclusion of Deloria, Hurston, and González’s fiction within the canon of anthropological writing. However, they also acknowledge that these works address issues of history, agency, and politics that move them far beyond the scope of contemporary disciplinary debates about ethnographic writing and the history of anthropology.³ Visweswaran points out that “to note only that these women an-

thropologists also produced novels is to lose sight of the ways in which each came to literature, and the conflicting currents of race and class [and gender] that marked their textual production.”⁴ In other words, while these ethnographic fictions undermine the norms of ethnographic meaning making by signifying on its narrative forms and rhetorical gestures, they also rewrite the *content* of classic ethnographies by incorporating subjects and narratives normally excluded from ethnographic discourse into their representations of social reality.

Indeed, though the worlds imagined in the pages of *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* were drawn from both personal experience and ethnographic research, the experiences of the (largely female) personas that populate those worlds exceed the narrative bounds of the classic ethnographic novel in that they engage with many of the key political concerns of American Indian, African American, and Mexican American communities in the 1930s and 1940s. As such, they are something more than mere re-presentations of ethnographic data in a more palatable popular form.⁵ For example, though reminiscent of the “life history” narratives that were increasingly popular in 1940s anthropological circles, *Waterlily* also deploys a utopian vision of pre-contact Dakota life that seems to offer an alternative model for social organization and survival to the post-assimilationist generation that followed Wounded Knee. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* doesn’t just offer a vivid and subjective picture of the context in which Black folklore is elaborated; it also wrestles with questions of gender oppression, colorism, and community cohesion within African American culture, North and South. In like manner, while *Caballero* offers up pages of dense folkloric detail, it does so through an overarching narrative of cross-cultural romance that speaks directly to the complicated political reality of Anglos and Mexicans in 1930s Texas.

Moreover, while these novels press implicit political agendas against the purely descriptive boundaries of ethnographic fiction, they also offer something that was conspicuously absent in American Indian, Mexican American, and, to a lesser degree, African American literary production in the 1930s and 1940s: they center on the historical experiences of women of color. This focus on gendered experience suggests an emergent feminist consciousness at play in the imaginary worlds of *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero*, a consciousness that addresses many of the theoretical concerns of contemporary writing by women of color. As such, they represent important historical articulations of an epistemology particularly to women of color. In “Cartographies of Struggle,” Chandra Mohanty points out that writing has always been a key site of struggle for

third world women and suggests that contemporary feminists should examine the literary production of women of color more closely for the innovative ways in which their writing has functioned as a discursive intervention against colonialist efforts to write them out of the historical picture.

For Mohanty, the historical recovery of the hidden tradition of writing by women of color is important not only as a “corrective to the gaps, erasures, and misunderstandings of hegemonic masculinist history,” but also because “the very practice of remembering and rewriting” involves imagining new forms of “politicized consciousness and self identity.” Mohanty consequently sees the act of writing as not simply an elite pastime or avocation, but as a theoretical process with conscious political overtones. For women of color the written word has provided “a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself. . . . It [is] imperative that we rethink, remember, and utilize our lived relations as a basis for knowledge. Writing (discursive production) is one site for the production of this knowledge and this consciousness.”⁶

Many contemporary U.S. women of color, especially American Indian women writers (Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Joy Harjo, among others), have explored how writing and storytelling unmask and unmake the relations of rule that underlie colonialist logics. In their introduction to *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, an anthology of contemporary Native women's writing, Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo stress the decolonizing power of language, noting that “to speak, at whatever the cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction.” For Bird and Harjo, language has the power “to heal, to regenerate, and to create.” And though the “colonizer's language”—as embodied in legal, ethnographic, and popular discourse—has both “usurped” and “diminished” tribal languages and handed back mere “emblems” and “images” of a culture that once belonged to tribal peoples, it is the responsibility of tribal writers and storytellers to reinvent these “enemy languages” and to transform them into a decolonizing idiom. Their call is not for a retrenchment into past, precolonial realities, but for a kind of reverse appropriation that utilizes the language of the colonizer “to mirror an image of the colonized to the colonizers” and thereby initiate a discursive “process of decolonization.”⁷

As I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, Deloria, Hurston, and González engaged in this process of reappropriation by deploying the “enemy's language” in the interests of their own communities. In their novels they reshaped ethnographic data into fictional representations of social reality that not only exposed ethnographic discourse itself as a product of the colonizing imagination but also rejected the mimetic limitations

of this colonizing discourse. Fiction writing offered Deloria, Hurston, and González the freedom to explore alternative resolutions to the hegemonic narratives that had written colonized communities, and especially women in those communities, into the margins of history. Their storytelling corrected the fictions about exotic Others that had been circulating for centuries, but it also engaged with this fictive discourse at the level of form, contesting the dominant logics (of authorship and authority) that naturalize asymmetrical relations of rule. Reframed as decolonizing projects, *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* emerge as novels that address audiences and issues beyond the academic sphere and outline alternative—even utopian—modes of imagining history, agency, and consciousness.

The centrality of gendered experience in *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* represents something more than a simple thematic shift, for it tilts the axis of descriptive power toward the very voices that struggled to be heard in Deloria, Hurston, and González's ethnographic texts. It also enabled these authors to resolve some of the dilemmas that they faced when writing about the communities of not-so-different Others that they studied. As I have argued in previous chapters, Deloria, Hurston, and González developed methodologies and modes of expression that helped them to contend with their contradictory identities as “outsiders within” in multiple sites of meaning making. While in the field, they embraced innovative methodologies that responded to the epistemological and ontological realities of the communities that they studied. When it came to writing narratives about their experiences in the field, Deloria, Hurston, and González addressed their contradictory locations as outsiders within by deploying rhetorical strategies that served both the interests of the communities they studied and the desires of the audiences that they imagined would read their work. This is evident in the ways in which each author blurred the lines between outsider and insider by adopting a complex voice that could speak authoritatively as both “ethnographer” and “native.” This narrative strategy provided them with a comfortable position from which to speak about their communities, even as it presumed a certain distance from both the insiders they studied and the outsiders with whom they shared ethnographic information.

While this strategy granted a greater degree of ethnographic authority to native epistemologies and viewpoints, the voices of women in the communities Deloria, Hurston, and González studied remained circumscribed, emerging only occasionally to offer (sometimes mute) commentary on the workings of patriarchal power. And though the women who populate the

pages of their ethnographic texts interrupt the gendered dynamics of anthropology's conversation among men, they generally do so from the margins. Mrs. Brown Elk's running commentary on her husband's version of history, the verbal sparring between men and women on Joe Clarke's storefront porch, and the madwomen that haunt the haciendas represent, at best, an interjection of the female voice into a creative universe still governed by the voices and the perspectives of men. When Deloria, Hurston, and González turned their considerable imaginative capacities to fiction, and more importantly to novels that centered on the lives of women in the communities they studied, they opened up a narrative space for more nuanced and complex gendered analyses of their communities and of historical experience itself.

But the turn to fiction also expanded rhetorical possibilities for the articulation of authority itself. In most ethnographic writing of the period—from the realist monographs of the Boasian school to the blurred-genre texts of popular folklore books—the speaking subject at the center of the text drew authority from the ability to capture the experiences of “exotic” Others and present them convincingly and compellingly. As Arnold Krupat, James Clifford, and many others have noted, novels also embrace this observational and relentlessly objectifying representational stance, but their authority as narrative reflections of human experience does not necessarily rely on the distance between the implied storyteller and the subjects of the story. Indeed, fiction—and all creative writing—enables a broad variety of relations between implied storytellers, their stories, and the presumed audiences to whom they speak.

In their turn to fiction, Deloria, Hurston, and González enacted a key shift in the authorial relations that governed their texts—a shift that is evident in the speaking subjects at the center of their novels. No longer a native ethnographic subject who translates or mediates between the world of the insider and the world of the outsider, the authorial voice now crosses the insider/outsider boundary line to speak with the fully embraced authority of an insider. The turn to fiction then represents a radical revision of both ethnographic authority and authorship itself, a revision that grants epistemic privilege to perspectives of women of color.⁸ In their fiction, Deloria, Hurston, and González embraced a mode of authority and authorship through which they could more effectively “rethink, remember, and utilize” their own lived experiences as women of color. This mode of authority, expressed in the shift from ethnographic description to storytelling, moves beyond the dialogic boundaries of ethnographic meaning making in that it speaks *from* difference instead of merely describing it. What dis-

tinguishes this kind of storytelling from other narrative traditions like the ethnographic monograph (*The Dakota Way of Life*), the folklore adventure (*Mules and Men*), or even the novelized account of folk practices (*Dew on the Thorn*) is that it centers authority and exchange within the communities of women of color from which these stories emerge.

In *Reading across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance*, Shari Stone-Mediatore has argued that storytelling, which is the primary mode through which “marginal experience narratives” are articulated, enables the production of critical knowledge about history, identity, and experience that “[destabilizes] dominant discursive logics and [highlights] aspects of life that are occluded by those logics.”⁹ This is certainly true for *Waterlily*, a narrative that draws readers into the camp circle and deftly educates them in the guiding principles of Dakota society, thereby assimilating them to its internal logic. *Waterlily*’s focus on kinship obligations and relatedness—which stands at the center of Dakota culture and is thus an overarching theme of the novel—is something more than simply a fictional elaboration of an ethnographic “fact.” Indeed, if we accept that kinship is the center of the Dakota way of life, as the novel literally teaches us to do, then the dominant vision of the Sioux as a culture centered on war is revealed to be false—a “dominant discursive logic” that functions as a rationale for genocide and colonization.

When stories address questions of history, agency, and marginalization, they can also illuminate previously unknown experiences and thereby “throw new light on the structure of historical reality and historical knowledge.” For example, in *Caballero*, Jovita González and her coauthor, Margaret Eimer, present Texas history as a dialogic encounter between Anglos and Mexicans; redistributing historical authority in a manner that undermines the (mono)logic of historical mythmaking in 1930s Texas. This collaborative vision of history is articulated against a plot structure that traces the decline of a Mexican patriarch. In this way *Caballero* exposes the mutual imbrication of patriarchal authority and singular notions of “authorship,” elaborating a complex feminist critique of dominant historiography. Stone-Mediatore argues that it is precisely the narrative flexibility of stories like *Caballero* and *Waterlily*—their simultaneous reference to and departure from the norms of supposedly objective dominant discourses—that enables them to respond more adequately “to the inchoate, contradictory, unpredictable aspects of historical experience” and thereby “destabilize ossified truths and foster critical inquiry into the uncertainties and complexities of historical life.”¹⁰

Storytelling reframes history and destabilizes dominant logics that rely

on the objectification of “marginal” subjects, but it can only do so through a process of theoretical mediation. In other words, the experience of marginality is not, in and of itself, liberating; what transforms “obscure experience into critical knowledge” is the theoretical lens through which we come to understand, interpret, and eventually narrate events (either personal or historical).¹¹ This is why *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston’s story of Black female empowerment has such resonance for contemporary feminists of color. The novel’s framing device—essentially a life history told by Janie Crawford, its central protagonist, to her friend Pheoby Watson—suggests not only the transformation of mute experience into narrative, but also the ways in which storytelling can express a theoretical perspective particular to the experiences of Black women. Stories of experience like Janie Crawford’s do not merely question the grounds upon which historical, ethnographic, and sociological discourses lay claims to “truth,” they also produce new ways of seeing the world and new forms of resistance. In short, storytelling enables the transformation of women of color from objects of theory into theory-making subjects.

What I want to suggest here is that like contemporary women of color writers, Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González used storytelling as a tool not only to counter the theories of culture, history, and subjectivity that had informed and even justified “the narratives of romance or death that have been, for women, the cultural legacy from nineteenth-century life and letters,” but also to create new theories of existence based on their own lived experience as women of color.¹² As Stone-Mediatore observes, storytelling is an eminently dialogic practice: “Simultaneously creative and historically rooted,” it is a representational discourse that revises accepted accounts of the past in the interest of uncovering as yet “unspoken and untheorized aspects” of historical experience itself. In this sense, storytelling, like most native ethnography, performs a corrective function in culture because it reveals previously occluded, ignored, or misrepresented experiences, but it also reframes these experiences from the perspective of marginalized subjects. Storytelling therefore has the potential to transform embodied experience into critical knowledge. This critical knowledge moves beyond a merely corrective (and presumably transparent) account of history—what one might term a counterhistory—because, at its best, storytelling disrupts the reductive logic that stands at the heart of all narrative claims to “truth,” whether hegemonic or counterhegemonic. By turning a critical lens on the complexities of experience, both historical and personal, storytelling has the capacity to ground “political thinking in historical reality while highlighting the plurality, complexity, and unpredictability

of that reality.”¹³ Storytelling is thus both a deconstructive and a productive theoretical gesture.

Understanding the importance of storytelling, writing, and remembering to the intellectual traditions of women of color is key to uncovering both their shared history of struggle and their distinct but nevertheless interconnected strategies of resistance. Moreover, in their explorations of writing as a site of struggle over the power to describe one’s lived experience, one’s social condition, and one’s place in history, feminists of color have recuperated literature as a legitimate site of resistance that connects women across communities and generations. As Mohanty notes, “Not all feminist struggles can be understood within the framework of ‘organized’ movements.” Indeed, she continues, “Questions of political consciousness and self-identity are a crucial aspect of defining third world women’s engagement with feminism. And while these questions have to be addressed at the level of organized movements, they also have to be addressed at the level of everyday life in times of revolutionary upheaval as well as in times of ‘peace.’”¹⁴ Though political activism remains a key context through which U.S.–third world feminist struggle is enacted, contemporary women of color in the U.S. still see in cultural production a primary site of struggle, as is evident in the multitude of anthologies and collections of essays, poetry, and short stories that have appeared since the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* in 1981.

As Gloria Anzaldúa, one of the editors of that volume points out, “In the process of creating the composition, the work of art, the painting, the film, you’re creating the culture. You’re rewriting the culture, which is very much an activist kind of thing. Writers have something in common with people doing grassroots organizing and acting in the community: It’s all about rewriting culture.”¹⁵ Deloria, Hurston, and González’s experiments with fiction are important historical examples of Anzaldúa’s concept of rewriting culture through the languages, forms, and epistemological perspectives of marginalized subjects. For women of color, rewriting culture also means moving beyond the boundaries of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic conceptions of subjectivity, resistance, and history. As a political act that happens in the discursive realm, rewriting culture constitutes a form of praxis for women of color, a theory-making process that illuminates new ways of examining social relations and initiates epistemic transformation.

Indeed, as anyone who has taught a course on women of color can attest, essays, short stories, autobiography, novels, and poems have constituted a primary terrain for theory making for contemporary women of color, con-

tinuing a tradition of counterdiscursive storytelling that, as Barbara Christian suggests, reaches far back into the oral traditions of our foremothers:

People of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing . . . is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since the dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? And women, at least the women I grew up around, continuously speculated about the nature of life through pithy language that unmasked the power relations of their world. It is this language, and the grace and pleasure with which they played with it, that I find celebrated, refined, critiqued in the works of writers like [Toni] Morrison and [Alice] Walker.¹⁶

Like the short stories, novels, and poems of contemporary women of color, the women-centered narratives produced by Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González encoded resistance through “the practice of writing and remembering” and created “alternative spaces for survival” through their examinations of the self, identity, history, and gendered consciousness.¹⁷ Their narrative retellings of individual and community histories in *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* therefore bear witness to the emergence of a theoretical and political consciousness in formation, a consciousness that encodes the centrality of gender to subjectivity, colonialism, and historical experience.

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“All My Relatives Are Noble”

Recovering the Feminine in *Waterlily*

Deloria knew perfectly well what was expected of ethnographic writing, and produced reams of it. But she was not at ease with it, and rebelled in letter after letter. What a relaxation it must have been to speak of Waterlily and her family rather than of “Ego” and “his affines.” To be the omniscient author about and within her culture! . . . In Waterlily, Deloria’s presence could disappear among the People, an omniscient author within and concealed by her culture, everywhere and nowhere.

SUSAN GARDNER, “THOUGH IT BROKE MY HEART . . .”

Through all the centuries of war and death and cultural and psychic destruction have endured the women who raise the children and tend the fires, who pass along the tales and the traditions, who weep and bury the dead, and who never forget. There are always the women, who make pots and weave baskets, who fashion clothes and cheer their children on at pow-wow, who make fry bread and piki bread, and corn soup and chili stew, who dance and sing and remember and hold within their hearts the dream of their ancient peoples—that one day the woman who thinks will speak to us again, and everywhere there will be peace. Meanwhile we tell the stories and write the books and trade tales of anger and woe and stories of fun and scandal and laugh over all manner of things that happen every day. We watch and we wait.

PAULA GUNN ALLEN, *THE SACRED HOOP*

In the summer of 1940, just six months before she began the process of transforming ten years of field notes into three separate manuscripts—*The Dakota Way of Life*, *Speaking of Indians*, and *Waterlily*—Ella Deloria found herself in Pembroke, North Carolina. She had been drawn there by the promise of six months of steady pay. Her assignment—under the joint

auspices of the Farm Security Administration and the Indian Service—was to study the linguistic and cultural practices of a mixed-race community in Robeson County.¹ The community, variously known as the “Croatan,” “Cherokees,” “Siouans,” or “Su-ons,” claimed Indigenous origin and had been petitioning the federal government for recognition since shortly after the Civil War. Though they were recognized as an Indigenous population by the state of North Carolina, they had yet to receive federal recognition.² Deloria’s task was to use her ethnolinguistic expertise, not to determine whether the Indians of Robeson County constituted an “authentic” Indian tribe, but to “work up a community pageant” that would raise national awareness about the group and their culture.³ She was to accomplish this task in consultation with both anthropologists like Benedict and Boas and artists like noted playwright Paul Green, the state poet of North Carolina, who had written and directed his own pageant entitled the “The Lost Colony.”⁴ This was the kind of assignment that Zora Neale Hurston would have relished. Throughout the 1930s Hurston experimented with the idea of folk performance, frequently translating the folklore she collected into performance genres. In fact, earlier that year, she had been close by, teaching theater at North Carolina College for Negroes and attending a weekly playwriting seminar taught by Paul Green. She even considered collaborating with Green on a play based on her short story “John De Conqueror.”⁵

While Deloria was a scientist first and foremost, she was no novice to performance genres. She had studied “pageantry construction and production” while at Columbia Teacher’s College, and shortly after her graduation she produced—with the open prairie as its backdrop—a bilingual Dakota-English pageant that depicted “the Church’s Mission to the Dakotas” for the annual convocation of the Episcopal Church.⁶ In the late 1920s, when she was teaching at Haskell, Deloria wrote and produced a pageant for the 1927 homecoming celebration. Entitled “Indian Progress: A Pageant to Commemorate a Half Century of Endeavor Among the Indians of North America,” Deloria’s production consisted of a series of tableaux representing the different historical phases of North American Indian life up to the 1920s. As Ann Ruggles Gere notes, “Indian Progress” was an important dramatic departure from previous years’ celebrations, which typically featured a dramatization of Longfellow’s “Hiawatha.” Because it was written from a Native perspective, “Indian Progress” replaced Longfellow’s mythical Indians with “actual people,” and thus “bolstered Indian pride.”⁷

If Deloria initially thought that she might replicate her Haskell success in Robeson County, she quickly discovered that her new assignment presented some immediate conceptual difficulties. Unlike the students at Haskell, the

Robeson County Indians had almost no linguistic or cultural traditions to "recover" and represent in a coherent dramatic form. "There is no trace of language among them except English," she noted in a letter to Boas. "Isn't that quite extraordinary? They want to be Indians so much; but can't produce a single bit of folklore or tradition or a word of Indian speech." Deloria nevertheless understood that she would have to create an Indigenous history for the Indians of Robeson County—imaginary, if necessary—that would give them "a chance to cooperate on something that would draw attention to them in a better light than they have been in for some time."⁸ So she temporarily laid aside her scientific rigor in the interests of therapeutic art and produced "The Life-Story of a People: From a Modern Questor's Notebook," a pageant based on historical research and interviews with the people of Robeson County. Deloria settled on a format for her pageant that was quite revealing: she told this "life-story of a people" through a single narrator, an actor dressed as a "serious research scholar" who reads from his notebook and "out of his notes . . . weaves a tragic story." It is a dramatic conceit that invokes the power of writing—native ethnographic writing in particular—to reconstitute a people, one that hints at how Deloria might have imagined herself at this juncture in her life as an anthropologist.

Deloria's work in North Carolina marked a turning point in her professional career. When she returned to South Dakota the following year she was ready to reconstitute her own people through writing, and she dedicated the next decade of her life to this task. Literary critic Susan Gardner has noted that the three texts that Deloria wrote during this amazingly productive decade—*The Dakota Way of Life*, *Speaking of Indians*, and *Waterlily*—essentially address the same task, albeit in different idioms: the "transmutation of oral, tribal materials into a foreign genre, an alien language, and for a new audience."⁹ But while all three of these texts "translate" the ethnographic observations, storytelling transcriptions, and life histories that Deloria collected under Boas and Benedict from 1927 to 1940, only her novel, *Waterlily*, tells the story of her people through the lives of its women. What accounts for this shift in focus? And, more importantly, what is at stake politically in *Waterlily*'s female-centered account of Dakota life?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to return to Deloria's cross-genre experiment with the Indians of Robeson County. During her time in North Carolina, Deloria wrote long and detailed letters to Ruth Benedict, Franz Boas, and Elaine Goodale Eastman. In these letters she often speculated on the root cause of culture loss among the Indians of Robeson County. Indeed, despite the lack of ethnographic evidence, Ella Deloria took the community's claims regarding their Indigenous roots seriously, and she

wondered if the absence of linguistic and cultural traditions among them might be traced to a specific historical event. “Might [it] be due to some-time in their history when all the mothers were non-Indian? I notice that in the Sioux country, children of white men and Indian mothers are steeped in folk-lore and language, but children of white mothers and Indian fathers are often completely cut off from the tribal folk-ways. If every Dakota woman disappeared today, and all the men took white wives, then the language and customs would die, but otherwise I do not see how they would.”¹⁰ This speculation marks an important shift in Deloria’s thinking about gender, culture, and tribal survival. Though she had always been interested in the questions of culture loss and cultural adaptation, the letters she wrote to Boas, Benedict, and Eastman in 1940 indicate that she had begun to think seriously about the connections between Indigenous women’s traditional roles and the preservation of tribal identity.

Deloria’s speculation about the Indians of Robeson County offers an intriguing, if geographically refracted, key to the gendered politics at the heart of her next experiment with cross-genre adaptation, *Waterlily*. Indeed, important parallels can be drawn between “The Life-Story of a People” and *Waterlily*, both of which were artistic productions that sought to reconstruct Indian communities through the artful blending of social scientific data with creative expression. But *Waterlily*, unlike “The Life-Story of a People,” depicts women as central protagonists in the story of a people, and thus offers a provocative and prescient gendered elaboration of the discourse of tribal revitalization. Despite this important intervention, few scholars have explored the political implications of *Waterlily*’s female-centered narrative to the politics of tribal survival, focusing instead on the anthropological context in which the novel was written or on its cross-cultural function as a text that reveals the psychological underpinnings of Dakota culture to a predominantly white audience. Such readings inevitably cast Deloria as a cultural mediator, someone who, in Janet Finn’s words, used her position in the “borderlands” between Indian and white worlds to “translate” her lived experience as a Dakota woman across cultural boundaries.¹¹ While Deloria’s self-representation in letters to non-Indian anthropologists and missionaries largely supports this view, I would like to suggest that Deloria, like most American Indian intellectuals, also envisioned her work as having relevance to her own people.

Indeed, Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey argues that Ella Deloria’s *primary* motivation for recovering Dakota linguistic and cultural traditions was to insure the survival of her people in the wake of government policies bent on destroying “the old ways.” While there can be little doubt that she was com-

mitted to correcting anthropological and literary misconceptions about her people through the production of mainstream texts designed for popular and academic audiences, Deloria clearly also figured herself as a modern-day keeper of tradition, one who utilized the "master's tools" not only to deconstruct the "master's house" but also to rebuild and revive the Dakota nation. Deloria's lifelong commitment to the field of education and, more pertinently, her innovative use of ethnographic materials to teach a new generation of D/L/Nakota children about history, kinship, and the "facts" of Dakota social life suggests that she understood only too well the connections between her ethnographic work and the politics of tribal survival.¹²

Because *Waterlily*, like "Indian Progress" and "The Life-Story of a People," was not simply an artistic project, but also a pedagogical one, its painstakingly detailed examination of precontact linguistic, cultural, and spiritual values represented something more than simply a humanization of Boasian codes of cultural description. Indeed, through her careful and sensitive illumination of "a scheme of life that worked," Deloria provided a generation of Dakota people with a primer on the purpose and function of the kinship system, figured in the novel as a sane model of social organization that had helped the Dakota endure and even thrive through the hardships of warfare, starvation, and sickness. The implication, of course, was that such a system might also help the Dakota recover from the economic and social devastations of the Assimilation Era, and, perhaps more importantly, provide them with culturally-appropriate tools for shaping their lives in the wake of Federal Indian policies that in the 1930s had called for the "re-organization" and "revitalization" of tribal governing structures based on anthropological notions about "authentic" Native culture.¹³ As such, *Waterlily* is a novel that contributes to and advances the discourse of tribal revitalization. That it does so through an intimate portrait of family life that foregrounds the role of women as cultural educators is worth noting, especially since Indigenous women's voices were so often silenced in the 1930s and 1940s, even as John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs under Roosevelt, proposed a new, tribally centered approach to Indian policy.¹⁴

The importance of kinship to both the narrative structure of *Waterlily* and its political project is all too often lost in critical interpretations of Deloria's work that focus primarily on her role as an interpreter of Dakota life to white audiences. Indeed, Lakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has argued that critical interpretations of Deloria's writing that focus on the author's role as a mediator between Indian and White worlds have seriously misunderstood the implications of her work to the nationalist struggle for tribal survival. She suggests that such misreadings are indicative of the gen-

eral indifference of “pedagogical models rising out of anthropology and literary/humanistic study centers” to exploring the nationalist foundations of Sioux intellectual production. According to Cook-Lynn, mainstream critics miss the point of Deloria’s ethnographic work—especially her interest in the kinship system—because they are unaware of the key themes and narrative strategies of Sioux literary practices, in particular, “the continuous overtracing of personal histories within the *tiospaye* concept . . . which is based upon blood and ancestral ties and lineage and is so much a part of the storytelling process.” The importance of the “*tiospaye* concept as a nationalistic forum for the people” goes unexplored, “in spite of the fact that the appropriate interpretation of traditional literatures suggests that nationalism is a major reason for their existence.”¹⁵ Cook-Lynn makes a compelling argument for contextualizing Deloria’s ethnographic interest in the Dakota kinship system within the struggle for tribal sovereignty and self-determination and for developing a mode of analysis that recovers Deloria’s ethnographic and literary work for a nation-centered political project.

Viewed within the political matrix of sovereignty, *Waterlily* emerges as a tribally-centered project that refracts the question of tribal survival through a gendered lens, and illuminates the workings of what Paula Gun Allen has called the “red roots” of feminism. Indeed, like Allen, Deloria turned to literature to reveal the importance of women to the survival of Indigenous values and histories, a gesture that not only reverses popular notions of Native women as oppressed, silent drudges, but also places “the grandmothers” as key figures in Indigenous struggles for survival. Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey points out that for Deloria, these two agenda—recovering the tribal and recovering the feminine—were intimately intertwined, because “she recognized from her own culture, from dealing with us, that [cultural regeneration] is vested in the women. So if we are going to make a resurgence, it *has* to come from the same place that it always was, with the women. And we have to understand that it’s *okay*, that our tradition always *has* been that the women are the ones that did this.”¹⁶ Indeed, she suggests that Deloria may very well have figured herself as continuing this feminine tradition by recording and preserving tribal knowledge through her ethnographic research.¹⁷ That Ella Deloria chose to tell the “story of the people” through the voices of its women in *Waterlily* suggests that she, like Godfrey, believed that women play a primary role in the continuation of tribal tradition and in the survival of a nation.

In his afterword to the novel, Deloria scholar Raymond J. DeMallie suggests that the reason Deloria chose to focus on women was that it was

the "only culturally appropriate way—as a Sioux woman," that she could accurately describe Dakota culture and insists that Deloria never intended for the book to be "construed as a feminist statement."¹⁸ True enough, in *Waterlily*, Deloria does not engage in the prototypical emancipatory tropes that we have come to associate with feminist writing, but such summary dismissals ignore the decolonizing effects of her representation of traditional Dakota life in a women-centered narrative. Although contemporary American Indian women writers seldom characterize their writing as strictly feminist, they do understand the importance of recovering the memories of the grandmothers to the nationalist project of tribal survival.¹⁹ In fact, contemporary articulations of "red feminism" speak precisely to the nexus between women and nation that *Waterlily* articulates, a crossroads that may seem contradictory to certain one-dimensional notions of feminism, but is a familiar landscape to most women of color, particularly Native women. Indeed Godfrey asserts that Ella Deloria's interest in Dakota women was neither purely ethnographic, nor a product of "western" feminism. Instead, her "interest in the women and girls really comes from way back into our law, the health of the nation rests on the backs of the women. That if our women are virtuous, if our women are moral, good mothers, caretakers, nurturing, etc., then our nation will be healthy. If our women are immoral . . . if they are not nurturers, if they are not caretakers, then our nation will be sick. Mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically, . . . women have to nurture the future." In this formulation, tribal survival as a nationalist agenda and women's mental, physical, and spiritual well-being as a gendered agenda are viewed not in opposition, as has often been the case in both nationalist and feminist discourse, but as mutually interdependent.

M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey corroborate Godfrey's view of the importance of healthy women to tribal survival in their essay "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America." They note, "Women have always formed the backbone of indigenous nations on this continent. Contrary to those images of meekness, docility, and subordination to males with which we women typically have been portrayed by the dominant culture's books and movies, anthropology, and political ideologues of both rightist and leftist persuasions, it is the women who have formed the very core of indigenous resistance to genocide and colonization since the first moment of conflict between Indians and invaders." However, the significance of Indian women as defenders of their national traditions, Jaimes and Halsey argue, has been diminished

through government programs designed to destroy tribal nations by attacking them at the mother-root—for example, replacing the kinship system of tribal organization with the patriarchal nuclear family model and indoctrinating Indians to European gender standards—and through colonialist discourse about Indians, which has very nearly erased the importance of Indigenous women throughout history as leaders, healers, warriors, and storytellers.²⁰

Like Godfrey, Jaimes and Halsey do not identify the traditional power that women hold in Indigenous cultures with mainstream feminism. Instead, they assert, “Many Indian women are uncomfortable [with feminist analysis] because they perceive it (correctly) as white-dominated.” Noting that white middle-class women have been the beneficiaries of the colonial exploitation of Indigenous peoples, Jaimes and Halsey point out that white feminists have too often criticized Indian gender relations without exploring the ways in which colonialism has transformed these relations. Moreover, by calling for the liberation of Indian women from the oppressive yoke of an imagined patriarchal Indian culture, these feminists have ignored the fact that Indian women have much more in common politically with Indian men than they do with white, middle-class feminists. Thus, the politics of Native feminism are first and foremost the politics of tribal survival; in turn, the nationalist agendas of sovereignty and self-determination are intimately intertwined with a women-centered Native feminist agenda.

Paula Gunn Allen has gone farther than most towards embracing a feminist perspective in her analysis of the importance of women in Indigenous cultures. Yet like Jaimes and Halsey, Allen insists “an American Indian woman is primarily defined by her tribal identity. In her eyes, her destiny is necessarily that of her people, and her sense of herself as woman is first and foremost prescribed by her tribe.” Allen’s linkage of the struggle for tribal survival to an understanding of the importance of women in tribal culture is central to the critical perspective that she terms “tribal feminism” or “feminist tribalism.”²¹ While Allen has been criticized by other Native women for her generalizations regarding the gynocratic foundations of Indian epistemologies and the role of gay and lesbian identities in “traditional” cultures, she has undoubtedly opened up an important space in which to rethink the ways in which patriarchal colonialist discourse has erased the historical significance of women to tribal survival.²² Allen suggests that both American Indian intellectuals and feminist critics should respond to the discursive erasure of Native women by “recovering the feminine” in American Indian textual and oral traditions. Through this discursive recovery project, elabo-



Figure 4.1. Portrait of Ella Deloria, circa 1940.
Courtesy of the Dakota Indian Foundation.

rated in her foundational book *The Sacred Hoop*, Allen hopes to introduce a potential source of spiritual and ethical renewal to American Indian intellectual discourse.

Some forty years prior to Allen's intervention, Ella Deloria offered her own women-centered tribal recovery project: in its depiction of the world of the Dakota through the eyes of its women, *Waterlily* reveals their importance to the transmission of tribal knowledge and the peaceful coexistence of tribal peoples. In the sometimes didactic description of the system of relations governing the *tiyospaye* in the pages of *Waterlily*, we see not only ethnographic data on kinship rendered in literary language, but also a potential roadmap for tribal survival in which men and women labor together with mutual respect to produce a healthy nation. In *Waterlily*, the undercurrent of "*tiyospaye* nationalism" that Elizabeth Cook-Lynn sees in Deloria's ethnographic focus on kinship is inflected with a vision of gender relations that, like the "tribal feminism" of Paula Gunn Allen, at once contests dominant representations of Indian men and women and reestablishes, once and for all, the primacy of women's roles as bearers and interpreters of tribal knowledge.

***Waterlily* and the Lessons of Kinship**

Ella Deloria began working on *Waterlily* shortly after completing her pageant project in North Carolina, but it took her nearly eight years to finish the manuscript. Ruth Benedict was instrumental in this process, at one point even procuring an editor who suggested massive cuts and trimmed the manuscript from an unwieldy 215,000 words (roughly 700 pages) to a much more manageable 100,000 words. In fact, Deloria may have initiated the project at Benedict's suggestion. Benedict read many of the life histories of elderly Dakota women that Deloria had recorded during the previous decade, and she no doubt wanted to insure that this information would reach a wider reading public. Deloria brought these testimonies to life in *Waterlily* through three key protagonists: *Waterlily*, the novel's eponymous heroine; her mother, Bluebird; and her grandmother, Gloku, all of whom offer a nuanced and empathetic picture of precontact Dakota culture. Their gendered experiences—of marriage, birth, child rearing, and death—illuminate a world that few people knew about in the 1940s. Indeed, the novel bears more than a passing resemblance to the classic life history, a form of ethnographic writing that was gaining popularity, at the time especially

among the new generation of feminist anthropologists associated with Ruth Benedict.

Life histories had been a feature of anthropological writing since the 1920s; Paul Radin's *Crashing Thunder*, published in 1926, stands as an emblematic example from the period. However, as Vincent Crapanzano notes, they were generally considered "somewhat of a conceptual—and an emotional—embarrassment to academic anthropology" and therefore "remained on the periphery of the discipline."²³ Inasmuch as life histories did constitute a legitimate form of ethnographic writing in the 1930s and 1940s, they were generally seen as only one part of the ethnographic whole: useful for rounding out the picture of a culture, but not entirely valid objects of analysis in and of themselves. However, there were a few anthropological outliers, mostly women, who argued for the relevance of the life history as a form of ethnographic writing. Ruth Benedict, in particular, was a proponent of the systematic analysis of life histories, arguing that they provided a lens through which anthropologists could study the impact of cultural norms on individuals. In her 1933 foreword to Ruth Underhill's groundbreaking ethnographic life history, *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman* (1936), Benedict complained that "businesslike" ethnographic accounts, so typical in standard monographs, recorded "only the formal outlines" of other cultures, "the techniques of planting and hunting; the form of marriage; the duties of relatives; the ways of doing magic and of getting supernatural power . . . all that is left out is what manner of men and woman these are and how they live and die and pursue their goals." Benedict celebrated Underhill's willingness to go beyond these boundaries to get a different story directly "from the lips of an old woman, her friend and confidante," a story "filled with achievements, with joys and sorrows that arose out of the substance of life among her people," that brings a "breath of life" to the "accuracy of an ethnologist's formal account."²⁴

Benedict's enthusiasm for the life history as a potentially illuminating (not to mention more readable) form of ethnography, no doubt influenced her willingness to work closely with Deloria on *Waterlily*. She may well have imagined that Deloria's novel would follow the formula laid out by Underhill in *Papago Woman*, or perhaps that of the short fictionalized life histories in Elsie Clews Parson's *American Indian Life*.²⁵ But Deloria did not—indeed, could not—follow the formal conventions of the anthropological life history. First of all, unlike Radin, Underhill, and Leo Simmons (who published the enormously popular *Sun Chief: Autobiography of a Hopi Indian* in 1942), she chose to think about the significance of a life that

was not so distinct from her own. But more importantly, while Deloria's fictional life history, like the realist life histories of her colleagues, traced the life, loves, and spiritual and intellectual development of its central protagonist from birth to maturity, its focus was collective, not individual—or perhaps more precisely, *Waterlily* revealed the mutual imbrication of these two domains of social identity in Dakota society.

Deloria deftly elucidates this principle by exploring the internal logic of kinship, the system of relationships that governed life in the Dakota social world, through the experiences of *Waterlily*, her central protagonist. Drawing the reader into the internal workings of *Waterlily*'s consciousness as she develops from a young girl who sometimes chafes against the strictures of kinship obligations into a mature young woman who eventually comes to understand the importance of these rules of behavior to the peaceful co-existence of the *tiyospaye*, Deloria artfully deploys the individualistic logic of the anthropological life history to communitarian ends.²⁶ More interestingly, she immerses the reader in *Waterlily*'s world, not as an outsider or an “objective” observer, but as a participant in the camp circle, figured in the novel as a rational, ordered social universe: a place with a past, a present, and most importantly, a future.

Waterlily and the other members of her *tiyospaye* group endure war, separation, plague, and the increasingly threatening presence of Whites in their territories, but through it all, they survive and even thrive because, in Deloria's words, “like the ash, [they are] resilient.” The key to this resilience is the kinship system. As Jace Weaver notes, “Kinship obligations are at the core of Deloria's novel,” and in this respect, the novel shares much with *Speaking of Indians*, Deloria's nonfiction book.²⁷ However, unlike *Speaking of Indians*, “*Waterlily* does not attempt to justify Dakota practices to a potentially hostile audience, but rather assumes the sympathy of the reader, and imbeds Dakota practices in a subtly elucidated cultural logic.”²⁸ Through *Waterlily*, the reader is essentially brought into the *tiyospaye* as a relative, as someone who participates in the system of relatedness that governs the camp circle. Once within this system, the reader is offered an insider's education as to the ways in which the kinship system represented “a scheme of life that worked” for the Dakota.

Through the lessons in Dakota manners and traditions offered by the women of the camp circle, Deloria replicates traditional Dakota pedagogical strategies, guiding her charges to “correct” behavior through gentle persuasion, vivid storytelling, and personal example. Jace Weaver has commented on the didactic tone of *Waterlily*, and certainly there is much in the

novel's structure that reminds one of a primer in proper Dakota behavior. But Deloria's attention to the manners and obligations that governed life in the *tiyospaye* is not simply a matter of conveying an accurate ethnological picture of the social conventions of an era long past. Instead, *Waterlily* attempts to *revive* the kinship system by offering an evocative guidebook that demonstrates the importance of kinship to the survival of the Dakota as a people.

In *Speaking of Indians* Deloria states unequivocally that through kinship "all Dakota people were held together in a great relationship that was theoretically all-inclusive and coextensive with the Dakota domain." As she explains it, kinship was not merely a logical way of keeping order in the camp circle; without kinship, that "great relationship" that held the Dakotas together, the people would cease to exist as a nation:

The ultimate aim of Dakota life, stripped of accessories, was quite simple: One must obey kinship rules; one must be a good relative. No Dakota who has participated in that life will dispute that. In the last analysis every other consideration was secondary — property, personal ambition, glory, good times, life itself. Without that aim and the constant struggle to attain it, the people would no longer be Dakotas in truth. They would no longer even be human. To be a good Dakota, then, was to be humanized, civilized. And to be civilized was to keep the rules imposed by kinship for achieving civility, good manners, and a sense of responsibility toward every individual dealt with.²⁹

In this passage, kinship is figured as a mode of social organization that distinguishes the Dakota from other peoples, and, in the Dakota way, human from nonhuman, civilized from uncivilized. For Deloria, then, kinship and the related *tiyospaye* concept signified the cultural, social, and tribal identity of the Dakota people. As she makes clear in *Speaking of Indians*, *The Dakota Way of Life*, and *Waterlily*, the *tiyospaye* concept was not simply a mode of cooperative social organization that enabled the Dakotas to survive the harsh realities of life on the Plains; it was, in fact, an "inner bond" that formed the very glue that held the Dakota together in the camp circle and beyond. In *The Dakota Way of Life*, Deloria notes that "beyond their physical togetherness, the really important fact was *tiyospaye* consciousness and interaction. This must always be, whether the related families lived in one camp circle, or were scattered far and wide in other camp circles. Their camping together and living cooperatively was but the expression of that

inner bond.”³⁰ Thus kinship was not simply a relic of a time long past; it was a concept that could, indeed *must*, be translated into “modern” environments and situations in order for the Dakota to survive as a people.

In a very material sense, then, *Waterlily* provides an object lesson in kinship, in the myriad ways through which one expressed one’s relatedness as a Dakota. This pedagogical aim is consolidated and continually emphasized through the depiction of both negative and positive models of social behavior. For example, the individualistic Whites who sparsely populate the pages of *Waterlily* are consistently offered as examples of a competing social ethos, an ethos generally condemned by the members of *Waterlily*’s band as “uncivilized” for the abusive child-rearing practices and atomized existence that it produces. However, the most stunning example of the tragic effects of the abandonment of the *tiyospaye* concept comes near the end of the novel, when *Waterlily* and her relatives are returning to their camp circle and encounter a Dakota family living in exile on the Plains:

Some strange people came in one evening, a surprise because it was far from any human habitation. There was a man and his wife, both well over fifty, two girls, their daughters, and three small children. One of the daughters was with child. As if she were their mother the little ones kept close to the man’s wife, a stupid-looking woman who said not a word more than necessary. Only the man talked, plausibly enough, accounting for their unexpected presence out there. But he was plainly evading the truth.

After they had gone, the warriors agreed that the man was probably a degenerate character who lived away from civilization, that is to say, the camp circle, because of some crime against society. It was impossible that his wife at her age could be the mother of those small children, and since the man was the only male, the conclusion was inescapable. “Something very bad” was the way the warriors voiced their suspicion, carefully avoiding the ugly equivalent of “incest.”³¹

Waterlily is amazed at the forward behavior of the man’s daughters with the warriors of her group and equally horrified at the behavior of the young children in the family, who react with disrespect and even “fear and hostility” toward her and the rest of her companions.

Here were unbelievably wild, untutored children. No one had ever said to them, “No, don’t do that . . . see, nobody does so!” and thereby shamed them into good behavior toward those about them. There were no others

about them from whom they might learn by imitation. And so they were growing up without civility—and the results were terrifying to see. Camp-circle people were civilized; they knew how to treat one another. They had rules. These children were wild because they lacked any standards of social behavior.

Waterlily is struck by these "unfortunate children, so unkempt and so hostile," and the scene inspires a veritable conversion experience for her. The children's unbelievable behavior causes Waterlily to reflect upon what she had considered to be the overly strict regulations that had governed her behavior as a young girl: "It came to her . . . how very much people needed human companions. It was the only way to learn how to be human. People were at once a check and a spur to one another." She concludes that the seeming rigidity of the social conventions governing camp life, "where everyone was obliged to be constantly aware of those about him, to address himself to them in the approved ways," was the only way that people learned "to be responsible for and to each other and themselves."³²

The dissolute family that Waterlily encounters living alone on the Plains seems a subtle reference to the atomized existence plaguing many of the families on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations, where Deloria carried out most of her ethnographic research, and where decades of assimilationist policies had led to the disintegration of *tiyospaye* values. It is not surprising, then, that she attributes the family's aberrant behavior to their physical disconnectedness from the camp circle and to their rejection of the *tiyospaye* concept. Like many of the other portents of disaster that disrupt the novel's generally utopian thrust—including an account of the introduction of smallpox through army-issue blankets and references to the increasing presence of firearms and alcohol among the camp circles that settled around newly established army barracks—this encounter with a dysfunctional nuclear family group seems an ominous indicator of things to come. But this extreme example of aberrant behavior also serves as a reminder within the narrative of the importance of the *tiyospaye* concept to the health of the Dakota nation. Every bit as destructive as the introduction of other European "innovations" among the Dakota—like smallpox, firearms, and alcohol—the break-up of tribalism and the kinship mode of social organization would lead the Dakotas to a degenerate and "uncivilized" state.

While this example and other examples of antisocial Dakota and Euro-American behavior remind the reader of how *not* to be a "good Dakota," the examples set by Waterlily's mother, grandmother, and aunts serve as idealized models for Waterlily and others to follow. Perhaps the most inter-

esting narrative strategy of the novel is the way in which it mirrors Deloria's own pedagogical concerns through the teaching practices of Waterlily's mother, grandmother, and aunts. Throughout the novel, these women instruct Waterlily and her siblings on their kinship obligations, offering advice on proper behavior and subtly steering them to make "correct" life decisions with the interests of the *tiyospaye* in mind. Their pedagogical style is rarely overt; they do not chastise the children or resort to corporal punishment (something abhorrent to the Dakota). Instead, they teach through example: in their behavior as good relatives, the women (and men) of the *tiyospaye* group serve as models for appropriate behavior for the younger generation.

For example, when the mothers of Sacred Horse, a young man from a prestigious family, offer several magnificent horses in exchange for Waterlily's hand in marriage, she is at first reluctant to accept. Waterlily worries that because Sacred Horse is a stranger to her, she may not find him agreeable once she becomes his wife. More troubling to her conscience is the fact that she has kept a secret from her female relatives: she has fallen in love with Lowanla, a young singer that she encountered at a Dakota Sun Dance. However, a more pressing issue ultimately determines her decision: the kinship obligations she feels toward her uncle, Black Eagle, and her recently deceased grandmother, Gloku. The previous winter, shortly after Gloku's death, Black Eagle's daughter, Leaping Fawn, pledged to "keep her grandmother's ghost." The ghost-keeping tradition usually involved a one-to-two-year mourning period, after which time the ghost-keeper sponsors a redistribution of goods donated in honor of the deceased. Black Eagle had two "very handsome American horses" that he planned to give away in honor of his mother-in-law. Shortly before the ceremony, however, the horses are killed, and Black Eagle is left with nothing for the give-away.

After overhearing her aunts discuss the situation, Waterlily comes to understand that by accepting Sacred Horse's offer, and giving the two horses to Black Eagle as a replacement for those he lost, she might fulfill her kinship obligations to her uncle and by extension honor the memory of her grandmother. "Suddenly Waterlily was seized with a great obligation to honor the dead woman, a personal obligation. But was it also a kinship obligation? She would go to her mother to learn if she had a duty here which the tribe would expect her to fulfill. Blue Bird was the one to advise her; she had always done so, dispassionately, and had always been right." Waterlily enters her mother's tipi with the pretext of helping her with some moccasin work. After some moments of silence, she decides to ask her mother directly what she should do: "Mother, tell me straight. Do

you think I should agree to this marriage so that the horses can be used in the redistribution rites?" Expecting her mother to tell her that she needn't marry unless it is her wish to do so, Waterlily is instead given a soliloquy that deftly juxtaposes the unpredictable realities of marriage against the solid foundation of kinship.

Blue Bird remained silent for many moments. Then she spoke, choosing her words carefully. "Daughter, it is in the nature of things that women marry. . . . And some men, who seemed so appealing before marriage, turn out badly, and some, whose fine traits do not show up before marriage, turn out well. . . . It is like guessing in the moccasin game. One does not know till later."

Waterlily worked very rapidly, with a concentration out of all proportion to the simple task, and said nothing. Her mother spoke again: "As if from the dead, you and I and our old grandmother Killed-by-Tree came back here because this was where I was born. Our kinsman, my cousin and your uncle, made us welcome at once. He provided for us. His relatives through marriage had never seen us before, yet they did not act distant, but warmly took us into their life. Your new grandmother [Gloku] lavished as much love and compassion on you as on her own grandchildren. And she took constant care of you and kept you happy. I can truly say that you grew up on her back. For your ceremonies she always gave of her best, in your name. Thus she bought a great deal of social prestige for you.

"Now your uncle is worried because he cannot find horses good enough to replace the ones killed. He does not want just any horses. He wants the best, worthy of his mother-in-law.

"You are now of a woman's stature and have come to a woman's estate. You are no longer a child. You know how these kinship matters run. If you are able to do your own thinking, you will see what a good relative would want to do . . . but that you have to decide."

So that was it. Blue Bird had first implied the crisscross of kinship obligations that held the people together, impelling them to sacrifice for one another. Then she washed her hands of the matter. Now it was up to Waterlily, having those facts before her, to make up her own mind.³³

Blue Bird does not insist that Waterlily comply with her kinship obligations. Instead, through a retelling of their shared family story, she demonstrates that the key issue is the reciprocity that Waterlily owes to her kin. As a "grown woman," Waterlily must come to an understanding of her obligations to her uncle and her grandmother on her own, but through her

mother's subtle instruction, she is able finally to balance her individual desires with her understanding of herself as part of a larger community.

Waterlily's decision to set aside her feelings of love for another man and fulfill her kinship obligations is not simply an example of feminine self-sacrifice. It is an important turning point in the novel that signals her transformation from a child into a fully integrated member of her *tiyospaye* group, an individual of "a woman's stature." And Deloria rewards Waterlily's sacrifice via a narrative twist that brings her first love, Lowanla, back to her after her young husband's unfortunate death from smallpox. Indeed, if the kinship system first intervenes to prevent these lovers from coming together, it also functions as the *deus ex machina* that enables their eventual reunification, for Lowanla is revealed to be Sacred Horse's cousin. Deloria explains, "While kinship law did not demand that a widow marry a brother or cousin of her husband, it was always desirable for the child's sake, that he might have for a father one who was his father already." And so, when Lowanla pays a visit to Waterlily's *tiyospaye*, where she lives with her infant son, shortly after Sacred Horse's death, it seems only natural that he should explain, "I have come to take care of my son . . . if that is agreeable to you." It is; and Waterlily, having married once to fulfill kinship obligations, marries for a second time at the end of the novel for love *and* kinship. "Older and far wiser now; she had herself well in hand. She was marrying in a quieter mood and with tribal approval. For the Dakota woman nothing could be better than that."³⁴ In this instance rhetorical and political aims meld through kinship, which comes to signify the delicate and ultimately satisfactory negotiations of freedom and restraint that hold Dakotas together as a nation.

**"Her own mother's wisdom . . . was her guide":
Storytelling and Decolonization**

That Waterlily's difficult, though eventually happy, journey into womanhood is carefully monitored by her mother Blue Bird is no accident. Indeed, Blue Bird functions in the novel as a kind of stand-in for Ella Deloria, an idealized keeper of tradition who imparts the values and beliefs that constitute the "Dakota way of life" to her young charges and enables them to enter into the interconnected system of relationships that govern the *tiyospaye* as fully cognizant and self-determining adults. And like Deloria herself, Blue Bird utilizes storytelling to teach lessons in proper behavior,

acquaint children with family and *tiyospaye* history, and sometimes just entertain them.

In one particularly evocative instance, Blue Bird indulges in some imaginary playacting with her children that suggests another potential use for storytelling: decolonization. Midway through the novel, Waterlily recalls how on one "lovely afternoon," Blue Bird took Waterlily and her siblings for a walk and played a game, "hard times," in which they struggled against an imaginary storm. Pulling her wrap over her head like a tipi, Blue Bird drew her children close, offering a "running commentary about their 'awful plight'" that elicited "playful shudders" from her young children:

"Now . . . here we are . . . all alone . . . just us four. On a wide, deserted, strange prairie. Worst of all, we have so little food, and it is not likely we shall find any more . . . Oh dear, isn't it terrible? . . .

"All we have is this tiny shelter . . . only a makeshift and not at all secure . . . Well, at least it protects us . . . if only the wind would not blow so hard! . . .

"Come, Ohiya," the mother said, "a little closer in. Waterlily, pull the tent downward and hold it firm, there, back of you . . . Oh, for some anchoring pins! But there is no tree to cut from, alas. The wind grows worse, and colder. It could rip our shelter right off . . . Hold tight! Oh whatever shall become of us!" The children loved it—it was such fun to be so wretched when it was only play.

Ohiya added his bit of make-believe by crying, "Mother! Look at Smiling One, crawling out from under the tipi!"

"No, no, Smiling One, come back here or you will freeze! All of you, keep close so we can warm one another." They huddled still closer, in a tighter knot. And then Ohiya began to moan in great misery. "What is it my son?" "Mother, I am starving . . . soon I shall be dead. I have eaten nothing for three days and three nights . . ."

His mother was appropriately distressed, as she hastened to offer him food. "Here, son, I have a very little pemmican . . . a mere handful. But at least hold a bit of it in your mouth . . . don't swallow it . . . swallow the juice only . . . That will sustain you. It is what warriors sometimes have to do. . . .

"I wonder, Ohiya, whether the storm has spent itself . . . it seems suddenly very quiet. Just peek out and see." She said this to find out if the children were tired of the game. Far from it. At least Ohiya wanted to prolong it, for he stuck his head out and then jerked it back with teeth chattering

noisily. "Ouch! My ears are nearly frozen off, it is so cold . . . I think we must stay here some more."

Waterlily said, "Mother, in that case, tell us a story." And so Blue Bird told them not one story but two and then a third. They were the same little stories long familiar but always welcome—about the stupid bear; the deceitful fox; the wily Iktomi, master of trickery; and about Meadowlark and her babies.³⁵

This playful and tender scene seems much more than simply a description of the affectionate relations between Dakota mothers and their children. In fact, the "imaginary" storm that Waterlily and her siblings endure with the help of the shelter provided by their mother's wrap reminds readers familiar with *Speaking of Indians* of the startling metaphor that Deloria employed to describe the cataclysmic changes brought about by the "arrival of the newcomers, the *Wasicu* [White people]" in Dakota territory: "In its approach, the change resembled . . . a great storm marshaling its forces without haste as though making exact and sinister plans so that when finally it gets into action, it will be sure to make a thorough job of it—perhaps even killing many." However, unlike a real storm, the Dakota were caught unprepared by the sweeping changes that the "coming of the new order" held for them; they had no time to secure their *tipis* by "weighing down the base with heavy logs and driving anchoring pegs still deeper into the ground." The storm of colonialism brought those "death-dealing shafts" that forever changed Teton-Dakota life, the "mass slaughter of the buffalo, . . . the Custer fight, . . . the killing of Sitting Bull," and finally the "ghastly incident at Wounded Knee, in 1890, when innocent men, women, and children were massacred."³⁶

In *Speaking of Indians*, Deloria deploys the metaphor of the storm with brutal pessimism and represents its destruction of Dakota social life as a depressing inevitability; in *Waterlily*, however, the children are protected from the storm through Blue Bird's nurturing actions and her storytelling. In the end, the imaginary storm is domesticated and the children are soothed by Blue Bird's stories: the story of how Meadowlark saves her children by outsmarting the snake that coils around their nest and the account of stupid and oppressive Bear, who abuses the less powerful Rabbit until Rabbit's grandson, "Blood-Clot Boy," kills Bear and his progeny.³⁷ These stories, in which seemingly powerful figures are overcome through guile or the assistance of helpers from the spirit world, serve to remind the children that they have the power to combat even the most frightening and overpowering enemies.

Blue Bird's storytelling and Deloria's figuration of the storm that assails her children as imaginary also point to what Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Leslie Marmon Silko, Paula Gunn Allen, and other American Indian women writers have identified with the "decolonizing power" of Indigenous imaginative processes. As Cook-Lynn has observed (paraphrasing Silko), "The idea of decolonization . . . is dependent on writing [and storytelling] that has 'living power within it, a power that would bring all the tribal peoples in the Americas together to retake the land.'" Cook-Lynn observes that Silko "clings to the idea that the imagination plays a functional role in political and social life, an idea which most of the native traditionalists I have known have always held."³⁸ Indeed, the power of language and storytelling to create new realities is one of the central themes of Silko's *Ceremony*, in which the healer Betonie consistently reminds the central character Tayo that "we can deal with white people, with their machines and beliefs. We can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place."³⁹ Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo also consider traditional storytelling a source of decolonizing power among Indigenous peoples, reminding readers, "To speak, at whatever the cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction. In our tribal cultures the power of language to heal, to regenerate, and to create is understood."⁴⁰

Through the decolonizing power of storytelling, Indigenous mothers and grandmothers throughout history have, like Blue Bird, not only sheltered their children from the "storm" of colonization, but also inculcated within them the sustaining principles that are the key to deconstructing and eventually overcoming the oppressive power of colonialist discourses and practices. They have given generations of Indian people the tools for survival through years of colonization, violence, and assimilation. As Paula Gunn Allen writes, "My great-grandmother told my mother: Never forget you are Indian. And my mother told me the same thing. This, then, is how I have gone about remembering, so that my children will remember too."⁴¹ Through their artful stories, these women reveal the power of colonialist discourses to be, like the storm raging around Blue Bird and her children, imaginary. Like Bluebird, Ella Deloria was a powerful storyteller and teacher. By "reinventing the enemy's language," the language of ethnography and the social sciences, and weaving it into an intimate account of the sustaining principles of Dakota life, Deloria hoped to "turn the process of colonization around," and like contemporary American Indian women writers, elaborate an approach to literature that could "be viewed and read as a process of decolonization."⁴²

In the closing pages of *Waterlily*, Deloria offers one last glimpse of her

utopian Dakota world through the eyes of her heroine. As a contented Waterlily observes her kinswomen picking berries while she works alongside her cousin, Prairie Flower, on a hill above them, she reflects on the harmony of the scene. The vision Deloria describes through Waterlily is of a perfectly functioning, perfectly reciprocal unit, equally at ease in work and play, and most of all, secure in their interconnectedness:

All the familiar friends and relatives were nearby, the women working below and the members of the men's military societies stationed for the day out in those hills and distant peaks, ready to head off anything that might otherwise endanger the women. Somewhere in those hills her new husband was hunting game for her and for her baby, who slept at her elbow, while she worked at this task that seemed no task at all. She felt infinitely content.

And as she worked she smiled now and again, delighting in the dear sounds rising from the women below: unrestrained feminine laughter and good-natured banter, occasional mock-scolding or lusty joking by those with an earthy and robust bent, sudden cries of happy surprise upon the finding of another bush even more lavishly laden or with still bigger and sweeter berries, shouted warnings to mobile children forever gravitating toward danger or mischief the instant backs were turned.

. . . The two girls worked all morning without rest because the fruit came in so fast and there was so much of it. With a wooden mallet Prairie Flower crushed the berries lightly while Waterlily shaped the mash into small cakes, patting them firm with delicate finger before laying them on fresh leaves to dry in the sun. At noon they stopped to build a fire and began cooking for their party. All the workers, seeing smoke curling up from their respective headquarters, began making their way back.

Presently they were seated in jovial groups under their awnings, and while they ate, they told funny stories on one another and laughed and joked heartily in a holiday mood, sharing their fun by shouting across from group to group till nearly all were laughing at the same things. . . . A fresh sense of security swept over her and her future looked very good. She had everything, she thought. Her brothers, Little Chief and Ohiya, would give her all the social backing a sister could desire. Already both had honored their little nephew [her son] by giving gifts away in his name. Soon they would be teaching him to ride and hunt, and to protect himself and grow up to be a real man.

Her younger sister, Smiling One, was lovely in Waterlily's eyes, and her parents, so active and vigorous at their prime best, were ever selfless

and adoring of her—as she was of Mitawa [her son]. There were also her aunts, the blunt and well-meaning First Woman and the more delicate and sensitive Dream Woman, so mysterious and so good—they would always stand by her. It was the way of father's sisters and women cousins to overlook even one's faults out of loyalty to one's father, their brother. . . . Her uncles, Black Eagle and Bear Heart, out of loyalty to her mother, their cousin, stood second only to Rainbow in their readiness to help and protect her, should she ever need them.

"All my relatives are noble," she thought. "They make of their duties toward others a privilege and a delight." It was no struggle to play one's kinship role with people like them. When everyone was up to par in this kinship interchange of loyalty and mutual dependence, life could be close to perfect.⁴³

Such a scene—of beauty and tranquility, of the virtues of reciprocity and community, of a life before the ravages of colonization—does not, indeed *cannot*, emerge from an ethnographer's notebook. The scene does not merely describe "women's work" or "women's play." Through the use of evocative language it lays flesh on the people, brings them to life, to consciousness, and revivifies the dream of the camp circle. In short, the gendered utopia pictured in the final pages of *Waterlily* is the product of a decolonizing imagination. This scene and the novel as a whole attempts, through the feminine art of storytelling, to reverse the impact of colonization that "created chaos in all the old systems, which were for the most part superbly healthy, simultaneously cooperative and autonomous, peace-centered, and ritual-oriented."⁴⁴

Deloria's choice of women as the central narrative agents in her account of Dakota society represents a major shift for both ethnographic and literary representations of Sioux culture. In *The Sacred Hoop* Paula Gunn Allen speaks to the radical political implications that such a shift in focus can signify:

Strange things begin to happen when the focus in American Indian literary studies is shifted from a male to a female axis. One of the major results of the shift is that the materials become centered on continuance rather than extinction. This is true for both traditional tribal literatures and contemporary poetry, fiction, and other writings such as autobiography, journals, "as-told-to" narratives and mixed-genre works. The shift from pessimism to optimism, from despair to hope is so dramatic that one wonders if the focus on male traditions and history that has characterized the whole field

of American Indian literature and lore was not a part of the plot to exterminate Native American tribal peoples and cultures and to extinguish their aboriginal title to land, resources, and moral primacy in the Americas.⁴⁵

Though Allen is clearly speaking to the discursive production of an always vanishing, always male Indian, evident in both literary and academic texts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, her observation is also pertinent when we think about the modernist realism of texts produced by Indians themselves in the 1930s. Foremost among these are the important novels of John Joseph Mathews (*Sundown*, 1934) and Darcy McNickle (*The Surrounded*, 1936), both of which document the more depressing realities of twentieth-century American Indian existence. In both *Sundown* and *The Surrounded*, we see the destructive effects of the assimilation period's educational and economic policies through the eyes of alienated and disenfranchised Indian males.⁴⁶ Allen argues that the form of modernist realism employed by male authors like Mathews and McNickle relies on "conflict-based plots [that] require a tragic outcome if the relationships between Indian and white are represented with historical accuracy." In contrast, the works by Native women writers during the same period (her primary example is Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, the Half-Blood*, 1927) generally focus on "survival as the recovery of tradition."⁴⁷

Allen's observation raises interesting questions regarding Ella Deloria's choice of historical fiction as a vehicle for the unique vision of Dakota life offered in the pages of *Waterlily*. Indeed, setting the novel in the early nineteenth century, before the wholesale invasion of Whites into Dakota territory, enabled Deloria to offer a "realistic" historical picture of the Dakota without having to succumb to the requisite tragic ending found in most novels about Indians. Interestingly, as she was finishing up work on *Waterlily*, Deloria did consider writing a sequel to her novel: "If *Waterlily* comes somewhere near making it, I have another story plotted now; about a man who went to Hampton and came back with high hopes, and then got tangled up in the struggle of making his education worthwhile under the chaotic conditions of the transition of his people from the old to the new, and finally gave up. I knew such a man; he died in a hut. But he was quite a man, and he put up a great losing fight."⁴⁸ The fate of this sequel is unclear: whether Deloria began drafting it will most likely remain a mystery, since no version exists in her extensive archive. Nevertheless, that the novel she *did* write documented Dakota life before the devastations of the assimilation era suggests her reluctance to portray Dakotas as inexorably destined for extinction. The minutely detailed account of traditional social,

cultural, and spiritual values, and perhaps more importantly, the expression of these values offered in and through the women who inhabit *Waterlily's* world, offered a model for survival to her literate Indigenous contemporaries—a model that embodied the “shift from pessimism to optimism” that Allen sees as the end result of “recovering the feminine in American Indian tradition.”

In the voices of its women, and through their persistent struggle to keep Dakota traditions alive in the face of war, famine, and disease, *Waterlily* offered a picture of Dakota life that was focused on continuance and survival. Ella Deloria's dedication to “keeping her grandmother's ghost”—to textually inscribing the memories of the grandmothers, the mothers, and the aunties into the nationalist struggle for tribal survival—represents an early, and for the most part overlooked, intervention against both popular and scientific discourses that had erased these women's voices from the historical record. Like Paula Gunn Allen, Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, and other Native women storytellers, Deloria understood that the “failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same as being lost—isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated,” an abhorrent fate for any Dakota.⁴⁹

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“De nigger woman is de mule uh de world”

Storytelling and the Black Feminist Tradition

Woman should not be compelled to look to sexual love as the one sensation capable of giving tone and relish, movement and vim to the life she leads. Her horizon is extended.

ANA JULIA COOPER, *THE WOMAN’S ERA*

We help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

AUDRE LORDE, “POETRY IS NOT A LUXURY,” *SISTER OUTSIDER*

In 1936, on the eve of Zora Neale Hurston’s departure to the Caribbean for what would be her last major ethnographic expedition, she wrote a letter to an Alabama librarian, William Stanley Hoole. In her letter, Hurston laid out the basic plot for a book that she had been kicking around for some time. It would be her follow-up novel to *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, and in it she would tell the story of a brown woman:

Who was from childhood hungry for life and the earth, but because she had beautiful hair was always being skotched upon a flag-pole by the men who loved her and forced to sit there. At forty she got her chance at mud. Mud, lush and fecund with a buck Negro called Tea Cake. He took her down into the Everglades where people worked and sweated and loved and died violently, where no such thing as flag-poles for women existed. Since I narrate mostly in dialogue, I can give you no feeling in these few lines of the life of this brown woman with her plentiful hair. But this is the barest statement of the story.¹

The story of Janie Crawford, this “brown woman with her plentiful hair,” would become *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the most celebrated work of the Hurston canon. It was a novel that would establish her reputation as a Black feminist icon in the 1980s after a long and dreadful critical hiatus. However, in the heightened political context of the late 1930s, Hurston’s account of a woman’s struggles to find erotic and emotional fulfillment in the all-Black communities of Florida was read as a simple folklore-infused love story by White critics and a dangerous foray into exhibitionistic exoticism by African American critics. In the end, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* would further distance Hurston from her Harlem contemporaries, who for the most part found the book to be entirely devoid of social consciousness.

While White critical commentary about the book generally celebrated both its universality as a love story and its supposedly accurate picture of the particularities of Black life in the South, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* got a markedly different reception in the parlors and literary salons of Depression-era Harlem. In fact, the book’s success with White reviewers played into the growing sense among African American critics and the literary left that Hurston was a literary climber, willing to sacrifice social reality for a pretty turn of the phrase. Lippincott, Hurston’s publisher, added to the problem by marketing the novel as a timeless love story with universal appeal, opening up the door for criticism that would focus all too rigidly on the novel’s putatively romantic central plotline. As M. Genevieve West points out, “Promoting the novel as a romance . . . created a lens through which her contemporaries, her worst critics among them, read the novel. The designation effectively suggested that Hurston was not a serious writer in a time when the social crises of the Great Depression and rampant racial discrimination demanded serious change.”²

This critical frame earned the novel thinly veiled scorn among the literary intelligentsia of Harlem, who generally gave it tepid and sometimes even antagonistic reviews. In perhaps the most infamous of these negative reviews, author Richard Wright summarily dismissed *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, claiming, “The sensory sweep of [Hurston’s] novel carries no theme, no message, no thought” lending itself to “significant interpretation.” Unwittingly revealing his own gender bias, Wright invoked a tradition of writing by Black women to lend weight to this dismissal. After admitting that “Miss Hurston” had talent as a writer, he complained that her prose was “cloaked in that facile sensuality that has dogged Negro expression since the days of Phillis Wheatley” and suggested that her novel was

little better than a form of literary minstrelsy designed to "evoke a piteous smile on the lips of the 'superior' race."³

While Wright's dismissal of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was certainly scathing, Hurston was apparently more rattled by Alain Locke's review in *Opportunity*, the journal that had published her first short stories and plays some ten years earlier. Locke praised the novel for its artful melding of folklore and fiction and made note of Hurston's gift for both humor and poetic language, but he also complained that these very qualities seemed to prevent Hurston from offering a deeper investigation into the "inner psychology" of her characters, which blunted what might have been a sharper "analysis of the social background" in which they lived. "It is folklore fiction at its best," Locke allowed, but he continued:

When will the Negro novelist of maturity, who knows how tell a story convincingly—which is Miss Hurston's cradle gift, come to grips with motive fiction and social document fiction? Progressive southern fiction has already banished the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over and envy. Having got rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplification.⁴

Despite Locke's assertion that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* turned away from the complexities and contradictions of Black life in the South, the story that its central protagonist, Janie Crawford, tells is anything but simple. On the contrary, as scores of contemporary scholars have noted, Janie's story highlights the complexities of that world, in particular its gender, class, and racial contradictions. Indeed, what *Their Eyes Were Watching God* offered was not a retreat from the domains of social consciousness, as so many of Hurston's contemporaries on the literary left claimed, but an attempt to elaborate a new kind of social consciousness that attended fully to the contradictions of community, class, and gender.

Teaching to Transgress: Zora Neale Hurston's Black Feminist Life History

From the earliest days of her career as a writer and folklorist, Hurston had mined her "native village" of Eatonville, Florida, for the raw materials that would become her evocative portrayals of Black life in the South. In a writerly cycle of departure and return that bore no small resemblance

to that of Janie Crawford, Hurston used both her childhood memories of Eatonville and the material she gathered there as an adult as the basis for her published stories and folklore. In one of her earliest works, “The Eatonville Anthology” (published in the *Messenger* in 1926), Hurston introduced a primarily African American audience to the personalities that would reappear in her later works of folklore and fiction: Matt Brazzle and his famous skinny mule; Mrs. Tony Roberts, the pleading woman; and Joe Clarke, mayor, postmaster, and owner of the storefront porch upon which many “big lies” were exchanged. Interestingly, Joe Clarke, the man who would become Joe Starks, Eatonville’s mayor and resident “Big Voice” in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is presented only obliquely in “The Eatonville Anthology,” where he makes an appearance as the subject of his wife’s subversive prayerful intentions:

Mrs. Clarke is Joe Clarke’s wife. She is a soft-looking, middle-aged woman, whose bust and stomach are always holding a get-together.

She waits on the store sometimes and cries every time she makes a mistake, which is quite often. She calls her husband “Jody.” They say he used to beat her in the store when he was a young man, but he is not so impatient now. He can wait until he goes home.

She shouts in Church every Sunday and shakes the hand of fellowship with everybody in the church with her eyes closed, but somehow always misses her husband.⁵

This silently resistant Mrs. Clarke seems an odd prototype for Janie Crawford, the protagonist that would become the articulate female hero of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Nevertheless, in her unsatisfactory marital relations with Joe Clarke, and particularly in his public dominance over her, we can discern the barest contours of Janie’s twenty-year union with her second husband, Joe Starks. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston transformed Mrs. Clarke, the meek middle-aged churchwoman whose “bust and stomach are always holding a get-together,” into the nubile Janie Crawford who felled her husband with a few well-placed words once her patience with his mastery had reached its limit. Hurston gave Mrs. Clarke her own (maiden) name of Crawford, along with a well-lived life apart from her husband and, more importantly, a voice that would transform her silent resistance into public rebellion. In the process, she opened up a world of kitchens, bedrooms, and back porches that revealed the hidden contours of the Black female experience.

Interestingly, like Deloria’s *Waterlily*, the narrative form through which

Hurston chose to shape this transformation—a story about life and love related by Janie Crawford to her “kissin’ friend” Pheoby Watson—both responds to and reshapes ethnographic narrative practices of the 1930s. While Hurston’s novel, like *Deloria’s*, takes the form of a life history, her articulation of this form is not surprisingly less wedded to the structures of ethnographic realism and biographical accuracy that characterized life histories in anthropological circles. Instead, Janie’s life story suggests the more subjective and conversational tone of life histories collected by folklorists in the 1930s as part of their efforts to uncover the untold histories of America.

As I noted in Chapter Four, life histories were viewed with some ambivalence as legitimate objects of ethnographic knowledge in anthropological circles. While life histories could add dimension and color to ethnographic accounts, as forms of raw data they were seen as far too subjective and susceptible to feelings of nostalgia and misplaced writerly desire on the part of ethnographic investigators to be entirely trustworthy sources of ethnographic knowledge. In folklore circles, however, where nostalgia, romance, and authorial intervention were not necessarily anathema to the production of knowledge, life histories were viewed with much less skepticism.

Indeed, folklorists, writers, and historians, especially those working under the auspices of the New Deal in the 1930s, made recording life histories a central research aim in their efforts to recover the voices of the American past. And they did so in full consciousness of the fact that their approach to the life history departed philosophically, if not methodologically, from that of social scientists. As W. T. Couch, director of the Federal Writers’ Project’s national life-history program, noted in his introduction to *These Are Our Lives*, a compendium of life histories collected under the auspices of the FWP, other branches of the human sciences, specifically sociology, viewed human beings and human culture in highly abstracted terms. These disciplines consequently limited the use of life histories to “narrow segments of experience collected and arranged to illustrate particular points,” but his contributors had a rather more holistic understanding of the usefulness of life histories as objects of knowledge.

Although Couch acknowledged that a more limited use of the “life or case history” could help to illuminate particular cultural phenomena, he argued that such an approach could not “possibly convey as much information and real knowledge as a story which covers the more significant aspects of the whole life experience, including memories of ancestry, written *from the standpoint of the individual himself*.” Indeed, Couch imagined that the oral histories offered up in *These Are Our Lives* would, much like Hurston’s

folklore, stake out a territory somewhere between folklore-inspired Southern fiction, which provided a vivid and personal, if not entirely accurate, picture of the South, and sociological studies, which provided plenty of data on the South but precious little sense of the “life of a community or of a people.”⁶

These Are Our Lives, the enormously popular collection of working people’s life histories that W. T. Couch edited, was only one of several popular books on American history and life published by the Federal Writers’ Project in the 1930s. During these years, the FWP undertook a massive popular history project that involved collecting the songs, stories, and traditions of rural America. At least initially, the primary objective of the FWP was to prepare a comprehensive guide to American life and culture covering every state and region in the nation to be published in state-by-state guidebooks known as the American Guide series. However, as work on the project progressed, its scope broadened, leading to the initiation of a number of innovative folklore projects, including an oral history project that resulted in “the largest body of first-person narratives ever collected in this country.”⁷ Published in a separate sequence of books known as the Life in America series, the FWP’s oral history project recovered a stunningly diverse assortment of life histories covering an array of occupational, racial, and regional experiences and produced several well-received books, which in some cases exceeded the popularity of the books published by its parent project, the American Guide series.⁸

There can be little doubt that Hurston knew about the goals of the FWP oral history project. In fact, she worked with the Harlem unit of the Federal Theatre Project in New York under Orson Welles from 1935 to 1936, shortly before her research trip to Jamaica and Haiti, where she wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Moreover, several of her Harlem contemporaries, including her later rival Sterling Brown, were working with the project, and just two years later, she herself would work for the Florida office of the Federal Writers’ Project under the directorship of Carita Doggett Corse, one of the primary proponents of the collection of oral history, in particular slave narratives. In any case, Hurston was already quite familiar with both the joys and challenges of collecting life histories. Her first research in the field, undertaken in the summer of 1927, had included an interview with Cudjo Lewis, an elderly survivor of the *Clotilde*, the last ship known to have transported African slaves into America. Hurston’s experience interviewing Lewis was apparently unsatisfying and unproductive—the article she wrote based on this interview was largely plagiarized—but it clearly had an impact on her, because she returned to Alabama later that year to spend more

time with Lewis. On this second visit Hurston was more successful, gathering enough material for a book-length life history of the man she came to call Kossula (Cudjo Lewis's African name). Though her manuscript, entitled "Barracoon," was never published, it stands—like "The Eatonville Anthology"—as an important formal precursor to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.⁹ As Hurston set out to write her second published novel, she surely recognized the life history as a key form of ethnographic meaning making that—like the Black storytelling tradition—produced knowledge from the margins.

Their Eyes Were Watching God, while clearly presented as a work of fiction, nevertheless invokes key conventions of the life history in its framing ethnographic scene (one person sharing her personal history with another) and its narrative, that moves through time telling one woman's story in a generally linear fashion. But it expands upon these conventions, as well, because the relations of production that function as the backdrop for Janie's story—its ethnographic frame, if you will—stand in stark contrast to those governing projects like Ruth Underhill's *Papago Woman*, and to a lesser degree, Couch's *These Are Our Lives*. In Ruth Benedict's defense of the value women's storytelling has as a form of ethnographic knowledge these relations go unquestioned; in her foreword to *Papago Woman* she states that "the daily task of the ethnologist is with the alien ways of acting, the alien ways of thinking, that are the traditional heritage of different peoples."¹⁰ For her part, Hurston ventured into the narrative realm of the life history to imagine a new kind of exchange between not-so-different others. This exchange is reminiscent of Hurston's earlier folklore work, in which she imagined ethnographic encounters as aesthetic exchanges that produced new forms of knowledge, but with a key difference: both the teller and the transcriber of this story are Black women.

Indeed, in the exchange between Janie and Pheoby we witness not only a world of Black female experience writ large, but also a newly authorized Black female storytelling voice coming into existence. In this way, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* suggests an innovative genre-crossing storytelling practice that articulates the complexities of Black female existence in the early twentieth century and grants epistemic privilege to a new kind of speaking subject within the context of both literary and ethnographic examinations of the Black "folk." This speaking subject—the articulate Black female storyteller—was one of Hurston's most critically acclaimed literary creations, and certainly her most revealing ethnographic informant: Janie Crawford.

What kinds of readings of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* can be mobi-



Figure 5.1. Hurston at a Federal Writers' Project exhibit in 1938. Courtesy of the Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

lized when we reframe the work as a life history told by Janie Crawford to Pheoby Watson? First, such an approach transforms Janie's story from a simple narrative of "coming to consciousness"—one that has relevance only to the storyteller, or perhaps to the friend to whom she tells it—into a story that speaks self-consciously to the collective complexities of gendered lives. As William Runyon has noted, life histories help us to understand the "kinds of lives that different types of individuals in different social locations have or have not been able to lead." And reading about these lives can "tell us much more about the ways in which the institutions and customs of a culture are differentially perceived, negotiated, and experienced."¹¹

Contemporary feminist critics have also noted that life histories, *testimonios*, and other first-person accounts of experiences can offer important personal contextualizations of women's lives that not only deconstruct patriarchal misrepresentations of them, but also prevent facile generalizations about the universality of women's oppression.¹² In other words, it is the specificity of individual experience when contextualized within (and against) the generality of a broader cultural milieu that can reveal the particularities of heteropatriarchal, racist, and classist relations of rule. In the case of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's life history works in precisely this manner because it contextualizes her individual experiences as a multi-raced, heterosexual, middle-class (and later working-class) woman against the historical backdrop of post-Reconstruction Florida, a place of particular race, caste, class, and gender relations. Janie's testimony reveals so much about this place because it charts her position in its web of social relations (marital, familial, erotic, racial, economic) and documents both her struggles to contend with the constraints of such social relations and her efforts carve out a space of freedom from the realm of necessity.

Understanding how life histories can move beyond a simple recounting of life events to a form of "testimony" is key here, because testimony is storytelling with a purpose, and unlike conventional life histories, it comes equipped with relatively visible rhetorical objectives that, in the words of Shari Stone-Mediatore, have the capacity to "transform obscure experience into critical knowledge." One of the most powerful rhetorical features of testimony is the melding together of personal and collective histories. This feature changes the stakes for the story that Janie shares with Pheoby because it moves her account beyond the mere transcription of the events in one woman's life to encompass a broader analysis of the structural dimensions of Black women's oppression. Janie's story offers up the facts of her life along with her reflections on what they signify and how they might be understood within the historical matrix of her life and the lives of

other Black women. Patricia Hill Collins has observed that such narratives can create ties “between what one does and what one thinks” and link individual “Black women’s experiences and ideas as a *group*,” offering an epistemological standpoint through which Black women can theorize their experience.¹³ By figuring Janie’s story as a knowledge-producing enterprise and having her share that story with another Black woman, as opposed to a White female ethnographer, Hurston opens a path for the rearticulation of storytelling itself, and in particular, the storytelling of Black women—as a theory-making practice.

Learning from Experience: Janie’s Story as Black Feminist Epistemology

Hurston sets the stage for Janie’s theoretical storytelling with a scene depicting her ambivalent return to her adopted village, Eatonville, after a scandalous departure in the company of Tea Cake, a gambler and itinerant laborer some twenty years her junior. Dressed in blue overalls with a “great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume” and “pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt,” Janie is a figure of female strength and embodied resistance against the “mass cruelty” of public speculation about what might have transpired during her hiatus from Eatonville. Deflecting the uncharitable insinuations voiced by the community, her friend and confidant, Pheoby Watson, rushes to the “intimate gate” in back of Janie’s house with a “heaping plate of mulatto rice” to quell Janie’s hunger and prime her for the story that she will tell. Before sharing her story, Janie reminds Pheoby that she must be an active listener, a conduit between Janie’s story of experience and the “mouth almighty” of the people of Eatonville. Janie promises to give Pheoby not only her story, but the “understandin’ to go ’long wid it.” In exchange, she asks that Pheoby use her own intellect and her empathy when she shares her story with others. “Pheoby,” she says, “we been kissin’ friends for twenty years, so Ah depend on you for a good thought. And Ah’m talking to you from that standpoint.”¹⁴

This standpoint of mutuality, exchange, and female friendship marks the social contours of the Black female storytelling tradition as it is articulated in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a narrative, we must always remember, that is framed by an exchange between “kissin’ friends” on Janie Crawford’s back porch. As Mary Helen Washington has noted, this storytelling context stands in obvious contrast to that of Joe Starks’s storefront

porch, where the men of Eatonville gather to master each other with "big lies" about women, mules, God, and his creations. Hurston holds these two storytelling contexts in tension throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a tension that is artfully foregrounded in the novel's oft-quoted opening lines:

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.¹⁵

This opening passage, with its stark distinction between male and female ways of knowing serves multiple rhetorical functions. As an explanatory metaphor for gendered consciousness, it invokes the mechanics of imagination that stand at the core of different conceptualizations of experience. But it also functions as a framing device that stands outside of Janie's story—the bulk of the narrative—a hermeneutic that offers a key to understanding the different storytelling traditions at play in the text. Most striking is the reversal of agency implied in Hurston's poetic evocation of the different lives of men and women, a reversal that is cleverly suggested in her use of chiasmus to describe the key function of memory and forgetting in the lives of women. While men cast their lot with ships on the horizon and are thus subject to the whims of chance and circumstance, women look closer to home and, through active acts of remembering (and, in some cases, strategic forgetting), they create "truth" from their dreams.

Janie's life history as told to Pheoby is thus framed as an active act of remembering and forgetting that documents and theorizes her dreams and experiences even as it suggests how one—Janie, Pheoby, the community—might "act and do accordingly." It is, therefore, something more than a simple account of her life with Tea Cake; Janie's story is an object lesson in the transformation of mute experience into a theoretical perspective that enables future action. The connection between storytelling and agency is key here, because as Shari Stone-Mediatore observes, "While we do not change reality merely by interpreting it differently, those stories that work with language to indicate the muted contradictions of everyday life, the diffuse agencies of multiply oppressed people, and the values and social relationships that ruling logics efface can nonetheless intervene in the processes

that determine what gets recognized—and responded to—as real, significant, and possible.¹⁶ Indeed, it is Pheoby’s “hungry listening” that helps Janie to tell her story. As Stone-Mediatore notes, “Experience becomes public knowledge through an exchange of stories in which specific people, in the context of historically specific social and cultural institutions, relay their views of events in a particular rhetorical style to a specific audience.”¹⁷ This rhetorical style, what Henry Louis Gates has called Hurston’s “speakerly text,” seamlessly melds standard literary English with Black vernacular idiom to tell a story that moves Pheoby and the larger community of readers for which she is a stand-in beyond the mystery of Janie’s life on the muck with Tea Cake, beyond even the limited horizons of Janie’s multiple loves and losses, to encompass the historical, social, and cultural context of her life as a Black woman.

By recording the back porch conversation between two Black women and by making clear that such conversations, ignored or marginalized by ethnographers, folklorists, and the general public, made and unmade whole worlds of experience, Hurston moves us beyond storefront porches and the lives of men with their “mule-talk,” and reveals the hidden lives of the “mule[s]” of the world. This revelation takes on both diachronic and synchronic dimensions, because by the time Janie is ready to tell the story of her life, she understands that its beginning lies not with her relationship with Tea Cake or any of the other men in her life, nor even with her own childhood, but with the legacy she inherited from her grandmother. This legacy, encapsulated in one of the novel’s recurring metaphors, is like “a great tree in leaf with things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in its branches.”¹⁸ It is a legacy that, like the tree and its branches, encompasses the Black diaspora, slavery and rape, violence and miscegenation, and ultimately the storytelling tradition as elaborated by Black women.

It is of no small significance, therefore, that Janie chooses to frame her story with a series of accounts from her childhood and young adulthood that together map out her coming to consciousness about race, class, and sexuality and the ways in which they intersect. She begins with a poignant retelling of her motherless days as a young girl, spent in the shadow of a shameful past (her mother was raped by a schoolteacher) and in the backyard of a White family for whom her grandmother worked. At first blissfully unaware of her difference from the White children of the Washburn family, “Alphabet,” as she was called because “so many people done named me different names,” comes to the realization of her racial identity through the objectifying lens of a photograph that a White man takes of the chil-

dren. Confronted with the photograph, Janie identifies everyone but herself. "Where is me?" she asks, "I don't see me." Miss Nellie, the mother of the other children in the photograph, points to "de dark one" and says, "Dat's you, Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself?" Janie responds with alarm and disappointment, "'Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!" initiating uproarious laughter. This scene of childhood innocence is charming in its way, but it is a deadly serious moment for Janie and for the story she tells, because it demonstrates how racialized subjects come to know themselves through the discourses of difference that marginalize them. Indeed, though young Janie doesn't realize that she is Black until she sees herself in a picture, she understands all too well what "colored" signifies in the post-Reconstruction South. "Alphabet's" fall from grace marks her transformation into the girl Janie, who will accrue many more such experiences and thus come to know her "ownself" more completely.

If Janie begins the difficult process of self-knowledge with the recognition of her ineluctable racial difference from her White playmates, it is her difference from the Black children at school that will teach her about the pervasiveness of racial ideologies in both White and Black communities. Teased about "livin' in de white folks' back-yard" and excluded from schoolyard games because of her mixed-race identity, Janie is introduced to the mechanics of colorism through her marginalization from her Black playmates. The issue of colorism is one that Hurston takes up to great effect throughout the novel, especially in her characterization of Mrs. Turner, a self-loathing "race woman." But in the context of the schoolyard it is explored in negative fashion when her classmates, in particular one "knotty head gal name Mayrella," react to Janie's fancy clothes (castoffs from the Washburn children) and the fact that she wears ribbons in her hair by taunting her about her shameful parentage.¹⁹ "They'd push me 'way from de ring plays and make out they couldn't play wid nobody dat lived on premises. Den they'd tell me not to be takin' on over mah looks 'cause they mama told 'em 'bout de hound dawgs huntin' mah papa all night long."²⁰ These painful experiences mark Janie early on as an outsider to both White and Black communities, a role that she will struggle to overcome in adulthood.

Janie learns the hard lessons of race and class in a treacherous geography bounded by the "white folks' back-yard" and the Black children's schoolyard—spaces that are united in their deployment of racial technologies that mark her as different because of her too-black or too-pale skin—but it is in the relative shelter of Nanny's backyard under a "blossoming pear tree" that Janie first hears a "flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again" and comes to know her own sexuality. It is a song that

Tea Cake will answer after years of emotional desiccation spent with other men, but for the moment it signals Janie's entrance into the confining horizon of Black womanhood that is her grandmother's only inheritance, an inheritance that in no way resembles the natural ecstasy that Janie experiences under her pear tree. When Nanny spies one Johnnie Taylor "lacerating her Janie with a kiss," she brings a quick and efficient end to Janie's dreamy girlhood by vowing to marry her off to a much older man, Logan Killicks.

Though Janie initially resists the marriage, Nanny explains its necessity with a summary account of the social location of Black women in a post-Reconstruction world:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell the nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so far as Ah can see.²¹

Nanny illustrates this hierarchical vision of the world with her own revealing story of experience. She tells Janie of her life on a plantation in Georgia, of the birth of Janie's mother, Leafy, fathered by the master of the plantation, of his wife's fury upon her discovery that Nanny's baby had "gray eyes and yaller hair," and of her threats to beat Nanny to death and sell off her baby. She tells Janie of her harrowing escape from the plantation and of her desire to make a better life for Leafy, only to experience the tragedy of Leafy's rape and consequent moral decline. In this manner, Nanny, like Janie, gives both her story and "understandin' to go 'long wid it."

Like Janie's story, Nanny's story is at once personal and collective, historical and tied to the specific moment of Janie's transgression. While it is meant, in the end, to be a cautionary tale, Nanny's story nevertheless gives voice to the muted aspirations of the women of her generation, a generation "born back due in slavery" who could never actualize the "dreams of whut a woman oughta be and do."

Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me. Freedom found me wid a baby daughter in mah arms, so Ah said Ah'd take a broom and a cook-pot and throw up a highway through de wilderness for her. She would expound what Ah felt. But somehow she got lost offa de highway and next thing Ah knowed here

you was in de world. So whilst Ah was tendin' you nights Ah said Ah'd save de text for you. Ah been waitin' a long time, Janie, but nothin' Ah been through ain't too much if you take a stand on the high ground lak Ah dreamed.²²

This story within a story draws important links between Janie's own position at the intersection of racial and gendered oppression and a tradition of Black women's thought elaborated within the confines of a system that denied them both physical and intellectual autonomy. It is a story that locates Janie's coming to consciousness within a broader history of Black women's oppression and contextualizes her struggle for autonomy as a historical struggle that reaches far beyond the individual horizon of her own aspirations.²³

Janie thus embarks on her travels through Black womanhood armed with this historical understanding and its critical prism, which will shape not only her perspective on the world, but also the story that she shares with Pheoby. By beginning her narrative with these stories of innocent childhood experience, Janie has provided her listeners with the critical tools they will need to deconstruct—as she has—the experiences of marginalization, confinement, love, and loss that she encounters on her journey. It is a critical perspective that is sharpened through Janie's experiences in a succession of marriages, all of which, as Ann duCille has noted, end very badly.

But it would be wrong to assume that Janie's story is merely a cautionary tale about the psychic and physical dangers of marriage and domesticity. In her story of experience and through her strategic framing of that experience, we see a subtle yet nevertheless trenchant analysis of heterosexuality itself as a formation that is anything but "natural." This is not to say that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* offers a simple feminist critique of compulsory heterosexuality—but it does reveal the ways in which something as seemingly "natural" as the relations between men and women can be "reconstructed" by the historical experiences of forced relocation, slavery, and Jim Crow.²⁴ This is one of the great ironies of the critical reception of the novel in the 1930s. While both White and African American critics tended to view the novel as a simple and universal love story, its examination of the particularities of Black love—in Nanny's words, "de very prong all us black women gits hung up on"—complicates the romance plot by revealing the devastating impact of racism on the familial, domestic, and erotic relations of African Americans. And while it is true, as Ann duCille, Susan Willis, and other feminist critics have noted, that Janie's story registers a critique of the "relations of dominance and submission . . . in patriarchal society,"

it is a critique that also explores the ways in which racism enters into this equation, corrupting intimacy between individual Black women and men, and thereby undermining community among Black people in general. Indeed, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* offers a prescient exploration of the complexities of Black sexual politics from a feminist perspective, one that forecasts the work of a later generation of Black feminist scholars.²⁵

In fact, Janie's narrative is as much an account of her repeated objectification by the men who desire her, and the Black communities that they come to represent, as it is a critique of the marriage plot. This objectification centers on Janie's features, her light brown complexion, her flowing hair: attributes that, as Mary Helen Washington has noted, connect her to the "conventional romantic heroine" of the "turn-of-the-century 'mulatto' novel."²⁶ While Janie is no tragic mulatto—she neither aspires to the "heaven of straight haired, thin-lipped, high nose-boned seraphs" that Mrs. Turner worships, nor understands why one would want to "class off" from darker-skinned Blacks—her physical features, in particular the "hidden mystery" of her hair, are, as Washington notes, "one of the most powerful forces in her life." They are also profoundly disquieting racial markers, reminders of a legacy of slavery, rape, and social control that paradoxically make her an object of desire for men and alienate her from the Black community in general. As such, Janie's physical appearance becomes a critical site of ideological struggle over the meanings of community, identity, and love itself. Her mixed racial heritage, as embodied in her physical features, functions less as a trope for the presumably tragic conflicts and contradictions of "mulatto" identity than as a site through which the mechanics of colorism within the Black community are theorized, exposing the multi-dimensional effects of colonizing discourses on the consciousness of the colonized. The "hidden mystery" of Janie's hair reveals the open secret of the all-Black communities in which she circulates: that the poisonous ideology of racism invades and permeates even relatively autonomous and intimate spaces.

It is no small matter then that Janie's marriage to Logan Killicks—a marriage arranged by her grandmother to shelter her from the dangers of love—ends with an insult that, in both form and content, recalls the verbal assaults of her childhood tormentor, Mayrella. When Killicks suspects that the wife that he so prizes—primarily, we are given to understand, for her physical appearance—is contemplating leaving him, he defensively lashes out at her using verbal tactics like those deployed by the schoolyard tormentors of her childhood: "Ah just as good as take you out de white folks'

kitchen and set you down on yo' royal diasticutis and you take and low-rate me! Ah'll take holt uh dat ax and come in dere and kill yuh! You better dry up in dere! Ah'm too honest and hard-workin' for anybody in yo' family, dat's de reason you don't want me!" Though initially Janie "turns wrong-side out just standing there and feeling," she soon recovers, and armed with the hard knowledge she gained as a mixed-race girl in the backyards of "white folks" and the schoolyards of "black folks," she comes to an important realization:

When the throbbing calmed a little she gave Logan's speech a hard thought and placed it beside other things she had seen and heard. When she had finished with that she dumped the dough on the skillet and smoothed it over with her hand. She wasn't even angry. Logan was accusing her of her mamma, her grandmamma, and her feelings, and she couldn't do a thing about any of it. The sow-belly in the pan needed turning. She flipped it over and shoved it back. A little cold water in the coffee pot to settle it. Turned the hoecake with a plate and then made a little laugh. What was she losing so much time for? A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out the front gate and turned south. Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good.²⁷

The passage is remarkable for a number of reasons, not least of which is its subtle kneading together of quotidian kitchen tasks—smoothing the hoecake, turning the sow-belly, settling the coffee—with Janie's interior thoughts. In a beautifully articulated domestic rhetoric of liberation, Janie thinks through Logan's words, placing them in the context of "other things she had seen and heard." Having already learned that marriage did not "compel love" in her daily life with Logan Killicks, Janie now understands that the insult he aims at her dubious parentage (a parentage, one cannot help but note, that distinctly lacks patriarchal figures) is, like the ones she suffered in childhood, directed at a history over which she has had no control. Janie's realization that, while she cannot control her past, she can determine her future, leads her out the front gate and into the arms of her second husband, Joe Starks, a man whose primary ambition is to become a "Big Voice."

If Janie is attracted to Joe Starks's ambition to become a "Big Voice" in the Black community, he sees in her mixed-raced features the perfect physical accompaniment to his verbal power. "A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self," he insists, seducing her

with the promise of a life of leisure and respectability. Though Janie recognizes from the outset that Joe Starks does not represent “sun-up and pollen and blooming trees,” his infectious ambition does speak “for far horizons,” and so she casts her lot with him, only to discover that it is Joe’s dream and not hers that will shape her life over the next twenty years. During this time, Joe builds his fiefdom in the all-Black town of Eatonville, and at least initially, fulfills Nanny’s dreams for Janie by ensconcing her in his “gloaty, sparkly white” house, the largest one in town. Though Jody, as Janie calls him, offers her the creature comforts of middle-class respectability, he also transforms her from his lover into the symbolic repository of his power. Like his “sparkly white” house, Janie’s beauty—in particular, her “coffee-and-cream complexion” and her long, flowing hair—are markers of Whiteness that Joe simultaneously displays and controls. Cycling between Joe’s house and his store, both of which are material embodiments of his power over the community, Janie is caught in a narrow orbit of things, increasingly alienated—first from the community, then from her husband, and finally, most devastatingly, from herself. Indeed, Janie responds to Joe’s control over her by developing an “inside and an outside” and learning “how not to mix them,” effectively aiding in the transformation of her body into an object. While Janie’s outside self submits to the trivial and not-so-trivial indignities meted out by her husband in his store, her inside self makes “summertime out of lonesomeness.”²⁸

But Joe’s control of Janie is, at best, provisional, for unlike his ostentatious house with its gold spittoons, Janie has the power of speech. As many critics have noted, Joe’s supremacy over Janie’s outside self, and consequently over the town of Eatonville, is eventually brought down by Janie’s reclamation of her own voice in an instance of ferocious signifying. Like the incident that ended her marriage to Logan Killicks, Janie’s final break with Joe Starks is initiated by an insult from her husband, but this time the insult is directed not at her dubious parentage and upbringing, but her physical appearance and mental capabilities. This time, Janie doesn’t just stand there turning “wrongside out”—she turns Joe “wrongside out,” cleverly deconstructing his insult and reminding him not to mix up her “doings” with her “looks.” Joe’s response, a pointed comment about her age, elicits an unexpected and savagely revealing retort from Janie:

Naw, Ah ain’t no young gal no mo’ but den Ah ain’t no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah’m uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat’s uh whole lot more’n *you* kin say. You big-

bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look like de change uh life.²⁹

It is an instance of signifying that signifies the diminution of Joe's power over Janie and the people of Eatonville, because, as the "mule-talkers" of the store front porch acknowledge, Joe made his "influence felt" over Eatonville not with "thrones," "ruling-chairs," or "crowns," but with his masculine power, the "throne in de seat of his pants."³⁰ And this power, predicated on his supremacy over his wife, its symbolic repository, is fatally undermined by her public rebellion. His power revoked, Joe Starks wastes away and eventually dies from a mysterious illness (kidney failure) that the people of Eatonville attribute to Janie's hoodoo.

True to her promise to give us the "understandin' to go 'long wid" her narrative, Janie reflects on her disastrous marriages to Logan Killicks and Joe Starks and comes to the conclusion that it was her grandmother's thwarted dreams, conceived in the age of slavery and emancipation, that had set her on a path toward what was ultimately a false horizon. As a girl she "had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her. But she had been whipped like a cur dog, and run off down a back road after *things*."³¹ Janie's growth involves not simply the realization that she "hated her grandmother" and had "hidden the fact from herself all these years under a cloak of pity." Janie finally comes to recognize that her grandmother's dreams of middle-class stability, like Joe's dreams of being a "Big Voice" in Eatonville, had "taken the biggest thing God had ever made, the horizon . . . and pinched it into such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it around her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her."

While Janie resents her grandmother for setting her on the path to things—and perhaps more importantly for helping her to *become* a thing to the men who married her—she nevertheless comprehends the historical circumstances that lead Nanny to value economic security over human relations. "She was borned in slavery time," Janie explains,

"[When] black folks didn't sit down anytime dey felt lak it. So sittin' on porches lak de white madam looked like uh mighty fine thing tuh her. Dat's whut she wanted for me—don't keer what it cost. Git up on uh high chair and sit dere. She didn't have time tuh think whut tuh do after you got up on de stool uh do nothin'. De object wuz tuh git dere. So Ah got up on

de high stool lak she told me, but Pheoby, Ah done nearly languished tuh death up dere. Ah felt like de world wuz cryin' extry and Ah ain't read de common news yet."³²

Here Janie deconstructs Nanny's desire for respectability, demonstrating that at its root lies a gender ideology forged in the exploitation and objectification of Black bodies "in slavery time." Patricia Hill Collins has noted that this form of gender ideology creates "dishonest Black bodies" because it allows the "top-down power relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality" to "permeate individual consciousness and tell African Americans how they should think about their own bodies. Moreover, such power relations invade the body because they also instruct Black people how they should *feel* within their own bodies." And, as we have witnessed in Janie's objectification by both Logan Killicks and Joe Starks, "This ideology severs mind, soul, and body from one another and helps structure oppression."³³ Because Janie reads Nanny's materialism in the historical context of the pinched horizons that slavery signified for Black women, she is able to meld their intergenerational experiences and develop a historically grounded understanding of her life that enables her to move toward what she thinks is an expanded horizon with her third husband, Verigible Woods (Tea Cake).

Janie's love marriage with Tea Cake represents something more than simply an attempt to reconnect her own "mind, soul, and body." It also suggests an effort to create for herself what Collins terms an "honest body" by reimagining Black intimacy as an avenue to freedom. Indeed, her choice to reject the destiny that both her grandmother and her community have laid out for her suggests an understanding that "the antidote to gender-specific racial oppression that advances controlling images of deviant Black sexuality does not lie in embracing a conservative politics of respectability that mimics the beliefs of those responsible for the sexually repressive culture in the first place."³⁴ Rather, it requires a redefinition of sexuality as a "source of power rooted in spirituality, expressiveness, and love" for oneself and one's community against the context of oppressive discourses that seek to deny humanity—and love—to the oppressed. Intimacy, as Collins has argued, can become an avenue to freedom for African Americans if it is founded on a "commitment to self and others [that] comes from seeing Black humanity in the context of oppression, and recognizing that choosing to love in that context is a political act."³⁵

Notwithstanding Janie's efforts to "rescue and redefine Black sexuality as a source of power" through her love for Tea Cake, her marriage to him

does not offer a happy ending to her story. Indeed, passionate as it may be, their union is marred by frequent misunderstandings, petty jealousies, and in the end, a cataclysmic natural disaster that brings their life together to an abrupt end. And while this love story is the one that stands as the iconic culmination of both Janie's story and the novel itself, Tea Cake's frequent psychological manipulations and his less frequent, but nevertheless noteworthy, physical abuse suggest an unsustainable relationship. If Janie's marriage to Joe Starks comes to stand as an iconic example of overt male domination in her story, it is her *submission* to Tea Cake's more subtle mobilizations of patriarchal power that informs its tragic end. Although she describes her relationship with Tea Cake as "uh love game" to distinguish it from the rather more pecuniary relations of her previous marriages, even love-struck Janie must understand that this description carries multiple meanings.

Indeed, like the game of checkers that Tea Cake teaches her at the start of their courtship—a game that seems to signify their seemingly more equitable relations—their love game is not without struggle. Though Janie finds herself "glowing inside" with the thought that finally "somebody thought it natural for her to play" checkers, a game that had been the exclusive recreation of her former husband and his friends, she soon discovers that Tea Cake is not an entirely trustworthy opponent. As she surreptitiously observes him, admiring "every one of his good points," Tea Cake takes advantage of her distraction and jumps her king.

She screamed in protest against losing the king she had such a hard time acquiring. Before she knew it she had grabbed his hand to stop him. He struggled gallantly to free himself. That is he struggled not hard enough to wrench a lady's fingers.

"Ah got uh right tuh take it. You left it right in mah way."

"Yeah but Ah wuz lookin' off when you went and stuck yo' men right up next tuh mine. No fair!"

"You ain't supposed tuh look off Mis' Starks. It's de biggest part uh de game tuh watch out! Leave go mah hand."

"No suh! Not mah king. You kin take another one, but not dat one."

They scrambled and upset the board and laughed at that.³⁶

This scene, like Janie's recollection of her first consciousness of her own racial difference, is at once charming and deeply meaningful. While it seems to foreshadow the playful equity that will shape their future relations, it also functions as a powerful allegory for both the subtle manipulations

and the structural forces that will allow Tea Cake to master Janie, even as it forecasts her final refusal to be mastered.

Indeed, other games will follow. When Janie meets Tea Cake in Jacksonville to get married, he discovers that she has brought along a cache of money to insure against what the people of Eatonville believe will be an inevitability—his eventual abandonment of her. Tea Cake punishes Janie’s lack of faith by taking her money while she sleeps, disappearing for a full day and night and causing her much mental anguish. He eventually returns, penniless but with plenty of stories about his escapades. When Janie chides him for not taking her with him on his spree, Tea Cake attempts to “class her off” by claiming that once he married her, he became determined not to let her see any “commonness” in his actions. “When I git mad habits on . . . ’Tain’t mah notion tuh drag *you* down wid me,” he explains. Given Janie’s history with middle-class isolation and alienation, Tea Cake’s attempts to shelter her from his commonness elicit a predictable reaction:

“Looka heah, Tea Cake, if you ever go off from me and have a good time lak dat and then come back heah tellin’ me how nice Ah is, Ah specks tuh kill yuh dead. You heah me?”

“So you aims tuh partake wid everything, hunh?”

“Yeah Tea Cake, don’t keer what it is.”

“Dat’s all Ah wants tuh know. From now on you’s mah wife and mah woman and everything else in de world Ah needs.”³⁷

And so Janie and Tea Cake’s courtship ends and their marriage begins, with a hard lesson that brings Janie into submission and establishes the power relations of their partnership. Later that night, as Janie watches Tea Cake “drift off to sleep,” she feels a “self-crushing love” that causes her soul to crawl out of its “hiding place.” Janie’s inside and outside are finally reunited, in what we might suppose to be the romantic resolution to the self-alienation she developed in her twenty-year marriage to Joe Starks. But if Janie is finally whole, she is a much diminished whole, because, as Mary Helen Washington, Ann duCille, and others have noted, the “moufy” Janie that felled Joe Starks with a well-placed challenge to his manhood is herself felled by the self-crushing love she feels for Tea Cake. And though their marriage offers Janie the opportunity to finally connect to people, instead of things, the love game that they play has winners and losers.

Nor does the game end with Tea Cake’s first victory in Jacksonville. Even on the “muck”—the Edenic migrant labor camp beside Lake Okeechobee, where Tea Cake holds court with the power and authority of a working-

class Joe Starks—he constantly struggles with his own fears and insecurities initiated, Janie's story suggests, by his wife's relatively high status as a beautiful and wealthy light-skinned woman. Tea Cake honors Janie's wishes to be integrated into the community of the muck, but he nevertheless develops his own rather more subtle technologies of control. For example, he "pops in" at the "kitchen door at odd hours" to check up on her, teasingly claiming that he fears the "boogerman" might "tote" her away in his absence. Though Janie believes he suspects her of infidelity, she nevertheless accepts his explanation that the "real truth" is that he gets "lonesome out dere all day" without her, and she agrees to pick beans "lak de rest of de women." Tea Cake's playful surveillance, like his playful abandonment in Jacksonville, is a technology of control that guarantees Janie's submission in the name of love.

While Janie sees her rowdy life on the muck in stark opposition to the staid and alienated existence she endured in Eatonville, even laughing to herself when she thinks of "the old days in the big white house and the store," there are some striking similarities between her former life in Eatonville and her experiences in the labor camp where she makes her home with Tea Cake. Here, too, her husband's home is "a magnet, the unauthorized center of the 'job,'" where folks come sit in the doorway to listen to Tea Cake play his guitar and where they hold their "big arguments . . . like they used to do on the store porch." The difference is that on Tea Cake's porch, unlike the one in Eatonville, Janie can "listen and laugh and even talk some herself," if she so desires. She even learns to tell "big stories herself from listening to the rest."³⁸ But this may be a difference without distinction; though we are led to believe that the muck represents a space where Janie can finally "preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high," we are given no "big stories" from Janie's mouth, no "big arguments," no signifying, and certainly no preaching.

If the muck is meant to be a working-class Eden, and Tea Cake and Janie its resident Adam and Eve, this garden has its serpents as well. Mrs. Turner, the "color-struck" proprietress of a local café, is a self-hating mixed race woman who makes money off of the Black laborers frequenting her establishment, but despises them just the same. She makes friends with Janie because she sees in Janie's Caucasian features an image of Whiteness to which she desperately aspires. Finding it inconceivable that a "featured" woman such as Janie would mix with common "niggers" like Tea Cake, Mrs. Turner attempts to seduce her by proxy, singing the praises of her light-skinned brother. Tea Cake overhears their conversation and, when Mrs. Turner eventually introduces her brother to Janie, he hatches a two-

part plan of revenge that demonstrates on the one hand his overt power over Janie, and on the other, his ability—through covert action—to rid the muck of its resident evil.

First Tea Cake beats Janie—to much public acclaim and admiration—and later he orchestrates a mock brawl in Mrs. Turner's café that destroys her business and results in her abandonment of the muck. Tea Cake is triumphant, but his actions reveal that Mrs. Turner's poisonous colorism, which “built an altar to the unattainable—Caucasian features for all,” is merely the most extreme articulation of an ideology that he and others on the muck share. Indeed, Tea Cake beats Janie “not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession.” This fear—that Mrs. Turner is right, and that Janie will (and should) leave him for a “featured” man—reveals a tragic flaw in the otherwise heroic Tea Cake.

As Mary Helen Washington has observed, Tea Cake's physical abuse of Janie represents a discomfiting moment of silence in her story, one that seems oddly contradictory. For how can a woman who, in her other marriages, responded to verbal abuse with decisive action issue neither remonstrance nor resistance to her physical beating? After the incident we hear nothing from Janie, just a heteroglossic commentary from the community that reveals “a sort of envy in both men and women.”³⁹ The men in particular are impressed by Janie's delicacy, visible in the bruises that show against her pale skin, which become signifiers for Tea Cake's supremacy over her, and thereby elevate his status on the muck. In fact, Tea Cake brags about the beating and about how “his Janie” is a “high time woman” that he got “outta uh big fine house.” When the men express amazement about the fact such a woman would be “down on de muck lak anybody else,” Tea Cake echoes the words he spoke to Janie after his night of carousing in Jacksonville, “Janie is wherever *Ah* wants tuh be. Dat's de kind uh wife she is and *Ah* love her for it.”⁴⁰

Though Janie's voice is silent at this key moment, the scene nevertheless reveals the true nature of Janie and Tea Cake's love game. For even if Tea Cake welcomes Janie's presence on his porch and in the fields where she labors “lak anybody else,” he, like her former husband, makes her body the symbolic repository of his power and status on the job. And his supremacy over her—which he enforces as much for his own pleasure as for the status that it brings—is not unlike her former husband's, except that in this game Tea Cake possesses both Janie's “outside” and her “inside.” Mary Helen Washington has argued that Janie's critical silence regarding her beating speaks volumes because it reveals that even in her relationship to Tea Cake,

which putatively represents the culmination of her erotic destiny, Janie is "so thoroughly repressed . . . that all that remains of her is what Tea Cake and the other men desire."⁴¹ But what can we make of Janie's effacement in the context of her own storytelling, and more importantly, what kind of "understandin'" does she give Pheoby to go along with it? I would suggest that whether or not she offers up commentary on the matter, Janie's beating, and especially its narrative coupling with Mrs. Turner's banishment from the community of the muck, represents a key turn in her story, in that both events highlight the destructive historical impact of racism on relationships of intimacy and sociality in Black communities. The incidents also demonstrate that, as bearers of the double burden of racism and patriarchy, "Black women are often the ones who bear the brunt of Black men's anger at a racism that has and continues to operate so thoroughly through gendered practices and ideologies."⁴²

Janie's beating, and the community reaction to it, demonstrates that even though Janie's access to Whiteness grants her some shelter from the most onerous effects of racism in both Black and White communities, it also prevents her from achieving the connection to Black people that she so desperately desires, and this revelation leads to the tragic end of her relationship with Tea Cake. For if Janie is willing to forgive her beating, Hurston is not, and she enacts her own form of narrative retribution in the cataclysmic flood that literally washes away the world of the muck and transforms Tea Cake from the bee to Janie's blossom into a mad dog. While we are given to believe that Tea Cake's madness is a result of the hydrophobia he contracts while trying to save Janie in the flood, as in the case of the passing of Joe Starks, there are multiple readings of Tea Cake's disease, for in his final moments with Janie Tea Cake succumbs to more than one kind of madness.

Indeed, while Tea Cake exhibits all of the classic symptoms of rabies, his ravings also reveal the fears and insecurities that he attempted to silence by beating Janie and running Mrs. Turner off the muck. Janie's final realization that she may have to take decisive action against Tea Cake if she is to survive their marriage and his madness is articulated in a scene that weaves together two seemingly opposed lines of reasoning: a defense of Tea Cake and a somewhat more occluded, though nevertheless insistent, will to survive.

[Tea Cake] gave her a look of blank ferocity and gurgled in his throat. She saw him sitting up in bed and moving about so that he could watch her every move. And she was beginning to feel fear of this strange thing in Tea Cake's body. So when he went out to the outhouse she rushed to see if

[his] pistol was loaded. It was a six shooter and three of the chambers were full. She started to unload it but she feared he might break it and find out she knew. That might urge his disordered mind to action. If that medicine would only come! She whirled the cylinder so that if he even did draw the gun on her it would snap three times before it would fire. She would at least have warning. She could either run or try to take it away before it was too late. Anyway Tea Cake wouldn't hurt *her*. He was jealous and wanted to scare her. She'd just be in the kitchen as usual and never let on. They'd laugh over it when he got well. She found the box of cartridges, however, and emptied it. Just as well to take the rifle from back of the head of the bed. She broke it and put the shell in her apron pocket and put it in a corner in the kitchen almost behind the stove where it was hard to see. She could outrun his knife if it came to that. Of course she was too fussy, but it did no harm to play safe. She ought not to let poor sick Tea Cake do something that would run him crazy when he found out what he had done.⁴³

Recalling the kitchen scene that ended her first marriage to Logan Killicks, this passage seamlessly blends Janie's thoughts about her husband's intentions with her own actions. Only this time Janie's actions are not quotidian kitchen tasks, but battle plans. And when Tea Cake finally lets loose his imprisoned insecurities, attempting to shoot Janie for an imagined infidelity with Mrs. Turner's brother, she is ready for him. Janie does not allow Tea Cake to put an end to her story. Taking decisive action, she terminates their love game just as she did their first game of checkers; for after all there are some things that women must never relinquish, "No suh! Not mah king. You kin take another one, but not dat one."

Janie's narrative of experience, her life history, charts her movement toward ever broader horizons of human relations—from the backyards of White folks, to her grandmother's front gate, to Logan Killicks's "sixty acres," to Joe Starks's Eatonville, to Tea Cake's muck, and finally back home again. But at the close of her story, Janie's search for connection with other human beings is in some ways still unrealized. For as she learns, in the Jim Crow South, even the most intimate human relations are structured by relations of power, not just between men and women, but also between folks that are Colored and White, poor and rich, featured and Black. Janie's journey through Black womanhood and her strategic retelling of it thus offer key insights into the complex structures of oppression that prevent Black women from taking possession of their own connections to community, not to mention their collective "Big Voice."

Thinking about this narrative of experience as a form of testimony re-

frames the political work of the novel in a number of interesting ways and enables critics to move beyond the well-rehearsed debates about Janie's voice as it relates to her social agency. If Janie's voice is articulated through her "testifying" to Pheoby—and not through the actions and experiences that her testimony describes—then her status as a speaking subject is a given. It is this testimony, Janie's frank retelling of her life to Pheoby, her intimate confessions of what would be considered "shameful" facts—her mother's rape, her own infidelity, deceit, and jealousy, and perhaps most damning, her victimization at the hands of the man who was the "bee to her blossom"—that reveals a world of experience that has been occluded in both scientific and literary treatments of Black culture. As Tricia Rose notes, "We are bombarded by stories about sex and romance, but we almost never hear what Black women have to say. The sexual stories that Black women long to tell are being told in beauty parlors, kitchens, health clubs, restaurants, malls, and laundry rooms, but a larger, more accessible conversation for all women to share and from which to learn has not yet begun."⁴⁴ Revealing this world of experience, testifying to both its limits and its joys, and articulating its fundamental contradictions, can constitute a path to transformation. This is made clear as Janie Crawford ends her account of her life so far, and Pheoby exclaims, "Lawd! . . . Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'. Ah means to make Sam take me fishin' wid him after this."⁴⁵ As Henry Louis Gates notes, the essentially pedagogical relationship between Pheoby's "hungry listening" and Janie's storytelling enacts a significant transformation in their lives.

But Janie's storytelling, as Mary Helen Washington has so astutely argued, takes a profoundly ambivalent posture with respect to the Black storytelling tradition, at once exhibiting the oral virtuosity of Black vernacular culture and demonstrating the ways in which this virtuosity has been deployed to silence women. Moreover, while Janie Crawford's storytelling narrates one woman's path to greater understanding of the social contradictions that shape her life—to her psychic development as a Black feminist, as it were—it leaves off precisely at the point where feminist readers might hope it would begin. When at the close of the novel Janie pulls in her "horizon like a great fish-net . . . from around the waist of the world" and drapes it "over her shoulder," readers are left wondering what she might do with all the life she finds "in its meshes." The novel offers a limited answer to these questions in Janie's assertion that having been to the horizon, she can now "live by comparisons." This answer leaves us with a truncated feminist hero in Janie Crawford; a teller of transformative stories of experience who,

having completed her quest for an “honest body,” returns to the confines of her marital chamber in Eatonville.

Despite an ending that might seem unsatisfying to contemporary feminist readers, Janie Crawford’s narrative of experience illuminates the hidden terrain of Black female consciousness in the rural South—a terrain that Hurston first touched upon, if obliquely, in *Mules and Men*—and thus opens up a space of possibility for the full elaboration of a Black feminist consciousness. And while it may be true that Zora Neale Hurston doesn’t give us an unambiguous heroine in Janie Crawford-Killicks-Starks-Woods, she doesn’t mean to. She means to give us a story through her, and through that story, a theoretical perspective on the world.

Feminism on the Border

Caballero and the Poetics of Collaboration

For those who privilege the notion of the solitary author, literature characteristically provides vicarious pleasure even while distancing the writer from the reader; literature provides voyeuristic seeing, possessive knowing, or teasing seduction. For those who interest themselves in collaborative writing, literature is reimagined as a place where people meet, where they must negotiate their differences, where they may contest each other's powers, and where, while retaining bodily borders, they may momentarily, ecstatically merge.

HOLLY LAIRD, WOMEN CO-AUTHORS

By moving from a militarized zone to a round-table, nepantleras acknowledge an unmapped common ground: the humanity of the other. We are the other, the other is us . . .

GLORIA ANZALDÚA, "NOW LET US SHIFT . . . THE PATH OF
CONOCIMIENTO"

In the late 1930s Jovita González and her friend Margaret Eimer began working on "a historical novel of the Border during the Mexican War" entitled "All This is Mine."¹ They started working on the manuscript in Del Rio, Texas, where González and her husband worked as teachers, and they continued to collaborate after relocating to different cities: González to Corpus Christi with her husband, Edmundo Mireles, and Eimer to Joplin, Missouri, with a relative, "Pop" Eimer.² Over the next decade or so, González and Eimer collaborated on the manuscript long-distance, sending revised copies to one other by U.S. mail and, occasionally, sharing the manuscript with friends and relatives, who praised its characters, plot, and historical setting.³ Unfortunately, publishers did not agree with these

friendly assessments of “All This is Mine” (later titled *Caballero: A Historical Novel*), and the manuscript was eventually tucked away in a box filled with Jovita González’s personal correspondence, only to be discovered some fifty years later and hailed as a foundational text in the Chicana/o literary canon.⁴

Given the novel’s contemporary relevance as a key text in a literary tradition that has defined itself in counter-discursive terms to Anglo-American literature and politics, it is no small irony that at least one hundred pages of the original manuscript appear to be typed on the reverse of a decade’s worth of business correspondence from Pop Eimer’s Missouri gun shop, a business whose patrons included sportsmen, members of the National Rifle Association, and avid gun collectors. The effect of reading both sides of the manuscript is like hearing two historical testimonies in simultaneous translation. On one side we find a gripping account of the struggle of Anglos and Mexicans to overcome their differences and craft a post-1848 borderlands in the wake of the U.S.-Mexican War, while on the other, we are witness to the everyday affairs of a powerful, self-assured, undeniably Anglo and male “gunfighter nation.”⁵

The curious intertextuality embodied in the *Caballero* manuscript seems a fitting metaphor for the contradictory politics that many critics find at the heart of its narrative. A tale of love in times of war, *Caballero* opens in 1846 at the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Mexico over the narrow strip of land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. In response to this conflict, Don Santiago de Mendoza y Soria—the eponymous *caballero* of the novel and the patriarch of *Rancho La Palma de Cristo*, a hacienda located squarely in the middle of the contested territory—vows to resist the Anglo invaders at all costs. But the unanticipated costs of his resistance are high: Don Santiago eventually loses his children, his *peones*, and even his sanity as a result of his refusal to compromise with the invading forces.

Indeed, though Don Santiago isolates his family on his *rancho* in an effort to shelter them from the insidious influences of Anglos, his children and *peones* inevitably do come into contact with the invading forces, with disastrous consequences. His beloved youngest child, Susanita, falls in love with an army lieutenant from the southern aristocracy, Robert Davis Warrener; his other daughter, the devout Maria de los Angeles (Angela), agrees to a marriage of convenience with the political opportunist Alfred “Red” McLane; his “effeminate” son, Luis Gonzaga, falls into a deep “artistic” engagement with a lame army doctor, Captain Devlin; and his *peones* develop a love affair with free market capitalism, leaving the hacienda for paid positions as servants in Anglo households. As his family and servants

betray him and “consort with the enemy” through these romantic, artistic, and economic encounters, Don Santiago’s imperious reign over the hacienda begins to crumble along with his identity, initiating his slow descent into madness. With its linkage of historical romance and *Lear*-like tragedy, *Caballero* explores the politics of betrayal even as it outlines the perils and the possibilities of various forms of collaboration—political, artistic, erotic. In the end, the authors reveal that “betrayal” is always contingent on one’s position within the social hierarchies of opposing forces, and they propose a reassessment of collaboration as a potential avenue for social transformation.

Because it focuses on the impact of war on the day-to-day realities of the family and the domestic sphere, *Caballero* also offers a uniquely gendered vision of borderlands history and reveals that “state building is not merely a matter of armies and bureaucrats drawing abstract borderlines, but also of how people come to link, or refuse to link, their daily lives and shifting identities to the larger imagined community of a nation.” As such, the novel literally engenders a post-1848 borderlands, illuminating the ways in which the intimacies of interpersonal contact, as well as subjects’ “self-conceptions as gendered beings, [and] their notions of family—can by turns advance, undermine, or complicate the larger state and racial projects that have repeatedly redrawn the map of North America.”⁶

As a dialogic artifact, the *Caballero* manuscript itself materializes this sense of history as something that is forged through an intimate encounter between opposing forces. On its face, the manuscript offers a narrative that most scholars have read as a foundational fiction outlining the necessary compromises of an emerging Mexican American political class. Behind this undeniably constructed history—literally, on its reverse—the manuscript also reveals the archival evidence of another history in the connections between state power and private property that is Pop Eimer’s gun shop correspondence. This history, too, contributed (albeit in negative fashion) to the formation of a Mexican political class in Texas. That much critical attention has been paid to one side of the manuscript and none to the other is not surprising, given that historical novels are generally more interesting to read than business correspondence. However the dual voices of the *Caballero* manuscript are no small critical matter because they constitute a material reminder that the text itself was forged in the borderlands between at least two historical perspectives, one Anglo and one Mexican American. In short, what makes *Caballero* interesting as both a work of borderlands feminism and a historical artifact is that it is a cross-cultural collaborative novel about the politics of cross-cultural collaboration.

What are the political and ideological implications of the gendered and

cross-racial coauthorship of *Caballero*? In what ways does this coauthorship shape the “erotic of politics” that the novel’s multiple romances allegorize? And how are the politics of nationhood—which are signified through the narrative’s various romantic plots—shaped by a larger feminist project involving a conversation between women across the divides of race, culture, and history? If the romances in *Caballero*, like those of conventional historical romances (as Doris Summer has argued with respect to the Latin American novel of the nineteenth century), represent a bid for utopian resolution of the contradictions of a nation at war, just what kind of utopia—or for that matter, nation—did González and Eimer envision?⁷ As I will argue, centering these questions, and collaboration itself, in our analysis of *Caballero* significantly alters not only the ways in which we read the text, but also the ways in which the novel itself might be recuperated as a narrative of national formation.

While reading *Caballero* as a cross-racial collaboration may lead to its exile from the world of Chicana/o letters, I am not overly concerned that placing the issue of collaboration at the center of an analysis of *Caballero* lessens its importance to the history of Chicana/o discourse, especially since the novel shares so many of the political and critical concerns that contemporary Chicana scholars have addressed in their own writing. Indeed, as both a project and a narrative, *Caballero* anticipates the interventions of writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, Emma Perez, and Norma Alarcón, because it poses a productive metatextual challenge to the “dominant discursive logics” of nation, patriarchy, and resistance. Moreover, González’s uncertain status within the Chicana/o intellectual tradition—a status always undercut by her tendency to express conservative political views and sometimes unpopular class and racial ideologies—has not been helped by the fact that *Caballero* has frequently been read as a single-author text, particularly since the novel seems to outline a project for reconciliation between Anglos and Mexicans in Texas based on the outdated and problematic norms of romance.

In fact, *Caballero* is often read as a failed Chicana/o text, a novel in which an essentially anti-imperial thrust is undercut by the author’s flawed ideologies of race and class. This argument is founded on the many examples of collaboration within the narrative, especially the romantic entanglements of its Anglo and Mexican characters, but ignores the collaborative nature of the narrative itself. Might there be a different reading of the multiple romantic, political, and economic collaborations in *Caballero*? Might these collaborations and romantic liaisons reflect the material conditions of *Caballero*’s production, the myriad negotiations that must be made

in the process of writing a collaborative text? Can we see in *Caballero* not one ambivalent and politically contradictory voice, but two voices that may or may not always agree and may even contradict one another? And could the ineluctable differences that exist between two writers with different agendas be a source of productive imagining? In other words, might not the idea of dialogue, or at the very least a dialogic perspective on history, culture, and race relations, be the ultimate agenda at the heart of *Caballero* as a collaborative political, historical, and literary project?

Jovita González's career as a public intellectual was marked by an interest in the promise and possibility of dialogue, from her support of Pan-Americanism to her promotion of bilingual and bicultural education for both Mexican *and* Anglo students.⁸ This approach to politics also found a place in her written work and is perhaps most vividly expressed in her only other piece of fiction writing, "Shades of the Tenth Muse." In that short story, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Anne Bradstreet engage in a dialogue across cultural, religious, and national boundaries. And while they cannot agree on most things, they do share their poetry and thereby come to a better understanding of the commonalities of their experiences as women intellectuals in the Americas. Which brings me back to the feminist dialogics at the center of *Caballero*, and in particular the provocative pseudonym that Margaret Eimer chose when she coauthored the text with González: Eve Raleigh. With its confluence of meanings—Eve, the first female, and Raleigh the English explorer of the Americas—does the name not hearken back to that first poetess of Anglo America: Anne Bradstreet? The hint is too delicious to ignore: could the writing of *Caballero* have been a material expression of that dialogue that González imagined happening in her study only three years earlier, with González in the role of Sor Juana and Eimer standing in for Anne Bradstreet? Indeed, like "Shades of the Tenth Muse," *Caballero* offers a complex feminist critique of the discursive limitations of *both* Mexican and Anglo visions of history, and it does so by virtue of a cross-racial dialogue that deconstructs conventional notions of authorship and, by extension, patriarchal authority.

Necessary Fictions: Gendering the Politics of Collaboration in *Caballero*

In the summer of 1939 Jovita González expressed her frustration with the decidedly unenthusiastic and sometimes downright negative responses to "All This is Mine" that she had been receiving from publishing houses.

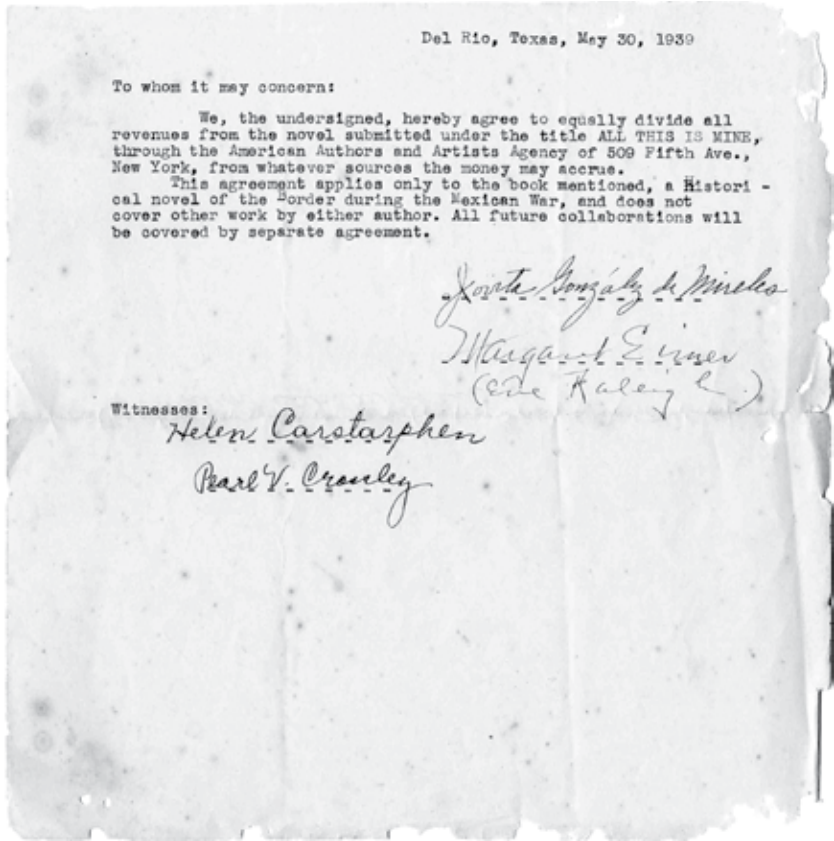


Figure 6.1. Original contract for *Caballero* signed by Jovita González de Mireles and Margaret Eimer, 1939. Courtesy of Jovita González (Mireles) Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Texas State University-San Marcos.

In a letter to John Joseph Gorrell, González complained that while publishers found the manuscript's historical setting "interesting," its plot "stirring," and its characters "alive," they nevertheless consistently rejected it. Pitching the manuscript to Gorrell, a sometime writer for Catholic magazines, González touted its historical accuracy, emphasizing that the story was based on material that had taken her "twelve years to compile" from memoirs and family history, as well as historical sources that she had come across while conducting research for her master's thesis at the University of Texas.

González believed the manuscript was groundbreaking because it accomplished two seemingly opposed rhetorical objectives. On the one hand, it

offered a corrective account of 1848 that gave voice to the historical experience of dispossessed *Tejanos*. “It is the only book of its kind,” she claimed; “the Mexican side of the war of 1848 has never been given.” On the other hand, this counternarrative was one element of an impartial account of one of the most contentious moments in Texas history:

We picture the Mexican *hidalgo* with their faults as well as their virtues, with their racial and religious pride, their love of tradition and of the land which they inherited from their ancestors. We also picture the American officers, their kindness to the conquered race, but we also picture the vandals who followed in on the trail of the army, hating anything and everything that was Catholic and Mexican, and who used the battle cry ‘Remember the Alamo’ as an excuse to pillage and steal.⁹

González’s letter to John Joseph Gorrell suggests an intriguing, if oblique, entry point into the political context of the collaborative project she undertook with Margaret Eimer. Indeed her insistence that the manuscript offered both an impartial and more accurate version of Texas history implies that at the time of its writing, the historiography of Texas was neither.

González and Eimer undertook their collaborative project during a period when Texas history was the subject of intense mythmaking. In the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, folklorists and historians like J. Frank Dobie, Eugene Barker, and Walter Prescott Webb were producing popular books that for the most part functioned as ornate apologias for Anglo imperialism. This period more than any other was responsible for structuring the very language of Texas history that Chicana/o scholars simultaneously inherited and disavowed in the 1960s. Chicana literary critic Leticia Garza-Falcón has argued that the language deployed by Dobie, Barker, Webb, and others to shape Texas history and culture constituted a “rhetoric of dominance” in which the exclusion and domination of Mexicans and Indians seemed natural and even justified.¹⁰

Walter Prescott Webb in particular stands out as a writer of popular histories about Texas—including *The Great Plains* (1931) and *The Texas Rangers* (1935)—that set the tone for a discourse on Texas history and culture that effectively “disappeared” Native Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans from its communal script. And it was his historical mythmaking, founded on the clash between savagery (nature, Mexicans, and Indians) and civilization (White masculinity), that came to construct popular notions about the necessary ascendancy of Anglo rule in Texas.¹¹

The rhetoric of dominance that defined both popular and scholarly ideas

about Texas, its people, and its history came to a head in the yearlong orgy of public history that was the Texas centennial celebration of 1936. State-wide events associated with the centennial began in Gonzales, Texas, in November 1935 and ran through 1936, featuring celebrations at various historic sites throughout Texas. Pageants were held in San Antonio to commemorate the “siege of Bexar,” as well as in Houston, where both the battle of San Jacinto and the “founding” of the city were reenacted in colorful productions. Dallas won the honor of hosting the central celebration on the grounds of the Texas State Fair (from June through November of 1936); which featured one of the centennial year’s most popular attractions, the “Cavalcade of Texas,” a panoramic display depicting four hundred years of Texas history. Fort Worth, Dallas’s sister city, hosted nearly as many visitors at its own unofficial Texas Frontier Centennial, which also featured a number of popular historical displays, including one called “Casa Mañana” and, of course, the requisite attraction, the “Winning of the West.”¹²

In the midst of the triumphal mood that suffused Texas’s statewide birthday celebration, Jovita González and other Mexican American culture workers attempted to ensure that the “Mexican side” of Texas history was included in events related to the centennial. González got her opportunity to contribute to the centennial celebrations when the Catholic Exhibit of Texas commissioned her to put together a special display of photographs, short biographical narratives, and material culture on notable Catholic women of Texas. Given its focus on the history of Catholicism in Texas (a largely Mexican history until the early twentieth century), this research assignment provided González with the perfect opportunity to diversify the centennial exposition’s vision of Texas culture, both in terms of gender and race. With the help of Carlos Castañeda, Adina De Zavala, and others, González designed a historical display entitled “Catholic Heroines of Texas” that cleverly foregrounded the role of *Mexicanas* in the founding of Texas. It was perhaps her research on this subject that inspired González to think about writing her own popular history on the contributions of Mexican Americans, and especially Mexican American *women* to the making of Texas. More significantly, it may well have been the unilateral vision of Texas history that was promoted across the state during the centennial year that propelled González into the borderlands of coauthorship.

The woman that would become her writing partner, Margaret Eimer, seems an unlikely choice for this cross-cultural writing project. A frustrated but talented writer whose short stories had been rejected by numerous magazines, Margaret Eimer had moved with “Pop” Eimer from Joplin, Missouri, to Del Rio, Texas, likely following the wave of new Anglo

settlers that had flooded into the region during the agricultural boom. Some years earlier González had written with bitterness about these newcomers in both her master's thesis and in a piece that appeared in the *Southwest Review*—an essay that she titled with no small irony, “America Invades the Border Towns.”¹³ Though Eimer was undeniably one of the Americans who invaded the border towns of Texas in the early twentieth century, she nevertheless developed a warm, even intimate, friendship with González, with whom she shared both a passion for writing and a skeptical stance toward received wisdom about politics, religion, and gender norms. Indeed, Eimer's letters to González, composed in the intimate voice of a confidante, offer an intriguing, though admittedly refracted, glimpse into González's own values and beliefs during this period. Hilariously written, occasionally in the dialect of the “white trash” newcomers, Eimer's letters wittily take on organized religion (she, like González, was a Catholic), the intellectual establishment of the East Coast (from a biting regionalist perspective), and societal gender norms (she steadfastly refused to marry).

For an Anglo woman and a Mexican American women to rewrite Texas history in the face of 1930's triumphalism was a political act, not simply because it inserted the “Mexican side of the war of 1848” into what had been a one-sided account of the supposedly foundational moment in Anglo Texans' self-imaginings. In its very dialogic form and its commitment to “impartiality,” the collaboration between González and Eimer engendered a version of Texas history that destabilized the practices of historical myth-making itself. The product of this collaboration, the novel that González referred to as their “brainchild” in a letter to Dobie, would take the form of a conversation across the boundary lines of difference and offer what feminist rhetoricians Andrea Lundsford and Lisa Ede term a “rhetoric in a new key” that promised to subvert the rhetoric of dominance of both Texas history and patriarchal authority itself.¹⁴

Returning to *Caballero* with this historical context in mind, one uncovers a striking meta-critical observation: while a good deal of *Caballero*'s action involves border crossing between Matamoros, Mexico, and Fort Brown, Texas, critics have rarely, if ever, attended to the implications of this particular spatial metaphor. But space matters, particularly in the borderlands, and even more so in the context of the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848, since this conflict, which stands at the center of *Caballero*, was essentially a territorial dispute over where and how the national boundaries between two opposing nation-states would be drawn. And it is of no small consequence to the geographical imaginary of the novel that the Texas Rangers and U.S. soldiers stationed at Fort Brown take their leisure in Matamoros,

precisely the same place that the *hacendados* have chosen to gather and plot their revenge against the Anglo invaders. As a result, *both* Anglos and Mexicans must continually cross the Rio Grande, which divides Matamoros not only from Fort Brown but also from the vast Texas landholdings of the *hacendados*. In the historical moment that *Caballero* documents, this geographical feature is, at least in political terms, still a “vague and undetermined” space not yet marked by the state apparatuses (bridges, walls, guards) that, in the twentieth century, would materialize its divisive binary logic. In the world of *Caballero*, the Rio Grande is less a dividing line than a double signifier, a liminal zone that promises both pleasure and danger. And it is no coincidence that most of the action that moves the plot forward—Luis Gonzaga’s first encounter with the man who will become his artistic “mentor,” his brother Alvaro’s violent death, and Don Santiago’s final mad attempt to transform the U.S.-Mexico boundary by damming the flow of the Rio Grande with an enormous boulder—occurs at this crossing place-meeting space where *eros* and *thanatos* collide.

Caballero’s omniscient narrator also crosses this zone repeatedly as she shuttles between the interiors of the elegant winter homes in Matamoros, where the *hacendados* plot their resistance, and the rough army barracks, where the Anglo invaders plot their romances. Here *Caballero*’s dialogic imagination is most revealing, providing the reader with an insider’s view of the plans, practices, conversations, and even interior thoughts of the opposing forces in the conflict. This crossing and recrossing into constantly shifting enemy territories also reveals the deeply subjective mechanics that produce both “enemies” and “territories.” But *Caballero* refuses the polarity of these options, offering a radical critique of the foundational myths that serve to justify them even as it deconstructs the very grounds upon which the oppression/resistance binary builds its seductive logic.

Caballero’s narrative voice openly articulates this deconstructing perspective on history, oppression, and resistance, inserting itself into the action with a number of pointed interjections. As B. J. Manriquez has observed in her careful reading of the tropological devices at play in *Caballero*, this wandering narrative voice “describes the . . . physical and political environment” of the novel “objectively,” but it also interjects “intrusive, sentimental explanations of the characters’ behaviors, mixing judgments with descriptions,” often guiding “the readers’ interpretation by evaluating the manner and purpose of the characters’ thoughts and actions.”¹⁵ This intrusive, border-crossing narrative voice has several rhetorical functions. First, it provides a framework for the dialogic imaginary of the novel, in that it moves omnisciently within and across spaces divided by language, nation,

and race. Its rhetorical outbursts also allow the authors to shadow what might be a too-celebratory representation of Anglo-American values (as embodied in the various figures with whom the victims of premodern Mexican patriarchy collaborate) with consistent reminders of the darker side of American “progress,” even as it undercuts a too-easy reading of heroic resistance by demonstrating that, to paraphrase Américo Paredes, a warrior-hero fighting for his rights with his “pistol in his hand” is, more often than not, fighting for control over the women, *peones*, and property that are his right under the patriarchal code.

One example of this function comes late in the novel when Don Santiago orders a group of Anglo squatters off his land. This chance encounter turns deadly when one of the squatters attempts to shoot Don Santiago and is shot dead by Tomás, a *vaquero*. Shocked by the killing, the dead squatter’s brother-in-law quickly explains to Don Santiago and his men that they had seen no markers and thus assumed that the land was free for the taking. He apologizes and promises to move on, but his sister refuses to be “run off,” despite her husband’s tragic death. “It’s their land, Katie,” her brother explains. In response, the woman points a finger at Don Santiago and screams, “That’s what they say, and even if it’s theirs they’re only Mexicans. We be white folks and this is the United States, ain’t it? We got the right of it. They kilted an American, you goin’ to let that get by?” Though the squatters finally agree to leave his land, Don Santiago cannot disguise his utter contempt for these impoverished vagabonds, summing them up in one dismissive epithet: “*Puercos*.”¹⁶

Regardless of Don Santiago’s parting words, the narrative makes clear that it is the *puercos*—pigs—and those like them that will eventually win out. Indeed, the squatters that Don Santiago orders off his land provide a harrowing premonition of the wave of White settlers that will come in the wake of 1848, as the narrator pointedly observes:

It was a scene that was to be repeated in variation for many years to come, until an empire of state would rise on land that had scarcely a square yard of it that had not been wet with blood. The fugitive, like the man Tomás had shot; the land-greedy who justified their rapaciousness with the word “pioneer” and used it as a blanket to cover their evils—sullyng the good word and the constructive men entitled to it; the trash, the “*puercos*,” like George and his sister, squeezed out of a community that refused to support them any longer; the wanderer, fleeing from nothing but himself; the adventurer, his conscience and his scruples long dead. All these and more, came to Texas like buzzards to a feast.

“Remember the Alamo!” they shouted and visited the sins of Santa Anna upon all his countrymen, and considered themselves justified in stealing the lands of the Mexicans. Some built themselves a house of righteousness like a snail builds his shell and carries it with him. “The Mexicans are Papists, Catholics who worship idols and pray to a woman they call the Blessed Virgin.” They pillaged and stole, and insulted, and called themselves a sword of avenging God, and shouted their hymns to drown their consciences.

They came on and on, and killed, and were killed. And the earth took their bodies, dust to dust returning, and sent up its flowers in the spring, and its gift of grass. And smiled to the sun, and lifted its face to the rain.¹⁷

This lengthy narrative interjection accomplishes a number of interconnected rhetorical objectives. On the surface, the passage undermines the claims of manifest destiny by offering an opposing reading of the westering pioneer, the veritable ur-symbol of American progress. But more importantly, like Don Cesáreo’s soliloquy in *Dew on the Thorn*, the narrative voice bears witness to the ways in which heroic discourses can be deployed to justify the rapacity of empire.

Western historian Patricia Limerick has observed that among the persistent values that Americans hold regarding the history of Westward expansion is the “idea of innocence.” This narrative of innocence—to which González and Eimer’s counternarrative refers—envisions the move West as a desire for “improvement and opportunity, not injury to others,” and suggests that White Americans went West to settle savage lands and bring the promises of democracy and “Christian civilization” to benighted Indians and Mexicans. As Limerick notes, even when westering Anglos trespassed on land already owned or colonized by others, they rarely figured themselves as “criminals; rather, they were pioneers.”¹⁸ According to Limerick, no figure more closely embodies the trope of innocent victim than the “white woman murdered by Indians.” Few such deaths actually occurred, but the symbol of the imperiled White woman retains extraordinary power in public imaginings of the West and has helped to cover over the messy realities of territorial expansion.¹⁹ That González and Eimer chose a female squatter, “a tall woman, thin, angular, drab, even from a distance anything but prepossessing,” as the voice of Anglo racism and greed adds discursive weight to their critique. With her “ragged clothes,” “gaunt frame,” and vitriolic speech, this “pioneer” is hardly the picture of heroic femininity so often associated with the myth of the frontier. As a negative figuration of

the “innocence” of westward expansion, she helps to complicate the Anglo side of this impartial history of Texas.

Caballero's intrusive narrative voice is not confined to a critique of the foundational myths of westward expansion. True to its dialogic commitment, the novel also exposes the internal contradictions of the *ranchero* class. Here the omniscient narrator shifts from a critique of the narrative of innocence that empire builds around its imperatives to the deconstruction of patriarchal authority within the hacienda system. This critique—well beyond a simple examination of the contradictions of patriarchy on the hacienda—actually functions as the fulcrum around which *Caballero*'s articulation of the politics of collaboration turns. Whereas the authors' critique of Anglo imperialism is articulated almost exclusively through intrusions of the narrative voice, their deconstruction of patriarchal authority takes a different rhetorical approach. The narrative outbursts are there, to be sure, but they accompany a much more deft strategy that turns on the character development of the novel's central protagonist, Don Santiago, a true *caballero*.²⁰

Indeed, González and Eimer spend a great deal of time inside Don Santiago's head, and this attention to the interior processes behind his actions brings the narrative's examination of patriarchal thinking into focus, enabling an oblique yet devastating feminist critique of resistance as an oppositional strategy. While Don Santiago expresses the requisite attributes that readers have come to associate with an epic hero—the bravery and nobility of character, the resolute belief in the “rightness” of his cause—his inability to cope with the historical transformations that are the legacy of his age and his consequent psychological decline mark him as a hero who is deeply flawed. Indeed, in the course of the novel, Don Santiago comes to represent a kind of antihero, suggesting that the novel's title, *Caballero*, contains an ironic reversal: while its gendered singularity gestures to the conventions of heroic narratives, the novel itself denies readers the heroic male figure that would normally stand at the center of such narratives.

Given these rhetorical nuances, it is worth remembering that the provisional title that González and Eimer chose for their manuscript was the rather more provocative “All This is Mine.” In its ambivalent evocation of territorial (and literary) possession, “All This is Mine” also suggests an ironic reversal, especially given the manuscript's shared authorship. The title they finally settled on, *Caballero*, translates this possessive territoriality into a more subtle (and ultimately more productive) gendered critique of the possessive individuality of the autonomous (male) subject-in-resistance. Indeed, the new title seems to refer less to a singular heroic figure in the

text, than to the *singularity* of patriarchal thinking and its bankrupt formulations of identity and authority. At the start of the narrative, this ideology—embodied in the patriarchal power of Don Santiago and the savage masculinity of his eldest son and heir, Alvaro—appears inviolable, as impregnable as the adobe walls of their hacienda. But in the course of the historical transformations that *Caballero* documents, cracks and fissures in this ideology begin to emerge.

Indeed Don Santiago's hardened stance against the Anglo enemy allows for fewer and fewer compromises, inevitably resulting in his increased isolation and irrelevance in the post-1848 borderlands. Exiling all who "consort with the enemy" from his *rancho* (including his own children) for fear of "contamination" from the hated *gringos*, Don Santiago literally depopulates his domain, effectively transforming himself from the embodiment of patriarchal power to a solitary old man. As his children and *peones* abandon him, Don Santiago longs to forget his hatred of *Americanos* if only to repopulate the *rancho* and bring his family together once more, but he cannot relent, because to do so would represent a fatal lessening of his authority as the patriarch. At war with the enemy and at war with himself, he is unable to fuse his divided loyalties, to force them to collaborate with one another. Instead he holds onto a rigid notion of identity grounded in patriarchal authority and uncompromising resistance that cannot survive the contradictions of living in the borderlands after 1848.

Don Santiago's "tragic flaw" is his refusal to relinquish his claim to an identity that is the embodiment of power within the patriarchal system of the *rancho*: the Patriarch, a male of godlike power. In fact, Don Santiago quite literally worships this projected image of himself at a natural altar, a secluded place at the uppermost region of his *rancho*, a spot that he aptly calls his "rendezvous." "It was a rendezvous beloved by the master of Rancho La Palma. Here pride could have a man's stature, here he was on a throne. He stood beside the cross, monarch of all he surveyed."²¹ The identification of this special place as Don Santiago's rendezvous, a term that typically signifies a meeting place for two or more people, is revealing. For as Don Santiago looks down upon his domain, he is visited by a vision of his "Power" personified—the alter ego of the patriarch, who is its reflection in the material world:

Power was wine in his veins. Power was a figure that touched him, and pointed, and whispered. Those dots on the plain, cattle, sheep, horses, were his to kill or let live. The peons, down there, were his to discipline at

any time with a lash, to punish by death if he chose. His wife, his sister, sons and daughters, bowed to his wishes and came or went as he decreed.²²

But the vision that whispers seductively to Don Santiago eventually points to the problematic nature of the patriarch's conception of identity-as-power. If the master's identity is founded upon the power of possession, the ability to punish the slave by death if he chooses, then what happens when he is stripped of this power, either as a result of the intrusion of a more powerful master or through the revolt of the slave? As the novel progresses, and the presence of *Americanos* increasingly threatens to strip Don Santiago's possessions (material, animal, and even human) from him, the very basis for his sense of a consolidated identity is undermined. As *Caballero* reveals, in the uncertain times of war, the power of possession of land, resources, and human beings is a most dangerous foundation upon which to build a sense of identity.

As if to direct Don Santiago to a more sustainable notion of identity, his vision reappears later in the novel, after his retreat from Matamoros to *Rancho La Palma de Cristo*. Troubled by his own increasingly despotic mood, Don Santiago returns to his rendezvous looking for a bit of spiritual reassurance. This time what he finds there is not a vision of power, but one of possibility. Standing beside the "high stone cross," the "Master of Rancho La Palma" surveys his kingdom, but is surprised to find that "the magic of it refused to come." As he regretfully ponders his cruel domination of both servants and family, a vision appears before him, a "man with his own face . . . and . . . quiet eyes."²³ The man points to the plain, but this time, instead of affirming Don Santiago's conception of power as total possession, he reminds the patriarch that in order to be the legitimate master of *Rancho La Palma de Cristo*, he cannot rule over its inhabitants with his "heel on their necks." The vision points out that in the end Don Santiago will never "know happiness" if he refuses it to those he governs, and asks the patriarch if he has forgotten that "a master must be servant also?"

Imploring Don Santiago to reject his singular vision of identity and embrace an identity that does not rely on unsustainable hierarchies and false binaries, the vision holds out his hand, and smiling a "warming, sweet smile," the vision speaks: "Your choice is now. You can be the man you are, or the one I am. You know me. I am the part given you by your splendid mother and I once lived with you." Don Santiago reacts violently to the proposal. Scooping up a pile of earth, he surrenders to "possession," and allows it to take him "in the grip of its pride and he gave himself to it as

a shameless woman to a lover. He struck out with the empty hand at the man with the quiet eyes, and struck again and again.”²⁴ The “man with the quiet eyes,” the legacy left to Don Santiago by his mother and an image of compassion and acceptance, is not simply the “feminine” locked within his “masculine” identity; it is the voice of the Other within him, a mediating force that allows the master to see himself as servant, the man to figure himself as woman.

Don Santiago’s refusal to negotiate with the interior threat that the Other poses to his identity suggests a too-narrow conception of identity itself, one that is locked into binary differentiations between male/female and, by extension, self/other. In his rejection of the female legacy that complicates both his claims to patriarchy and his strategies of resistance, Don Santiago constructs an “absolute notion of the self as an autonomous, independent entity,” a notion of self that is founded upon a denial of “the otherness within the self and the incessant presence of the self in the other.”²⁵ In short, Don Santiago’s understanding or resistance is grounded in a conception of an autonomous and coherent self constituted in and through the unequal class, gender, and race relations of the patriarchal order. As Chicana critic Norma Alarcón has noted in her seminal essay, “The Theoretical Subjects of *This Bridge Called My Back*,” this notion of the autonomous and exclusive subject is at the center of all oppositional thinking, including reactionary forms of ethnic nationalism and bourgeois forms of feminist thought. And reactionary oppositional thinking, she argues, actually undermines real social transformation because its reductive logic projects singularity onto multiplicity, which limits both an analysis of “the many-headed demon of oppression” and potential strategic responses to that oppression.²⁶

The singularity of the autonomous subject is a singularity that, as the authors imply, stands at the center of logics of domination like patriarchy and also functions as the unexamined center of historical narratives and authorship itself. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford note these connections, pointing to the ways in which the notion of a singular author is a construct of modernity that is inextricably linked “to the development of modern capitalism and of intellectual property, to Western rationalism, and to patriarchy.”²⁷ In other words, the singular authorial subject has become a kind of “foundational fiction” that grants both authority and authenticity to all narratives, including the ones we tell about ourselves, our traditions, and our histories. *Caballero*’s collaborative authorship works to undo this fiction by rejecting the singular authorial subject in favor of a plural one and thereby suggesting (as does western literary critic Linda Karrel) that

“the author” is always a “composite figure” and that his/her “singularity is always a fiction.”²⁸ This has important implications for the historical vision that González and Eimer present in the pages of *Caballero*. If history, as Chicana historian Emma Perez has observed, “is the way in which people understand themselves through a collective, common past,” and history—especially Texas history—has been a story told about and through the singular vision of “great men,” then González and Eimer’s bid to rewrite the past from a plural, cross-racial, and gendered perspective represents a key challenge to historical meaning making itself.²⁹

Caballero’s collaborative authorship—as well as the rhetorical devices that it deploys to guarantee a more accurate and more impartial account of Texas history—destabilizes the dominant logic of historical mythmaking in Texas by offering a multi-perspectival vision of history, one that literally multiplies the authority upon which historical claims can be made. Thinking about *Caballero* in this way reveals the complexity of its critical project: through various rhetorical devices, particularly its omniscient narrative voice, the novel documents the struggles of a *caballero* (the antihero Don Santiago) to maintain a coherent sense of identity in the face of conflict and historical change. But the novel’s dialogic structure—and the cross-racial relations behind its production—deny a stable ideological center to the narrative, and thus present a meta-textual challenge to the autonomous subject-in-resistance upon which Don Santiago grounds his oppositional logic. If, as Jeffrey Masten has suggested in *Textual Intercourse*, “Collaboration is a dispersal of author/ity, rather than a mere doubling of it,” then the hero’s inevitable descent into madness offers an all-too-fitting allegory for the disruptiveness of the collaborative historical project under way.³⁰ The death of Don Santiago may indeed signal not simply the demise of a particular (Mexican) form of premodern patriarchy, but also the death of authority—and authorship—itsself. To paraphrase Emma Perez, the collaboration between González and Eimer—in form, content, and practice—takes the “his” out of the “story” of Texas.³¹

“They were neither Mexican nor Anglo Saxon, but artists”: Borderland Poetics and the Erotics of Collaboration

In the *Decolonial Imaginary*, Emma Perez argues that the “historian’s political project . . . is to write a history that decolonizes otherness.” In such a history “one is not simply oppressed or victimized; nor is one only oppressor or victimizer. Rather, one negotiates within the imaginary to a decoloniz-

ing otherness where all identities are at work in one way or another.”³² As I have noted, *Caballero* gestures toward this historical and political project by decolonizing “otherness” in both its collaborative relations of production and its narrative and rhetorical devices. It seems a strange irony, then, that the great preponderance of critical interpretations of *Caballero* turn on a too-literal interpretation of the politics at play in the novel’s multiple encounters across difference and their consequent allegorical relationship to Mexican American history.

Caballero is most often read as a historical romance that responds to the problems associated with the hegemonic incorporation of Mexican Americans into the political and economic mainstream of the U.S. nation-state. Such readings generally rely on the following conditional logic: If Don Santiago (the emblematic *caballero* who represents the old Mexican order) is clearly destined for extinction despite his “heroic” attempts to resist the invading forces, and the “new order” is clearly marked as a bicultural generation that emerges from the couplings of Anglo men and Mexican women, then González and Eimer must be suggesting that accommodation, not resistance, is the appropriate strategy for Mexican Americans in a post-1848 borderlands. In this view of the novel, which borrows from Doris Sommer’s insights in *Foundational Fictions*, the romantic relations between Mexican women and Anglo men stand as allegories for Anglo-Mexican relations in Texas’s emerging economic, political, and social order.³³ This reading lends itself to arguments that the novel serves the interests of an “assimilationist” political agenda, because *Caballero*’s romantic entanglements are almost exclusively between conquered Mexican women and invading Anglo men. Indeed, one can hardly ignore the asymmetrical vision of social relations suggested by the gendered dynamics of *Caballero*’s couplings: Mexican subjects enter into this imagined social order as always already conquered, subservient, and servile. Such criticisms are founded, of course, on the exigencies of race and nation, forcing what is essentially a critique of patriarchal ideology into service as a critique of imperialism, a service that the novel only imperfectly satisfies.

This critical take on the novel hinges on the many instances of Anglo-Mexican collaboration within the narrative, but it does not take into account the fact that the text itself represents such a collaboration. Such critical discrepancies and erasures highlight the multivalent meanings—both negative and positive—of “collaboration,” the term that necessarily stands at the center of our understanding of the text’s production, as well as our critical inquiries into the allegorical nature of Anglo-Mexican romance in *Caballero*. Indeed, the multiple and contradictory meanings of “collabo-

ration” as both a productive enterprise and a destructive form of betrayal necessarily complicate how we read the political project of *Caballero*.

As Holly Laird observes in *Women Coauthors*, collaborative writing is often figured as a threat to the ideological integrity of the writing process, because it has “played the villain’s role in modern liberation movements (solidarity gets to be the good guy).”³⁴ This is an especially salient observation with respect to the González-Eimer collaboration, which reached across the acrimonious ideological divides of racial and cultural politics in Texas, and still troubles too-easy nationalist recuperations of *Caballero*. Laird calls for a feminist rereading of the politics of (writerly) collaboration—one that can “keep both faces of this term in play, collaboration as collaborationism and as cooperation,” even as it allows us to “discern how we can move from emphasizing one to emphasizing the other.”³⁵ Laird’s approach offers a useful entry point for rethinking the ways in which González and Eimer thematize the politics and poetics of collaboration through the romantic emplotments of *Caballero*, especially since her study focuses on the ways in which collaborative writing projects often signify a desire to undo the binary logic that divides self from other, which, as I have argued, is one of the central challenges that *Caballero* presents to dominant discursive logics.³⁶

Laird envisions literary partnerships as transgressive projects that, more often than not, suggest a utopian political imaginary. Noting that many coauthored narratives are “preoccupied with collaboration in relation to, and at times as a path to, various kinds of equity, both socioliterary and erotic,”³⁷ she argues that collaborative writing often deconstructs established polarities, including the “binaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality—but also polarizations that are imposed on age, the mind’s faculties, the real, and the relations between a text and its contexts.”³⁸ It is no accident that her language is suggestive of a borderlands discourse. Laird sees collaborative writing as existing at a kind of literary *encrucijada*, a crossroads “where people meet, where they must negotiate their differences, where they may contest each other’s powers, and where, while retaining their bodily borders, they may momentarily ecstatically merge.”³⁹

As her language implies, Laird also pays close attention to the erotic valences of collaboration. Examining what she terms the “socio-erotic poetics” at work in several collaborative texts, she points out that it is the erotic that often becomes a marker for both the transformative, border-crossing gestures within coauthored texts and the practice of collaboration itself in the autobiographical self-representations of women coauthors. This acknowledgment of the erotic, both as a metaphor for collaborative

writing and a trope for border-crossing within cowritten texts, is particularly important for reading *Caballero's* multiple romantic, political, and economic collaborations. Reframed in this way, a central question about these Anglo-Mexican couplings might be how the authors deploy them to “represent authorial and psychosocial relations in their texts” and how, in turn, “romance” functions as a trope through which to “imagine the alternative interpersonal relations” suggested by collaboration itself.⁴⁰ This seems a particularly fruitful way to view the politics of collaboration at play in *Caballero's* romances, given that like its authors, the text’s “collaborators”—both Anglo and Mexican—transgress the boundaries of race, nation, custom, and heteronormativity to form more perfect unions with former enemies.

Caballero's collaborations across difference take place against a historical and geographical backdrop that highlights the risks that such crossings entail: a U.S.-Mexico borderlands still in formation in 1846–1848, a place and time, as I have already noted, that represented a crossroads in both the temporal and geographic sense. Indeed, as González and Eimer imply, nothing will be the same after 1848; Mexican subjects will be transformed by fiat of the Treaty of Guadalupe into American citizens, and Anglo invaders will be transformed into borderland subjects by virtue of their economic, political, and erotic relations with the newest “Other” in their growing empire. This attention to the transcultural processes that take place in the borderlands of culture, time, and space connects *Caballero* to the postmodern texts of contemporary borderlands criticism, notwithstanding its seemingly old-fashioned appeal to the conventions of historical romance. Moreover, *Caballero's* rhetorical and thematic attention to the politics of “crossing,” as well as its clear interest in the perils and possibilities of transculturation, suggests that its multiple couplings across difference offer something more than simply a socio-erotic poetics that allegorizes the collaborative transgressions of its production. Even though instances of collaboration within the narrative undoubtedly signify on the various dimensions (aesthetic, economic, erotic) of González and Eimer’s collaboration, they also point to a theoretical and political project that I term—following Gloria Anzaldúa—“nepantla aesthetics.”

Nepantla is a *Nahuatl* (Aztec language) word that refers to a space between or a middle ground. Anzaldúa frequently used the word as a referent for a politics of transformation and as a signifier for the spatial, psychic, temporal, and relational process of “crossing over.” For Anzaldúa, the act of crossing over, of entering into a state of *nepantla*, requires a leap of faith that irrevocably changes one’s perspective, transforming one into a *nepant-*

lera, a subject who facilitates “passages between worlds” and recognizes “an unmapped common ground: the humanity of the other.”⁴¹ *Nepantleras* embrace “states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another.”⁴² They are “boundary-crossers,” “thresholders,” and conduits of transculturation, moving across (and through) conflict to build bridges and transform culture.

Anzaldúa’s formulation of *nepantla*, like Laird’s socio-erotic poetics, claims a kind of transformational, deconstructive power for the processes of bridging difference. Like Laird, Anzaldúa argues that the process of “crossing over,” of living in *nepantla*, collapses the “binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body,” because “the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems” that characterizes the *nepantla* state makes one aware of the permeability of “racial, gender, sexual, and other categories, rendering the conventional labeling obsolete.” Because of this, *nepantleras* present a challenge to old systems and to those in power who “continue using them to single out and negate those who are ‘different’ because of color, language, notions of reality or other diversity.”⁴³ Anzaldúa’s *nepantla* concept seems particularly suited to understanding the socio-erotic poetics at play in *Caballero*, since the novel’s political concerns and narrative action are situated in the threshold space of historical and geopolitical transformation, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands of 1846–1848.

It seems especially fitting, then, that *Caballero*’s first, and arguably most significant, act of crossing is initiated in an encounter between Mexicans and Anglos at the Rio Grande, the future dividing line between the United States and Mexico. While crossing this liminal zone, Don Santiago’s sons, Alvaro and Luis Gonzaga, come upon a group of *Americanos* that includes Lieutenant Robert Warrener, the Anglo hero who will later woo their sister Susanita, and a lame army doctor, Captain Devlin. Alvaro and Lieutenant Warrener exchange angry and defiant stares as they cross the river in different directions, but Luis Gonzaga lingers on his side of the Rio Grande and casts a “searching look” at the departing *Americanos*, a look that Captain Devlin “returns in kind.” Luis’s appearance, in particular his exotic otherness—the “long sensitive face,” “arched eyebrows,” and “deep brown eyes”—make a huge impact on Captain Devlin, “thrilling” him “through and through.” Devlin is so taken with Luis that later, while warming himself by a fire at the soldier’s compound, he admits to Warrener that he longs to see the boy again “under pleasanter circumstances. I like him. Rather more than merely like him.”⁴⁴

That Captain Devlin and Luis Gonzaga feel an immediate affinity toward

one another is no surprise, for they are both marginal figures within their respective cultures. As his name suggests, Captain Devlin cuts an odd and somewhat mysterious figure among the invading forces. A Catholic widower who suffers from the lingering effects of a mysterious “wound,” Devlin is an aesthete who seems ill-suited for either the romantic escapades or the violent excesses of the other military men that share his army barracks. Luis Gonzaga is an outsider as well, “prettier than a girl” and uninterested in the masculine pursuits of *ranchero* life; he cannot conform to the ideal of manhood held up by his father in the image of his elder brother Alvaro, a “true” man “who had sown his wild oats so that he could be more true to the one he had married, one who possessed a proud name and could be the father of strong sons.” Moreover, Don Santiago considers Luis Gonzaga’s artistic nature an affront to his rigid notion of masculinity: “The *marica* [queer]! Eighteen and without an affair, never even kissing the servant girls he sketched!”⁴⁵ Like Devlin, Luis Gonzaga’s outsider status is marked by his aesthetic sensibility, which becomes both a trope for the homoerotic dimensions of his developing relationship with Devlin and a common attribute that connects them.

Indeed, these two misfits quickly develop an affair of the heart and mind that far surpasses in intensity of emotion—and erotic urgency—Luis’s sisters’ developing romances with Anglo invaders. Unlike the scenes of his sisters’ rather more conventional romantic exchanges, Luis and Devlin first gaze upon each other across the liminal divide that is the Rio Grande, a space that functions symbolically in the novel as a place of both crossing and contestation for Anglos and Mexicans.⁴⁶ After their first meeting in this liminal zone, Luis and Devlin come together for a series of artistic exchanges—increasingly erotically charged encounters—that take place in other spaces of pleasure and danger.

Their first artistic exchange occurs when Luis wanders into the Skeleton Bar, a hangout for American soldiers and a forbidden zone for young *hidalgos*. Drawn into the bar by a mural of a skeleton executed by Captain Devlin, Luis sits at a table and proceeds to reproduce the mural on his own sketchpad, unaware that Devlin and Warrener are sitting just a few tables away. What follows is an encounter between the two men that is animated with creative and erotic energy. Luis “feels a stir within him” when he spots the two men and sees the older one rise, walk toward him, and “put a finger on the drawings lying on the table.” Seeing his opportunity to connect with Luis, Devlin asks him for one of his drawings and compliments him on his “superb” artistic talent: “It is more than mere pleasure to meet you for

I also am an artist. But of sorts, for I can only draw the body and cannot breathe the soul into it.”

Devlin’s talk of bodies and souls suggests not only the erotic valences of his attraction to Luis, but also an invitation to collaborate (artistically). The encounter, and the invitation, transform Luis and initiate a feverish reassessment of the values of his father:

The world rocked and shook for Luis Gonzaga. This man an *Americano*? But he had always been told that they were coarse, sometimes clever enough to simulate gentility but without inner grace which was its true test. And to meet an artist at last—he had dreamed and hoped and prayed to some day meet a man who would understand the thing which drove him forever to crayons and paints. What a cruel jest that he should be one of the enemy, and on the day that his father had cursed them. . . . Then there was loyalty, to his father and to his people. Impulses urged and warred, beckoned and threatened, disrupted and confused him.⁴⁷

In this scene, the authors allow us to witness both the mechanics of collaboration—in the exchange implied in Luis’s redrawing of Devlin’s mural and Devlin’s seductive tracing of the image with his finger—and the disruptive, even transformational, potential of such exchanges across difference. As Laird observes, “Collaboration ultimately assumes a crossing between differences and sameness; it issues in and through what are, by turns, troubled, rhapsodic, torn, pleasurable realizations of difference within sameness, of sameness amid difference.”⁴⁸ It is not surprising then, that this chance meeting with a man who shares his affinity for art leads Luis to question his loyalty to his father—who derides him for his artistic sensibility and effeminacy—and, by extension, to a community that seems to hold no place for men like him. In fact, Luis is the first to abandon the *rancho*, and his departure marks a turning point in the narrative that initiates the departures of other key figures, leading inexorably to Don Santiago’s demise.

Out of loyalty to father and homeland, Luis initially rejects Devlin’s offer to become his mentor and help him develop his artistic talent. However, he cannot long endure the stultifying environment of the *rancho* knowing that another world exists for him. Upon his return to *Rancho la Palma de Cristo* with his father, Luis comes to feel “impotent” and resentful, and finally decides that he must take a different path. Before parting, he asks for his father’s blessing and attempts to explain his motivations in what sounds very much like a *ranchero* coming-out statement: “I know I am a

great disappointment to you, *papa*, but if I do not like killings and cruelties, it is that I was made that way and cannot change.” All the while, Luis feels the ghostly presence of Devlin by his side, holding tight to his hand, urging him on and bolstering his courage and determination: “Now, now, say it quickly! ‘I do not like anything here anymore. With all my trying I cannot become a *ranchero*. I know I never will.’”⁴⁹

Don Santiago’s reaction to this statement is to enforce an identity upon Luis that is consummately alien to him. He commands him, not only to stay, but also to destroy the very creative tools that have helped define his marginal identity within the *rancho*. “I, your father, command you to learn the things you must. I command you to be a *ranchero* as I am, as was your grandfather and his father before him. Your task begins today. As soon as you get home you will destroy those childlike things with which you amuse yourself, you will burn all your paints and crayons. This is my final command.”⁵⁰ While Don Santiago invokes a long patriarchal history, he can no more command Luis to assume the cloak of patriarchal masculinity than he can actually force him to give up the tools that define him as an artist and connect him to Devlin. As it happens, Luis is empowered not only by his own confession, but also by his father’s edict. He rejects the patriarchal tradition represented by his father, grandfather, “and his father before him,” and asserts that he will leave the *rancho*, blessing or no. When Don Santiago calls Luis “despicable” for “consorting with a gringo,” for once the words do not sting, because Luis finally realizes that the real issue is not “his consorting with an American, or even his leaving; the issue [is] a test of the mastership of his father over his family.”⁵¹ Luis’s heavy burden of guilt is lifted once his father’s assertion that he is a “traitor to his people” is demystified, and Luis understands that what is at stake is not his manhood, or even his loyalty to family and nation, but rather the challenge to patriarchal authority that his choice to “collaborate” represents.

Luis realizes that his “betrayal” of the patriarchal code does not constitute a revocation of his connection to family and culture, but rather a rejection of those discourses and beliefs that damage his psyche and prevent him from developing a full understanding of his identity. His realization represents an important turning point in the novel and suggests the process of gradual enlightenment that Anzaldúa outlines as the path to *conocimiento* for *nepantleras*:

A spiritual hunger rumbles deep in your belly, the yearning to live up to your potential. You question the doctrines claiming to be the only right way to live. These ways no longer accommodate the person you are, or the

life you're living. They no longer help you with your central task—to determine what your life means, to catch a glimpse of the cosmic order and your part in that cosmovisión, and to translate these into artistic forms. Tu camino de conocimiento requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid (desconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades.”⁵²

This “path of *conocimiento*” is not simply a coming to consciousness about one's individual desires, but a borderlands praxis predicated on a connection “across colors and other differences to allies also trying to negotiate racial contradictions, survive the stresses and traumas of daily life, and develop a spritual-imaginal-political vision together.”⁵³ In other words, Luis's path of *conocimiento* is not a retreat to individualism or an escape from the bounds of community, but a gesture toward collaboration with a different kind of community.

Luis's determination to pursue a life of creativity, and to do so alongside his “enemy” Captain Devlin, thematizes the transformative collaborative desire at the heart of coauthored novels like *Caballero*. Based on the convergence of art and queer desire, Luis and Devlin's relationship seems an ideal example of Laird's socio-erotic poetics at work. But their relationship also signifies a model for what can happen when “enemies” leave their comfort zones (heteronormative, national, linguistic) in order to explore the possibility of a new kind of alliance, an alliance based on something other than the old pieties of politics, nation, or race. In his own words, the transformative optic of his intensely erotic collaboration with the Other enables Luis Gonzaga to figure Devlin and himself as “neither Mexican nor Anglo Saxon, but artists,”⁵⁴ a conceptual move that deconstructs geopolitical boundaries and generates a creative third term from the clash between two warring parties. No doubt González and Eimer figured their own collaborative relationship in this way.

Like most coauthored texts, *Caballero* is unruly, both in its political ideology and its use of genre. Part history, part tragedy, part romance, part feminist tract, its multivalent strategies of description reflect the very complexity of the historical transformations that it seeks to document. But these multiple strategies of description also reflect the *nepantla* aesthetics at the heart of the novel and its border-crossing, transformational poetics. And in this sense, *Caballero*'s politics cannot help but reflect the conditions of its production: González and Eimer, *nepantleras* both, moved from a “mili-

tarized zone to a round table” in an effort to understand “their common humanity” and to reveal that we are all “co-creators of ideologies—attitudes, beliefs, and cultural values” and must therefore “act collaboratively” to transform the world.⁵⁵

Caballero is a collaborative text about collaboration, a text that self-consciously enacts the politics of its production within its pages. But it is also a utopian project, a bid to craft a world that was scarcely imaginable in the Texas of the 1930s. Such a project required a leap of faith from both sides of the boundary that divided Jovita González from Margaret Eimer. As feminist writer Joyce Elbrecht has pointed out, writing together means that “you have to desire the collaborative world under formation more than the unextended ‘yours’ and ‘mine’ of the old power structures.”⁵⁶ This collaborative world, this borderland, is at the heart of *Caballero*’s prescient challenge to rigid notions of identity, authority, and resistance.

EPILOGUE

“What’s Love Got to Do with It?”

Toward a Passionate Praxis

I think about the . . . lack of openness about feelings of love and affection in most scholarly books—history books, anthropological analyses, philosophical essays—and I cannot help but ponder the intellectual and political costs of going against the grain. . . . Scholarly awkwardness with, or even closeting of, feelings of real affection—which I hope are there much more often than we reveal—seems self-protective. In a field often perceived by other social scientists to be too subjective to be considered reliable, revealing feelings of love would seem to be the kiss of death. The baring of feelings and reflections about the way our questions, doubts, and actions in “the field” affect the results we obtain is not the issue here. Our colleagues might consider such revelations more or less scientific, depending on their interest in methodology and questions of evidence. It is love that is in question. We have largely bought into the notion that it produces untrustworthy work presumably because it blinds us. To cross that line is to be perceived as producing unscholarly work.

VIRGINIA DOMINGUEZ, “FOR A POLITICS OF LOVE AND RESCUE”

What does it mean to turn from regimes of description that center on disconnection, objectivity, and distance, and embrace modes of telling founded on connection, subjectivity, and intimacy; to “cross that line,” as Virginia Dominguez puts it, that demarcates the intellectual safety of objective truth from the “untrustworthy” realm of subjective emotions; to shift, as did Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González, from dispassionate scholarship to passionate praxis? What does it mean to write about love in times of war? To reclaim love’s erotic, poetic, and political power, its ability to bridge difference and create new solidarities, to transform individuals, communities, and histories? And why did

Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González choose to reclaim love when they turned away from the ethnographic facts that they collected and contested to embrace worlds of fiction?

It is an important question, not just because each in her manner created fictional narratives that addressed the unpredictable workings of romantic love, but also because the critical reception of their novels, especially in the case of Hurston and González, has so often focused on precisely this aspect of their narratives. Though Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was the only one of their novels to actually appear in print during their lifetimes, it's likely that had *Waterlily* and *Caballero* been published in the 1930s and 1940s, Deloria and González might have faced some of the same criticisms that Hurston encountered.

Why love? Following the lead of their more celebrated male colleagues, they could have written about the harsh realities of detribalization, or racial terror and segregation, or the economic transformation of the borderlands that pushed the once great *hacendados* into landless poverty. Male writers in their respective intellectual milieus—John Joseph Matthews, Richard Wright, Américo Paredes—were pursuing these subjects to great effect, and sometimes to literary acclaim, so why didn't they? Did their focus on love signify a turning away from political discourse? Must we accept Richard Wright's assessment that novels that focus on the erotic and intimate dimensions of human relations carry "no theme, no message, no thought that lends itself to significant interpretation"?¹ Or can there be a politics of love?

We know from personal experience that romantic love does not stand apart from historical and political forces, and the work of feminists has demonstrated time and again how politics invades our bedrooms, but can love itself constitute an engaged political act, a theoretical praxis? In thinking through these questions, I am reminded of June Jordan's assessment of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as "the most successful, convincing, and exemplary novel of Black love that we have. Period," and the ways in which this statement recuperates the novel for a new kind of political project, one centered on intimacy, relatedness, and affection for self and community. Jordan expands on this conception of politics in her essay "Where is the Love?" in which she reimagines love as a particular kind of political project, one that reaches both backwards into the past and outwards across difference to create new solidarities in an essentially loveless world ruled by money, power, and violence. She writes, seemingly in direct response to Richard Wright's dismissal of Zora Neale Hurston:

Can any of you name two or three other women poets of the Harlem Renaissance? Or, for that matter, how well-known is the work of Margaret Walker, a most signal contemporary of Richard Wright? Why does the work of all women die with no river carrying forward the record of such grace? How is it that whether we have written novels or poetry, whether we have raised our children or cleaned and cooked and washed and ironed, it is all dismissed as "women's work"; it is all, finally, despised as nothing important, and there is no trace, no meaning echo of our days upon the earth?

. . . It is against such sorrow, such spiritual death, such deliberate strangulation of the lives of women, my sisters, and of powerless peoples—men and women—everywhere, that I work and live, now, as a feminist, trusting that I will learn to love myself well enough to love you (whoever you are), well enough so that you will love me well enough so that we will know, exactly, where is the love: that it is here, between us, and growing stronger and growing stronger.²

Jordan conceives of love as a political movement that begins with the healing of the self through reflection on the ways in which the healing words of *certain* selves have been erased from our historical memory—their ideas about love, domesticity, intimacy, and emotion exiled to the barren territory of "women's work" by both mainstream intellectuals and intellectuals of color.

A politics of love, for Jordan, must begin with self-love, but before we can embrace ourselves, we must believe that we are essentially worthy of being loved, a status that has been denied women of color (indeed, people of color) since the beginning of Europe's five-century romance with colonialism. Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson has commented on the curious invisibility of any commentary on love in both popular and scientific depictions of indigenous people:

If we were to trust popular and scholarly representations of Native People we would have to conclude that they, unlike any other peoples in the world, are without love. Native people are represented in mechanistic and ultimately loveless terms: as hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists of yesterday and cultural revivalists of today. They are written in popular press as activists (troublemakers), as artists-with-a-mission, as cigarette smugglers. In new age journals as naturally in tune with the earth, in movies of the seventies as shape-changers. They are Indian Princesses, sav-

age squaws, brave hearted men and guerilla warriors. Rarely however, are they in love (the tragedy of Pocahontas aside), rarely are they contemplating love, acting out of love or simply being, as they are—their Native selves in love or out of love, in the funk out of the funk. How can this be? We are human beings and human beings act out of love. Romeo loved Juliet, Alexandra [sic] the Great loved Roxanne, and Henry VIII had several loves, Thomas Jefferson had some undercover desires and Eleanor Roosevelt, it is said, loved women and men, Pierre Trudeau loved Margaret . . . Margaret loved him and others. All of these westerners acted out of love, but what about us? Why the oversight when it comes to our history and our present? What [is] this strange perception of us, which is so inconsistent with our sassy, our funky and our desiring selves?³

Simpson's observation illuminates the discursive context against which Ella Deloria wrote *Waterlily*, even as it reveals why loving relations between the men and women of the *tiyospaye* are so delicately and carefully rendered in that novel. Indeed, the reader is witness to countless acts of intimate kindness between men and women—the gentle brushing, oiling, and braiding of a husband's hair as he prepares for a journey, the soothing painting of the soles of his tired feet when he returns, the respectful but nevertheless playful courtship gestures between men and women—all wrought within the overarching principle of kinship that keeps individual desire and collective need perfectly in balance. In *Waterlily*, kinship is a kind of love, in that it relies upon the tenuous balance between autonomy and sacrifice that real love requires. Through *Waterlily*, Deloria writes Native love back into the ethnographic and literary frame, placing it at the center of the Dakota world.

When women of color have been drawn into dominant discourses on love, more often than not they have been depicted as objects of colonial desire rather than desiring subjects. From clichés about Indian princesses, to tired evocations of the inherently unruly sexuality of the “tragic mulatto,” to tales of beautiful *señoritas* peeking out from behind thick hacienda walls, women of color have been at the center of colonial desire since the first days of the conquest. But *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* reverse the standard colonial script by transforming the women—and men—who populate their worlds into actively desiring social agents. When she first sees Lowanla at the Sun Dance, for example, Waterlily is so taken with him that she steps out of the bounds of decorum, risking her honor (and his) to secretly carry water to him under cover

of night. Janie Crawford is desired by many men, but it is *her* desire that ultimately carries her to Tea Cake and leads her to break with the stifling conventions of middle-class domesticity that she has come to represent in her husband's town, Eatonville. The women of *Caballero* break with convention as well, searching out their destinies in direct opposition to their father's wishes. But perhaps the most dangerously desiring subject in the novel is their brother, young Luis Gonzaga, whose love of art and another artist challenges not only patriarchy embodied in the rule of their father, but also heteronormativity—two discourses that support and carry out the ruling logics of nations at war.

What is at stake in representing these social agents in the fullness of their "sassy," "funky," and "desiring selves?" What does it mean to turn away from the public world of war to reveal—and revel in—the inner workings of the private world of love? In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chéla Sandoval argues that these domains are not quite so distinct as Western thought would have us imagine. Making a case for love as a decolonizing practice, she notes:

Third world writers such as Guevara, Fanon, Anzaldúa, Emma Perez, Trinh Minh-ha, or Cherrie Moraga, to name only a few, . . . understand love as a "breaking" through whatever controls in order to find "understanding and community": it is described as "hope" and "faith" in the potential goodness of some promised land; it is defined as Anzaldúa's *coatlicue* state, which is a "rupturing" in one's everyday world that permits crossing over to another; or as a specific moment of shock, what Emma Perez envisions as the trauma of desire, of erotic despair. These writers who theorize social change understand "love" as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement.⁴

Because "the language of lovers can puncture through the everyday narratives that tie us to social time and space," Sandoval argues (following Roland Barthes) love has the capacity to defamiliarize "the descriptions, recitals, and plots" that serve dominant discursive logics. Love reorders our sense of the everyday, and the framing devices that produce "common sense" knowledge about the world and human relations.⁵ If love reveals a new kind of world to those subjected to its powers it also can constitute a critical perspective, and conversely, as Sandoval points out, "oppositional social

action” itself can be seen as “a mode of ‘love’ in the postmodern world.”⁶ For Sandoval, then, love is a “technology for social transformation.”⁷

Sandoval’s recuperation of love as oppositional praxis helps us to see the ways in which texts themselves can constitute acts of love. In this sense, *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* might be figured as love letters that speak in a coded language to the communities that Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González spent their lifetimes coming to know more intimately. Undertaken as side projects, distractions from the “real” work of research and writing, these novels became repositories for all the messy feelings and irreconcilable contradictions of the native ethnographic project, for all that could not be spoken and everything that could not be silenced. Into these novels, Deloria, Hurston, and González poured all of the love that they felt for their communities, love that had to remain unspoken in a discursive practice that required, even from its native ethnographers, some degree of separation and objectivity in the interests of ethnographic authority—even though, as anthropologist Virginia Dominguez audaciously acknowledges, love has been, and must always be, a part of the ethnographic encounter.

In “For a Politics of Love and Rescue,” Dominguez outlines a vision of love as a form of anthropological praxis and calls anthropologists to task for refusing to explore this last hidden terrain of self-reflexivity.⁸ There are, of course, ethnographies that self-consciously explore the passion, rage, grief, and vulnerability of the ethnographer, but to express love for the anthropological Other, or in some cases the not-so-different Other, is to cross into a territory from which there seems to be no return, a no man’s land of intersubjectivity.⁹ The kind of love Dominguez has in mind is neither the submerged erotic charge that permeates some classic monographs, nor the uncritical fetishization of a primeval Other that often accompanies it, both of which are forms of objectification, but “the kind of love, respect, and affection . . . we feel for family members, tough love at times but never disengagement or hagiography.”¹⁰

It seems to me that this is precisely the kind of love that stood as the unspoken center of the ethnographic practice of Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González. And though it was a love that could not be named, it nevertheless structured their clear-eyed assessments of both the beauty and the contradictions of the places they called home. That their novels about those places paid such close attention to the workings of love suggests a rhetorical transference in which the hidden affective relations of the native ethnographic exchange are elaborated in romantic plots and subplots that thematize deep love between not-so-different others.

Waterlily, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* are allegories for a kind of passionate praxis that could not be imagined in the ethnographic milieu in which Deloria, Hurston, and González worked, a praxis centered on intimate encounters across difference in the interest of social transformation. As such, these novels both surpass and reveal the ideological limits of ethnographic meaning making in the 1920s and 1930s. By uncovering the essentially relational and collaborative process through which knowledge about history, culture, and subjectivity is created, Deloria, Hurston, and González's ethnographic novels are corrective literary gestures that rewrite—in the enemy's language—the very modes of meaning making that had transformed American Indians, African Americans, and Mexican Americans into artifacts: domesticated yet exotic oddities for scientific study and public consumption. And while *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* stand on their own as literary creations, their decolonizing gestures are most vividly revealed in juxtaposition against ethnographic writing: in the shifting authorial relations and themes, in the elaboration of love as a potentially transformative praxis, and perhaps most importantly, in the emergence of women of color as central speaking subjects.

Indeed, although the political imperatives at the heart of these novels differ, as do their conceptualizations of feminism, community, nationhood, and survival, all three explore the role of women as agents in their own histories. By writing women of color into our shared historical narrative, *Waterlily*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Caballero* propose visions of history, continuity, and change that fundamentally reorient the masculinist and colonialist direction of our collective historical imagination. This book follows in that tradition, because like Deloria, Hurston, and González, I believe that the story it tells has the power to change the way we think about history, in particular the shared history of women of color. Like their work, it shifts the critical "spy-glass" toward women of color, and reveals that they were *central* to the production of knowledge about colonized Others in the early twentieth century—that they approached this task with attention to the politics of knowledge production and awareness of the contradictions of their particular social locations as gendered and racialized subjects—and that they elaborated new ways of knowing and telling at the intersections of politics, cultural production, and disciplinary knowledge.

But this book is also an act of love: one that reaches across the divides of time, space, nation, and community to imagine a historical consciousness—at the crossroads between gender, race, and nation—that links the theoretical insights and discursive interventions elaborated by an earlier

generation of women of color to contemporary feminist of color imaginaries. Audacious, like all acts of love, it offers both a challenge and an invitation to break with received wisdom about intellectual traditions and to explore the affinities inside our differences. It is a bid to create new genealogies founded on multi-vocal constituencies of struggle—and to re-imagine feminist intellectual history through the eyes of women of color.

Notes

Introduction

1. Maria Cotera, “Engendering a “Dialectics of Our America”: Jovita González’s Pluralist Dialogue as Feminist *Testimonio*,” *Las Obreras, Chicana Politics of Work and Family*, ed. Vicki Ruíz, 237–256.

2. Norma Alarcón, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo American Feminism,” in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa, 356–369.

3. See Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, 51–77.

4. Alice Gambrell, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference: Transatlantic Culture, 1919–1945*, 142.

5. Gambrell, 127.

6. Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, 1–47.

7. Chela Sandoval, “Mestizaje as Method: Feminists-of-Color Challenge the Canon,” in *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujillo, 362.

8. Ella Shohat, “Introduction” in *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, ed. Ella Shohat, 1–64 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 1.

9. I arrived at these methodological “rules of engagement” after a series of conversations that took place at the Future of Minority Studies Summer Workshop on Transnational Feminism taught by Chandra Mohanty and Beverly Guy Sheftall, sponsored by the Mellon Foundation.

10. Ella Cara Deloria to Ruth Benedict, May 20, 1941, Ella Cara Deloria Project, Dakota Indian Foundation.

11. *Ibid.*

12. José E. Limón, Introduction, *Dew on the Thorn*, by Jovita González, ed. José E. Limón, xxii–xxiii.

13. Paula Gunn Allen, “‘Border’ Studies: The Intersection of Gender and Color,” in *The Ethnic Canon, Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu, 33–34.

14. For example, folklorist Américo Paredes is the recognized intellectual “father” of Chicana/o Studies, even though González’s writing covers much of the same ground and precedes his work by over thirty years. José Limón has noted that González’s writing has been largely ignored by both the Chicana/o literary canon and the regional folklore canon: “In my own training as such a folklorist, I took several courses in this area with the distinguished Américo Paredes. Not once were we introduced to her work, nor was she ever even mentioned in our discussions of folklorists such as Aurelio M. Espinosa, Arthur Campa, and Vicente Mendoza.” See José Limón, “Folklore, Literature and Politics: Jovita González’s *Dew on the Thorn*,” 2. Likewise, in the field of American Indian studies, Vine Deloria’s critique of Indian-White relations in *Custer Died for Your Sins* stands as a foundational moment in American Indian anticolonial discourse, even though his aunt Ella Deloria addressed many of the same issues in her own extended statement on Indian-White relations, *Speaking of Indians*. A most telling example of Ella Deloria’s relative invisibility in the area of anthropological history may be found in an anthology entitled *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology*. This collection of essays emerged from a session of the eighty-eighth annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1989, titled “*Custer Died for Your Sins: A Twenty Year Retrospective on Relations between Anthropologists and American Indians*.” Although the book was published in 1997, eight years after the conference took place and nine years after *Waterlily* was published, neither Ella Deloria nor her ethnographic novel is mentioned in any of the selected essays. This marginalization is especially surprising given the fact that Ella Deloria was a trained anthropologist, while her nephew Vine Deloria Jr. was not.

15. Moreover, because of their close connections to anthropology and the social sciences, Deloria, Hurston, and González bear the taint of co-conspirators in the project to describe and domesticate their native communities and have even been figured as collaborators with colonialist discourse.

16. Allen, “‘Border’ Studies,” 33.

17. Sandoval, “Mestizaje,” 360.

18. Sandoval, “Mestizaje,” 355.

19. Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*.

20. Angie Chabram Dernerseian, “Chicana/o as Oppositional Ethnography,” 243.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, *African American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 7.

Part One

1. Jovita González, “Early Life and Education,” Jovita González, *Dew on the Thorn*, ed. José E. Limón, xii.

2. Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 144.

3. Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr., 1.

4. Chandra Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and

the Politics of Feminism,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra T. Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, 32.

5. Ruth Benedict to Norris Millington, Office of Indian Affairs, November 2, 1931. Ruth Benedict Papers, Vassar College.

6. See Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman, “‘The Foundation of All Future Researchers’: Franz Boas, George Hunt, Native American Texts, and the Construction of Modernity,” 479–528.

7. I borrow the phrase “rhetoric of dominance” from Leticia Garza-Falcón, who uses it to describe a particular mode of discourse that justifies U.S. imperialism through heroic narratives of progress and westward expansion. Leticia Garza-Falcón, *Gente Decente: A Borderlands Response to the Rhetoric of Dominance*, passim.

8. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 24–25.

9. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 27.

10. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 34.

11. Dell Hymes, “The Use of Anthropology: Critical, Political, Personal,” in *Re-inventing Anthropology*, ed. Dell Hymes, 25.

12. Hymes, “The Use of Anthropology,” 26.

13. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*; George E. Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*.

14. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, 30–31.

15. Clifford, 24.

16. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, 49.

17. Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, *American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue and Dissent*, 38.

18. Simon Bronner, *Folk Nation: Folklore and the Creation of American Tradition*, 17.

19. Even within the Texas Folklore Society there were both theoretical and methodological disagreements regarding the nature and function of folklore and its analysis. I will explore these debates more deeply in Chapter Three.

20. Boas was editor of the *Journal of American Folklore* from 1908 to 1923, when Ruth Benedict took over. Benedict held the post until the 1940s. Zumwalt, *American Folklore Scholarship*, passim.

21. Zumwalt, *American Folklore Scholarship*, xii

22. John S. Wright, “The New Negro Poet and the Nachal Man: Sterling Brown’s Folk Odyssey,” 97.

23. Benjamin A. Botkin, Introduction, *Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany*, 15.

24. Benjamin A. Botkin, “Applied Folklore: Creating Understanding Through Folklore,” 204.

25. Simon Bronner, *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture*, 383.

26. Robert L. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920–1945*, 101.

27. Dorman, 9.

28. James Charles McNutt, “Beyond Regionalism: Texas Folklorists and the Emergence of a Post-Regional Consciousness,” 226.

29. McNutt, “Beyond Regionalism,” 226.

30. Quoted in Jerre Gerlando Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935–1943*, 270.

31. Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox, 142.

32. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa, 374–375.

Chapter One

1. A note on terminology: The descriptive term "Dakota" was used in the classification of Indian languages during the early development of anthropology and linguistics in the United States. In this early ethnolinguistic paradigm, the word was employed to identify those tribes who spoke one of three dialects: Dakota (Santee), Lakota (Teton), and Nakota (Yankton). In keeping with the linguistic and ethnographic norms of her period, Deloria employed the term "Dakota" to identify the people among the Siouan linguistic family who spoke one of the D/L/Nakota dialects. Deloria used the general term "Sioux" when referring to the larger classification of the linguistic stock, which included twenty-seven other forms of the Siouan language. It is important to note that Deloria claimed fluency in all three dialects. Because her formative years were spent near the Standing Rock reservation, where the dominant language was Lakota, she gained expertise in vernacular (spoken) Lakota. Her family, being Yankton, spoke Dakota at home. Though the Yankton-Yanktonai dialect is frequently referred to as "Nakota," the Yanktons and Yanktonai refer to themselves as Dakota. This is in keeping with Deloria's self identification as a "Yankton-Dakota." Deloria was also familiar with the Dakota of the Eastern Santee because it was the first language to be transcribed and used in written documents (Bibles, prayer books, hymnals, and dictionaries). In their editorial notes to *Speaking of Indians*, Agnes Picotte and Paul N. Pavich suggest that Deloria chose the word "Dakota" to identify the Santee, Teton, and Yankton communities she studied because the Dakota dialect "was the first to be recognized in written form by Stephen Return Riggs in his study of the Santee language" (15). But there is perhaps a counterdiscursive objective to her choice as well. Like many American Indian scholars, both then and now, Deloria objected to the tendency of popular discourse to generalize when writing about distinct tribal communities. Her preference for the more precise "Dakota" over the general term "Sioux" may well have been a reaction to the generalizations that had plagued past studies of this language group. Her use of the term "Dakota" also has distinct aesthetic and political implications. In *Speaking of Indians*, Deloria writes: "Peace is implied by the very name of the people, Odakota, a state or condition of peace; the "O" is a locative prefix" (22). By employing the descriptive term for "peace" as the primary identifier of her people, Deloria offers an intervention, at the level of language, against the popular perception that the Sioux were a "warlike" people. Throughout this book I will follow Deloria's lead with regard to terminology, employing the term "Sioux" when referring to the Plains tribes who share the Siouan linguistic stock and "Dakota"

when referring to her work among Teton, Santee, and Yankton communities. See Ella C. Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*.

2. Ella C. Deloria, “Ella Deloria’s Life,” 1952, Box I:58, Margaret Mead Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

3. Ruth Benedict to American Philosophical Society, September 27, 1943, quoted in Susan Gardner, “Though It Broke My Heart to Cut Some Bits I Fancied,” 690.

4. Janet L. Finn, “Walls and Bridges: Cultural Mediation and the Legacy of Ella Deloria,” 169.

5. Though Deloria tried repeatedly to land a high level job in the Office of Indian Affairs during John Collier’s administration in the 1930s, she was consistently passed over for non-Indian “experts” with PhDs. In her letters to Franz Boas in the 1930s, Deloria mused over the rather dispiriting irony that while she did not hold the credentials to be a registered anthropologist with the Indian Bureau (and thus secure a regular salary), she could not get any “federal work” under Collier’s tribal revitalization program because she “had the reputation of being so educated!” Despite the few scattered jobs that she secured with the administration toward the end of the decade, Deloria, like many American Indian intellectuals, remained marginal to the decision-making process of the Indian New Deal, the federal policy “revolution” whose putative purpose was tribal self-determination. Ella Deloria letter to Franz Boas n.d. (late summer) 1939, ECD project.

6. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 224–251.

7. Though Ella’s father, Philip J. Deloria, never attended seminary, he was educated in boarding schools and worked as a missionary for the Episcopal Church among the Yankton, and later the Teton Dakota. He was finally ordained a priest after years of service. Vine Deloria Jr. notes that Ella Deloria most likely received her education at St. Elizabeth’s as partial compensation for the “miniscule” salary usually accorded Sioux priests who, like Phillip Deloria, had not attended seminary. Vine Deloria Jr., Introduction, *Speaking of Indians*, by Ella C. Deloria, xi–xii.

8. Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets, Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, 21.

9. Ella C. Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 98–99.

10. Deloria begins *Speaking of Indians* with a poem from Stephen Vincent Benet’s “Western Star” (1943): “They were neither yelling demon nor Noble Savage . . . They were a people / . . . With beliefs / Ornaments, language, fables, love of children / . . . And a scheme of life that worked.” *Speaking of Indians*, front matter.

11. Bea Medicine describes how this “mixed-blood” cultural heritage helped Deloria to navigate the terrain between *wasicu* (White) intellectual traditions like anthropology and the traditional practices of D/L/Nakota communities. “Ella C. Deloria: The Emic Voice,” in *Learning to be an Anthropologist and Remaining Native*, 269–288.

12. Deloria also completed two summer sessions of graduate school in education at the University of Wisconsin and the University of Kansas. Ella Deloria, “Vita,” unpublished manuscript, Ella C. Deloria Project, Dakota Indian Foundation, Chamberlain, SD.

13. Boas desperately needed someone familiar with all three dialects of Dakota to aid him in translating Lakota stories collected by George Bushotter (a young

Lakota educated at Hampton Institute in Virginia) under the supervision of James Owen Dorsey, an anthropologist working for the Bureau of American Ethnology in the late nineteenth century. During the spring and summer of 1915, Deloria helped Boas and his students prepare a portion of the Bushotter materials for publication. As she noted in a letter some years later, the money she received for her help was her first “real paycheck.” Ella Deloria to Rev. Hugh Burseson, June 20, 1926, Ella C. Deloria Project, Dakota Indian Foundation, Chamberlain, SD.

14. According to her biographer, Jeannette Murray, Deloria also served as an unofficial dean of women for American Indian girls from all over the nation and was frequently called upon to teach academic classes and substitute for absent teachers. Janette K. Murray, “Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis.”

15. Franz Boas to Ella Deloria, April 27, 1927, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

16. Franz Boas to Ella Deloria, January 26, 1928, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society. See also Franz Boas to Otto Klineberg, February 6, 1928, Franz Boas Papers.

17. Franz Boas to Ella Deloria, January 26, 1928, Franz Boas Papers. For more on Ella Deloria’s work for the Klineberg Project, see Richard G. Whitten and Larry J. Zimmerman, “Directions for Miss Deloria: Boas on the Plains,” 161-164.

18. While both Benedict and Boas were always able to find funding to support her field research for their own linguistic and ethnographic projects, there is no evidence that they ever tried to help Deloria get the credentials she needed to become an independent anthropologist. This lack of mentorship seems especially glaring in light of the fact that both Boas and Benedict had reputations for mentoring and finding financial support for other women interested in the field. Surely Boas could have arranged to fast-track her through the PhD program at Columbia, as he did for Benedict some years before, especially given the fact that Deloria had more field experience than most of his graduate students. Benedict often arranged scholarships for her favored graduate students, including Margaret Mead, but she apparently never attempted to do so for Deloria.

19. As Deloria notes in the prefatory remarks to her article, the material on the Sun Dance was first given to physician J. R. Walker by one of his Og.lala informants, George Sword. Some ten years later, Deloria would return to Walker’s manuscript, which included a “Sioux mythology” based on Lakota stories transcribed by Sword.

20. Deloria collected the tales included in this publication from the Standing Rock, Pine Ridge, and Rosebud reservations in South Dakota; her informants were mostly Lakota speakers. See Ella C. Deloria, *Dakota Texts*.

21. Janet Finn, “Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove: Writing for Cultures, Writing Against the Grain,” 136.

22. Finn, “Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove,” 136.

23. Joyzelle Godfrey, “Ella Deloria Research Project,” 1-2.

24. Medicine, “Ella C. Deloria: The Emic Voice,” 284-285.

25. Ella C. Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life*, 110.

26. Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, Interview.

27. Ibid.

28. Medicine, “Ella C. Deloria,” 283.

29. Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, Interview.

30. Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, “Ella Deloria Research Project,” 1–2.

31. In this letter, Deloria also complains about Ruth Benedict, who had been assigned by Boas to manage the disbursement of funds to fieldworkers. According to Deloria, Benedict had consistently blocked her requests for money to cover field expenses. Fearlessly demanding that she be treated on an equal footing with accredited anthropologists, Deloria openly critiqued the elitism of her colleagues: “Mrs. Benedict said you told her—or she understood you to say I was to have only one hundred dollars while in the field. She told me that she and anyone else who went on the field did it at their own expense, and made me feel very uncomfortable. I think if she and Gladys and others do go out on their own, it is because they wish to. I thought my coming out was a sort of commission, and I know Dr. Klineberg had a salary and travel fund, because I was with him. I can see how some people, who are trying to raise their standing as anthropologists, etc., might be willing to go out at their own expense for their own advancement. But I do not like the way she made me feel; I resent it, and would like very much to ‘*Waciko*’ (to ‘pout’ a long time) but I shall not!” Apparently convinced by her arguments, Boas asked Benedict to provide Deloria with the funds she needed to carry out her field research. Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, July 11, 1932, Franz Boas Papers.

32. Elaine A. Jahner, Preface, *Lakota Myth*, by James R. Walker, vii.

33. James R. Walker, “Walker’s Autobiographical Statement,” *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 47.

34. Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, January 6, 1938, Boas Papers.

35. Franz Boas to Ella Deloria, February 3, 1938, Boas Papers.

36. Franz Boas to Ella Deloria, February 10, 1938, Boas Papers.

37. Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, February 24, 1938, Boas Papers.

38. Franz Boas to Ella Deloria, February 28, 1938, Boas Papers

39. Franz Boas to Ella Deloria, March 24, 1938, Boas Papers.

40. Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, April 5, 1938, Boas Papers.

41. Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, April 19, 1938, Boas Papers.

42. Franz Boas to Ella Deloria, June 1, 1938, Boas Papers.

43. Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, June 28, 1938, Boas Papers

44. Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, May 12, 1939, Boas Papers.

45. In the first report that Deloria sent to Boas on the Walker manuscript, she included the statements of several elderly members of the Og.lala community who had known the man. The consensus among these informants was that they found Walker to be a self-interested, manipulative bully. According to one of her informants, Walker tried to become an Indian agent on the Og.lala reservation, but was unsuccessful because even though he was on the reservation for many years, he “could not speak Dakota. Odd, since he was so very anxious to know Dakota custom!” Nor was Walker’s interpreter, Charley Nines, held in high regard by the Og.lala: “There was a kind of man, part Spanish, part Negro perhaps . . . and he was not much better able to talk Dakota and yet Dr. Walker always went with him, and used him for an interpreter. It is possible that if he had used a real Dakota instead he might have been able to tell things more accurately.” Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, January 6, 1938, Boas Papers.

46. Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 32.

47. Kirin Narayan, “How Native Is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” 672.
48. Finn, “Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove,” 140.
49. Raymond DeMallie, “Afterword,” *Waterlily*, 236.
50. Deloria mentions *Waterlily*’s fate in a letter to her friend, Virginia Lightfoot Dorsey. Ella Deloria to Virginia L. Dorsey, November 23, 1952, Ella C. Deloria Project.
51. In 2007, *The Dakota Way of Life* was recovered and published by Deloria scholar Joyzelle Godfrey. Ella Cara Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life*, ed. Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey (Sioux Falls, SD: The Mariah Press, 2007).
52. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Scope of Anthropology,” 16.
53. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, 34–35.
54. Trinh Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism*, 64–65.
55. Ella Deloria to Ruth Benedict, February 13, 1947, Ella C. Deloria Project.
56. Ella Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life*, 6–7.
57. Clifford, 40.
58. Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life*, 111–112
59. Ella Deloria letter to Ruth Benedict, May 16, 1947, Ella C. Deloria Project.
60. Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life*, 57.
61. Authority: Race and Writing in the Ethnography of Margaret Mead and Zora Neale Hurston,” in *Modernist Anthropology, from Fieldwork to Text*, ed. Marc Manganaro, 156.
62. Beatrice Medicine, “Professionalization of Native American (Indian) Women: Towards a Research Agenda,” 31.

Chapter Two

1. Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 56–61.
2. Folklorist Herbert Halpert recalls that in the 1930s there was a distinct division of the field of study among folklorists and anthropologists. The assumption, especially among folklorists, was that the Department of Anthropology at Columbia under Boas was focused on the study of American Indians and groups in the South Pacific. Folklorists tended to focus their research closer to home, on rural ethnic (including White ethnic) groups. Herbert Halpert, “Coming into Folklore More than Fifty Years Ago,” 442–457.
3. Melville Herskovits, “The Negro in the New World: The Statement of a Problem,” 145–155.
4. Zora Neale Hurston to Edwin Embree, Rosenwald Fund, January 6, 1935, in *Zora Neale Hurston, A Life in Letters*, 334–335.
5. Gwendolyn Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture in the Ethnography of Zora Neale Hurston,” in *African American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, 51–69; Mikell, “When Horses Talk: Reflections On Zora Neale Hurston’s Haitian Anthropology,” 218–230; Mikell, “The Anthropological Imagination of Zora Neale Hurston,” 27–34; Alice Gambrell, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference: Transatlantic Culture, 1919–1945*; Deborah Gordon,

“The Politics of Ethnographic Authority: Race and Writing in the Ethnography of Margaret Mead and Zora Neale Hurston,” in *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text*, ed. Marc Manganaro, 146–142; Graciela Hernandez, “Multiple Subjectivities and Strategic Positionality: Zora Neale Hurston’s Experimental Ethnographies,” in *Women Writing Culture*, eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, 148–165; Karen Jacobs, “From ‘Spy-Glass’ to ‘Horizon’: Tracking the Anthropological Gaze in Zora Neale Hurston,” 329–360; D. A. Boxwell, “‘Sis-Cat’ as Ethnographer: Self-Presentation and Self-Inscription in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men*,” 605–617; Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 33–38.

6. B. A. Botkin, “American Folklore,” in *Folk Nation: Folklore in the Creation of American Tradition*, ed. Simon Bronner, 136.

7. Lorenzo Thomas, “Authenticity and Elevation: Sterling Brown’s Theory of the Blues,” 409–410; Sterling Brown, quoted in George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 410.

8. Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 437–438.

9. Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 60–83.

10. Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” *The Nation*, June 23, 1926; reprinted in *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*, 43–44.

11. Hemenway, 62.

12. Hemenway, 63.

13. Hemenway, 84.

14. Hemenway, 88–89.

15. Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 143–144.

16. Franz Boas to Zora Neale Hurston, May 3, 1927, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

17. Hemenway, 99.

18. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, 137.

19. Visweswaran, 99–100.

20. Hemenway, 104.

21. Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, September 21, 1927, in Kaplan, *A Life in Letters*, 106.

22. Hemenway notes that Mason funded Hurston continuously for a two-year period (from December 1927 to December 1929), and then granted her a fifteen-month extension from January 1930 to March 30, 1931. Though Mason tried to remove Hurston from the payroll in the spring of 1931 in an attempt to rein in expenses during the Great Depression, Hurston managed to hang on to some measure of financial support until September 1932. Hemenway calculates that Mason’s support of Hurston amounted to approximately fifteen thousand dollars over a period of five years. Hemenway, 110–111.

23. Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, March 8, 1928. Zora Neale Hurston, in Kaplan, *A Life in Letters*, 112–113.

24. Kaplan, *A Life in Letters*, 112–113.

25. Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, July 10, 1928, in Kaplan, *A Life in Letters*, 121.

26. Zora Neale Hurston, “The Florida Expedition,” Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society.

27. Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, July 10, 1928, in Kaplan, 121–122.

28. Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, April 12, 1928, in Kaplan 116.

29. In “The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk,” Hazel V. Carby draws a sharp distinction between Hughes’s literary project and Hurston’s, claiming that while “Hurston constructed a discourse of nostalgia for a rural community,” Hughes developed his own “discursive category of the folk in direct response to the social conditions of transformation, including the newly forming urban working class and ‘socially dispossessed.’” Carby bases her claims on Hurston’s early antagonism toward urban mass cultural forms like “race records” as evidenced in her “Florida expedition” report to Boas. But Hurston’s dismissive stance toward commercial culture may well have been a clearer reflection of Boasian expectations than of Hurston’s own thinking on the subject. Indeed, there are indications that Hurston’s position changed by the time she took to the field on her second major ethnographic expedition. By 1934, when she wrote “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” an essay that stands as her most significant and coherent statement on Black expressive culture, Hurston clearly understood folklore to be an ongoing process, noting, “Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the Black man: nothing is too old or too new, domestic or foreign, high or low for his use” (836). Carby’s binaristic reading of Hurston and Hughes’s discursive appropriations of Black folk culture is not borne out by their actual literary productions. Hurston wrote numerous short stories and essays centering on the vernacular culture of the urban working class, including “Now You Cookin’ With Gas,” “Story in Harlem Slang,” “Muttsy,” “The Emperor Effaces Himself” (a riff on Marcus Garvey), and “Book of Harlem.” Moreover, later in his career Hughes and Arna Bontemps compiled a treasury of African American folklore that followed the conventions of the popular genre (established by B. A. Botkin in his own folklore treasuries) and included a great deal of Hurston’s early folklore research. See eds. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, *The Book of Negro Folklore*; Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” *Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall, 836; Hazel Carby, “The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk,” in *Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall, 59–116.

30. Zora Neale Hurston to Franz Boas, December 27, 1928, in Kaplan, 127.

31. Zora Neale Hurston to Franz Boas, April 21, 1929, in Kaplan, 137–138.

32. Franz Boas to Zora Neale Hurston, April 24, 1929, Franz Boas Papers.

33. Franz Boas to Columbia University Council for Research in the Social Sciences, “Report on Investigation into ‘Racial and Social Differences in Intelligence,’” October 3, 1929, Franz Boas Papers.

34. Franz Boas to Zora Neale Hurston, May 17, 1929, Franz Boas Papers.

35. Zora Neale Hurston to Otto Klineberg, October 22, 1929, Franz Boas Papers.

36. Franz Boas to Zora Neale Hurston, December 13, 1929, Franz Boas Papers.

37. Hemenway, 113.

38. For a full account of the *Mule Bone* collaboration and its dissolution, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “A Tragedy of Negro Life,” in *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro*

Life, by Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, 5–24. For feminist readings of the controversy, see Rachel A. Rosenberg, “Looking for Zora’s *Mule Bone*: The Battle for Artistic Authority in the Hurston-Hughes Collaboration,” 79–105, and Ruthe T. Sheffey, “Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes’s *Mule Bone*: An Authentic Folk Comedy and the Compromised Tradition,” 49–60.

39. Zora Neale Hurston to Franz Boas, June 8, [1930?], in Kaplan, 190. Later, in the fall of 1934, when the Rosenwald Fund invited her to apply for funding, Hurston would explore once again the possibility of pursuing a PhD under Boas. Unfortunately, though Edwin Embree of the Rosenwald Fund promised to provide enough funding to get her through coursework at Columbia, and though Boas designed a course of study especially for her, the foundation pulled its support in early 1935, and Hurston was left with only enough funding to take a few classes. She never completed her degree.

40. The proposed “Negro number” never materialized because of lack of funds. Instead, Benedict edited an “Indian number” as the April–June 1933 edition of *JAF*. Ruth Benedict to Zora Neale Hurston, April 12, 1933, Ruth Benedict Papers, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. However, Benedict did hold on to the manuscript, and this is most likely how a copy of “Negro Tales from the Gulf States” ended up at the Smithsonian Institute in the papers of anthropologist William Duncan Strong, a friend of Franz Boas. The manuscript was recovered from the archive, authenticated as Hurston’s work, and published in 2001. See Zora Neale Hurston, *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-Tales from the Gulf States*.

41. Zora Neale Hurston, Plans for Study, Guggenheim Application, July 25, 1933, Archives of John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

42. Franz Boas to John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship, November 29, 1933, Archives of John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.

43. Ruth Benedict to John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship, October 15, 1933, Archives of John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.

44. Hurston had been shopping “Negro Tales from the Gulf States” for several years when she first came to the attention of editor Bertram Lippincott after the publication of her short story “The Gilded Six-Bits” in *Story* magazine in August 1933. Impressed by the Hurston’s writing, Lippincott wrote to her asking if she had any book-length manuscripts. Though she had a finished version of “Negro Tales,” Hurston wrote an entirely new book for Lippincott, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, a novel filled with folkloric details culled from both her personal history and her various ethnographic expeditions. *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* was published in 1934 to both critical and popular acclaim—it was selected for the Book-of-the-Month Club in May 1934—and Hurston used her newly acquired status as a celebrated author to negotiate a contract for her folklore manuscript, “Negro Tales.”

45. Zora Neale Hurston to Franz Boas, October 20, 1929, in Kaplan, 150.

46. Zora Neale Hurston to Franz Boas, August 20, 1934, in Kaplan, 308.

47. Franz Boas, Preface to Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, xiii–xiv.

48. Hurston had to contend with two distinct yet interconnected traditions in the literary uses of Black folklore. On the one hand, she was well aware of the continuing affection among her White audience for the tales of Joel Chandler Harris, a

White Southerner who in the late nineteenth century helped popularize the “plantation tradition” of dialect writing via nostalgic literary reminiscences of the old South. Harris created a genial Black narrator to tell his folktales, “Uncle Remus,” a relic of plantation days who had “nothing but pleasant memories of the discipline of slavery . . . and all the prejudices of caste and pride of family that were the natural result of the system.” Through the voice of Uncle Remus, richly rendered in putatively “authentic” dialect, Harris offered a vision of the Black vernacular tradition that simultaneously celebrated its aesthetic and cultural importance as a cultural form and deployed it as an apologia for the slave system. On the other hand, Hurston’s creative appropriation of ethnographic information, and especially her artful use of dialect, conjured the work of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Charles Chestnutt, two major African American authors who also used folklore from the antebellum era as source material for their poetry creative writing. Neither canon was an entirely comfortable one for Hurston. Simon Bronner, *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture*, 110; see also Michael Elliot, *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism*, 61–88.

49. Quoted in Hemenway, 219.
50. Alain Locke, “Deep River, Deeper Sea,” 9.
51. Keith Walters, “‘He Can Read My Writing but He Sho’ Can’t Read My Mind’: Zora Neale Hurston’s Revenge in *Mules and Men*,” 343–345.
52. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 3.
53. Franz Boas, Forward to *Mules and Men*, xiii.
54. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 60–61.
55. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 63.
56. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 65.
57. *Ibid.*
58. Cheryl A. Wall, “Mules and Men and Women: Zora Neale Hurston’s Strategies of Narration and Visions of Female Empowerment,” 664.
59. As Cheryl Wall has observed, both the invisibility and the demonization of Black women in the folklore scholarship and popular culture of Hurston’s generation gives particular ironic saliency to Hurston’s choice of *Mules and Men* as the title for her first major folklore book. Wall, “Zora Neale Hurston’s Strategies of Narration,” 666.
60. Zora Neale Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” in *Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, 844.
61. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 30–34.
62. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 60.
63. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 124.
64. For more on the feminist legacy of Blues women see: Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).
65. See: Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Wahneema Lubiano, “Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological Warfare by Narrative Means,” in *Race-Ing Justice, En-Gendering Power*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 323–363.

Chapter Three

1. In this chapter as in the chapter on Jovita González and Margaret Eimer's novel, *Caballero* (Chapter Eight), I refer to Whites as "Anglos." In part this designation reflects the norms of scholarship on race relations in Texas, and is therefore merely linguistically expeditious. However, the shift is worth noting since it suggests the ways in which the discourse of Whiteness has been subjected to some degree of regional variability. While not all Whites in Texas identified as "Anglo" (the notable exceptions being so-called White ethnics like German and Irish immigrants), in the early part of the twentieth century white supremacy was reproduced and deployed in the Texas context through an appeal to Anglo-Saxon history and culture. Whites are still commonly referred to as "Anglos" by Mexican Americans in Texas, a telling linguistic residue of the discursive power of Anglo Saxonist discourse. See Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, and David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas: 1836–1986*.

2. González's memoir is included in the front matter of *Dew on the Thorn*.

3. David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986*, 107.

4. Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 114, 161.

5. For more on this xenophobic discourse, see Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in America*, 57–81.

6. Montejano, 116–125; see also Benjamin Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans*.

7. Ruth Benedict, letter to J. Frank Dobie, June 20, 1927, J. Frank Dobie Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

8. Dobie took over as secretary-treasurer of the society in 1922, at which time he also assumed the role of editor of the *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society*, a position he held until 1943. For more on Dobie's professional career and his relationship with the Texas Folklore Society, see James Charles McNutt, "Beyond Regionalism: Texas Folklorists and the Emergence of a Post-Regional Consciousness," 166–266.

9. Francis Abernathy traces the final break between the Texas Folklore Society and the American Folklore Society to 1926, following an unfavorable review that appeared in the *Journal of American Folklore* of Dobie's signature *PTFS* publication *Legends of Texas*. "In a section of long, fulsome, signed reviews it was tossed in at the last, in a brief, unsigned review, alongside a book the *AFS* panned—and it was damned with exceedingly faint praise." According to Abernathy, the *JAF* review "disappointed, pained, and angered Dobie" and, coupled with the undeniable popularity of *Legends of Texas* among the reading public, confirmed Dobie's feeling that the type of folklore studies the *JAF* promoted was out of step with what the general public looked for in folklore. These factors, no doubt, contributed to Dobie's decision to end the Texas Folklore Society's association with the national group. After the break with the *AFS*, Dobie stepped up his efforts to promote a literary approach to folklore and "retained only briefly in his career as editor the kinds of restrictions against doctoring collected texts which many other folklorists viewed as necessary." Quoted in McNutt, "Beyond Regionalism: Texas Folklorists and the Emergence of a Post-Regional Consciousness," 220.

10. Thompson and others promoted the “Finnish method” of folklore analysis, a historic-geographic approach that sought to trace the diffusion of folklore, particularly narrative forms, by mapping the spread of particular motifs. They frequently registered internal critiques of the style of folklore produced by amateur members of the Texas Folklore Society. Payne’s criticism of Dobie-style folklore was particularly severe in the *PTFS* volume *Man, Bird, and Beast*, in which he asked, “Can we hope to get anywhere, to get anything nailed down and fixed, to reach any dependable conclusions by merely going on collecting and jumping to quick and unwarranted generalizations without subjecting this material to a close and careful scientific, scholarly, and comprehensive examination? It seems we cannot.” Dobie responded to Payne’s rhetorical question in typical style in his editorial remarks in the same volume, “Doctor Payne appears to be concerned in a very scholarly way about ‘what all this collecting’ is leading to. . . . He seems to be saying that the collections should lead to monographic disquisitions on the historical and ethnographic evolution of each particular song with particular attention to its borrowing from other songs. . . . As editor of the *Publications* of the Texas Folk-Lore Society,” he concluded, “[I] am not at all concerned about ‘where all this collecting’ will lead us. What bothers me is that I can’t seize that blind, snaggle-toothed, red-faced, and kindly featured woman I heard playing a guitar on the street of Oklahoma City one night . . . and put her down in print for the whole world to relish.” For Dobie, capturing the “essence” of the folk in print was clearly more important than writing “historical learned-sounding monographs.” Leonidas W. Payne, “Recent Research in Balladry and Folksongs,” in *Man, Bird and Beast*, 163; J. Frank Dobie, “Just a Word,” *Man, Bird and Beast*, 5–6.

11. See McNutt, 166–267; see also José Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican American South Texas*, 43–59.

12. Francis Edward Abernathy, *The Texas Folklore Society: 1909–1943, Volume I*.

13. Jovita González herself made this observation in a very public (though veiled) critique of the Texas Folklore Society’s cultural politics that appeared in her contribution to *Our Racial and Ethnic Minorities* (1937). Noting that while Anglos were willing to celebrate the cultural contributions of “Latin-Americans,” they persisted in denying them equal rights. “When one sees the great sums of money spent to reconstruct the Spanish missions and other buildings of the Latin-American occupation in our country, one cannot help but wonder at the inconsistency of things in general. If Anglo-Americans accept their art and culture, why have they not also accepted the people? Why have not the Latin Americans been given the same opportunities that have been given other racial entities in the United States? A difficult question to answer, and one which will be left to posterity to solve.” Jovita González, “Latin Americans,” in *Our Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, eds. Francis J. Brown and Joseph S. Roucek, 509.

14. McNutt, 226.

15. José E. Limón, “Folklore, Literature and Politics: Jovita González’s *Dew on the Thorn*,” 3.

16. Dobie, *Man, Bird and Beast*, 6.

17. Jovita González, “Folklore of the Texas-Mexican Vaquero,” in *Texas and Southwestern Lore*, ed. J. Frank Dobie, 241.

18. The Lapham Scholarship in Texas History was awarded to González by the

San Antonio chapter of the American Association of University Women. The one thousand dollar fellowship represented “the largest fellowship ever given through the University” at that time. “Miss Gonzales [sic] Speaks Tonight.” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 22, 1929, E. E. Mireles and Jovita González Mireles Papers, Bell Library, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.

19. I recently recovered and published González’s thesis as *Life Along the Border: A Landmark Tejana Thesis*.

20. *Dew on the Thorn* was recovered by José Limón in 1994 and published by Arte Público Press in 1997.

21. González, “Early Life,” *Dew on the Thorn*, xiii.

22. Leticia Garza-Falcón, *Gente Decénte: A Borderlands Response to the Rhetoric of Dominance*, 89.

23. Quoted in Garza-Falcón, *Gente Decénte*, 90.

24. Limón, *Dancing With the Devil*, 61.

25. As early as 1929, Newton Gaines, president of the Texas Folklore Society, singled out González as one of the “Folklore Society ‘stars’” in a short article that appeared in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. A few years later an article appeared in the *Laredo Times* that made note of her national prominence, claiming that Harvard folklorist George Lyman Kittredge, the “Dean of American Folklore” considered her work “the best of its kind in the southwest” and that he had frequently “used her articles in his English classes.” “Miss Gonzales [sic] Speaks Here Tonight,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 22, 1929; “Well Known Writer in City,” *Laredo Times*, nd., E. E. Mireles and Jovita González Mireles Papers, Bell Library, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.

26. Jose Limón suggests as much in his chapter on González in *Dancing With the Devil*.

27. Truett B. Marshall, “Tales of Old Texas Mexican Vaqueros Told at Meeting as Mexican Cowboy Sings Their Ballads,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 25, 1927, E. E. Mireles and Jovita González Mireles Papers, Bell Library, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.

28. Limón, *Dancing With the Devil*, 62.

29. Limón, *Dancing With the Devil*, 61.

30. A celebrated historian of the Texas Revolution, Eugene C. Barker had written a biography of Stephen F. Austin, whom he considered to be the founding father of Texas. He had also recently published his popular lecture series on Texas-Mexico political relations and the causes of the Texas Revolution. Jovita González must have been well acquainted with Barker’s version of Texas history, since he was her thesis adviser and they had been circulating in the same scholarly circles for at least two years. And Barker must certainly have realized that this was no ordinary master’s student. Within the small enclave of Texas folklore and history enthusiasts, Jovita González was becoming a celebrity in her own right. She was already the vice president of the Texas Folklore Society and was about to assume its presidency. And she was gaining a reputation beyond the University of Texas: “Folklore of the Texas-Mexican Vaquero,” her contribution to the 1927 PTFS *Texas and Southwestern Lore* was singled out as the “best piece in the collection” in the *New York Times Review of Books*, November 13, 1927.

31. I offer extended analyses of Jovita González’s master’s thesis in “A Woman

of the Borderlands,” my Introduction to *Life Along the Border: A Landmark Tejana Thesis*, and “Refiguring the ‘American Congo’: Jovita González, John Gregory Bourke and the Battle Over Ethnohistorical Representations of the Borderlands,” 76-94.

32. González, *Life Along the Border*, 41.

33. McNutt, “Beyond Regionalism,” 250-251.

34. Rockefeller Foundation grants-in-aid representative David Stevens handled Jovita González’s file. This was the same David Stevens who provided Franz Boas with a six-month grant to employ Ella Deloria as a research assistant from July 1, 1934, through December 31, 1934. González’s grant application included letters of support from J. Frank Dobie, Paul Taylor, and Eugene Barker. Taylor’s letter is particularly illustrative of the wide-ranging recognition González enjoyed among scholars interested in Mexican American culture. In a handwritten note to Stevens, Taylor indicated that he first met González in 1928 while conducting research in South Texas for the first volume of his sociological study, *Mexican Labor in the United States* (1928) and that he had “followed her work” since their first meeting, concluding, “She understands, analyzes, and presents better than any American of Mexican descent . . . the significant aspects of the contact of the two peoples [Anglo and Mexican] in the area.” Paul Taylor to David Stevens, Rockefeller Foundation, May 30, 1934, Jovita González File, Rockefeller Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

35. J. Frank Dobie, “The Editor’s Prerogative,” *Texas and Southwestern Lore*.

36. José Limón, “Introduction,” *Dew on the Thorn*, by Jovita González, xx.

37. Jovita González, letter to J. Frank Dobie, April 8, 1935, J. Frank Dobie Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

38. J. Frank Dobie, *Tongues of the Monte*, xiv.

39. Limón, *Dancing With the Devil*, 58.

40. José Limón, “Folklore, Literature and Politics: Jovita González’s *Dew on the Thorn*,” 18.

41. Grant-in-aid report, June 26, 1934, Jovita González File, Rockefeller Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center.

42. Jovita González to David H. Stevens, May 29, 1935, Jovita González File, Rockefeller Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center.

43. González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 179.

44. Limón, “Folklore, Literature and Politics,” 19. Limón’s insight on the multiple audiences for *Dew on the Thorn* is borne out by a review of newspaper coverage (in both English and Spanish) of González during this period. González received a good deal of press in Spanish-language newspapers in San Antonio, Laredo, and Del Rio after she was awarded the Rockefeller grant, most of which focused not only on her academic work but also her “social work” as an educator in “night schools.” In much of the Spanish-language newspaper coverage of González’s career, her community activism is highlighted alongside her professional success.

45. Limón, “Folklore, Literature and Politics,” 4.

46. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Scope of Anthropology,” 16.

47. González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 7.

48. Garza-Falcón, 101.

49. González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 32–33.
50. José Limón offers a nuanced reading of the counterdiscursive function of Tío Patricio's stories in his unpublished essay "Folklore, Literature and Politics: Jovita González's *Dew on the Thorn*."
51. González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 111–12.
52. González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 159–161.
53. González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 178.
54. Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, 10.
55. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, 151.
56. Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*, 151.
57. Sonia Saldívar-Hull, "Feminism on the Border: From Gender Politics to Geopolitics," in *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology*, eds. Hector Calderón and José David Saldívar, 204.

Part Two

1. The manuscript, titled "Catholic Heroines of Texas," was never published, nor does it exist in any of González's known archives. The only evidence that González was working on this project comes from a series of written exchanges between González, Adina De Zavala, and Jos. O'Donohoe dating from the spring of 1936. See E. E. Mireles and Jovita González Mireles Papers, Bell Library, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.
2. Diana Elam, *Romancing the Postmodern*, 8.
3. Louise Lamphere, "Unofficial Histories: A Vision of Anthropology from the Margins," 126–140; Ruth Behar, "Out of Exile," in *Women Writing Culture*, eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, 1–29; Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*.
4. Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 3.
5. Visweswaran situates the ethnographic novels of Ella Deloria and Zora Neale Hurston within a long tradition of "writerly" ethnographic texts that includes Ruth Benedict and Edward Sapir's poetry and essays and Elsie Clews Parsons's 1922 anthology of fiction based on ethnographic subjects, *American Indian Life*. Parsons hoped that *American Indian Life* would bridge the gap between popular interest in American Indians and the "forbidding monographs" of ethnology and provide the general reading public with a more grounded and sympathetic understanding of cultural difference. *American Indian Life* included twenty-seven short stories by such anthropological luminaries as Edward Sapir, Franz Boas, Leslie Spier, and Alfred Kroeber. Interestingly, this early exploration of the interconnections between ethnographic writing and fiction was taken up by many of Boas's female students. Ruth Underhill, for example, wrote *White Moth* (1920), a novel documenting the lives of women in a changing American labor force, and later, in a more traditionally ethnographic vein, *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman* (1936), a life history that offered a picture of the Papago world through the eyes of an elderly female informant, "Mama Chona." Visweswaran notes that, because of their "literary qualities," the

ethnographic texts of Underhill, Parsons, and Benedict (among others) were often dismissed by the male anthropological establishment as having little relevance to the “scientific” goals of ethnology. Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 2-3.

6. Chandra T. Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra T. Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, 34-35.

7. Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo, Introduction, *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writings of North America*, eds. Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo, 22.

8. My understanding of “epistemic privilege” draws from the work of feminists of color like Patricia Hill Collins, Uma Narayan, Chela Sandoval, and Maxine Baca Zinn (among others) who expanded the horizons of early feminist standpoint theory to include questions of race, class, nation, and sexuality. These feminist scholars have argued that subordinate groups—in particular those that are marginalized not only by their gender or sexuality, but also by their race, class, and citizenship status—possess unique insights about the workings of power as a result of their particular social locations. It is also informed by the work of Satya Mohanty, Paula Moya, and Michael Hames-Garcia who critique poststructuralist challenges to identity-based politics and argue for a realist theory of identity grounded in theoretically mediated understandings of experience. See eds. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia, eds. *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*.

9. Shari Stone-Mediatore, *Reading across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledge of Resistance*, 8.

10. Stone-Mediatore, *Reading across Borders*, 9.

11. Stone-Mediatore, *Reading across Borders*, 9.

12. Ruth Behar, “Introduction: Out of Exile,” in *Women Writing Culture*, 15.

13. Stone-Mediatore, *Reading across Borders*, 127.

14. Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle,” 33.

15. Gloria Anzaldúa, quoted in AnaLouise Keating, “Charting Pathways, Making Thresholds . . . A Warning, An Introduction,” in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, eds. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, 9.

16. Barbara Christian, “The ‘Race’ for Theory,” in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa, 336.

17. Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle,” 38.

Chapter Four

1. Deloria was chosen for this assignment at the recommendation of Ruth Muskrat Bronson (Cherokee), a colleague from her days as one of the few Indian teachers at Haskell. Ella C. Deloria to Franz Boas, July 18, 1940, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

2. Though their struggles for federal recognition have continued into the

present day, in 1953 the North Carolina state legislature enacted a law designating the Indians of Robeson County as the “Lumbee Indians of North Carolina.” At an estimated thirty-nine thousand enrolled members, the Lumbees constitute the largest nonrecognized tribe in the United States. David E. Wilkins, “Breaking Into the Intergovernmental Matrix: The Lumbee Tribe’s Efforts to Secure Federal Acknowledgement,” 123–142.

3. Ella C. Deloria to Franz Boas, July 18, 1940, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society.

4. Ella C. Deloria to Franz Boas, August 7, 1940, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society.

5. Zora Hurston to Paul Green, January 24, 1940, in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 450–451, see also 780.

6. Ella C. Deloria, “Ella Deloria’s Life” (1952), Margaret Mead Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

7. The Haskell pageant was a huge success, drawing an audience of four to five thousand and winning Deloria much praise from administrators and alumni. Ann Ruggles Gere, “Indian Heart/White Man’s Head: Native-American Teachers in Indian Schools, 1880–1930,” 59.

8. Ella C. Deloria to Franz Boas, August 7, 1940, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society.

9. Susan Gardner, “Though it Broke My Heart to Cut Some Bits I Fancied: Ella Deloria’s Original Design for *Waterlily*,” 676.

10. Ella C. Deloria to Franz Boas, August 7, 1940, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society.

11. Janet L. Finn, “Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove: Writing for Cultures, Writing Against the Grain,” in *Women Writing Culture*, eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, 131–147.

12. For an overview of Ella Deloria’s career as a teacher see: Janette K. Murray, “Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis,” diss., University of North Dakota, 1974 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1997. 75.9100), 91–159; and Ann Ruggles Gere, “Indian Heart/White Man’s Head: Native-American Teachers in Indian Schools, 1880–1930.” For more on how Deloria used her ethnographic research to correct common misconceptions about Dakota social practices among Native people themselves, see: Susan Gardner, “Speaking of Ella Deloria: Conversations with Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, 1998–2000, Lower Brule Community College, South Dakota,” 456–481.

13. Deloria, like other American Indian intellectuals expressed reservations about the anthropological generalities and ethnocentric biases that shaped the policies of the Indian Reorganization Act (1934). Launched by John Collier under the New Deal administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Indian Reorganization Act shifted the goals of federal Indian Policy away from assimilation and toward greater self-determination. One of Collier’s primary goals was to preserve tribal cultures and promote nonpaternalistic self-government. This goal, Collier believed, could be achieved by developing policies that promoted “Indian cultural patterns, Indian self-determination, and Indian self-government.” To this end, under the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act “any tribe or the people of any reservation could

organize themselves as a business corporation, adopt a constitution and bylaws, and exercise certain forms of self-government.” Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 333.

14. For more on Deloria’s thoughts on the role of Indigenous women in the implementation of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, see: María E. Cotera, “Native Speakers: Locating Early Expressions of U.S. Third World Feminist Discourse, A Comparative Analysis of the Ethnographic and Literary Writing of Ella Cara Deloria and Jovita González,” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2000), 100–122.

15. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Why I Can’t Read Wallace Stegner*, 93.

16. Gardner, “Speaking of Ella Deloria: Conversations with Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey,” 473.

17. Godfrey notes that the Dakota women Deloria interviewed were willing to share information with her because “the old ways, the language, kinship, etc., were disappearing,” and “they believed that they had to preserve it for this day, the day that we are now, Ella was the vehicle that they all saw as the person to give that information to.” Thus a conversation between women, between the grandmothers and the new generation of “keepers of the tradition” as embodied in Ella Deloria, the recorder of her people’s history, enabled tribal survival. Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey interview, August 26, 1999, Dakota Indian Foundation, Chamberlain, SD.

18. DeMallie, Afterword, *Waterlily*, by Ella Deloria, 233–234.

19. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*; Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Why I Can’t Read Wallace Stegner*; M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey, “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America,” *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes, 311–344.

20. M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey, “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America,” 327.

21. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 43.

22. Jaimes and Halsey in particular condemn Paula Gunn Allen’s “sweeping exaggeration” of the role of gay and lesbian identities in traditional Indigenous communities and assert that her ideas have “been seized upon by those seeking to deploy their own version of ‘noble savage’ mythology for political purposes.” Jaimes and Halsey, “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America,” 333.

23. Vincent Crapanzano, “Life-Histories,” 954.

24. Ruth Benedict, “Foreword to The Autobiography of a Papago Woman” (1933), in *Papago Woman*, by Ruth Underhill, vii.

25. Elsie Clews Parsons, ed., *American Indian Life*.

26. Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and the Native American Community*, 112–117.

27. Weaver, *That the People Might Live*, 116.

28. Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 4.

29. Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 25.

30. Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life*, 62–63.

31. Deloria, *Waterlily*, 214.

32. Deloria, *Waterlily*, 215–216.
33. Deloria, *Waterlily*, 151–153.
34. Deloria, *Waterlily*, 220–221.
35. Deloria, *Waterlily*, 80–82.
36. Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 77–79.
37. The sources for Blue Bird's stories can be found in Deloria's collection of translated Teton-Dakota narratives, *Dakota Texts*. Ella C. Deloria, *Dakota Texts*.
38. Cook-Lynn, *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner*, 89.
39. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*, 132.
40. Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo, Introduction, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America*, eds. Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo, 21–22.
41. Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 50.
42. Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, 25.
43. Deloria, *Waterlily*, 222–224.
44. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 31.
45. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 262.
46. John Joseph Mathews, *Sundown*; [William] Darcy McNickle, *The Surrounded*.
47. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 76–85; see Mourning Dove (Hum-ishu-Ma), *Cogewea, the Half-Blood*.
48. Ella C. Deloria to Ruth Benedict, July 6, 1947, Ella C. Deloria Project, Dakota Indian Foundation.
49. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 209–210.

Chapter Five

1. Zora Neale Hurston to William Stanley Hoole, March 7, 1936, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 366–368.
2. M. Genevieve West, *Zora Neale Hurston and American Literary Culture*, 107.
3. Richard Wright, "Their Eyes Were Watching God," in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, eds. Henry Lewis Gates and Anthony Appiah, 17. Originally published in *New Masses*, October 5, 1937.
4. Alain Locke, "Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, eds. Henry Lewis Gates and Anthony Appiah, 18. Originally published in *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, June 1, 1938. Not surprisingly, Hurston responded to this critical reception with fury. In a rebuttal to Alain Locke's review that she submitted to the editors of *Opportunity*, she called his assessment of the novel a "conscious fraud" and claimed that Locke knew "nothing about Negroes." Her letter to *Opportunity* was never published. See *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 413–414.
5. Zora Neale Hurston, "The Eatonville Anthology," in Cheryl A. Wall, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings, The Library of America* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1995), 817.

6. Ed. W. T. Couch, *These Are Our Lives*, x.
7. Ann Banks, cited in Norman R. Yetman, *An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives*.
8. Jerre Gerlando Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935–1943*, 366–367.
9. Hurston may have recorded life histories on a fieldwork expedition that she undertook with folklorists Alan Lomax and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle in the summer of 1935, just a year before she wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. During that trip, the three traveled to a migrant labor camp in Belle Glade, Florida, undoubtedly the prototype for the muck where Janie Crawford and her husband, Tea Cake, live until a violent storm uproots their lives. Hurston likely collected from the residents of Belle Glade accounts of the great Okeechobee flood of 1928, a natural disaster that claimed over two thousand lives in Florida alone, using them as the basis for Janie's account of the disaster. See *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 353–356.
10. Ruth Benedict, "Foreword to The Autobiography of a Papago Woman" (1933), in Ruth Underhill's *Papago Woman*.
11. William McKinley Runyan, "Life Histories in Anthropology: Another View," 183.
12. Susan N. G. Geiger, "Women's Life Histories: Method and Content," *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 338.
13. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, 24.
14. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 7.
15. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1.
16. Shari Stone-Mediatore, *Reading Across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance*, 9.
17. Stone-Mediatore, *Reading Across Borders*, 5.
18. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 8.
19. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 9.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 14.
22. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 16.
23. Patricia Hill Collins makes much the same argument in her foundational book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.
24. Hazel V. Carby offers an excellent examination of how the politics of slavery and Reconstruction impacted the writing of Black women in the nineteenth century in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*.
25. Patricia Hill Collins, for example, has explored the connections between racism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism in her book *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*; see also Tricia Rose, *Longing to Tell: Black Women Talk About Sexuality and Intimacy*.
26. Mary Helen Washington, "I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands': Zora Neale Hurston's Emergent Female Hero," in *Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall, 36.
27. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 32.
28. Janie's approach to Joe's supremacy seems, at best, a defeatist strategy, but

there is, after all, a theory behind her tactics, one that mirrors the “featherbed resistance” described in Hurston’s folklore study, *Mules and Men*. Like the subjects of Hurston’s folklore, Janie sets “something outside the door of [her] mind” for Joe “to play with and handle,” and while he can wield his supremacy over her body “he sho’ can’t read [her] mind.” Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 3.

29. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 79.
30. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 49.
31. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 89.
32. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 114.
33. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 282.
34. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 51.
35. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 299.
36. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 96.
37. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 124.
38. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 132–134.
39. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 147.
40. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 148.
41. Washington, “I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands,” 32.
42. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 82.
43. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 182.
44. Tricia Rose, *Longing to Tell*, 4.
45. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 192.

Chapter Six

1. It’s not entirely clear when González and Eimer started working on the novel, but correspondence suggests that their collaboration began sometime between 1936 and 1938. In 1939, they signed a contract with the American Artists and Authors Agency, agreeing to divide equally the proceeds of their completed novel, “All This is Mine.” In 2004 I found a copy of the contract in the Jovita González (Mireles) Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Texas State University–San Marcos.

2. Judging from the archival record—which includes correspondence between Eimer and González, census data, and Margaret Eimer’s death certificate, which states that she was never married—it appears that “Pop” Eimer was Margaret’s uncle. C. L. Eimer was a well-known gunsmith who developed a revolver called the .40 Eimer Special or the .401 Eimer in his Joplin, Missouri, gun shop.

3. There are a number of letters written by Margaret Eimer to Jovita González in the E. E. Mireles and Jovita González Mireles Papers at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. Spanning three decades from the late 1930s to the mid-1960s, at least four of these letters—dated June 27 [no year], July 13 [no year], June 29, 1946, and January 12, 1951—deal directly with the *Caballero* manuscript, addressing issues of plot, character development, and editorial changes. In one letter, Eimer apologizes to González for putting her own name first on the manuscript’s title page, explaining that an acquisitions editor from the Julian Messner Publishing Company had mistakenly thought her “merely the compiler given a certain sop by having [her] name put on.” She changed the title page so that other publishers would not be simi-

larly “confused” about her role as full coauthor. Margaret Eimer to Jovita González, June 29, 1946. E. E. Mireles and Jovita González Mireles Papers, Bell Library, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.

4. We may credit José Limón with the recovery and publication of *Caballero*. As a graduate student, I worked on the research project that he directed, and subsequently, when Texas A&M Press agreed to publish *Caballero*, he asked me to co-edit the manuscript and write a critical epilogue. His nuanced introduction to *Caballero* offered a first critical reading that established the novel as a foundational text in the Mexican American literary canon. See Jovita González and Eve Raleigh (pseud. Margaret Eimer), *Caballero: A Historical Novel*, eds. María Cotera and José E. Limón.

5. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*.

6. Benjamin Johnson, “Engendering Nation and Race in the Borderlands,” 260.

7. See José E. Limón, “Mexicans, Foundational Fictions, and the United States: *Caballero*, a Late Border Romance,” and Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*.

8. Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity*, 240–241.

9. Jovita González to John Joseph Gorrell, August 26, 1939, E. E. Mireles & Jovita González Mireles Papers, Bell Library, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.

10. See Garza-Falcón, *Gente Decente*.

11. Barker was undoubtedly influenced by the ideas of Frederick Jackson Turner, who first outlined this “Frontier Thesis” in a speech he gave to the American Historical Association during the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. See Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*.

12. *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Texas Centennial,” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/WW/fwe6.html> (accessed May 25, 2006).

13. Jovita González, “America Invades the Border Towns,” 468–477.

14. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, “Rhetoric in a New Key: Women and Collaboration,” 234.

15. B. J. Manriquez, “Argument in Narrative: Tropology in Jovita González’s *Caballero*,” 173.

16. Jovita González and Eve Raleigh (pseud. Margaret Eimer), *Caballero*, 194–195.

17. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 194–195.

18. Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, 36.

19. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 37.

20. In Mexican and Mexican American culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the word *caballero* had multiple meanings. Not simply a man who was skilled in riding and training horses, the word also had distinct class and gendered overtones that can be traced back through the Spanish tradition, in which a *caballero* signified a cavalier or the Spanish equivalent of a knight. To this day the word suggests a man who exhibits gentlemanly behavior.

21. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 32.
22. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 33.
23. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 172.
24. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 172–173.
25. Ramón Saldivar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, 174.
26. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back*, 195, cited in Norma Alarcón, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism,” in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa, 356.
27. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, “Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship,” 354.
28. Linda Karell, *Writing Together/Writing Apart: Collaboration in Western American Literature*, xxiii.
29. Emma Perez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, 7.
30. Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama*, 19.
31. Perez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, xiv.
32. Perez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 6–7.
33. See José Limón, “Mexicans, Foundational Fictions, and the United States: *Caballero*, a Late Border Romance,” and John González, “Terms of Engagement: Nation or Patriarchy in Jovita González’s *Caballero*.”
34. Holly Laird, *Woman Coauthors*, 6.
35. Laird, *Women Coauthors*, 6.
36. Holly Laird, “Preface: Forum on Collaborations, Part I,” 239.
37. Laird, *Women Coauthors*, 1.
38. Laird, *Women Coauthors*, 8.
39. Laird, *Women Coauthors*, 13.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Gloria Anzaldúa, “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento*: inner work, public acts,” in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, eds. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, 570.
42. Anzaldúa, Preface, *This Bridge We Call Home*, 1.
43. Gloria Anzaldúa, “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento*,” 541.
44. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 48.
45. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 38.
46. The site of Luis Gonzaga and Devlin’s first meeting differs quite starkly from the conventionally romantic backdrops of the meetings between his sisters and their future husbands. Susanita, the heroine of the novel, falls in love at first sight with the heroic Lieutenant Warrenner in the plaza in front of a Catholic church, while Maria de los Angeles sets the terms for a strategic marriage with the Anglo power broker Red McLane in the cottage of a humble *peon* on *Rancho la Palma de Cristo*. Both of these spaces are domains of patriarchy, where the power of the old order enacts and enforces its gender, racial, and class distinctions. The Rio Grande, in contrast, is consistently figured in the novel as a zone of crossing and a space of contestation between the old order and the new.
47. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 103.
48. Laird, *Women Coauthors*, 6.

49. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 196.
50. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 197.
51. Ibid.
52. Gloria Anzaldúa, “now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento,” 540–541.
53. Anzaldúa, “now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento,” 571.
54. González and Eimer, *Caballero*, 156.
55. Anzaldúa, Preface, *This Bridge We Call Home*, 2.
56. Joyce Elbrecht and Lydia Fakundiny, “Scenes from a Collaboration: On Becoming Jael B. Juba,” 12.

Epilogue

1. Richard Wright, “Their Eyes Were Watching God,” in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, eds. Henry Louis Gates and Anthony Appiah, 17. Originally published in *New Masses*, October 5, 1937.
2. June Jordan, “Where is the Love?” in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa, 176.
3. Audra Simpson, “Making Native Love” (accessed 30 November 2005), <http://www.cyberpowwow.net/nation2nation/love.html>.
4. Chéla Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 140.
5. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 140.
6. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 147.
7. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 2.
8. See Virginia Dominguez, “For a Politics of Love and Rescue.”
9. Some examples include Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*; Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*; Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*; Julie Taylor, *Paper Tangos*.
10. Virginia Dominguez, “Love and Rescue,” 365.

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