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Labor and Leisure in the Tropical Environment: Race, Class, and the Enjoyment of Nature

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LABOR AND LEISURE IN THE TROPICAL ENVIRONMENT:

RACE, CLASS, AND THE ENJOYMENT OF NATURE

By

ROBERT BOWMAN

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Department of English
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This work is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother,
Bonnie J. Gullick, who was a voracious reader, a published poet,
and someone who always encouraged my love of language.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations....................................vii
Abstract...viii

1. INTRODUCTION 1

   1.1 The Americanness of a Tricoastal Nation 1

   1.2 The Western Landscape and the Virtue of Labor 6

   1.3 Florida and the Vice of Leisure 11

   1.4 The Cowboy and Ponce de León 19

   1.5 Thinking Like a Swamp: The Ontology of the Tropical Sublime 26

   1.6 Chapter Overviews 32

2. "WHO SHALL DO THE WORK FOR US?": RACIALIZING THE ENJOYMENT OF NATURE IN HARRIET BEECHER STOWE'S *PALMETTO LEAVES* 35

   2.1 The Abolitionist after Abolition 35

   2.2 The Racialized Swamp: Beauty and the Beast 42

   2.3 The Development of Leisure 54

   2.4 The Color of Labor 66

3. THE CRACKER SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH: MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS'S POETICS OF POOR WHITE LABOR 74

   3.1 Who Speaks for the Cracker? 74

   3.2 Blessed Are the Cracker Poor 81

   3.3 The Ethics of Nature's Enchantment 95

4. THE BEAUTY OF BLACK LABOR: WORK AND PLAY IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S TEXTS 109

   4.1 The Cultural Value of Labor 109

   4.2 The Withering Vine 114

   4.3 Labor Exploitation 122

   4.4 Black (Labor) Is Beautiful 132

5. EPILOGUE: LABOR AND LEISURE IN THE MODERN-DAY FLORIDA THEME PARK 138

REFERENCES...145

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH......................................151

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC: *Cross Creek*
D: *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*
DT: *Dust Tracks on a Road*
JG: *Jonah's Gourd Vine*
MM: *Mules and Men*
NT: *Native Tongue*
PL: *Palmetto Leaves*
SL: *Selected Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*
SS: *Short Stories by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*
TE: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
TR: *Team Rodent: How Disney Devours the World*
Y: *The Yearling*

ABSTRACT

There is no shortage of encomiums to Florida's natural environment. Many writers have conventionally depicted it as a tropical paradise, a latter-day Eden in which leisure awaits the fortunate visitor. Building on this conventional attitude that aestheticizes Florida's nature, my dissertation argues that writers have repeatedly racialized and classed the tropical environment of Florida by using the frequently competing activities of labor and leisure. As an advocate for the development of Florida tourism, Harriet Beecher Stowe naturalizes black labor, using it as a foil to the white appreciation of natural beauty. Broadening the view of labor, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings romanticizes the rural work of poor whites while continuing to privilege the leisurely observation of nature as a superior behavior that allows for the philosophical and aesthetic contemplation of the natural environment. In contrast to these two writers, Zora Neale Hurston offers a more thorough and thoughtful treatment of African-American labor, seeing its cultural value as well as its relationship to an exploitative labor system. In the epilogue, I use Carl Hiaasen's work to discuss the way in which contemporary Florida theme parks intensify these romanticized attitudes toward labor, leisure, and nature.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Americanness of a Tricoastal Nation

Given their insistence on seeing the United States as a bicoastal nation organized along the Atlantic-Pacific axis, American literary and Western frontier scholars have typically neglected to consider that the nation is, in fact, bounded by three large bodies of water. The frequently-neglected but massive Gulf of Mexico adds more than 1600 miles to the country's coastline. An example of this coastal oversight can be found when Western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick writes, "The West reminds us that the United States is a bicoastal nation, making attention to the Pacific Ocean as necessary as attention to the Atlantic Ocean" (24). The omission of the third coast is understandable if not exactly justifiable. By directing their attention to the Atlantic-Pacific/East-West axis, many literary scholars have greatly simplified the task of narrating the evolution of the American mythos. To look at many of the central texts of American literary criticism like Perry Miller's *Errand into the Wilderness* and Sacvan Bercovitch's *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* to name two of the more prominent examples, one would conclude that New England soil gave birth to American identity, even though that region

comprised but one later entry point into the New World by European colonization.

From the Puritan writings of William Bradford, Jonathan Edwards, and Cotton Mather, other twentieth-century literary critics conceived a narrative of American letters that spread west across the continent following the dictum of Manifest Destiny eventually arriving in California. Richard Chase's *The American Novel and its Tradition*, an exemplary text in this regard, starts with the New England writings of Charles Brockden Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne before moving increasingly further west with James Fennimore Cooper, Mark Twain, and Frank Norris. This western trajectory, many critics find, is as important to Americanness as the Puritan influence, so much so that some critics have proposed that Americanness is largely informed by the incorporation of the myth of the Western frontier. Most famously, Frederick Jackson Turner proposed a Frontier Thesis which argued that that American society distinguished itself from its European antecedents by the existence of a western frontier which required the righteous expansion of American culture. Revisionist scholars like Henry Nash Smith, Patricia Nelson Limerick, and Richard Slotkin have critiqued Turner's thesis, in the process complicating our understanding of Turner's terminology and exposing the hegemonic politics that framed his argument. Even with these scholarly correctives, the

image, ideology, and ethics of the Western frontier continue to the present day to possess cultural clout in the form of movies, television shows, popular music, literature, and political discourse. The significance of the Western myth extends beyond these cultural texts, however, to the environment itself: American culture's high regard for the Western myth's righteous physical labor and masculine domination in the face of brutal nature affects how writers valorize the natural environment west of the Mississippi River and consequently how they underappreciate land located elsewhere, especially in the South.

While there has been a considerable amount written about the Western frontier and its cultural representations, what has not been adequately addressed is the extent to which the myth of the West affects the perception of other American places that do not replicate the myth's values. American discourse has tended to privilege the landscape of the Atlantic-Pacific trajectory to the extent that the history, society, writings, and the very environment of the Gulf of Mexico region are regarded as something un-American. What does Americanness look like when this third coastal region, specifically a place like Florida, is included as a necessary component and not an outlier on the fringe of the cultural discourse? In this Americanness of the third coast, the Puritanical influence is less pronounced, and the Spanish legacy of New World colonization becomes more

apparent (although, admittedly, Spanish colonization expanded into the American Southwest). The mythology of Western labor is offset with the myth of tropical leisure. The sublime natural environment of the arid West is complemented with and complicated by the humid fertility of the tropics. Florida offers a compelling example of a place that, while politically part of the United States, remains on the periphery of traditional, bicoastal notions of Americanness. Its recognizable cultural identity is often treated as exotic, alluring, and yet un-American. This cultural perception of Florida is a byproduct of American ideas about the virtue of labor and the slothfulness of leisure that the culture uses to assign values to different kinds of environments. I maintain this is the kind of thinking that has contributed to the persistent environmental degradation of tropical places like Florida and the Caribbean whose environmental worth and expendability are closely linked to their association with Eden and leisure.[1]

It is my argument that the Western myth, with its insistence on romanticized physical labor in a harsh expansive natural environment, contributes to the devaluing of other

[1] I have opted to use "tropical" as a cultural term to refer to Florida even though a large part of the state is considered "subtropical" by climatologists. My use of the term is, thus, less concerned with scientific specificity. Instead, I am stressing the cultural perception adopted by many writers that since Florida is not temperate like much of the nation, it is consequently akin to the tropics.

American environments that ostensibly lack those qualities. My more general point is that the kinds of human activities and practices associated with different natural environments dictate the extent to which those environments are aestheticized, valued, and protected. Landscapes representing leisure have been more susceptible to degradation because they deviate from the narrative of righteous labor that contributes value to the Western landscape. Labor performed in places of leisure, citrus or sugar cane harvesting in Florida for instance, is not as evenly valued and romanticized as it would be if it were performed in the context of the Western frontier. Consequently, these landscapes of leisure have a complicated and problematic relationship with agrarian and physical labor, which leads to their marginalization and neglect by many writers, artists, scholars, and environmentalists who are unsure how to treat these landscapes of leisure with seriousness in American discourse. Not only have the cultural representations treated these places as frivolous, these environments have historically not been considered significant or beautiful enough to warrant strenuous environmental protection, either. In that way, the natural environment that is home to the leisurely pursuits is as disposable as the leisure that makes the region profitable, in part because of the type of behavior associated with it.

1.2 The Western Landscape and the Virtue of Labor

In contrast to the Edenic leisure that dominates depictions of Florida, the mythology of the American West promotes the image of a hard lifestyle based on the moderation of leisure. The Western myth embraces the industrious labor performed by the agrarians and workers on horseback who populate and cultivate its landscape. As Henry Nash Smith points out in *Virgin Land*, Western mythology heavily romanticizes the backbreaking labor required to settle and cultivate the land (123-4). The myth's culture of labor transforms the work of empire expansion into the bucolic, pastoral life of the individual homesteading family. According to Smith, the Western figure who symbolizes the integrity and righteousness of American expansionism is not the soldier charged with policing the actions of Native Americans, nor is it the wealthy Eastern railroad baron who funds the construction of rail lines which further expand the range of market capitalism. Instead, Smith contends, it is the nineteenth-century homesteader, the independent farmer and the apotheosis of the Jeffersonian agrarian, who embodies the romance of the Western narrative. The agrarian's labor tames the wilderness, his hard work of cultivation making nature profitable for the capitalist society. In twentieth-century representations of the West, particularly in television, movies and popular fiction, the cowboy supplants the agrarian as the

central figure of the Western myth "[suggesting] to Americans what they might have been and what they might yet become" (Savage 38). But he, too, is associated with independence, self-reliance, and a hard-scrap life more devoted to labor than leisure. Other forms of outdoor labor like gold prospecting and mining, equally detached from easy lives of leisure, while less visible in popular depictions of the West, also encapsulate the myth's values.

What all these identities have in common is an intimate, antagonistic relationship to the outdoors and nature. The acknowledgement of this antagonism differentiates the West from the tropics where domination of the environment occurs but is effaced from the Edenic myth. These Western professions can be framed as "man versus nature" metanarratives because as agrarians, ranchers, and miners, their labor attempts to dominate, cultivate, or extract from the land. The Western landscape promotes the antagonism with these figures as it "[isolates] the individual through extremes of geography and climate…forcing him to depend solely upon his own physical and psychological resources" (Savage 61). The justification for the "progress" and land development that these figures oversee thus requires that the natural environment be perceived initially as pristine wilderness, even if it has been inhabited and influenced by indigenous groups for many generations.

Envisioned as pristine wilderness, the natural environment behaves as an antagonist that homesteaders attempt to conquer and dominate with the force of empire building. After the process of cultivation and ranching has begun, nature remains an antagonist that the Westerner battles in order to retain control over his environment. The threat of wild nature is never completely overcome as various natural forces beyond the agrarian's control like crop-destroying insects and drought constantly pose threats to the productivity of his harvest (Limerick 126).

Even though nature is figured as an antagonist in this relationship, paradoxically the romance of the agrarian's lifestyle is largely dependent on the presence of nature. This means the myth relies on the assurance that wild nature will never be fully vanquished even if success demands that it primarily be held in check. If this wild nature were to be vanquished, the West would cease to be the West and the frontier would irrevocably close. This complicated relationship with nature is what makes the West different from the East and the homestead different from the city. The Westerner supposedly experiences a life "closer" to nature, but it is also a life at odds with nature. The myth sees the homesteader's labor bringing him closer to nature as he battles it, an idea that glorifies (and romanticizes) the physical labor of pre-modern,

pre-industrial societies. By contrast, the allure of the tropics is a life close to nature that requires no battling and no struggle, an idea that in its own way glorifies (and romanticizes) the "primitive" lifestyle of pre-modern, pre-industrial societies.

The landscape of the West, then, is so much more than a backdrop to the myth of cowboys and Indians. It is a central component to the story: a severe landscape whose prairies, mountains, buttes, and deserts validate the virtue of the work ethic. Consequently, the landscape is privileged by its association with the Western myth. That is not to say that the myth has prevented the West from experiencing environmental degradation, because, like everywhere else, it has. But it is also true that American culture frequently presents the West as beautiful, sublime, and worth protecting. Is it any wonder that the vast majority of the National Parks—the figurative gems of American nature—are found west of the Mississippi River? The Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Rocky Mountains are among the most visited and emblematic natural landscapes in the United States. It is no coincidence that these Western landscapes are given such prominence in the national consciousness.

The association with the Western myth has proven powerful in its ability to aestheticize and venerate nature west of the

Mississippi. By that same token, the cultural and environmental consequences of not being associated with the West have proven disastrous for other natural environments, like Florida's, whose indigenous nature is perceived as unappealing, unimportant, or unworthy of serious environmental protection because of its perceived deficiencies. Lacking a connection to a venerated cultural touchstone like the Western myth, the Florida natural environment becomes a place without protection against the demands of land development for the business of leisure. The images of a rugged John Wayne on horseback in Monument Valley and John Muir in the Sierras fail to speak to the development of a non-western, tropical place like Florida whose landscape is not sublime and whose leisure is naturalized: if the indigenous landscape was worth protecting, the entire image of Florida would have to be reconsidered. The cultural and environmental value of Mickey Mouse, tourism, resorts, and land development would need to be questioned, the cost of which could be high from a business and economic standpoint. Hence, the questioning is avoided. Fortunately for those business interests, because it does not have the inherent value fostered by the Western myth, Florida's environment conveniently obscures those questions while the business of leisure, tourism, and land development continues as usual.

1.3 Florida and the Vice of Leisure

On the map of North America, a thin finger-shaped peninsula juts from the southeastern corner of the continent. The peninsula's orientation appears uniquely at odds with the land mass to its north. With a little imagination, we can see its shape suggesting two separate relationships to the continent. As a place whose uniqueness is evident from North America's tenuous hold on it, the peninsula appears to be pulling away from the continent and on the verge of a geological rupture that will solidify its separateness. Looked at more statically, though, it appears isolated from the rest of North America as an exile colony might look: a place for the discards that represent the worst the culture has to offer. Both of these relationships hint at how American culture has viewed Florida. As a place that represents separation from the rest of the continent, it has been imagined as the bountiful and tropical Eden, a winter's paradise and an escape from the drudgery of the tourist's "real" life back home in the temperate North. Conversely, it is also the dense rows of anonymous condominium towers along the overdeveloped coasts, the urban tourist attractions that are as congested as rush hour back home, and the massive retirement communities where many American families relegate their elderly relatives to get the care the families are unable or unwilling to supply. Moreover, along with sugar and citrus

agribusinesses, the state's natural environment consists of beaches fit for postcards but also endangered scrub habitat and the Everglades whose environmental destruction has been fodder for magazine articles and popular culture hand-wringing for several generations now.[2]

The literary tradition of using Edenic language to describe Florida can be traced to *The Travels of William Bartram*, an eighteenth-century book whose descriptions influenced the Romantic poets including Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Anne Rowe notes that Bartrum repeatedly uses the word "Elysium" to describe his jaunt through Florida as he highlights "the unspoiled terrain, the lush plant life and abundance and variety of animals, the breathtaking beauty of lakes and streams" (3-4). His account anticipates later writers' invocations of Edenic imagery to describe the region. However, it was during the decades after the Civil War that Florida's relationship to leisure, labor, and nature evolved contemporaneously with the settlement of the West. After the war "when reconciliation was on the mind of the nation," the state "offered too many things—an inviting climate, an exotic, faraway past, and the charm of quaint, out-of-the-way villages" that captured the American imagination (Rowe 28). Florida land development accelerated causing tremendous economic and environmental changes.[3] A place

[2] Joy Williams' "Neverglades" provides an overview of the failed attempts to restore the Everglades, pointing out that, no matter what restoration project is implemented, the Everglades will never again be a pristine landscape.
[3] For more discussion of the legacy of the environmental degradation that accompanied Florida's development, see Mark Derr's *Some Kind of Paradise: A*

that many Americans had previously considered a frontier wilderness, the location of the Seminole Wars, angry Indians, and mosquitos, was discovered in the late nineteenth century by industrialists and tourists, many of whom were from northern states. Although before the war small numbers of invalids and tourists had wintered in the state in places like St. Augustine, the decades after the war saw tourism, the business of leisure, become increasingly inseparable from the state's identity and economy. The expansion of steamboat and railroad lines in north Florida spurred economic development and landscape alterations, fueling the tourism industry in the process. The construction of luxury resorts financed by industrialists like Henry Flagler and Henry Plant drew attention to already-established destinations like St. Augustine while also creating new vacation destinations and relocating labor forces in places like Tampa and Miami.[4]

While its identity is as dense and layered as the West's, Florida is a place whose complexities are often overlooked by writers and cultural commentators who are content to see it as the disposable paradise-lost landscape of tourist attractions,

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Chronicle of Man and the Land in Florida; Michael Grunwald's *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise*; and Bill Bellville's *Losing It All to Sprawl: How Progress Ate My Cracker Landscape*.

[4] Larry Youngs' article "The Sporting Set Winters in Florida: Fertile Ground for the Leisure Revolution, 1870-1930" looks at the role that these expensive resorts played in establishing the association of leisure activities with Florida's tourism.

retirement villas, and beachside developments. One way to complicate this view and better understand the environmental implications of this cultural degradation is to recognize that in terms of their natural histories and cultural representations, Florida shares a number of striking similarities with the Caribbean islands, a point that postcolonial ecocriticism can help us appreciate. Both places have historically been associated with Eden and paradise imagery; both places have neglected agricultural histories that involve the exploitation of physical labor; and, perhaps most importantly, both places today are inextricably linked to international tourism and the promise of a tropical getaway.[5] Most importantly for my argument, these associations with paradise imagery, invisible labor, and tourism promote an image of the "tropical" natural environment that can lead to the devaluing of the regions' indigenous nature.

While ignoring Florida, postcolonial ecocritics have productively commented on the significance of the natural environment for Caribbean writers. Elaine Savory has described how Derek Walcott uses flora in his poetry in a way that critiques the image of Caribbean nature as beautiful and static. Instead, she argues, Walcott uses both indigenous and introduced

[5] On the subject of tourism's relationship to postcolonial nations, see Anthony Carrigan's *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture, and Environment.*

plant species to speak to the painful history of Caribbean slavery and exploitation. His mixture of temperate and tropical plants hints at the legacy of colonization: an environment of hybridity in which pristine originary nature cannot be recovered and which still affirms the necessity and self-empowerment of the adaptation of a diasporic population (Savory 89). Many postcolonial ecocritics, including Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, have observed that modern Caribbean writers have been inspired to tarnish the image of "'island paradise', that tiresome trope that has historically over-determined European aesthetic appreciation of the Caribbean" (111). In an essay about Jamaica Kincaid, Walcott, and Édouard Glissant, writer Jana Evans Braziel makes a similar point about the critique of Caribbean-as-Eden, but also delves into the role that tourism plays as an antagonist to these writers' visions of the independence of Caribbean populations. She shows how travel guides present island nature and ecotourism differently than does Kincaid, for instance, who sees "the environmental and human degradation of tourism [as] linked to the earlier historical violence of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the region" (Braziel 115). With slight modifications, all of these arguments could apply to Florida's cultural and natural history, because underpinning each of these arguments is the understanding that the perception of nature is connected to the

expectations of an invisible labor force and permissive Edenic leisure.

These postcolonial ecocritical discussions are worthwhile because they question how political, social, and cultural factors contribute to different perceptions of the tropical natural environment. The fundamentals of Caribbean ecocritical analysis have not been applied to Florida although its human and nonhuman environments suffer from many of the same issues described by Caribbean writers and postcolonial ecocritics. Admittedly, there are significant differences between the two places in terms of their current political identities and their sociopolitical histories: Florida, as part of the United States, does not politically fit into the "postcolonial" category as do Antigua or Saint Lucia, for example.[6] Additionally, the slave trade does not feature as prominently in Florida's history as it does in Caribbean history, since the "highly developed plantation system of…the Deep South had never made great inroads into" Florida (Rowe 28). However, slavery was still present in Florida and its connection to the Caribbean can be seen in the cases of indigenous Calusa peoples who were taken from Florida and enslaved in Cuba. Moreover, poverty has not been as romanticized in Florida to the same degree that it has been in

[6] On the subject of seeing America as a postcolonial site, see Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, C. Richard King's anthology *Postcolonial America*, and Deborah L. Madsen's *Beyond the Borders: American Literature and Postcolonial Theory*.

the Caribbean. Nevertheless, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's writings about Florida Crackers are examples of Florida texts that do romanticize poverty.

The scholarly neglect of these Florida-Caribbean correlatives raises some troubling questions: why do the conversations of postcolonial ecocritics—those conversations seeking to discover the connections between people and nature, conversations that are important and incisive—extend to the Caribbean but not to the peninsula whose coastline is one hundred miles from Cuba and the Bahamas? Do these discussions avoid analyzing Florida because it is "less interesting" than the Caribbean? This kind of dismissal would simply reinstate a hierarchy of "interesting" topics, places, and people and foster the same kind of hierarchical thinking that literary criticism has ostensibly been seeking to avoid for the last several decades. Whatever the reasons, we can admit that the natural history of both places and their association with a certain brand of tropical tourism are central points of commonality that permit us to think about Florida in proximity to the Global South as a borderland between America and the Caribbean and as a place that shares many of the same environmental concerns as the Caribbean.

While the Western landscape is dominated by images and narratives of a romanticized labor force working close to

nature, Florida, even more than the Caribbean, furnishes an example of an environment in which the dominant cultural mythology dismisses the respectability, and indeed the very existence, of physical labor. Portrayed in tourist brochures, television and movies, as a modern-day Eden dominated by the life of leisure, Florida is home to the exotic flora and fauna that enhance the myth of a carefree tropical lifestyle. Just as the violence and the harsher aspects of pioneering are effaced in the romantic Western myth, many depictions of Florida overlook the environmental transformation that developers and politicians have spearheaded. These depictions suggest that this place has always been a resort paradise since the first European explorers discovered it.

As a humid subtropical environment whose main industry is tourism, Florida reveals the complicated relationships between labor, leisure, and nature, which the Western myth's romanticizing necessarily obscures. Florida raises questions about the role that leisure plays in the perception of environmental fragility and degradation. Many of the Western habitats like mountain ranges and desert buttes appear more resilient to human alteration, both because their gargantuan scale appears to dwarf the surrounding labor activities and because the man-versus-nature metanarrative of the West implies an environment that can never be completely dominated by human

endeavors. How do leisurely behaviors contribute to a different perception of the humid subtropics with their own fragile habitats that are also exploited by development practices typically passed off as simply good business? Where does leisure fit into the Western paradigm of an idealized agrarian labor force? Conversely, where does labor fit into the Floridian model of a tropical vacation paradise? The connecting tissue between all these questions is the issue of how leisure, class, and environment affect cultural perceptions of land development, environmental change, and the metanarrative of man versus nature. While the businesses of labor and leisure both undoubtedly contribute to the alteration of the natural environment, American discourse privileges the preservation of those regions historically prized for their associations with free agrarian labor, places that are understood as important and American perhaps because through the work ethic they seem associated with the nation's Puritan origins. Yet in the same way that Western labor is idealized as the righteous American domination of nature and other cultures, Florida leisure functions as a vice, not a virtue, and serves as the term by which the domination of nature is justified and marginalized.

1.4 The Cowboy and Ponce de León

Juxtaposing two representative images of the West and Florida can adumbrate the ways in which labor and leisure relate

to the traditional, East-West oriented metanarrative of Americanness. One of the most common images of western art and films is the rugged cowboy on horseback appearing insignificant amidst giant towering buttes and mountains. It is an image that encapsulates the virtue of Western expansionism and the individual work of bringing the "civilization" of the East to the wilderness. In its association with righteous and rugged Western labor, the image embodies the argument for seeing America as a bicoastal narrative/nation. The image suggests the man's fortitude and his adversarial relationship to the environment, but more importantly we are to understand the image reveals the hard-scrap life of the man whose existence is defined by his labor, not by the brief moments of leisure his life affords.

The connotations of that western image stand in contrast to the legendary and apocryphal narrative of Juan Ponce de León's search for the fountain of youth in Florida, a narrative that seems to subvert the work ethic that is so central to the East-West metanarrative. Although historians have pointed out that Ponce de León was not searching for the fountain of youth when he journeyed to Florida, through literature and popular culture, the narrative has become associated with Florida (Peck). The fountain of youth suggests not a life of labor in which the years of hard work take their toll on the human body, but

instead the myth creates an image of infinite years of youth and leisure, everything that is antithetical to the leathery skin of the haggard Western cowboy. Florida offers us the chance to see how leisure and labor collide to create very different impressions of the nature. Despite being close to nature, the Western cowboy or farmer is constantly at odds with nature, as represented in the image of the cowboy isolated among the towering buttes and the harsh landscape. Survival in this environment is viewed as a constant battle with overpowering, inhuman forces. While American narratives have typically viewed Western nature in this way, the depiction of Florida's subtropical nature has been quite different. As a place that calls to mind images of leisure activities, resorts, vacations, and miraculous pools of water that negate the aging process, Florida serves as a site for an alternative, but perhaps no less exploitative, view of nature.

Opposing notions of wilderness in the West and Florida hint at the divergent cultural treatments of labor as well as the differences in how nature is valued in these two places. In visual and linguistic texts, popular imagery defines the western wilderness by its arid, barren spaces, a lifeless place devoid of lush green vegetation. A place largely devoid of water, the West—in particular the Great Plains and the Southwest, which inform much of the imagery of the West—can be seen as the

obverse of Florida's wet, humid wilderness.[7] Depictions of the Florida wilderness typically stress the region's similarity to the superabundant nature of verdant tropical zones. Even though the desert and prairie spaces of the west were historically biodiverse ecosystems with a variety of flora and fauna, popular images depict these frontier spaces as consumed by nothingness. Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* refers repeatedly to the "emptiness" of the desert along the American-Mexican border which the scalphunters traversing the desert must confront, as if the "emptiness" of the natural environment invites an existential crisis more severe than any physical danger. Willa Cather's *My Antonia* likewise comments on the vacancy of the Nebraska prairie when the narrator Jim Burden recalls his first impressions of the Western landscape: "There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields….There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made" (11-12). Importantly, Cather acknowledges here that the country is *made* through labor, not formed organically without human assistance. According to the Western myth, the pioneer discovers a place

[7] The Pacific Northwest serves as an exception to the image of the West as an arid place, but it also appears less connected with Western imagery in popular culture. If visual texts are a primary indicator of the West's identity, we might note that very few Hollywood westerns take place in the forested areas of the Northwest. Far more often, the desert landscapes of the Southwest and California serve as the visual touchstones of Western scenery.

defined by the nothingness of the prairie, the expendable indigenous species, and the gigantic forms of mountains and mesas, landscape features that dwarf the human scale. The nothingness and absence of anything on the human scale is replaced and improved upon when the pioneer brings labor to the frontier, ushering in progress, civilization from back east, and cultivation of the land.

Whereas the physical labor of farmers, cowboys, and miners is associated with the masculine domination of Western nature, it is the business of land development that most represents the masculine domination of nature in Florida. The myth of the West praises the figure of the self-reliant man who, through his labor and masculine identity, brings order and civilization to a wild, untamed place. Richard Slotkin contends that this imagery masks the economic forces that motivate frontier expansion (33-34). In depictions of Florida, however, because labor is not afforded the same value, the image of the masculine, rough-hewn individualist holds less cultural capital. On the contrary, the figure of the land developer, who especially in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries was typically a man, becomes the central masculine paradigm for the domination of the tropical landscape. The figure of the developer also masks the labor dynamic, because although the developer gets credit for building infrastructure like resorts and railroads, he rarely

performs any physical labor. More often, he pays low-wage laborers to do the actual work of construction. But it is the visionary developer, like Henry Flagler, Henry Plant or Walt Disney, who receives accolades for developing Florida, while the physical labor, which has substance in the Western frontier model of masculinity, is effaced. Moreover, the land developer's business is closely tied to the culture of leisure because the resorts and railroads he funds are seen as bolstering the tourism industry.

The labor that transforms the Florida environment is likewise not given much visibility in depictions of Florida, suggesting that what matters is the final development—the resort, the theme park, the strip mall—and not the pristine wilderness that predates the business of tourism. The culture of leisure maintains that the artificial Eden, created by landscapers and introduced plant life, holds a power that the local indigenous nature cannot replicate. What matters in Florida is that the resorts and developments are capable of creating an environment of plant and animal life that fits the cultural expectations of a tropical paradise.

On those occasions when Florida labor is acknowledged in print, such as in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Palmetto Leaves* and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *Cross Creek*, it is often presented as the task of the lower classes that prefigures the leisure of

wealthy plantation owners and tourists. This denigration of labor and its separation from aestheticized nature as seen in these writers' works partially derives from the demands of Florida's natural environment. Florida's wilderness seemingly overflows with fertile nature to such an extent that the pioneering effort is not seen as the act of permanently inscribing culture onto a blank landscape so much as the attempt to carve civilization out of the living superabundance of the tropical environment. Florida's environment requires labor to hold off the unruly, feisty nature for momentary control of the landscape, but this constant need for labor goes unnoticed in the depictions of Florida leisure. Susan Orlean reveals this never-ending battle between labor and leisure when she comments that "The wild part of Florida is really wild. The tame part is really tame. Both, though, are always in flux: The developed places are just little clearings in the jungle, but since jungle is unstoppably fertile, it tries to reclaim a piece of developed Florida everyday" (11-12). Orlean grasps that while labor may be required to fight the wild parts and leisure may emerge from the tame parts, the environment is never effectively defined in singular terms of labor or leisure no matter how much American culture attempts to do so. At the very least, this represents a complexity that is obscured by the Western myth which highlights the work of labor to the virtual exclusion of leisure. Many

Florida texts demonstrate that labor and leisure exist in an antagonistic relationship. The understanding of these shifting boundaries between labor and leisure can further reveal the oversimplifications of the romanticized labor in the West. Crucially, reversing the West's naturalization of labor, writings about Florida reveal how development and leisure can be naturalized while marginalizing the work of laborers who construct and maintain the built environment.

1.5 Thinking Like a Swamp: The Ontology of the Tropical Sublime

The desert or prairie may be landscapes of "nothing" as Jim Burden initially believes, but their scale and expansiveness suggest a degree of sublimity that writers frequently deny in Florida's nature, perhaps because they often refuse to associate its landscape with the connotations of virtuous labor found in the West. Despite their fascination with Florida's wildlife and vegetation, writers also seldom find the nature in Florida to be unequivocally beautiful and rarely discuss it in terms of sublimity. In some cases, this lack of sublimity may be owing to the (what is perceived to be) frivolous leisure of the region or the proximity of development to the attractive "natural" areas. But another of the reasons for this denial of the sublime is found in the landscape itself. Wholly absent from the landscape are mountains, the natural feature that so often inspires transcendent feelings in nature writers like Thoreau,

Muir, and Aldo Leopold. What is the Florida equivalent of Leopold's "thinking like a mountain," we might ask? Thinking like a swamp? Thinking like the scrub? Thinking like the Everglades? Clearly, the cultural and literary connotations are different when Florida habitat is substituted for "mountain," much less when experience in the Florida environment is substituted for experience in the mountains of enlightenment.

Although it is rarely associated with the sublime, Florida's nature often earns qualified praise in the eyes of many of its writers. Even though many tourist promoters describe the place in Edenic terms, fiction and non-fiction writers typically describe its environment as beautiful but imperfect, either because of the severity of the climate during long periods of the year or because of the inescapable shadow of land development that threatens to corrupt whatever natural beauty there is. Even twentieth-century writers who criticize the damage being done to Florida's environment are reluctant to invoke natural beauty as a reason to limit development. Far more often, writers defend Florida's nature on the grounds that it is unique and rare, not because its nature is aesthetically pleasing. Nevertheless, even with their qualified statements on the attractiveness of the region's nature, writings about Florida's environment can offer us an alternative way to process the experience of interacting with and aestheticizing non-human

nature – an alternative that is less epistemological and more ontological. This alternative could potentially offer a way around viewing and devaluing environments like Florida or the Caribbean based on their associations with the sublime, labor, or leisure.

In an article that addresses the ostensibly oxymoronic idea of a "tropical sublime," Jon Smith has perceptively commented on the difference between temperate and tropical nature in an article that makes a compelling case for seeing the American South as a liminal space between the temperate North and the tropical Caribbean. By contrasting "jungle" with "wilderness," he presents an understanding of tropical nature that offers a variation of the aestheticized sublime, whose limited value in places like Florida can contribute to the perception of the "unimportant" nature of those places. His argument hinges on the idea that the physical experience of observing—and more accurately, interacting with—a humid, tropical environment reveals a different relationship between the subject and the natural environment than what is revealed when an observer experiences a temperate environment or any environment more traditionally associated with the sublime.[8] He maintains that

[8] This could include the arid, continental, and temperate regions of the West. Since Smith includes much of the Deep South in his "tropics," it is apparent that he is not using the term with scientific specificity. In the context of his article, it would seem the any landscape capable of being termed sublime qualifies as "temperate" and stands in contrast to the non-sublime tropics.

"by speeding up the ontological transitions of both objects and subjects *as* objects, the greater heat and moisture found in the tropics have tended to make people more aware of materiality—of things themselves, and of themselves as things" (Smith 117).

Smith is describing the experience a hiker might have traversing the tangled vegetation of a hardwood hammock, a tropical forest with dense undergrowth. In this common tropical habitat, the hiker will not only encounter difficulty traversing the landscape, but will also fail to reach a mountaintop vista overlooking the surrounding area. This nature experience doesn't physically or metaphorically involve the same kind of ascension associated with mountains in much nature writing. Smith argues that the tropical environment makes it difficult for the observer to remain bodily detached and subsumed into the idealism of the environment. The experience of having one's ears buzzed and flesh stung by dozens of biting insects in an Everglades hammock produces a drastically different experience than what Thoreau records feeling on Mount Katahdin. Instead, in the tropics, the observer cannot avoid being implicated in the natural environment as any attempt at physical detachment is undermined by the climate which continually serves to remind the subject that he is material, a thing among things in the landscape. This alternative to the experience of an aestheticized, sublime nature forces us to reconsider the

connotations of "wilderness" and "jungle," the latter of which, Smith points out, has been treated by many American thinkers as un-American. This helps explain why Florida (and the third coast discussed in Part 1.1) have such a strange relationship to the rest of the Republic: their very nature seems to undermine the sanctity and safety of the temperate environment associated with Americanness.

John Muir's writings about Florida and the Sierra Mountains encapsulate Smith's argument about this alternative tropical sublime. Muir acknowledges the unwelcoming tropical environment when he writes that "Florida is so watery and vine-tied that pathless wanderings are not easily possible in any direction" (*Thousand* 89). The Florida landscape vexes Muir who typically demonstrates a preference for pristine wilderness. The labor required to navigate the region's wetlands and dense forests compels him to cross the state by walking along a railroad track, representative of the technological progress and land development that he laments in the West. In Florida, though, he welcomes this sign of civilization, suggesting two things: this landscape does not warrant the same degree of preservation as the Western landscapes, but also that Muir's experience of tropical nature is grounded in the physical discomfort he feels, not in the concept of nature's inherent value. The leisurely, studious observation of nature that Muir applies elsewhere

becomes uncomfortable and undesirable in Florida. His expectations of finding a tropical paradise are foiled by the reality of the environment. The Florida he finds fails to consist of the "close forest of trees, every one in flower" and "bright-blooming vines, and over all a flood of bright sunlight" that he anticipates discovering (*Thousand* 87). Contrast this disappointment with the effusive, spiritual language Muir uses when describing the sublime Sierras: "Yonder, to the eastward of our camp grove, stands one of Nature's cathedrals, hewn from the living rock, almost conventional in form, about two thousand feet high, nobly adorned with spires and pinnacles, thrilling under floods of sunshine as is alive like a grove-temple" (Muir, *First Summer* 196).

The contrast of these Muir passages highlights one way that the culture of leisure fosters the exploitation of the natural environment. The same cultural standards that lead many writers to describe the mountainous landscapes of the West as sublime frequently are the same standards that encourage writers to see Florida as a peculiar exotic novelty. John Muir, ostensibly a protector and advocate for all of nature, finds that Florida's nature fails to live up to the image of tropical paradise that promoters have propagated. His disappointment is damning: he never returned to Florida after his first visit and never advocated for the protection of its environment, one would

assume, because in his eyes its nature did not measure up to the nature of the West.

1.6 Chapter Overviews

The following chapters look at how three writers, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and Zora Neale Hurston, have represented labor and leisure in conjunction with the Florida natural environment.

Beginning with Stowe's abolitionist novel *Dred* and then moving to her work of Florida promotion, *Palmetto Leaves*, I look at how she racializes labor and leisure as separate responses to nature. In *Dred*, she depicts black and white characters experiencing different relationships to the swamp. With the character of the Clayton, a white abolitionist, Stowe introduces the idea of the leisurely, peaceful observation of natural beauty, a response to nature that is unavailable to the savage runaway slave Dred. *Palmetto Leaves* codifies this idea by naturalizing the white leisure and black labor as necessary, moral responses to the tropical environment of Florida. Clearly, Stowe's racializing of leisure and labor is highly problematic as she denies African-American laborers the ability to enjoy the aesthetic pleasures of the natural environment.

In the subsequent chapter, I show how Rawlings romanticizes the poverty of poor whites in Florida in a way that allows her to construct a rural culture capable of harkening back to the

mythical agrarian frontier as well as connecting with the sanctity of nature. By analyzing a pair of her fictional works, "Jacob's Ladder" and *The Yearling*, I show how she gradually came to emphasize the romantic pioneer aspects of the poor whites over their primitiveness. Her memoir, *Cross Creek*, features Rawlings, a figure of privilege, appropriating this rural culture in a manner that turns frontier labor into leisure for herself and for her reader. She unsuccessfully attempts to use this rural culture to resolve the frontier's man-versus-nature metanarrative and her own romantic and biocentric sympathies. Her writing produces hollow-sounding romantic praise for white agrarian labor that fails to engage the question of labor exploitation, because her depictions of labor are ultimately more concerned with aestheticizing the natural environment than with the realistic living conditions of laborers.

The final author I look at is Zora Neale Hurston whose awareness of African-American labor conditions produces texts that valorize the laborers' efforts and honestly comment on the value of the workers' lives. She sees labor and leisure coexisting within communities of African-American workers who reveal their personalities through interactions with the natural environment. Hurston's representation of labor and leisure is more harmonious and balanced than the representations of Stowe and Rawlings for whom labor and leisure are diametrically

opposed according to race and class. Hurston's handling of the interactions between humans and non-human nature provides a workable alternative that, while anthropocentric, refuses to see the natural environment primarily in aesthetic and leisured terms.

CHAPTER TWO

"WHO SHALL DO THE WORK FOR US?": RACIALIZING THE ENJOYMENT OF NATURE IN HARRIET BEECHER STOWE'S *PALMETTO LEAVES*

2.1 The Abolitionist after Abolition

Although scholars typically associate Harriet Beecher Stowe with her New England residence, she was an annual winter resident in Florida from 1867–1880 (Hendrick 383). The standard biography of Stowe scholarship devotes scant attention to the author's time in the state, almost completely overlooking her writings about Florida. Nevertheless, her Florida experiences inspired the 1873 book *Palmetto Leaves*, a compilation of articles many of which were written for the *Christian Union* that "proved to be a signally important intervention in the re-imagining of Florida as…a gold-plated tourist destination" (Roberts 203). I maintain that this scholarly dismissal of Stowe's relationship to Florida has occurred in part because the arguments she makes in *Palmetto Leaves* are not consistent with her message of social progress found in other works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In an essay about Stowe's subversion of patriarchy, Elizabeth Ammons has performed the kind of criticism that is complicated if not completely undermined by an examination of *Palmetto Leaves*. Ammons writes that Stowe rejected "the emerging industrial-based definition of community

in the nineteenth century as something organized by work, ruled by men, and measured by productivity (of things, ironically called 'goods')" and instead endorsed a matrifocal model, "an ideal community as something defined by family (rather than work), measured by relationships (rather than products), and ruled by women (rather than men)" (156-7). Although this makes Stowe a prized figure for feminist criticism, the argument for her subversion of patriarchy is weakened when we expand the focus beyond *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

My argument is that *Palmetto Leaves*, because of its idealized and racialized view of labor and leisure, represents a moment of significant political and social backpedaling for its author. Gone are the matrifocal messages of social change found in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In their place Stowe promotes the development of Florida using the capitalist/imperialist model of manifest destiny that the United States applied to the settling of the Western frontier. Although her progressive politics has earned her the mantle of an esteemed social critic in the eyes of some scholars, it is also clear that her political and social conservatism toward the Florida natural environment helped establish a pro-development precedent that anticipated the reckless environmental destruction that has occurred in the state up to the present day.

As an early promotional text for Florida tourism and development, *Palmetto Leaves* contains many of the tropes and conventions of a carefree leisured lifestyle that continue to guide public perception of the state's environment today.[9] With *Palmetto Leaves*, Stowe encourages the Florida's development—a term I associate with both building construction and agricultural cultivation—while simultaneously aestheticizing the plants and animals bound to be affected by the region's development and consequent changes to the landscape. Even today, cultural representations of Florida continue to downplay the environmental effects of development, but Stowe's texts resemble these contemporary representations in another central way. Like many of the subsequent depictions of Florida as a place of boundless leisure, Stowe's writings present leisure and labor as classed and racialized behaviors that determine how one relates to the natural environment.

Despite not being a traditional non-fiction nature writer in the mold of Thoreau or John Muir who specializes in the "personal, reflective essay grounded in attentiveness to the natural world" (2 Elder qtd. in Armbruster and Wallace), Stowe fits the description of a nature writer as more recent critics understand the term. Over the past decade, the critical push

[9] While neglecting the environmental effects of the development Stowe calls for, Susan Eaker's article "Gender in Paradise: Harriet Beecher Stowe and Postbellum Prose on Florida" looks at the liberation that Florida leisure afforded to women after the Civil War.

in books like Michael Bennett and David Teague's *The Nature of Cities* and Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace's *Beyond Nature Writing* has been to expand the definition of nature writing to include those texts, including novels, concerned to any extent with the intersection of natural and developed environments. *Palmetto Leaves* fits into this more inclusive definition, because in addition to describing the nature and rural areas of Florida, the book is also significantly concerned with the human business of cultivation and land development. Nevertheless, by implying that certain experiences in nature are racialized and classed, Stowe appears to adopt the more exclusive values of traditional nature writing. That is to say that the nature experiences she narrates typically assume a position of privilege while overlooking other ways of relating to nature that do not foreground leisurely and aesthetic reflection. Although Stowe aestheticizes nature and even occasionally voices preservationist values, she also polices who can enjoy nature and how they can enjoy it. In some cases, as when Stowe lambasts the casual, senseless slaughter of animals by sightseeing men on riverboats (PL 259), this policing seems noble and biocentric. Far more often, though, one's relationship to nature reflects racial and class hierarchies as when Stowe describes why people of color are naturally suited for outdoor labor in the tropics. In these instances, the

policing of outdoor labor and leisure seems essentialist, problematic, and the work of a privileged author.

Because of its tropical environment, Florida is intrinsically different from the rest of the nation but especially the North. For Stowe, this regional distinction is directly related to Florida's exotic nature, the land's potential for development, and the development's need for backbreaking physical labor in a harsh climate. But, as she argues, Florida's proximity to the tropics also verifies the correlation between blackness and physical labor suggested elsewhere in the fields of the American South. The "naturalness" of black labor in the tropics neatly identifies the ideal laborers and, by contrast, the "natural" leisure-seekers. In fact, this interconnectedness of blackness and the natural environment deviates from the late nineteenth century notion that "wild nature…[was] a performative space of whiteness," representative of the type of wilderness experience associated with John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt (Braun 196). Concerns over white racial degeneracy in the multiracial city led to the belief that venturing into pristine nature could restore the purity of whiteness. Nature became "a place where people became white, where the racial and hereditary habits of immigrants could be overcome" (Braun 197). As Stowe's depiction of Florida shows, however, white racial purity was not to be

located in the tropical environment with its different set of racial connotations than New England forests or Western mountains.

Crucially, these three elements—nature, leisure, and labor—unite to define the frontier experience of Florida for Stowe. I argue more generally that this trifold dynamic comes to define the tropical frontier, informing much of what has been written about Florida. While Stowe incorporates this triumvirate into her writing, as a regional promoter who is herself a person of privilege, she downplays the domination of nature and labor that accompanies her pro-development message. If anything, she actually defends the domination of nature and labor as necessary to produce a place where affluent whites can indulge in leisure and an aestheticized appreciation of the natural environment. According to this model, even though she praises the beauty of Florida's nature, she continues to see nature and labor in moral and financial terms as extensions of the racialized landscape.

One of the central reasons Stowe is unconvincing when discussing labor is because she avoids considering how the laborers, whose work frequently puts them in contact with the outdoors, experience nature differently than members of the privileged class such as developers and wealthy sightseers. Her failure to address the role of privilege and the experiences of laborers speaks to a critical deficiency that becomes more

apparent when considering the role of social class in her work. Instead of looking at her writings through the lens of ecofeminism, I have adopted an ecofeminist analytic, substituting a class/labor dynamic for the gender dynamic traditionally associated with ecofeminism. Accordingly, this analytic will focus on the hierarchical domination of nature that parallels the marginalization and dehumanization of the working class laborers. In this way, I am stressing the extent to which she naturalizes labor so that it becomes, along with the process of agricultural cultivation, simply another feature of the landscape without any relation to historical, socioeconomic, or environmental conditions.

Unsurprisingly, Stowe believes the "natural" laborers are typically poor and/or people of color. By presenting these people as having an innate, physical connection to nature, she can more easily avoid addressing the social and ethical dimensions related to the hardships and exploitation of the laborers' work. Importantly, the aesthetic and philosophical appreciation of nature that Stowe promotes as a major component in the leisurely enjoyment of the natural environment is not accessible to these laborers, despite their physical proximity to the natural environment. She elevates the leisurely and aestheticized contemplation of nature above the more brutish work of outdoor labor. Were these black laborers capable of

detaching themselves from their interconnectedness to wild nature, they too could enjoy the benefits of whiteness, namely the recognition of nature's beauty and the pleasure derived from outdoor leisure. In fact, the tendency in *Palmetto Leaves* toward racializing the natural environment surfaces in Stowe's earlier antislavery novel, the 1856 *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*. In that text, she juxtaposes the runaway slave Dred's primal connection to wild nature with the white abolitionist Clayton's aestheticized appreciation for the swamp's vegetation.

2.2 The Racialized Swamp: Beauty and the Beast

Despite its overt abolitionist message, *Dred* is more interesting for the ways in which it subtly anticipates the essentialist conflation of race, nature, and labor in Stowe's Florida writings. In the guise of a politically-charged narrative of social progress, *Dred* maintains that a person's relationship to nature is dependent on race. The novel's black and white characters relate to nature differently, a particularly troubling notion because Stowe presents the white experience of nature as more sophisticated and aestheticized than the wild savagery of the black experience. The range of racialized experiences in the novel allows the swamp to be a subversive hideout for runaway slaves, but also a tranquil nature sanctuary for white characters. Descriptions of the

wildness and savagery of the swamp contrast with passages that note the wetlands' pristine beauty and agricultural potential. The swamp serves as both a poetic, Romantic landscape for the reader to admire and the figurative embodiment of the runaway slave Dred's grotesque spirit. Nature is beauty or beast, then, depending on how one racially relates to the natural environment. Introducing what will be a main theme of *Palmetto Leaves*, Stowe's ambivalence toward the swamp in *Dred* reveals an essentialist belief in how people of color have inferior non-aestheticized relationships to nature.

In his wide-ranging study of cultural interpretations of Southern swamps, Anthony Wilson writes that the swamp in *Dred* metaphorically possesses "a stridently moralistic symbolic valence" that exposes the dark side of Southern society, namely the existence of slavery (18).[10] He finds that Stowe uses the negative cultural connotations of the swamp, noting that for her the "swamp, as a literal region of unchecked growth and as symbolic correlative to the untrained savagery of neglected, uncultivated slaves, is something to be eliminated through a process of ordering, education, and cultivation" (19). Dred, one of these "uncultivated slaves," is thus representative of the swamp's wildness, meaning that both he and the swamp require

[10] David Miller's *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* also provides an examination of the perception of swamps during the Stowe's lifetime.

abolitionists' reform and environmental change, respectively, in order to better Southern society. These human and environmental improvements problematically demand the intervention of privileged whites with a social conscience and with the money to fund swamp drainage. Wilson's contention that Stowe relies on the negative connotations of the swamp, however, neglects to explain those passages in which she presents the swamp as beautiful and serene. For every description of the swamp as a "[region] of hopeless disorder" and a "leafy desolation" of "parasitic moss," there is a corresponding description of the swamp's beautiful "pennons of gold and purple," "triumphant banners," and "pearly festoons" (D 1: 255). The same habitat that is populated by harmless, musical birds is home to threatening reptiles like the alligator, the moccasin, and the rattlesnake. Despite the "hopeless disorder" of the swamps, they contain "untold splendor" that reflects the "solitary majesty of nature" (D 1: 255). Do those positive images of the swamp reflect the righteousness and wellbeing of the slaves? On the contrary, these positive depictions of the swamp coupled with the negative ones serve to racialize the natural environment so that, far from being a neutral habitat, it possesses white and black dimensions.

Drawing on the negative connotations of the swamp as a dreary, inhospitable wilderness, Stowe suggests that there is a

dark, repressed side to Southern plantation society and that the slaves it produces are as wild and savage as the swamp itself. This dark side of the South is found in the "wild, dreary belt of swamp-land," which becomes "an apt emblem, in its rampant and we might say delirious exuberance of vegetation, of that darkly struggling, wildly vegetating swamp of human souls, cut off, like it, from the usages and improvements of cultivated life" (D 2: 274-5). Stowe racializes the landscape as figuratively black using the negative connotations of the swamp that Wilson discusses. The "wild, dreary" swamp—not the beautiful, serene swamp—resembles the "darkly struggling…human souls," those blacks suffering the oppression of Southern society. Despite the abolitionist message of the novel, the equalizing of "wild" swamp and "wildly vegetating" black lives cannot be a neutral comparison precisely because of the swamp's negative imagery. Stowe implies that these slaves, like the swamp, need the intervention of whites in order to enjoy a superior "cultivated" state. It is inconceivable that she would describe white society with the same language of savagery and dependency, but in this description, the swamp's wildness is the environmental equivalent of racial blackness.

The book's depiction of the swamp as a dark, mysterious place parallels Stowe's abolitionist sympathies since she uses the swamp to expose the ugliness of Southern society. In the

process, this revelation of the existence of the dreary swamp in the South's pastoral utopia speaks to the ability of African-American slaves to see past the Southern veneer of respectability and decorum. Disparaged as a malarial miasma by much of white society, the swamp, in contrast to the plantation society, offers secretive protection to black abolitionists and runaway slaves like Dred who seek their independence. Figuratively, the wildness of the swamp also serves as a reminder that Southern society is not a utopia of plantation houses and orderly agricultural fields, a point that runaway slaves acknowledge by fleeing this society. In this way, the swamp figuratively mirrors the cultural and social awareness of African-Americans who see far beneath the society's pretenses.

There are aspects to (and habitats in) the Southern landscape that white southerners anxiously ignore such as unhappy, potentially rebellious slaves and forested swamps, both of which pose a threat to the stability of the region's plantation economy. The novel replicates white society's failure to grasp this dark, subversive nature of the swamp in its handling of Dred who is absent for the first two hundred pages of the novel. In fact, Stowe keeps hidden from the reader the entire existence of rebellious fugitive slaves conspiring in the Great Dismal Swamp until Dred's sudden appearance. Following a threatening confrontation with a white man, the

slave Harry hears a "deep voice from the swampy thicket" that begins to chastise him for not forcefully confronting the white man's abuse (D 1: 240). The subsequent appearance of Dred come as a surprise to the reader, but Harry immediately recognizes the swamp prophet's voice. We discover that Stowe has kept hidden from the reader this aspect of Southern society for the first third of her novel, even though the slaves on the Gordon plantation are aware of Dred's plotting in the swamp. Robert Levine identifies this "point of rupture" in the narrative as the return of the repressed, "the 'naturalized' black presence that supports both the plantation and the plantation novel" (177). In my own ecocritical reading of the text, I see the setting and circumstances of the character's entrance into the narrative as representative of the intimacy between blackness and the wild swamp, the knowledge of which is only made available to the white characters and the reader at this moment.

Not only do the novel's African Americans possess this heightened awareness of life in the swamps, but Stowe contends that they are biologically better equipped than whites to deal with life in this environment. Stowe's initial description of Dred emphasizes the physicality of his muscular body although as leader of the fugitive slaves in the swamp, he is also "more than just a body" (Levine 177). Lisa Whitney remarks on the Dred's similarity to Old Testament prophets as he "prophesies

the coming vengeance" (557). Yet revolutionary energies and rebellious leadership notwithstanding, Dred's "physical system" has been influenced by the "nursing influences of nature" to the extent that he seems to connect with the forces of nature in the same way that a tree would (D 2: 6). William Tynes Cowan says that Stowe "blurs the distinction between the runaway and his environment" (143) suggesting the presence of "people and places at odds with the social order" of the South (142). However, she emphasizes the runaway slave's primal connection to nature implying his blackness determines his natural role: for him, "the rain, the wind, and the thunder, all those forces from which human beings generally seek shelter, seem to hold with [Dred] a kind of fellowship, and to be familiar companions of existence" (D 2: 6). Her description earlier in the novel of how the swamp "seems to rejoice in a savage exuberance" (D 1: 255) could just as easily be a description of Dred's disposition in the wilderness. She discusses Dred's physiology as if, given a choice, he would prefer to live in the swamp:

> So completely had he come into sympathy and communion with nature, and with those forms of it which more particularly surrounded him in the swamps, that he moved about among them with as much ease as a lady treads her Turkey carpet. What would seem to us in recital to be incredible hardship, was to him but an ordinary condition of existence. To walk

> knee-deep in the spongy soil of the swamp, to force his way through thickets, to lie all night sinking in the porous soil, or to crouch, like the alligator, among reeds and rushes, were to him situations of as much comfort as well-curtained beds and pillows are to us. (D 2: 6)

She goes on to say, while comparing Dred to a hunting dog, that the "savage perfection of the natural organs" makes him a perfect candidate for maneuvering through the swampy thickets (D 2: 6). Perhaps keeping him close to nature is Stowe's way of ensuring that Dred bears no mark of whiteness, so that the reader will not confuse his radical abolitionism for her own more tempered methods. Dred's instinctive activities in the swamp, his foiling the advancement of fugitive slave hunters, cannot amount to an aestheticized appreciation of the swamp, a relationship to nature that requires more intelligence and sophistication than Stowe is willing to provide him.

Through the white abolitionist character of Clayton and her own narrative voice, Stowe associates the swamp's natural beauty with a white perception of nature. The aesthetic treatment of the swamp corresponds to a nonphysical, leisurely engagement with the environment, since it presupposes critical detachment with the aestheticized subject. In several passages, Stowe uses florid language to depict the environment such as when she discusses the swamp's "glossy green leaves, and its masses of

pink-tipped snowy blossoms" create "a wilderness of beauty" (D 1: 291). While the novel's narrator uses this language, Stowe never indicates that her slave characters are capable of such aestheticizing of nature. At times, the descriptions reflect a heightened cultural awareness likely not available to the slaves, as when the narrator describes "the pendants of the yellow jessamine swing[ing]…like censers, casting forth clouds of perfume" (D 1: 291). Thus, the description appears to reflect the sensibilities of the cultured New England author, not the sensibilities of the wild Dred. Yet in aestheticizing the swamp, Stowe furthers her abolitionist purpose of showing the blindness of white Southern society: the swamp which white Southerners find detestable and disgusting, Stowe finds beautiful and striking.

The descriptions of the beautiful swamp are further racialized as white since the only character in the book who "dwells…on [nature's] mystical power" (Cowan 143) and produces aestheticizes the environment is the white abolitionist Clayton. After nearly being beaten to death by a group of slavery supporters, he is brought into the fugitives' swamp camp where he slowly recuperates, finding beauty and tranquility in his surroundings. Though he is as staunch an abolitionist as there is in the book, Clayton finds in the swamp none of the anxiety or the tragedy that the slaves experience in fearing the roaming

fugitive slave hunters or the scattered graves of those who have been mauled by the hunters' dogs. Describing Clayton's realization of the sacred, healing qualities of the swamp, Stowe writes:

> Amidst the wild and desolate swamp, here was an island of security, where nature took men to her sheltering bosom. A thousand birds, speaking with thousand airy voices, were calling from breezy tree-tops, and from swinging cradles of vine-leaves; white clouds sailed, in changing and varying islands, over the heavy green battlements of the woods. The wavering slumberous sound of thousand leaves, through which the autumn air walked to and fro, consoled [Clayton]. Life began to look to him like a troubled dream, forever past. His own sufferings, the hours of agony and death which he had never dared to remember, seemed now to wear a new and glorified form. Such is the divine power in which God still reveals himself through the lovely and incorruptible forms of nature. (D 2: 290-91)

Clayton announces his privileged position by thinking of the swamp hideout as an "island of security" since elsewhere in the narrative we see that even here the threat of slave hunters persists. Distinguishing the tranquil "island of security" from the rest of the wildly overgrown swamp, Cowan argues that Clayton's enjoyment of this environment shows that he depends on

"re-establishing boundaries relative to the energy of this boundless region" (144), but it also involves his ability to see beauty in the natural environment. Clayton's ability to decipher the aesthetic difference between wild and beautiful places simply confirms his sophistication. Moreover, in the whole of the novel, Stowe restricts this aestheticizing of nature to Clayton's thoughts and her narration, suggesting that whiteness, unlike blackness, can relate to nature by beautifying it.

While Dred does, in fact, receive a measure of enlightenment from nature, his process is primitive and unlearned. Late in the novel, we discover that Dred's exceptionalism derives from nomadic expeditions that have taken him to the swamp, the seacoast, and even the Florida Everglades, places that allowed him a chance at independence and selfhood not granted by Southern society. These travels permit Dred to meditate on the universal meaning of nature, the significance of which, Stowe believes, empowers him to lead his rebellion against Southern oppression. Roaming places "generally held inaccessible to human foot and eye," Dred moves like a remarkable man-animal capable of "struggling thoughts" but ultimately "[d]estitute of the light of philosophy and science" (D 2: 291-2). Dred's exceptionalism fails to provide explanations for those "causes of natural phenomena" that puzzle

him (D 2: 291–2). By fasting and praying, he reconnects with nature, communicating with it in a way that white men cannot. Thus, his meditation permits him to interpret "strange hieroglyphics…written upon the leaves" (D 1: 257) and the "voices [that] came to him in the moaning of the wind and the sullen swell of the sea" (D 2: 291–2). Unsurprisingly given his oneness with nature, wild nature communicates with him. But more importantly, Dred, representative of black exceptionalism, turns out to be less social revolutionary, much less nature lover, than primitive nature mystic. Because he so closely identifies with the wind, the sea, and the swamp in a way that is neither white nor sophisticated, Dred, unlike Clayton or a white Romantic poet, cannot achieve the subjective and critical detachment necessary to aestheticize nature.

Though she contends that Dred's relationship to nature derives from his blackness, Stowe neglects to identify the hardship implicit in his lifestyle. Instead, she argues, he was made for life in the wilderness. But how did he get to that point? Was he, like Mowgli, raised by wolves? On the contrary, he lived as a slave until the time an overseer fought him and was killed in the fight. After that, Dred "made his escape to the swamps, and was never afterwards heard of in civilized life" (D 1: 255). Two factors make Dred a natural inhabitant of the swamp: first, not unlike one of the points Stowe makes in

Palmetto Leaves, the racialist argument holds that Dred's blackness, signifying his oneness with wild nature, better equips him for living in the wilderness, and second, his experience as a slave laboring outdoors on plantations has provided him contact with nature that helps prepare him for life in the swamp. Taking these two factors together, we see that racial identity functions as a barometer for one's relationship to nature. Labor, which Stowe associates with blackness, becomes a lower and less sophisticated way to experience the outdoors, while leisure, which she aligns with whiteness, serves as an alternative and aestheticized response to the natural environment. Whereas *Dred* more thoroughly considers the injustice of physical labor performed in the bonds of slavery, *Palmetto Leaves* will racialize both labor and leisure in Florida, suggesting how whiteness relates to the alluring Otherness of tropical nature.

2.3 The Development of Leisure

Whereas the swamp in *Dred* is more figurative than literal—an environment whose actual importance to Stowe is in its ability to introduce ideas about the racialization of nature and abolitionist strategies of resistance—the natural environment in the post-Civil War *Palmetto Leaves* functions as a literal place capable of being altered according to the frontier mentality that promotes the human domination of nature. In terms of

development of the wilderness, *Dred* contains a brief reference to the "general salubrity of the air and water" in the swamp, attested by the "lumber-men" (D 1: 291) engaged in removing trees, also noting that drained swamp land is suitable for agricultural cultivation. Building on this stance, *Palmetto Leaves* looks forward to the economic and land development of Florida, a process, however, that Stowe continues to racialize. The land development of Florida reflects the aesthetic values and leisure of whiteness, but is also as an entrepreneurial endeavor that requires financial backing and physical labor. The aesthetic, financial, labor aspects all build upon the racial framework that Stowe introduced in *Dred*. Her sympathy in the earlier novel for the social progress of abolition gives way to an attitude, borne of social and racial privilege, that promotes land development. What remains consistent in both texts is Stowe's racialization of the natural environment and her naturalizing of black labor and white leisure.

In *Palmetto Leaves*, Stowe expands on *Dred*'s aestheticizing of nature by emphasizing Florida's exotic beauty. Along rivers, in swamps, and in forests, the region's natural beauty impresses Stowe, but does not reveal social truths as the swamp did in *Dred*. Wilson notes that following the Civil War writers were more open to reconsidering the swamp's negative connotations. No longer needing to use the swamp as a rhetorical image for the

ills of Southern society, northern writers visiting the South could appreciate the pristine beauty of these areas. The nature of *Dred* and *Palmetto Leaves* bears out this changing approach to the Southern landscape. The swamp in *Dred* functions as a den of racial, political, and natural Otherness: Stowe uses those characters, plants, and animals drawn to the swamp to hint at an alternative set of values opposed to the oppression of white Southern society. Stripped of political and cultural critique, the landscape and swamps of *Palmetto Leaves* possess leisurely, sightseeing potential and serve as valuable assets whose exotic difference adds value to the development and settlement of Florida.

Not unlike the white abolitionist Clayton who aestheticizes the swamp in *Dred*, Stowe finds beauty in the exotic natural environment of Florida. In passages that appear in nearly every chapter, she comments on the fantastic plant life, contrasting it with the New England environment. To properly observe Florida's nature, Stowe recommends "good long tramps in the woods" where "with eyes open to see what is to be seen, you will be prepared to explore those wild glades and mysterious shadows where Nature's beauties, marvels, and mysteries are wrought" (PL 98-99). The advice, sounding remarkably similar to John Muir though predating him by a couple of decades, commences a chapter in which Stowe catalogues the various flowers she has

discovered in the area including yellow jessamine, "as picturesque and beautiful a tree-study as an artist could desire" (PL 105). In another instance, describing a sightseeing trip on a riverboat, she writes, "It is the most wild, dream-like, enchanted sail conceivable. The river sometimes narrows so that the boat brushes under overhanging branches, and then widens into beautiful lakes dotted with wooded islands" (PL 257). In Stowe's telling, all of these experiences—strolling through the woods, painting *en plein air*, riding the riverboat cruise—involve white people of the upper class. People of color, much less laborers, do not enjoy tramps through the forest and paintings of flowers in *Palmetto Leaves*. The riverboat carrying sightseers does have a former slave employed as a "stewardess" who serves the ship. But while Stowe says the woman is knowledgeable about the history of the plantations lining the river, her expertise does not extend to the natural beauty of the river setting (PL 249-50).

Echoing her sentiments in *Dred*, Stowe indicates that the aesthetic appreciation of nature reflects a refined, white engagement with the environment. Far removed from the toil of outdoor physical labor, this aesthetic appreciation of nature extends from both the intellectual detachment from wild nature and the luxury to spend unrestricted time with personal pursuits. While this luxury may in fact be more common to upper

class people not victimized by labor exploitation, Stowe's book withholds it entirely from laborers and people of color suggesting they are incapable of communing with the beauty of nature. The praise she lavishes on the orange tree hints at her class and racial blind spots. As "the fairest, the noblest, the most generous" tree, Stowe writes, "It gives one a sort of heart-thrill of possession to say of such beauty, 'It is mine'" (PL 17). Of course, the possession of the tree does not mean that the harvesting of the oranges will fall to Stowe. She admires it as a fragrant, ornamental tree, not as a crop that requires a laborer to harvest its fruit. The orange tree exists as a beautiful object she admires at her leisure. To the laborer, it is an object of toil, the source of exhaustion. Each of these perspectives has validity, but *Palmetto Leaves* is not a text that will scrutinize how the two perspectives provide a deeper understanding of nature. Instead, Stowe treats the aestheticizing of tropical nature as a (racially) superior method of engaging with the natural environment that inspires the settlement of Florida.

At first glance, the book's mixture of loving descriptions of nature and the promotion of development that subdues or eradicates that nature seems contradictory. At its core, the central argument of *Palmetto Leaves* is that the development and further settlement of Florida is a noble, worthy enterprise.

Stowe prepares prospective New England investors and settlers by constructing a romanticized image of life in Florida, defending the reputation of the state as a site of health and recuperation, and dispensing advice about the potential of commercial agriculture. We can better understand her position on development if we note that Stowe's Florida is an enchanting Eden that development and cultivation will improve. Despite the fact that she appears mesmerized by the plants and animals of the region, it would be an overstatement to say that Stowe adopts a preservationist stance or that she fully appreciates Florida's environment in its indigenous form. Indeed, there are times when she laments Florida's inferiority to the New England environment as when she discusses the lack of grass in her winter home. Stowe complains that the "peculiar sand soil is very difficult to arrange in any tidy fashion. You cannot make beds or alleys of it: it all runs together like a place where hens have been scratching; and consequently it is the most difficult thing in the world to have ornamental grounds" (PL 33-4). Correcting this shortcoming in Florida nature is not a simple task, either. She describes the difficulty of trying to get grass to grow in Florida, claiming that the Bermuda grass that can take root does not "have the beauty of well-ordered Northern grass" (PL 34). This perceived deficiency in Florida's

environment allows Stowe to adopt a judgmental attitude which keeps her somewhat detached from the tropical environment.

Stowe's commentary on the wetlands on the edge of her property is emblematic of her ambivalence toward the wild Florida environment. She writes that although the "swampy belt of land in front of the house is now bursting forth in clouds of blue iris of every shade," the "swamp is one of those crooks in our lot which occasions a never-ceasing conflict of spirit" (PL 137). Its luxuriant growth is "a glorious, bewildering impropriety" that produces blossoms year-round, causing the swamp to be a place "where Nature has raptures and frenzies of growth, and conducts herself like a crazy, drunken, but beautiful *bacchante*" (PL 137). But the beauty of the swamp is undermined by the river that creates "under all that tangle of foliage…a foul sink of the blackest mud" where the "black, unsavory moccasin-snakes are said and believed to have their lair" (PL 138). Stowe presents this wetlands area as a veritable nature sanctuary as she names all the plants and birds found there. Yet she considers "ditching and draining, and what not, [in order to] convert the wild *bacchante* into a steady, orderly member of society" (PL 140). What makes this swamp different from the tranquil swamp sanctuary of *Dred*? For one thing, it is a literal place that she must consider in real-world terms. But more than that, the untidy and disorderly

swamp, like the sandy soil, threatens Stowe's control over her environment. Like the developers and promoters of tourism and development in the state, Stowe admires nature up to a point, but feels the need to tame it in order to exert her control, the desire to dominate nature being a byproduct of her whiteness.

This dominance over nature, most clearly embodied by land development and agricultural management, reflects a racial dimension. As she presents it in *Palmetto Leaves*, development of the land—the financing of infrastructure construction or the non-labor management of agricultural projects—is a white response to the environment. By listing numerous examples of successful Florida developments led by white men, Stowe implies that this kind of large-scale development hinges on the business acumen associated with white men of means. This racialized pro-development attitude surfaces when she looks at her burgeoning community on the St. Johns River and says approvingly, "Already, around us a pretty good group of winter-houses is rising: and we look forward to the time when there shall be many more; when, all along the shore of the St. John's, cottages and villas shall look out from the green trees" (PL 38-39). Poised on the banks of a river, the communities retain an appropriate amount of nature. This is, perhaps, the clearest evocation of what Stowe wants in Florida: civilized, affluent communities in the wilderness. "Winter-houses" tells us that the inhabitants of

these communities are not residing in Florida year-round, which speaks to their relative wealth and the likelihood that they are white. A similar pro-development stance can be seen when Stowe mentions that her family keeps a fire going in the hearth, leading her to reflect that "It is good to keep fire in a country where it is considered a great point to get rid of wood. One piles and heaps up with a genial cheer when one thinks, 'The more you burn, the better'" (PL 24). What does deforestation matter when land must be cleared to be converted into agricultural fields or built communities? "It only costs what you pay for cutting and hauling," she decides, ignoring the environmental price and even suggesting that the land becomes more valuable once it is cleared for future development. She says as much when discussing her closest neighbor who "owns extensive tracts of rich and beautiful land…destined, as [Jacksonville] grows and extends, to become of increasing value" (PL 230). This same family has success raising cattle and, reflecting on their success, Stowe, ever the promoter, imagines that milk and butter could be produced "on a larger scale by somebody in the neighborhood of Jacksonville as a money speculation" (PL 237). Of course, the financial (not to mention the social) costs of operating this sort of business will limit who can take advantage of this opportunity. People of color might be a suitable labor force for this farm, but owing to the

racism of the society (and Stowe's own racial essentialism), they would not be in a position to organize and operate the business.

The book provides instances of white settlers who Stowe admires for transforming the natural environment through their settlement and cultivation of the land, although she never refers to this work as mere physical labor. There is, for example, her neighbor who has bought an oak hammock, "a jungle of passion-flowers," where he is planning to build a house (PL 173), although she disregards the labor needed to accomplish this. Stowe refers to another settler as a "horticulturalist and florist" (PL 171), terms that signify a level of sophisticated whiteness that elevates the man above the toil of physical labor even if he has cleared a section of forest in order to create "his plantations of grapes, peaches, and all other good things" (PL 170). Stowe comments on the difficult work of keeping nature at bay for this man's rose garden, saying, such clearings are "spots torn out of the very heart of the forest, and where Nature is rebelling daily, and rushing with all her might back again into the wild freedom from which she has been a moment led captive" (PL 171). Raising rose bushes and ornamental flowers, this man is more gardener than field hand; his work tends beautiful flowers, not commercial crops like vegetables or cotton.

While she repeatedly mentions the agricultural potential for Florida's lands, Stowe also endorses the large infrastructure projects spearheaded by wealthy men and needed to promote settlement and industry. Even more than the agriculture examples, these massive projects, because of their financial and social demands, reflect the way in which Stowe racializes development as a white enterprise. During an excursion to St. Augustine, she meets a group of white men considering investing in a railroad to connect that city to Jacksonville and a canal to link the Indian and St. Johns Rivers. While the business leadership that finances these infrastructures will be white, the labor will be performed by wage earners, many of whom are people of color. These large-scale development projects tap into the romantic settlement of the frontier for Stowe who observes, "By all these means this beautiful country is being laid open, and made accessible and inhabitable as a home and refuge for those who need it" (PL 223). Using the passive voice allows Stowe to bury the point that the country is being laid open by white wealth and the labor of the poor and marginalized.

Stowe also discusses the success of resort developments, more directly addressing how Florida juxtaposes the leisure of the privileged class with the physical labor of the disenfranchised. With its influx of northern visitors, the tourism industry shows great commercial potential, she notes,

with the most successful of these resorts operating at full capacity (PL 90). These resort developments capitalize on the privileged class's desire for outdoor leisure activities, which in *Palmetto Leaves* is exclusively a white method of engaging with the environment. Stowe applauds the "amusements," like boating, fishing, and croquet, that winter resorts offer (PL 88). The variety of leisure activities available to the upper class includes sightseeing excursions on steamboats, visits to plantations to socialize with the landowners, and encounters in St. Augustine with "some families of wealth and leisure" (PL 216). In one revealing scene that underscores her tone-deaf acknowledgement of labor, Stowe goes to a neighbor's sugar plantation to watch "the whole process, from the grinding of the cane through the various vats and boilers, till at last we see the perfected sugar in fine, bright, straw-colored crystals in the sugar-house" and finally sample the "liquid sugar-candy" produced (PL 44). The hard work of processing sugar becomes an afternoon's trifle for Stowe and her readers. The work of sugar processing exists as a novelty for her to observe without any commentary on the labor required to raise and harvest the sugar cane in the fields. The sightseer's passive engagement with the social surroundings further explains Stowe's comments that "Florida is peculiarly adapted to the needs of people who can afford two houses" (PL 38). The Florida

of *Palmetto Leaves* is at most a resort for the wealthy and at least a frontier for the industrious white settler.

2.4 The Color of Labor

Although she neglects to include a convincing image of what the Florida environment looks like to the poor and people of color, Stowe uses the book's final chapter, "The Laborers of the South," to argue who should perform the labor needed to support the land development and agricultural cultivation that she has endorsed. Following through on its racializing of the landscape, this final chapter contends that the laborers should be those people of color whom Stowe has marginalized throughout the text. Employing a racialist (and racist) argument that essentializes people of color, she imagines a Southern society in which, even though slavery has been abolished, very little has changed in the racial makeup of the privileged class. The leisure of nature walks, riverboat cruises, and sightseeing excursions that she has described throughout the book is firmly understood to be the province of wealthy whites. Not unlike a plantation system in which the leisure of whites depends on the labor of blacks, the toil of laborers tending agricultural fields, constructing railroads, and erecting buildings produces profits for landowners who may then enjoy the region's life of leisure. But turning her attention to how labor will buttress this leisurely lifestyle, Stowe asks, "Who shall do the work for

us?" (PL 279). Considering the phrasing of the question, we see that the answer is evident in the interrogation: whoever does the work will not be "us," the white people who have the luxury to enjoy leisure time or manage the work of these laborers.

The framing of this question, "Who shall do the work for us?," further indicates that throughout the book Stowe has been addressing an affluent white readership. She acknowledges that labor will be crucial "in this new State, where there are marshes to be drained, forests to be cut down, palmetto-plains to be grubbed up, and all under the torrid heats of a tropical sun" (PL 279). She believes that the people best suited for this kind of labor are dark-skinned, because they are naturally equipped not simply to survive, but to enjoy the harsh climate. She goes so far as to claim "the negro is the natural laborer of tropical regions" (PL 283) owing to the fact that he "is immensely strong; he thrives and flourishes physically under a temperature that exposes a white man to disease and death" (PL 283). This point is crucial; Stowe claims not only intimacy between black bodies and the tropical environment, but labor as the natural expression of this intimacy.

Her argument for the union between black labor and the tropical environment simultaneously justifies white leisure in Florida. By contrast, even though *Dred* advocates a connection between blackness and wild nature, Stowe does not completely

disregard white labor. One of the novel's characters remarks about a white man in New Hampshire who owns his own farm and nobly works alongside the laborers whom he employs. Most surprisingly, this New Hampshire farmer is also Governor of the state (D 1: 267-8), an instance of white labor by a prestigious politician that shames the Southern abuse of black labor. In *Palmetto Leaves*, however, Stowe shows less interest in white labor since "No white man that we know of dares stay in the fields later than ten o'clock" before "he retires under shade to take some other and less-exposing work" (PL 280). As further justification for the properness of white leisure, she claims that black laborers suffer none of this exhaustion:

> Yet the black laborers whom we leave in the field pursue their toil, if any thing, more actively, more cheerfully, than during the cooler months. The sun awakes all their vigor and all their boundless jollity. When their nooning time comes, they sit down, not in the shade, but in some good hot place in the sand, and eat their lunch, and then stretch out, hot and comfortable, to take their noon siesta with the full glare of the sun upon them. (PL 280)

Just as she presented the character of Dred as the embodiment of wild nature, Stowe maintains that black laborers in the tropics are immune to exhaustion because "a boiling spring of animal content is ever welling up within" (PL 281). Likewise, just as

she implies that Dred's outdoor field work as a slave anticipates his "communion with nature" in the swamp (D 2: 6), the implication at the end of *Palmetto Leaves* is that this kind of outdoor labor is the natural way for blackness to connect with nature.

This social conservatism leads Stowe to commend the landowners who have hired former slaves to do the same kind of work they did before Emancipation. Not only are these former slaves still working outdoors in fields, but the basic relationships of slavery are further preserved by their paternalistic relationships with the former slaveholders. Thus, these former slaves are "still looking up to [the former slaveholders] for advice, depending on them for aid, and rendering to them the willing, well-paid services of freemen" (PL 230-31). While she is pleased that they are no longer enslaved, she expresses no concern for a labor system that continues to perpetuate the unequal and exploitative dynamics of slave labor. Consequently, when she visits a neighbor's plantation and notes, "[a]s in the old times, the servants of the family have their little houses back of the premises" (PL 238), one does not get the impression that she necessarily disapproves of this holdover from the days of slavery. The same can be said of her conservative ideas about labor in the tropics: seeing the outdoor labor of people of color as a

naturalized behavior obliterates the need to feel guilty about the pleasures of privileged leisure. Free of racial guilt, Stowe is saying that people of privilege are doing nothing more or less than enjoying nature in a different way than laborers do.

At its core, Stowe's racializing of labor and leisure reflects a moral judgment based on the belief that the contrasting activities of labor and leisure imply different amounts of physical contact with and intellectual detachment from the natural environment. Stowe's depiction of black labor being physically invigorated by the sun and tropical climate indicates that the connection between laboring black bodies and the environment rightfully taps into the essence of the tropics. The leisure of whiteness occupies the periphery of this place, demanding some detachment from the wildness of the tropical environment. Following Stowe's logic, this detachment is necessary to preserve the purity of whiteness, which helps explain why she stresses the moral contrast between Florida's and New England's natures. She compliments New England's nature by personifying it as an "up-and-down, smart, decisive house-mother" (PL 28), in other words, a respectable and morally righteous woman. Conversely, she represents Florida's nature with images of irresponsible and immoral women: firstly, Florida's nature is "an easy, demoralized, indulgent old

grandmother, who has no particular time for any thing, and does every thing when she happens to feel like it" (PL 29) and secondly, a "brunette, dark but comely, with gorgeous tissues, a general disarray and dazzle, and with a sort of jolly untidiness, free, easy, and joyous" (PL 36). The descriptions reflect a moral criticism of the excesses of tropical nature. Instead of the environment being like "a neat, trim damsel, with starched linen cuffs and collar," the tropics are an alluring environment of excess, a seductive woman (who is "dark" [PL 36] no less) versed in transgressive behavior. However attractive the woman is, and however beautiful the Florida environment is, the whiteness that Stowe values can most safely relate to it with the detachment of leisurely aesthetic observation.

The consequences of this racializing of labor and leisure extend beyond agriculture and tourism. Not only does affluent whiteness connect to the natural environment through leisure, but Stowe's line of thinking eventually spawns the belief that twentieth-century environmentalism is a white cause. Although not strictly an act of leisure, the social advocacy of environmental conservation involved using the leisurely observation of nature to argue for the protection of vulnerable lands. These early twentieth-century advocates, in particular those who argued for the conservation of Florida's environment, focused on the exceptional natural beauty that Stowe describes.

Rather than arguing preservation on ecological grounds, these early attempts to preserve the flora of the Everglades, for example, stressed the need to protect those plants which were unique and thus beautiful. The list of affluent or well-educated white environmentalists who acted on behalf of Florida's nature includes both women and men. May Mann Jennings, wife of a Florida governor, was instrumental in the establishment of Royal Palm State Park, the first preserved area of the Everglades (Vance 2). The Smithsonian Institute's naturalist Charles Torrey Simpson wrote about a Florida in which forested "hammocks are destroyed, the streams are being dredged out and deepened, the Everglades are nearly drained; even the pine forests are being cut down" (*v.*). The Columbia University-educated botanist John Kunkel Small's *From Eden to Sahara: Florida's Tragedy* documented the state's depleted natural resources, especially its water supply. These white environmentalists, while acknowledging the deleterious effects of agriculture and industrialism, focused on the beauty of pristine nature. Like Stowe, they emphasized the aesthetic qualities of nature that are implicitly accessible to people like themselves and not to the laborers who work the soil. Even though the modern-day environmentalist movement has made strides in becoming a more diverse community, it must remain vigilantly

inclusive or run the risk of racializing the experiences of communing with nature as Stowe did.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CRACKER SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH: MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS'S POETICS OF POOR WHITE LABOR

3.1 Who Speaks for the Cracker?

The title page of my library copy of *The Yearling*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's 1938 novel about a family of Florida pioneers, carried the following inscription: "For Jim: A wonderful North Florida story for our North Florida builder. Thank you for helping our clearing become a real house." It was signed by a grateful family undoubtedly separated from the novel's pioneers by both time and money but nonetheless moved by Rawlings's story. Did the homeowners who gifted this copy of *The Yearling* to their builder envision themselves as modern-day pioneers? Did they consider the significance of giving their builder (however officious the title) a book romanticizing the hard work of settling the wilderness? The inscription reveals in miniature the dynamic that propels and problematizes Rawlings's Florida writings. Her narratives about rural labor, poverty, and wild nature address a readership willing to embrace her poetics of poor white labor. Nevertheless, her depictions of poor whites do more than marginalize and mythologize rural poverty, because ultimately Rawlings uses these problematic depictions to represent how she, a college-educated professional

writer who engages in minimal physical labor, relates to the natural environment.

Although Rawlings wrote about Florida more than half a century after Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Palmetto Leaves*, the rural outposts of Rawlings's work are more primitive and rustic than the sprouting touristy communities of Stowe's promotional texts. Rawlings's scant references to the tourism industry are especially interesting since by the 1930s and early 1940s, the time period of her work, tourism had "reemerged…as a potentially more lucrative source of wealth" than the traditional economic mainstays of agriculture, railroads, and lumber (Colburn 25). Her emphasis on the labor and lives of Florida's rural population thus represents a conscious effort to resist the effects of modernity and restrict herself to what she called the "picturesque people" found along the "last of Florida's frontier" (SL 40). If, as I believe, depictions of Florida tell us more about the authors' attitudes toward nature, race, labor, and leisure than about the region itself, then we are left to question what the rural communities reveal about Rawlings's attitudes in texts like her memoir *Cross Creek* and the novel *The Yearling*, her most popular work and the 1939 Pulitzer Prize winner.

Rawlings refers to the poor whites of her narratives as Crackers, a term designating the white rural folk of Florida

who, despite their poverty, eked out a living by farming, hunting, and fishing (Bigelow 99, 104). By aligning the agrarian Crackers with the archetype of the frontier pioneer, she finds a satisfying alternative to twentieth-century modernity. In her memoir, she claims the rural backwoods of Florida provide "a certain remoteness from urban confusion" (CC 11), which stokes her conservatism as she retreats into the mythical pioneers' past and drives her adoration of nature. Rawlings's attraction to the Cracker culture parallels early twentieth-century art's infatuation with primitive cultures whose "connection to the land" and whose "ownership of the means of production through…agricultural labor," as Susan Hegeman has shown, offered cultural escape from the present's modernity (25). Sounding like someone who enthusiastically embraces the retreat from modernity, Rawlings proudly writes of the Florida wilderness, "The scrub has defeated civilization" (SL 49). What she really means by the scrub's victory is that the rural lifestyle, especially the labor, of poor whites provides a bridge to an idealized frontier past.

While the integrity of rural labor functions as an overriding theme in Rawlings's work, its significance extends from the Crackers' poverty. A noticeable, if explicable, omission in Harriet Beecher Stowe's promotional *Palmetto Leaves*, Southern poverty is the fulcrum of Rawlings's texts. In

particular, white poverty provides a moral framework to her writing as her rusticated characters are bettered and made more colorful by their privation. Yet, as important as white poverty is to Rawlings, black poverty, though historically present in the region, fails to receive the same fawning attention in her writing. Rather, her fiction focuses on how poor white men relate to nature through labor. Deviating slightly from the myth of the Western frontier which stresses the masculine domination of nature, *The Yearling* presents male Crackers relating to nature with a mixture of pioneer domination and romantic sensitivity. The novel shows that their proximity to wild nature invites hunting and agricultural cultivation, but also the peaceful observation of plants and wildlife. But it is the latter, the ability to find beauty in nature by being close to the land, that Rawlings appropriates for herself in *Cross Creek*.

The Crackers' poverty and labor inspire Rawlings's aestheticizing of the natural environment, a process that depends on the author and reader identifying the Otherness of both poor whites and wild nature. We can note that literary regionalism and nature writing, two genres applicable to Rawlings's work, hinge on the reader's recognition of and detachment from cultural, racial, and natural Otherness. Literary regionalism, the genre that early critics most

associated with Rawlings's work, "is a form *about* the representation of difference" (Foote 4) and locates the reader outside the community being depicted by the author who assumes to be knowledgeable of the inner workings of the culture. This outsider-insider relationship is expressed in Tom Lutz's observation that the "hallmark of…regionalist writing" is an attempt to resolve the disparity between the local and the global by employing the narrative device of a "visitor who frames, interprets, and/or invades the scene" such as Jim Burden in *My Ántonia* (30). Traditional nature writing in the style of the personal essay operates in a similar way with the narrator/author interpreting a natural scene for the reader. In many cases, this first-person narrator attempts to explicate the sublime, using hyperbole to bridge the gap between the reader and the subject. Both genres specialize in subject matter that is typically unusual or exotic to the reader and depend on a subjective narrating presence to construct the cultural, racial, or natural Otherness for the reader.

In the case of *Cross Creek*, the subjective narrating presence is Rawlings herself as she speaks from the standpoint of an outsider who has relocated to Florida and interprets the surrounding natural and cultural environment for the reader. But even in fictional works like "Jacob's Ladder" and *The Yearling*, Rawlings acts as mediating voice depicting Cracker

culture as primitive and heroic. Her persona in *Cross Creek* betrays a combination of sympathy for and detachment from the Cracker country. Following a brief, two-day tour of the Cross Creek community in which she accompanies a census taker, she boasts that she "knew every one, black and white, and could never again be a stranger" (CC 63). Meant to confirm her credibility as a spokesperson for the region, the quickness with which she acquires an expertise of Cracker culture instead raises questions about her identification with the white and black families of the community.

Although she claims to understand these rural families, *Cross Creek* hints that her cultural, financial, and educational background may influence her Othering and romanticizing of the white and black residents of the Florida backwoods. Raised in Washington, D.C. as the daughter of a federal attorney, Rawlings must have noticed and evidently enjoyed the culture shock of rural Florida. Beginning in 1928, she lived in Cross Creek where she wrote and owned an orange grove (Silverthorne 56). In her memoir, she recounts her hunting and fishing excursions in the backwoods, but these are episodes in which she uses the labor and customs of Crackers for her leisurely enjoyment wearing her hunting attire as a "costume" (Bigelow 58). As research for her writing, she lived with a Cracker family for a short period of time (Bellman 27), but, however sincere her

efforts to valorize Cracker culture, she realized "she was playing a kind of glorious game" (Bigelow 58). *Cross Creek*'s passing references to her "lean times" (CC 38, 335) do not suggest that she experienced the dire poverty of her poorer characters. She finds relief from these lean times by selling her stories for publication (CC 335), a financial solution not available to many of the Creek's residents, at least some of whom are illiterate (CC 22, 33). The episode in which she goes on vacation to a beach cottage while men work to fertilize her orange grove (CC 32) encapsulates her disjunction from the community's way of life, especially since she never describes any of the other residents taking vacations. Yet in an instance of her apparent investment in the community's residents, Rawlings delays a trip to New York to meet with her editor when she discovers that the family of her grove man is suffering from pneumonia (CC 126).

Because her relationship to Cross Creek oscillates between writerly detachment (some might say exploitation) and communal concern, it is impossible to pigeonhole Rawlings strictly as an aloof outsider or a sympathetic insider. But despite this fluctuation, she can never fully divest herself of the privilege and education of her upbringing which necessarily influences how she relates to Southern poverty, physical labor, and the natural environment that joins the two together.

3.2 Blessed Are the Cracker Poor

Why, then, does Southern white poverty invite Rawlings's romanticizing while black poverty hides in the margins of her texts? Cracker whiteness offers a bridge to the natural environment that stimulates the leisured interest of author and her audience, but why does Cracker labor, as opposed to black labor, produce a satisfying union with nature that Rawlings envies and attempts to imitate? Rawlings inclusion of poor whites puts her firmly in the tradition of Southern writing. From antebellum literature's "demeaning" stereotypes to William Faulkner's more nuanced portrayals (Flynt 17), poor whites appear with great frequency in works of Southern literature. Dispensing to a large extent with the stereotypes of lazy, ignorant poor white trash, Rawlings draws on the romantic ideal of the frontier pioneer in her depictions of Crackers. The frontier ideal is a fitting comparison, since Cracker poverty "owed much to the economic conditions of a frozen frontier characterized by static technology and geographical isolation" (Flynt 9). At the encouragement of her editor Maxwell Perkins (SL 42), Rawlings focused her fiction on these poor whites who offered local color capable of exoticizing the author's rural narratives.

In fact, her focus on Crackers is often to the exclusion of other racial groups. The closest *The Yearling* comes to

including non-white characters is a group of Minorcans who enter and exit the story on the same page without a single line of dialogue (Y 84). The novel, set in the South during the late nineteenth century, does not feature a single African-American character, proving that the Baxter family's isolation is not only geographical but racial as well. By excluding black characters from the novel, Rawlings carefully constructs a narrative in which agricultural labor, poverty, and closeness to nature are wholly the domain of white Crackers. However, her memoir *Cross Creek* includes a racially-diverse set of characters that results in a narrative whose contrasting depictions of poor whites and blacks better reveal the ways in which Rawlings mythologizes the poverty of white Crackers. The book not only devotes more attention to the white Crackers, but Rawlings privileges white poverty, treating it as a mark of Cracker integrity, whereas she associates black poverty with social and moral deficiency. An examination of the memoir's depiction of African-Americans elucidates why Rawlings's fictional works like "Jacob's Ladder" and *The Yearling* rely so heavily on a romantic view of Cracker poverty and labor.

Cross Creek depicts a range of interactions between Rawlings and the Crackers, more varied than her interactions with African-Americans. Her white neighbors Tom Glisson and Old Boss Brice own orange groves and raise livestock making them

more affluent than most of the Crackers in the community. These two men appear in the narrative as her social equals, befriending Rawlings, helping her adjust to Creek life, and even quarrelling with her. The Crackers are poorer than Rawlings, although these poorer whites still interact with her in a social capacity, dining with her at home or accompanying her on hunting and fishing trips. Other poor whites like the grove man Snow and Tim temporarily serve under her employ. She interacts with a variety of Cracker men and women, some poorer than others, as friend and employer. Whites who work for Rawlings are typically men who do farm work and tend the livestock. She avoids hiring white women as maids, because it "is impossible to make a servant of any southern white," a fact which causes her to "rejoice" (CC 340-41). Without the servile racial memory that Rawlings attributes to African-Americans, the Crackers of Rawlings's memoir are straightforward good country people.

In contrast to the variety of social and business interactions between Rawlings and the Crackers, her relationships with African-Americans typically develop from her employment of female domestic servants. Black men appear in *Cross Creek* primarily as the troublesome lovers of Rawlings's maids, although some of these beaus consequently find employment with Rawlings. In contrast to Rawlings's depiction of Cracker culture in which the work of men is more prominent than the work

of women, the most visible people of color in her memoir are the numerous African-American girls and women who serve as maids. Some of them approach her looking for employment (CC 90) while others' employment is the result of a business agreement between Rawlings and the child's parents or grandparents. The uncomfortableness with which Rawlings admits to having "bought" a young girl from her father for five dollars (CC 85) is only exacerbated when she commends the Southern plantation's method of successfully training domestic slaves over a period of years (CC 87). By largely limiting her depiction of African-American labor to "feminine" housework, Rawlings downplays the work of black men while simultaneously accentuating the labor of Cracker men who manage orange groves, work in agricultural fields, fish, and hunt. Moreover, by limiting her depictions of African-American to her workers, Rawlings emphasizes the race's dependence on white employment.

Since her interactions with African-American women are initiated by the employer-employee hierarchy, it is difficult to avoid seeing these relationships as an extension of Jim Crow racial inequality including those instances when Rawlings eventually befriends her maids. As opposed to championing the work of her black maids, Rawlings belittles many of her female employees as when, parroting the civilized/white-uncivilized/black binary, she describes the housekeeper 'Geechee

on the verge of "[bursting] into a belligerent dance, tearing her garments from her, prancing naked in savage triumph" (CC 92). Fortunately for Rawlings, she quickly overcomes this fear of savagery and begins to feel comforted by "being watched over and served and cared for" by her new maid (CC 93). The complicated, if self-serving, power dynamics of their relationship prompt Rawlings to intervene on behalf of 'Geechee and convince the state prison to release her maid's beau, an arrangement that ends disastrously when the beau abandons both women. 'Geechee's grief rouses her alcoholism, which leads to her eventual dismissal. Years after their parting, Rawlings injures her neck in a riding accident and, declining the doctor's recommendation of a white nurse, travels to a nearby town in order to retrieve her former maid. 'Geechee tacitly understands why Rawlings has come and follows her willingly, providing care and earning the author's commendation as a "black Florence Nightingale" (CC 102).

The racial difference and class disparity of the two women ensure that their relationship is more complicated than simple friendly companionship even if strict domination is not the extent of it, either. Whether she is a sympathetic friend, a self-serving authority figure, or a combination of the two, Rawlings's interactions with 'Geechee exemplify her contrasting treatment of African-Americans and Crackers. The subordination

that she expects from 'Geechee would prevent Rawlings from ever presuming to arrive unannounced on a white person's doorstep expecting to fetch them to come live with her. 'Geechee's loyalty or acquiescence confirms for Rawlings that "the Negro serves" (CC 39) as if serving a white household is the natural labor of the African-American woman.

Even though Martha, the narrative's wise black matriarch and part-time housekeeper for Rawlings, is a "natural aristocrat" (CC 33), she fails to engender the author's admiration for the larger African-American community. Instead, Rawlings presents the black poverty of rural Florida as an historical consequence of slavery and, thus, bereft of the romanticized beauty that she saves for Cracker poverty. While Rawlings shows remarkable perception when she argues that the wages for Southern blacks "are a scandal and there is no hope of racial development until racial economics are adjusted" (CC 189), she also reverts to racial essentialism by concluding that "only in rare instances can a Negro work for long on his own initiative" (CC 190). She claims that her efforts to treat African-Americans in her employ with fairness and high wages have led to the realization that Southern blacks, conditioned by the oppressive history of slavery, cannot manage their freedom and responsibilities. Their raucous behavior and hard drinking are a momentary "escape…[from] the lowliness and the poverty" of

their life in the Jim-Crow South (CC 190). This rationale helps explain why Rawlings's fiction does not hold black poverty in the same esteem as Cracker poverty, nor black labor in the same regard as Cracker labor. Not simply a result of rural living, the African-American poverty at Cross Creek serves as an inescapable reminder of the slavery era. Unable to signify social independence as Cracker poverty does, black poverty acts as a scar inflicted by historical injustice that Rawlings unfairly uses to demean the poetics of African-American labor. Where a postmodern text, like Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* or Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, would see confronting historical injustice as a crucial step toward the self-actualization of the oppressed subject, Rawlings' memoir and fiction treat slavery as the historical antecedent that destroys the possibility of romanticizing African-American labor after Emancipation. Following this logic, fictional texts like "Jacob's Ladder" and *The Yearling* that are committed to romanticizing Cracker labor and poverty omit black labor because it never rises above servitude and disrupts the labor fantasy of agrarian independence that Rawlings constructs.

Unencumbered by a history of enslavement, Cracker laborers in Rawlings's texts attain the mythical independence of the frontier pioneer. Richard White observes that Americans have long "associated freedom and independence with the borders of

their own society," which holds true for the West but also for Rawlings's rural Florida ("Frederick" 16). As farmers, her Crackers resemble the noble Jeffersonian agrarian as well as the "heroic figure" of the western frontier myth who tames the wilderness with the "supreme agrarian weapon, the sacred plow" (Smith 123). Their hunting and fishing recalls the importance of those practices in the frontier tales of James Fennimore Cooper and the travel narratives of Teddy Roosevelt. Rawlings attributes hard-nosed determination to the rural whites, identifying in them a "pride that would not admit defeat" (CC 61). Having located in the Crackers the "autonomy and self-discipline…that mattered most" in the frontier myth (White, *Misfortune* 621), she valorizes them by repeatedly referring to the "integrity" of the rural white men in Cross Creek (CC 134, 136, 147, 374).

The perseverance to cope with poverty and the harsh Florida environment consequently gives the Cracker culture an attractive dignity that Rawlings denies with rural African-American culture. As opposed to African-Americans who, according to her, are "alien" to the Florida environment, Crackers neatly adapt to the natural surroundings (Rawlings qtd. in Bigelow 102). Rawlings contrasts the "Negro settlements" which exist as "sun-baked excrescences…in open, tree-less areas" with the Cracker dwellings idyllically framed by Spanish moss, crepe myrtles,

trees, and flowers (Rawlings qtd. in Bigelow 102). The juxtaposition of these two settings firmly racializes the natural environment without giving any consideration to social reasons for these different locales. With African-Americans residing in the unshaded barren desert and Crackers dwelling in the fertile Edenic garden, it is little wonder that Rawlings relates the Crackers' living to the beauty of nature while downplaying the toil and living conditions of poor African-Americans. Still, by connecting the Crackers to the natural environment through their labor and poverty, Rawlings positions the poor whites to be dehumanized cultural Others.

The novella "Jacob's Ladder" melds Cracker labor, poverty, and the natural environment in a rural tale, but it problematically relates Crackers to nature through their primitive and animalistic characteristics. First published in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1931 and only Rawlings's second story to reach print, the narrative recounts the hard living endured by a poor young Cracker couple, Florry and Mart, during the early twentieth century. As Mart searches for work, the couple moves around Florida, beginning in the pinelands and then relocating to a prairie marsh, an island in the Gulf of Mexico, the interior scrubland, and eventually returning to the pinelands. Over the course of several years, Mart does various jobs including trapping and selling animal skins, illegally catching

fish with a seine, working in an orange grove, and assisting a moonshine operation. Too primitive to serve as legitimate models for communing with nature, the couple's rustic living in the wilderness is the stuff of pure backwoods fantasy for the reader of *Scribner's*. This detachment between reader and subject is indicative of the "certain condescension" in Rawlings's early works in which she writes with the voice of an outsider "exploiting the quaint customs of the natives for the amusement of big-city readers" (Bigelow and Monti 45).

Less interested in the characters' humanity than in the deprived living conditions, Rawlings uses Florry and Mart's poverty as an excuse to aestheticize the natural environment. This description of a springtime night demonstrates this subordination of character to natural setting:

> The lake turned musical overnight. The frogs piped up and down the length of their small silver song. Hoot owls over the marsh boomed with the vibrancy of a bass viol. The cranes and loons cried dissonant, not quite inharmonious. On a night of full moon in April, Mart and Florry sat on the cabin steps. The palms were silver in the moonlight. The new growth on the oaks was white as candles. An odor grew in the stillness, sweeter than breath could endure. It seeped across

> the marsh like a fog of perfume. It filled the hammock. Yellow jessamine was in bloom. (SS 58)

Rawlings relies on lyrical language here to heighten the sensuality of wild nature in such a way that the characters sitting on the cabin steps do no more than provide the picturesque poverty that completes the idyllic scene. The poverty of these characters is uncomfortably transformed into leisure reading material, a fact made more disturbing when Rawlings discloses in her memoir that the story was inspired by the privation of two actual tenant laborers who worked for her at Cross Creek (CC 73).

She further dehumanizes Florry and Mart by repeatedly comparing them to wild animals. The initial description of Florry emphasizes her animal appearance: she has "the graceful ease of any thin wild animal" with "chipmunk-colored hair" and eyes that give her "the look of a young squirrel" (SS 43). Although Rawlings includes fewer descriptions of Mart, she twice compares him to a willful "bird-dog" (SS 49, 70). Besides their physical appearances, their sexual interactions convey natural instinct as opposed to an emotional response:

> Well-nourished, strong, conception took place within her. It was strangely fortuitous. Neither was amorous of nature. Passion for her seized the man as briefly, if as necessitously, as flames that lick the

> turpentine pines when forest fire moves through. The meager delights of her spare body were no more to him than the pleasures of a drink or two of the hot, raw 'shine old Boyter sometimes passed around (SS 64-5).

Less an act of lovemaking than a natural duty, their sexual interaction is, like a "forest fire," an extension of their wild nature and, like a sip of moonshine, a debased sensual pleasure. Anticipating a major plot point in *The Yearling*, Florry adopts a wild raccoon and acts as its surrogate mother after the death of her infant child. With the raccoon living in the family's domestic space and sleeping in their bedroom, the narrative implies an equivalency with the raccoon and Florry's offspring. While *The Yearling* will strive to mythologize this kind of Cracker-animal interaction as heroic and innocent, "Jacob's Ladder" presents Florry's behavior as the desperate response of a primitive woman who looks for solace in her intimate connection to wild nature.

Owing to their animalistic essence, the Crackers prefer the wilderness to populated towns. When Florry and Marty travel to the Gulf of Mexico, Florry feels the "oppression of the town, of the ever-alarming contact with folk, lifted from her" (SS 74). She studies the coastal plants and animals, finding kinship by observing the wide variety of organisms. By contrast, the couple feels fear and anxiety when they go to town for business,

their tattered clothes drawing attention to their extreme poverty. The subject of the townspeople's stares, the couple becomes skittish and more animal-like: Florry "was panicked, distraught, like a squirrel caught in a room….Her one thought was to meet Mart quickly and get away again. He came out of the fur dealer's dusty little building to find her crouched against the wall like a frightened dog. He was very little more comfortable than she" (SS 56). Exile from the crowded town is a small price to pay for the pastoral bounty of the Crackers' lives. Thus, the tone of Rawlings's statement that "Anywhere among trees [Florry] would be at home" (SS 68) is envious despite the hardship and privation evident in Florry's life.

Not only does their animalism drive them away from other people, but it also enables them for a life of outdoor labor. Before she meets Mart, Florry does logging work in the swamps so that she becomes "accustomed to working hard on light rations" (SS 47). Throughout the narrative, however, Mart is more closely associated with labor as he takes on a variety jobs like trapping, fishing, farming, and moonshining to provide for the family. Because this labor accentuates his physicality and puts him into contact with the outdoors, Mart, more than Florry, becomes a primal extension of the landscape. Mart's outdoor work further "naturalizes" his body so that his physical form is one with wild nature, as these lines show: "In his brown face

and hands and arms, his bare golden chest, in his blue work-clothes, *he was like a patch of good loamy soil* covered with a mat of blue flowers. He had the smell of earth, with man-sweat and mule-sweat over it" (my emphasis, SS 69). Mart is not only composed of mules and men, but of soil, too. His dependence on outdoor labor parallels the larger Cracker culture's dependence on the natural environment. Even when a grueling summer heat inspires Florry and Mart to fantasize about an easier life, they restrict their dreams to the rustic and the rural: Florry wishes for a "cabin with good doors to it" (SS 92) while Mart desires cold water and a place to sleep with screens to keep out mosquitoes (SS 95). As luck (and the author) would have it, they realize their dream by returning to the Florry's childhood home complete with windows and doors and becoming de facto landowners as they claim the cabin from her father. The story ends abruptly with the only certainty that Mart will continue laboring, likely logging in the swamps as Florry had done before she ran off with him.

By seeing the Crackers as primitive and anchored to wild nature, the author and reader can vicariously dabble in the wilderness since, in this novella, the Cracker laborer embraces his wild nature. The persistence of his labor forms a crucial, permanent bridge between the drawing room reader and the flora and fauna of the landscape. Their commitment to a pastoral

lifestyle ensures that, as a leisure activity, the bourgeois reader can find an accessible human-shaped entrance into the natural environment. *The Yearling* further guarantees that the reader's access to nature is not simply human-shaped as Florry and Mart are, but in the form of Penny and Jody Baxter, more humanized and philosophical as well. What remains consistent between the two works is the middle-class fantasy of being an independent pioneer. The romanticized homestead and its accompanying agrarian labor fend off the rigors of modernity while providing the characters, author, and reader an idyllic measure of nature.

3.3 The Ethics of Nature's Enchantment

With the Baxter family, *The Yearling* presents mythologized pioneers whose dignity extends from their complex relationship to the natural environment. Richard White notes that for the frontier historian Frederick Jackson Turner the "true pioneer" was a "peaceful" farmer who "overcame a wilderness" with minimal interference from Native Americans (Frontier in American Culture 9). True to Turner's pioneer, the Baxter family encounters no resistance from Seminoles, African-Americans, or any other social group. A small feud with a neighboring white family, the Forresters, proves to be little more than a distracting subplot. In fact, the most destructive force with which the Baxter family must do battle is wild nature: storms, floods, bears, wolves,

and even Jody’s pet deer, Flag. In spite of their modest homestead in the clearing of the wilderness and the labor that defines their daily life, the Baxters are not cultural Others like Mart and Florry. Rather, Rawlings presents the Baxters, especially father Penny and son Jody, as admirable characters who embody a code of ethics governing how they hunt, farm, and generally interact with wild nature.

The landscape that surrounds the Baxters’ homestead affords the seclusion that reinforces the independence of the family’s way of life. It is the scrub, the arid and sandy wilderness of Florida’s interior, that defines the values that Penny tries to instill in his son. Whereas Florry and Mart instinctively prefer life in the wilderness, Penny has a more introspective understanding for why he prefers isolation in the scrub. Lacking the frontier’s wide open spaces, populated areas like towns are where “men’s minds and actions and property overlapped” and permit “intrusions on the individual spirit” (Y 16). Instead, he opts to settle his family in “the very heart of the wild Florida scrub, populous with bears and wolves and panthers” (Y 16). By emphasizing Penny’s impeccable moral judgment, Rawlings guides the reader toward sympathizing with his love of the wilderness. The product of a childhood in which his father overworked him damaging the boy’s physical development, Penny finds “healing” and the “beneficence

of…silence” in the natural environment of the scrub (Y 17). His fondness for the wild landscape extends to its animals because, unlike humans, they behave violently only when their survival demands it. Penny’s sensitivity for the natural environment of Florida’s interior is the novel’s first inkling that, however Rawlings aestheticizes the region’s plants and animals, Penny’s relationship to nature is implicitly a question of ethics.

As a coming-of-age story, the novel traces the developing awareness of Jody from a young boy who enjoys loafing in the woods to a more mature young man who, like his father, comprehends how his relationship to nature is rooted in the overlap of ethics and labor. Throughout the narrative, Jody does the kind of labor associated with agrarian pioneers: chopping wood, milking the cow, fetching water, hoeing the fields, and planting the crops. The early chapters, though, show him shirking his chores in favor of exploring and lounging in the woods. After he adopts the orphaned fawn, Jody begins to focus on his responsibilities as a worker and provider of victuals for his family (Y 246). As part of the agreement to keep the fawn, Jody willingly sacrifices a portion of his rations to feed his pet, which puts him in the position of being a nurturer like his father. When his father becomes bedridden, Jody hunts and brings rations for Penny (Y 367). By embracing his responsibilities and the work around the homestead, the son

learns to emulate the pioneer spirit of his father who years earlier had felled the trees in the clearing and built a trough system to provide water for the family (Y 74). The father's and son's willingness to do labor distinguishes them from their neighbors the Forresters, a large family of poor whites who loaf and lackadaisically "plow a field now and agin" (Y 166). The Baxters' code of ethics will not permit them to embrace the Forrester's "rough and easy" life (Y 166), nor will it allow the Baxters to kill animals wastefully as the Forresters do.

The novel suggests that the Baxters' devotion to labor is inseparable from their respect for nature. It is as if Rawlings rewards their dedication to pioneer labor, their ethical and willful domination of nature, by allowing them to glimpse the wild's transcendence. This subordination of nature to labor echoes the vision of the frontier as a garden "eagerly awaiting the hand of the cultivator" (White, *Misfortune* 621). Even if the garden motif frequently appears in depictions of the Western frontier, there remains something remarkable about the moment when Florida pioneers Penny and Jody lovingly observe a flock of displaying cranes. Rawlings highlights the scene with the lyrical language of Romanticism: "Magic birds were dancing in a mystic marsh" (Y 88). Upon discovering the cranes, the Baxters quickly halt their bear hunt and spend an hour passively watching the birds. Emotionally moved by the scene, father and

son return to their hovel unable to focus on mundane home life for "[t]hey had seen a thing that was unearthly. They were in a trance from the strong spell of its beauty" (Y 89).

The juxtaposition of the two attitudes in this scene—the characters beginning as Rooseveltian hunters and being transformed by nature's beauty into Muirian disciples—neatly collapses Penny's philosophy toward wild nature. Although he is an agrarian pioneer who cultivates the landscape, he is also the protector of wild nature who refuses to kill animals that are feeding or mating (Y 31) and rejects a plan to poison a pack of wolves out of concern that other animals might take the bait (Y 268). He suffers a snake bite, but excuses the rattlesnake saying it was understandably acting out of fear (Y 184). Yet, befitting his role as pioneer, Penny's tenderness toward nature does not prevent him from hunting what his family can use and feeling bloodlust toward the bear, Slewfoot (Y 177, 310). The idealist ethics that inspire Penny to wish that there was "room enough in the world for folks and creeturs, both" (Y 229) crumble by the end of the novel with Jody's climactic decision to kill his fawn Flag because it continues to destroy the family's crops. Rawlings's memoir, however, propagates this idealism associating it with pioneer labor while incompatibly attempting to balance the nobility of agricultural cultivation with the biocentrism she half-heartedly promotes.

Since Rawlings makes her central characters in *The Yearling* more emotionally complex than the poor whites of "Jacob's Ladder," it is little surprise that she amends the more thoughtful model of Penny Baxter for her own identity in *Cross Creek*. Interestingly, though her white and black neighbors perform agrarian labor like the Baxters do, the memoir neglects the poetics of these laborers' interactions with nature. Their labor does not accompany an appreciation of nature as it does with Penny and Jody. Accordingly, acting as an important revision of *The Yearling*'s emphasis on the connection between honorable labor and the respect for nature, *Cross Creek* allows the exceptional Rawlings to echo the Baxters' love for nature while bypassing the daily chores of the homestead. The memoir includes passing references to her smaller, infrequent tasks like repairing a fence or caring for her flowerbed, but she hires workers to do the more strenuous work of tending her crops and caring for her livestock. Even those occasions when she engages in the labor of hunting and fishing prove to be the leisurely amusements of a professional author, not the poor whites' vital search for food. In the language of *The Yearling*, she allows herself to enjoy the displaying cranes without first having to scour the forest searching for the menacing bear. The Baxters' poverty is a precondition to their Cracker pioneer identity and their communing with nature; Rawlings's finances

and social privilege conveniently do not prevent her from dabbling in rural Cracker culture and aestheticizing the natural environment.

A superficial glance at the depiction of nature in *Cross Creek* suggests a glaring inconsistency: Rawlings fluctuates between reverentially admiring the beauty of wild nature and endorsing the Cracker's pioneering ways which fundamentally dominate nature. The former perspective sees Rawlings abandoning her former practice of shooting squirrels because of her acquired tenderness toward animal life in the woods. The shooting that was "great sport at first" comes to "sicken [her]," and now reformed, she "[goes] to the pines as a guest and not an invader" (CC 44). But the passive role of being a "guest" in the woods does not satisfy her sentimental yearning for the romanticized customs of Cracker pioneers like the Baxters. Thus, she participates in an annual tradition of hunting squirrels, deer, and quail on the opening day of hunting season (CC 326). Rural labor or, more accurately, the fantasy of being a pioneer laborer becomes a source of leisure and amusement for Rawlings as she uses this hunt as an opportunity to "[return] to the pioneer aspect of the state, when all men took a portion of their living from the hunt" (CC 322). In an attempt to allay her guilt for shooting animals she feels fondness towards, she claims to shoot the squirrels since

"breakfast depends on it" (CC 327), but that is only because she pretends that her sustenance depends on her hunting. This parody of the pioneer spirit reaches its climax when Rawlings hunts from a car, which she relates to the hunting wagons of the past (CC 329). The relative comfort of the automobile and her indifference to being a "poor shot" (CC 330) undermine the verisimilitude of the fantasy in which she engages. It is less important to act convincingly the role of Cracker pioneer than to clutch the romantic myth of rural labor and poverty, because it is the myth which functions as a lens through which Rawlings can relate to and aestheticize nature.

Relieved of having to perform the actual labor of pioneers like Penny Baxter, Rawlings uses her leisurely hunts to commune with the beauty of nature in a way that a fatigued laborer would be less likely to appreciate. Walking through the forested trail on her annual hunt, she sees nature become a "magical fact" as she "[moves] silently into the dark core of a dream" during the "mystic hour between daylight and sunrise" (CC 327). On other occasions, a duck hunt is notable for the "aesthetic delights" of the "great beauty of the surroundings" (CC 332) and a deer hunt in the Everglades leads her "through a dream world of gray cypresses and silent Spanish moss and soft knee-deep watery sloughs" (CC 333). During these outings, she spends more time observing wildlife than firing her gun, making these

excursions more like nature walks than hunts. In addition to hunting trips, her wanderings through the nearby hammock inspire more encomiums to nature. In the hammock, a densely-vegetated tropical forest, near her house, she reaches Muirian heights of ecstasy:

> The jungle hammock breathed. Life went through the moss-hung forest, the swamp, the cypresses, through the wild sow and her young, through me, in its continuous chain. We were all one with the silent pulsing. This was the thing that was important, the cycle of life, with birth and death merging one into the other in an imperceptible twilight and an insubstantial dawn. The universe breathed, and the world inside it breathed the same breath. This was the cosmic life, with suns and moons to make it lovely. It was important only to keep close enough to the pulse to feel its rhythm, to be comforted by its steadiness, to know that Life is vital, and one's own minute living a torn fragment of the larger cloth. (CC 46-7)

Rawlings's romanticizing of rural Cracker culture, the primary lens through which she views nature, brings her to an understanding of the natural environment that is both local and universal. The hammock reminds her of the local colonial

history with "the Spaniards blazing their trails," but these forests "were the same then as now, and will be the same forever if men can be induced to leave them alone" (CC 42). As romantic (and ecologically dubious) as that sounds, she sees in the natural environment a universalizing energy that connects life across the centuries. The pronouncement that one's life is a "torn fragment of the larger cloth" (CC 47) ensures that the reader will not confuse Rawlings for merely being a pioneer. Along with her declaration to someday "lay down [her] arms entirely" (CC 330), her philosophizing the oneness of nature betrays a biocentric thought ostensibly inconsistent with the Cracker pioneer, acting as a signpost of Rawlings's superior sophistication.

However, this biocentric turn that asserts the universal equality of all nature and the ethical respect that should be afforded to all human and non-human nature is ultimately incompatible with Rawlings's pioneer ideals, especially her emphasis on the business of agrarian cultivation. The title of the memoir's final chapter, "Who Owns Cross Creek?," stands posed to subvert the pioneer notions about the human domination of nature. But instead of questioning the fundamental concept of human ownership of land, Rawlings answers that rightful ownership belongs to those who "take care of the land lovingly" (CC 379). If she "did not nourish and cultivate" her land, "it

would revert to jungle" (CC 379). Harkening back to the pioneer fantasies of her fiction, Rawlings decides that agricultural cultivation is the honorable use of the land, even if it requires labor that she hires others to do. Agricultural cultivation may be a central part of the pioneer myth, but as her concern over the crop-destroying Mediterranean fruit fly demonstrates, it also represents the economics of nature. The "poorest" inhabitants of North Florida risk starvation if the fly decimates the crops, but the threat is more purely financial for Rawlings and other landowners (CC 295). Ironically, given her testimony over the universality and oneness of nature, Rawlings is again separated from the poor whites by her social privilege.

In fact, her narratives' repeated depictions of the social inequality that laborers and people of color endure further undermine and problematize the biocentrism of her nature revelries. Most noticeably, Rawlings does not tend her groves, but hires "Negro pickers [who] arrive on a truck like a cage of birds, huddled together in silence" (CC 335-6). This image of labor is rather stark, the cage suggesting a prison sentence rather than the liberating opportunity to earn wages and improve one's financial status. In contrast to the heroic Cracker laborers of her fiction, Rawlings sees these black laborers as "chattering monkeys" climbing ladders to harvest the fruit, the

ladders figuratively reminding the African-American workers of the need to climb in order to surmount "the burden of their race" (CC 336). If their labor could surmount the history of oppression, perhaps they, too, could commune with wild nature as the Crackers and Rawlings do. Instead, their labor, the low wages, and the endless cycle of poverty bear out social inequality while Rawlings, a product of her social environment, appears unable or unwilling to envision a society that subscribes to her egalitarian nature beliefs. Living in such a society would mean losing her privilege and her superiority over the poor whites and poor blacks. It is far easier to talk about the leisurely enjoyment of nature, the "enchantment" of entering the orange grove, stepping "out of one world and in the mysterious heart of another" (CC 15) where one encounters "an ancient and secret magic" (CC 16). One wonders whether the African-American pickers climbing ladders and harvesting the fruit feel similarly.

An alternative approach to the racialized and romantic depictions of labor in Rawlings's works can be found in *Harvest of Shame*, a 1960 television documentary produced by CBS journalist Edward R. Murrow. The film, which calls attention to the inhumane conditions experienced by migrant farmworkers, begins in the agricultural lands of South Florida. At the start of the documentary, Murrow attempts to shock his American

viewers by showing the exploitative process by which the laborers are hired and employed. The film does not portray Florida as a touristy, tropical paradise whose exotic backdrop seems custom-made for the leisure activities of the prosperous. Instead, standing at the edge of a cultivated field with the stark geometry of the rows of crops behind him (not unlike the "geometric rhythm" [CC 16] of orange groves that Rawlings describes), Murrow presents the state as a place where deplorable labor conditions blot out the more familiar cultural representations found in Rawlings's texts. The laborers interviewed pick beans, a crop that imparts less exotic charm than citrus trees. Murrow also avoids seeing Florida in isolation: the story, he says, "begins in Florida and ends in New Jersey and New York State." He focuses on the treatment of the people who work in the fields, so that as an individual concept nature is not treated separately from human activities. Nevertheless, *Harvest of Shame* offers an alternative model for the nature-development-labor dynamic that so strongly informs Rawlings's writings.

The intersection of labor and leisure is highly problematic *Cross Creek* in the sense that Rawlings takes the physical labor needed to maintain the agricultural industry and transforms it into a leisure product in the form of her books. Rawlings closely observes the Cracker lifestyle, including the poverty

that goes along with it, and makes it a product to be purchased and enjoyed by her readers. The labor of those around her becomes the textual material that satisfies the non-Cracker's leisure activity of reading a good yarn, a transformation of labor into leisure commodity that helps create her social privilege. Rawlings views the natural environment through the lens of white rural poverty. The labor of poor whites and poor blacks enables her leisurely enjoyment of nature, which is reserved for a privileged class of people who can afford to avoid physical labor.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BEAUTY OF BLACK LABOR: WORK AND PLAY IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S TEXTS

4.1 The Cultural Value of Labor

Despite Florida's image as a tropical paradise, Zora Neale Hurston avoids touting the state's Edenic character. In fact, unlike much of the writing about Florida, Hurston's books spend minimal time describing the botanical identity of the region. When she does invoke the image of Florida as Eden, she typically undercuts the trope, revealing its cultural and gendered underpinnings as she does in the story "Sweat." There she uses the trope ironically to refashion the Eden myth as a story of African-American feminist empowerment, hardly an echo of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Eden of white tourists and black laborers. The story's African-American protagonist Delia tends her garden and earns money doing laundry for white families while she suffers the abuse of her villainous husband Sykes. A murder plan that he devises to kill his wife backfires and leads to his own death from a rattlesnake bite. She silently watches him die, the serpent having favorably assisted the woman in this retelling of the Eden myth. Nonetheless, rarely does Hurston so explicitly rely on the Edenic motif when describing Florida, because the motif's theme of paradisiacal leisure implicitly effaces the

presence and value of labor, which are of utmost importance to her.

In contrast to the many white writers who have described the state from the perspective of sightseers, Hurston situates Florida not as a mythical garden of luxuriant recreation overflowing with exotic flora and fauna but as a place of work where communities of people of color perform that labor that is simultaneously exploited, empowering, and beautiful. Whereas Rawlings maintains her privileged white status when she discusses her difficulties employing reliable domestic workers of color, Hurston refuses to write from a position of racial or socioeconomic superiority when describing the black laborers of her stories. Rawlings reinforces her class pretensions when describing the parties she throws while entertaining white visitors from the city. Those social pretensions provide an uncomfortable reminder that although she may appreciate the rural Cracker culture, she views her own social customs as more sophisticated. This racial and class discrepancy between the author and her subjects is absent in Hurston's work. Consequently we sense that her writing offers an alternative perspective on human interactions with Florida's natural environment by locating vibrant communities of laborers, who live and work close to nature, in labor camps in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Mules and Men* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Hazel Carby criticizes Hurston for relying on "a discourse of nostalgia for a rural community" (77), but the author actually uses these rural communities, in particular the rural labor of African-Americans, to provide a perspective on the natural environment which runs counter to Romanticism's nostalgic fixation on natural beauty. Although her African-American communities reap the cultural benefits of being close to nature, her depictions of nature are not reliant on the sublime. With the exception of the hurricane in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston distances her work from nature on a grand scale, instead depicting wild nature as that which is shaped and engaged by physical labor and creative storytelling. In refusing to naturalize black labor or present it as a picturesque extension of the landscape, she considers labor as an expression of cultural values and social circumstances, not the biological birthright of an inferior, mentally-stunted people. More than Rawlings, who consciously fashions herself as the literary voice of a rustic backwoods community, Hurston sees the value of rural labor while critiquing the system that exploits the laborers. Her acknowledgement of the social forces that racialize the labor system allows her writings to undermine the race- and class-based degradation of people of color traditionally associated with the frontier myth. While she recalls the Western frontier model when she emphasizes the value

of labor and privileges the man versus nature ethos, Hurston also explores the leisure activities of her laborer characters in order to avoid portraying them as emotionless beasts of burden. What results is a radically redefined Florida that is less notable for its paradisiacal nature and privileged leisure than for its communal infusion of both labor and leisure.

The African-American labor that Hurston records is stimulated by being communal and by being close to the natural environment. As recorded in the folk tale collection *Mules and Men*, the laborers' awareness of nature influences the imaginative stories they tell to each other. These nature tales recount various exploits involving mockingbirds, snakes, woodpeckers, catfish, and mosquitos as well as other animals, fish, reptiles, and insects. One story describes how the alligator got his expansive mouth; another relates how the rattlesnake received its noisy tail. Despite the sense of natural wonder that these tales playfully express, Hurston's interest in the natural environment extends beyond these oral tales into the way that the natural environment acts as a backdrop to invigorating African-American communities. Hence, in her texts, leisure and the enjoyment of nature are more communal than the solitary Romantic's observation of nature. This communal enjoyment of the outdoors is evident with the groups of people in *Mules and Men* who trade stories about

animals and who go fishing together, and the groups of people in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* who hold a funeral for a mule and who turn their field work into a source of fun. Such moments ensure that leisure is not the exclusive domain of the privileged and show that laborers are capable of enjoying the outdoors as well.

Whereas the Western frontier myth casts a wary eye toward the value of leisure, Hurston offers a vision of a Southern tropical frontier in which leisure overlaps with labor. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* portrays laborers singing and telling stories throughout the work day; *Mules and Men* depicts laborers trading stories during the work day that explain the South's racialized labor system; and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* shows laborers having fun while they work in the fields and in the jooks at night. Unlike numerous white writers who denigrate outdoor labor as an unsophisticated nature experience for brutes that pales in comparison to the "sophisticated" aesthetic observation of the natural environment, Hurston validates these labor experiences by showing how the laborers, who work and play in the natural environment, contribute the rural "raw material upon which African American culture drew in its creation" of "uniquely black and American" art forms (Patterson 131).

4.2 The Withering Vine

Ranging from the agricultural work of the nineteenth century to the industrial work of the twentieth century, the labor in Hurston's books remains closely tied to the natural environment. While agricultural fields may be absent in much of her work, the outdoor work of black men remains quite visible. Rather than tending vast acres of crops, her characters more frequently work in forests extracting turpentine from trees, cutting down trees to be used for railroad crossties, constructing rail lines across Florida, and operating the machinery at sawmills. Hurston mourns the loss of a rural way of life, because it indicates a detachment from the natural environment that, in turn, depletes Southern African-American culture. Carby's observation that *Mules and Men* "both discovers the rural folk and acts to make known and preserve a form of culture that embodies a folk consciousness" (87) could equally apply to Hurston's first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. With social changes like the Great Migration and modernity increasingly fracturing black culture by separating its physical labor from the natural environment, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* argues that African-Americans' rural labor and leisure activities, like dances, singing, storytelling, and oration, create significant cultural continuity for the African diasporic population in the South.

Jonah's Gourd Vine uses the story of John Pearson to track the growing detachment between African-American labor and the natural environment during the first decades of the twentieth century. John transitions from a rural work life that demands his outdoor physical labor to a later profession that is more cerebral and less labor-intensive. By depicting John's evolution from laborer to preacher, the narrative sees him moving from brawn to oration in what ostensibly parallels his upward progression through the ranks of society. He moves further from nature as he moves from farm work and labor camps in the forest to the burgeoning Florida town of Eatonville, a contrast that suggests what has been both lost and gained in his cultural shift. As an anthropologist invested in cultural practices, Hurston valorizes those labor communities which foster the self-actualization of African-American men who would, otherwise, struggle to find a similar social space in the South.

In her search for the ideal type of labor that empowers workers of color, Hurston tests and rejects the plantation labor system as harmful to the well-being of her young African-American protagonist. The novel initially focuses on John's agrarian lifestyle as he works for his sharecropping stepfather, the most direct contact John will have with agricultural labor. The teenage John's exceptional adult-like physique attracts the attention of several characters with his stepfather Ned saying

his stepson could be "the finest plowhand in Alabama" (JG 6). Critic Alan Brown notes that by introducing John to outdoor labor, his stepfather provides him "the means by which black boys at this time became men in the accepted meaning of the word" (79). Seemingly destined by his physique and social station to be a farmhand, John does not enjoy submitting to his stepfather's authority. After leaving his stepfather's farm, John ceases working in the cotton fields and instead performs plantation management for Mr. Pearson, a white plantation owner and his biological father. Pearson gives John a job and cares for him to an extent, but the older white man's presence also serves as a reminder of the Southern racial hierarchy that John cannot avoid. Agriculture thus solidifies John's place in the social and racial hierarchy, making the young man subordinate to white and black authority figures who oppressively dictate the direction of his life.

The novel tests a second, more affirmative form of labor when John abandons agrarian society for a time and works in an Alabama labor camp with other African-American men cutting railroad ties. In contrast to the plantation system's overwhelming hierarchy, the labor camp introduces him to a communal model of semi-independent black labor. The laborer here retains the agrarian's closeness to the natural environment, but the camp also gives the worker a degree of

freedom from the eyes of white society. In the forest swinging an ax, John reverses the effects of his biological father's paternalism by embracing physical labor once again: now he cuts crossties for the railroad and finds that he enjoys this life of hard work. Brown believes the railroad camp allows John to "[work] close to nature" transforming him into a man "who is proud of his body and who responds to its needs" (79). He discovers a taste for fighting and aggression that he has not previously shown, suggesting his desire to establish himself as a dominant personality in this community. While the railroad camp is indeed a turning point for him, it represents more than his physical awakening. Brown maintains that this labor experience awakens the self-destructive animal within the man, but John experiences a cultural awakening as well.

John's enjoyment of the labor camp is in part due to his inclusion in a community of black workers who, because of their location in the forest, possess a degree of cultural independence from the watchful eyes of white Southerners. White society's avoidance of the forested wilderness gives the black community a chance to thrive. The cultural expressions that are restricted to occasional nighttime parties in the plantation communities can be enjoyed on a daily basis in the camp. The verbal and musical arts are prominent among the laborers in the form of work songs and storytelling. By fighting and telling

stories, John can entertain the other men in the community while demonstrating his individual supremacy over them (JG 61). Hurston depicts the laborers, all of whom are men, as hypermasculine as they were in the agrarian community earlier in the novel: they define each other by feats of strength, their willingness to fight, and the women they romance. The labor community, thus, allows these African-American men access to competition as well as a space in which white society does not constantly remind them of their racial and class identities.

After he arrives in less-agrarian Florida, a land Hurston describes as having "no mules and cotton" (JG 103), John embraces physical work and leisure in a second railroad camp. In addition to "swinging a nine-pound hammer and grunting over a lining bar" (JG 105), John enjoys the leisure of the "big camp" with the numerous "hammer-muscling men, singers, dancers, liars, fighters, bluffers and lovers" (JG 107). But once he relocates to Eatonville, John's identity as a man of labor begins to disintegrate as he becomes a preacher, which fuels his social class ascent away from physical work. At the same time, settling in the growing town strains his relationship to the natural environment. Brown sees his self-destruction increasing because of his relocation from the frontier to the more civilized Eatonville which demands conformity and which seeks to repress his wild instincts. But John is also a figure who

contributes to the civilizing of this place in his side job as carpenter and land developer (JG 109). Eatonville not only suffocates his freedom, but it encourages him to renounce the physical labor of his happier days and subscribe to the non-labored ambitions of Southern white and black society. Although he dabbles in carpentry work, John's primary occupation is being a successful preacher removed from the communal life of physical labor. His years of preaching recounted in the second half of the novel are clouded by his infidelities that eventually lead to him losing his church. But his third marriage to a woman who owns rental properties ensures his wealth and confirms his comfortable life far removed from the labor of his youth.

Even though John achieves financial success by forgoing a life of hard outdoor labor, Hurston suggests that the tragedy of his life hinges on his departure from the rural labor communities of his youth. Certain elements of African-American culture, she implies, run the risk of being lost when people like John turn their backs on rural customs and rural communities that implicitly provide a connection to the natural environment. Two passages in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* point to the importance of maintaining continuity with African origins and living close to the natural environment in communities that resemble the rural communities of West Africa.

Early in the book, a lengthy passage describes an outdoor party that John attends with black families who work on neighboring plantations, the sort of people who perform the work that John will eventually opt not to do. Hurston uses the rural party as an opportunity to incorporate an anthropological description of the lyrics that the partygoers sing and the music being played on the drums. She contends that through the instruments, rhythms, and rural setting, "Congo gods [are] talking in Alabama" (JG 30). The drumming recalls the African drum Kata-Kumba and the tale of the African slave Cuffy, who says rhythm is his mother and covertly hides a drum inside his shins. The music and dance of this rural party confirm Southern African-Americans as "the end-link in a chain that stretches in time back through the West Indies to West Africa" (Collins 51). The diasporic spirit of the party reappears later in the novel when Hurston associates the rhythm of the African drumming with John's work in the railroad camp. She writes, "All day long it was strain, sweat, and rhythm" (JG 105), suggesting a cultural parallel between the rhythm of the African drumming and the rhythm of rural labor. Hurston attempts to capture the rhythm of the laborers driving spikes into the ground, uniting the rhythm of the labor and the words of the work songs the men chant. She verbalizes the "rhythmic shaking of the nine-hundred-pound rail" as the men set it in place, "Ahshack-uh-

lack-uh-lack-uh-lack-uh-lack-uh-lack-uh-hanh!" (JG 106), the onomatopoeia suggesting how the labor stimulates not only the men's work songs but the creativity of the author's words as well. Are these stabilizing and inspirational African roots vulnerable to being forgotten, the book asks, if African-Americans move beyond the customs and labor of rural communities that maintain those cultural origins? Will it be possible to preserve these rural African roots in a Northern urban environment?

A later passage depicting the Great Migration of African-Americans to the North following the First World War suggests that, indeed, this cultural continuity is jeopardized as rural communities become more sparsely populated. The anonymous voice of a black veteran returning from the First World War expresses his unwillingness to settle for a life of outdoor labor: "Ah ain't goin' back tuh no farm no mo'. Ah don't mean tuh say, 'Git up' tuh nary 'nother mule lessen he's setting down in mah lap….Done done too much bookoo plowing already!" (JG 149). Though he refers to the kind of farm work that does not appeal to John either, the speaker's departure from the South speaks to the younger generation's search for a better life that does not involve rural communities and outdoor labor. In Northern cities, labor is more likely to occur indoors in factories, and communities of men of color working in the natural environment

are unlikely. The North may be "the land of promise" (JG 151), but in a book that restricts itself to Alabama and Florida, this appellation sounds threatening. The "promise" of the North, it appears, undermines the cultural stability of rural African-Americans in the South.

As central as the rural environment is to maintaining cultural continuity for African-Americans, Hurston also recognizes that the natural environment stabilizes these Southern black communities. Nevertheless, she does not focus on the natural environment as a source of beauty as other writers might, but as a place that fosters black culture.

4.3 Labor Exploitation

Rather than duplicating *Jonah's Gourd Vine*'s trajectory in which empowering labor precedes comfortable middle-class unhappiness, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reverses course by liberating its protagonist Janie and her lover Tea Cake from stifling, judgmental Eatonville and sending them to an invigorating labor camp in the agricultural fields of the Everglades. Paul Outka has shown how the novel's pre-Everglades sections comment on the "naturalized trauma of slavery" and use the deaths of Matt Bonner's mule and Janie's second husband, Joe Starks, to allow Janie to "embrace…the pastoral in the figure of Tea Cake" (192). While some critics like Carby accuse Hurston of romanticizing the hard work in the Everglades fields, the

novel actually provides a range of experiences and emotions for the laborers, and ultimately, she uses the hurricane and its aftermath to demonstrate the white landowners' exploitation of the laborers. As in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, working close to nature fosters a community in which people of color can enjoy themselves. Jan Cooper points to the Everglades labor camp as an "agrarian ideal…a community in which all members have a well-defined role and are fundamentally at harmony with the luxuriant natural world surrounding them" (66). But unlike the earlier novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* directly acknowledges the inharmonious poverty of the migrant workers and fosters more criticism of the labor system that employs these workers without offering them a chance to improve their social station.

Before they arrive in the Everglades, Tea Cake tells Janie that life in the fields and camps on the muck will provide them a life of labor in which they can live and love freely. "Folks," he says, "don't do nothin' down dere but make money and fun and foolishness" (TE 128). Indeed, Laura Doyle observes that "improved labour relations [are] the distinguishing mark of Janie's relationship with Tea Cake," because "he looks on her as a partner in play *and* work" (her emphasis, 131). He promises enjoyment, and indeed, Janie and Tea Cake's romance develops there. Very quickly, though, we realize that this life of labor is demanding for many workers who must compete with each another

for accommodations. The powerful landowners provide little support for the workers whose numbers swell when the work season begins. Overcrowding becomes a problem with only one place to bathe as Tea Cake notes, "'Tain't nowhere near enough rooms" (TE 129). After all the beds have been claimed, the remaining workers pay a fee to "the man whose land they slept on" in order to pass the night outdoors around campfires (TE 132). Janie and Tea Cake rush to claim a house since the burden is on the workers to survive with negligible assistance from the landowners, a point that the hurricane will reinforce.

With the exceptions of Janie and Tea Cake, the laborers suffer from dire poverty. Arriving penniless, they come to the labor camp "limping in with their shoes and sore feet from walking" (TE 130). They are "[p]ermanent transients with no attachments and tired looking men…hurrying in to pick beans," "[p]eople ugly from ignorance and broken from being poor" (TE 131). This group of people would likely quibble with Tea Cake's assessment of the Everglades as a place for money, fun, and foolishness. Nonetheless, despite their destitution, the Everglades laborers experience moments of leisure and levity. By juxtaposing the migrant workers' poverty with the jook's nighttime leisure, Hurston implies that the workers socialize with each other as a way to find relief from their material hardships. The work day may be hard, but in the social spaces

of the jooks, the laborers express a range of emotions, "[d]ancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour" (TE 131). Even with the promise of emotional escape, the jooks are not free of the irritation of labor as the soil from the day's work "[clings] to bodies…biting the skin like ants" (TE 131). The blues music that serenades the revelers further suggests the hardships of the day's labor extend into the night's leisure.

In much the same way that John enjoys his freedom in the labor camps in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, this impoverished community of laborers offers Janie a chance to assert her identity without having to worry about the judgment of her African-American neighbors in town. Whereas Eatonville society polices Janie's behavior and appearance, prohibiting her from participating in the men's arguments on the porch of the general store, in the Everglades she can join the men's conversations and "listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to" (TE 134). She learns to "tell big stories herself from listening to the rest" (TE 134), showing that the community of the labor camp provides a space for her to explore her social identity. Maureen McKnight points out that Janie's willingness to "move classes—from upper middle to working class" allows her to enjoy the labor community of the Everglades and "[work] toward autonomy" (101). With his effervescent personality, Tea Cake

also stimulates the working environment, contributing to the independent spirit of Janie and the other laborers. "[L]aughing and full of fun," he "kept everybody laughing in the bean field" (TE 132). When Janie joins him to work in the fields, their "romping and playing…behind the boss's back…got the whole field to playing off and on" (TE 133). This playful, carefree behavior demonstrates how the community's conflation of labor and leisure is a subversively liberating act.

In response to the happiness that the laborers exhibit, Hurston uses the climactic hurricane, the novel's symbolically-loaded display of sublime nature, to confirm the hardship and exploitation of their lives. Martyn Bone's discussion of the novel shows how "the storm's aftermath foregrounds the *social* reality of Southern white power," especially with the segregation of dead bodies (his emphasis, 765). In fact, Hurston slowly builds to this "social reality" before and during the storm as well. Outka observes that in a "more conventional white [novel]…the tremendous hurricane that blows in and disrupts the pastoral community would perform the iconic function of the natural sublime, providing the sort of climactic experience" that verifies Tea Cake's heroism and Janie's love for him (193-4). Instead, by signifying the economic and social forces with which laboring people of color such as the migrant workers must contend, the hurricane suggests how Hurston sees

the exploitation of labor as a central force that her characters battle even though many of them do not recognize the seriousness until it is too late. More literally, the storm poses a threat that generates different reactions from the white and black characters. Distinguished by their different housing accommodations, the black "folks in the quarters" and the white "people in the big houses" feel unconcern toward the impending storm (TE 158). Hurston writes, "The folks let the people do the thinking. If the castles thought themselves secure, the cabins needn't worry. Their decision was already made as always" (TE 158). The different connotations of fortified "castles" and vulnerable "cabins" underscore the varying degrees of protection enjoyed by the landowners and the workers. While the initial statement suggests the laborers are to blame for relying on the arrogant white landowners, the final statement emphasizes that the laborers' behavior reflects a systemic inequality that they have internalized.

As a group of people located at the bottom of this social hierarchy, the workers accept the landowners' decision not to flee, tragically failing to take into account the privilege and power afforded those landowners because of their race. Rachel Stein maintains that the storm upsets "the normal order, causing all sorts of frightful reversals and transgressions….in which boundaries between classes, races, sexes, human and nature,

living and dead, no longer hold ("Remembering" 42). Yet when Janie and Tea Cake are fleeing for safety, they continue to experience inferior treatment at the hands of white society. Arriving at the bridge at Six Mile Bend, an elevation point that could provide safety from the flooding, Janie and Tea Cake find it crowded with white people. With "no more room" (TE 164) along the elevated land, the two characters must continue trudging through the dangerous floodwaters. The scene encapsulates the disadvantages, sometimes life-threatening, with which people of color must contend because of the unjust Southern racial hierarchy. By extension, the image of Janie, Tea Cake, and another laborer Motor Boat walking with locked arms against the force of the storm, struggling to move forward and to "hold together" (TE 161), better signifies the laborers' refusal to "engage in the (white) narratives of combat and self-definition such a storm invites" (Outka 196) and their on-going fight for survival against overpowering natural forces and social prejudices. Rather than upsetting the social order, the hurricane serves to expose the migrant workers' dangerous exposure to the Southern racial hierarchy. Historically, the 1928 hurricane that inspired the novel's storm killed thousands of people, the vast majority of whom were migrant workers of color (Bone 767). After the storm, the burial of the white and black corpses further emphasizes the social inequality of the

South that the laborers must face. Not only do the white authorities force Tea Cake to help bury the bodies, but they instruct him to separate the white and black corpses. The white corpses are given pine coffins for burial while the black corpses are sprinkled with quicklime and placed in a mass grave (TE 170), a difference that speaks to the general disrespect afforded people of color in the South like the migrant laborers who toil in the Everglades.

Although the Everglades episode gives Hurston a chance to consider the complicated social dynamics of labor exploitation in which the struggling workers experience moments of happiness and enjoyment amidst the larger system of depravity, her critique of the relationship between race and Southern labor is more explicit in *Mules and Men*. A set of folk tales nestled within a narrative frame describing Hurston's travels through the South collecting stories, *Mules and Men* addresses the hardships of a labor lifestyle that *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* largely downplay. Whereas the majority of Hurston's work indirectly speaks to the issue of labor exploitation, *Mules and Men* acknowledges the social power structure that racializes Southern labor by relating stories that reveal an acute awareness of the harshness of outdoor work as well as commenting on the social context of black labor. David Nicholls contends that the stories that the laborers at

the Everglades Cypress Lumber Company tell one another "form a discourse of dissent relating to the conditions of labor in the company town" (467). He discusses the morning banter between the workers who, while waiting for their white supervisor to arrive at the work site, express their "resentment for the straw-boss in this camp," representative of labor camps across the South (473).

When the book's laborers/storytellers recount several versions of a tale explaining how hard work outdoors causes men to adopt the easier life of a preacher, it becomes clear that the African-American community recognizes physical labor as exhausting and envisions a less taxing alternative. Speaking for the larger African-American community, the storytellers use humor to subvert white Southern society's belief that people of color are "natural" physical laborers. Another of the laborers' conversations discusses the racial dynamics of the labor system revealing that not only are they aware of their exploitation, but that their stories and songs reflect their perseverance in the face of these oppressive social forces. Hurston listens to the workers' conversation while accompanying the group of men to work in hopes of collecting some stories since "they lied [told stories] a plenty while they worked" (MM 66). Two of the workers casually debate who is responsible for the preponderance of black labor: one man believes "God made de world and de white

folks made work" while another man disagrees: "Yeah, dey made work but they didn't make us do it….We brought dat on ourselves" (MM 74). One of the anecdotes that follows this conversation explains how white people typically push hard work onto black men who in turn push the work onto black women, a point that anticipates Nanny's comment in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that the African-American woman is "de mule of de world" (TE 14).

A final anecdote demonstrates a profound awareness of the racialized power structure that governs the allocation of labor between whites and blacks. It tells of a black man and a white man who are each claiming two parcels that God has placed further down the road. The black man outruns the white man and claims the larger parcel assuming its size makes it more valuable than the smaller parcel: the larger parcel, he discovers, contains a shovel, an ax, a plow and other tools for labor. The white man's smaller parcel contains a pen and ink. The story concludes with the moral: "So ever since then de nigger been out in de hot sun, usin' his tools and de white man been sittin' up figgerin', ought's a ought, figger's a figger; all for de white man, none for the nigger" (MM 75). This anecdote, blunt in its recognition of how white Southern society distributes power along racial and class lines, is a rare moment when Hurston explicitly includes commentary on the machinations

of the social system which relies on race to determine who deserves to do physical labor and who deserves to profit from the labor of others.

4.4 Black (Labor) Is Beautiful

Many literary works about Florida aestheticize the natural environment hinting at the dominant allure of exotic tropical nature. In place of aestheticizing nature, Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, aestheticizes the labor of African-American men treating the natural environment where they work as little more than an afterthought. This aestheticized rendering of labor, however, does not negate the incisive social commentary of *Mules and Men*. In fact, her autobiography's portrayal of labor valorizes the African-American men who perform outdoor labor as she presents their work in lyrical, heroic terms in order to help the reader to see the significance of these men's work. She is clear that she wants the reader to notice and appreciate the too-often overlooked work of these men. *Dust Tracks on a Road* does not exactly register indignation over worker exploitation: indeed, how can the labor be exploitative when it is aesthetically and culturally attractive? On the contrary, she embraces the aesthetic and social value of this kind of masculine outdoor labor, reminding the reader that although society may frequently overlook these men's work, they perform labor that plays a crucial part in the

economic production of goods. In this way, they perform necessary labor that other people refuse to do.

Hurston's aestheticizing of black labor elevates the work of these men into mythical dimensions. During a section in the autobiography in which she travels in Florida collecting folk material, she describes black bodies performing the work of sawmilling, phosphate mining, and railroad construction. Less concerned with humanizing these workers as she did in her earlier works, Hurston's lyrical descriptions romanticize the movements of these laborers, objectifying the power of these black bodies. Hence, she commemorates the men who fell trees with the appellation "poets of the swinging blade" (DT 147). The movement of their bodies expresses an aesthetic beauty that is both masculine and mechanical: "The brief, but infinitely graceful, dance of body and axe-head as it lifts over the head in a fluid arc, dances in air and rushes down to bite into the tree, all in beauty" (DT 147). The description's emphasis on the natural beauty of the laboring black bodies recalls Hurston's description of a swamp crew in *Mules and Men* in which their ax-work again resembles dancing: "Not only do they chop rhythmically, but they do a beautiful double twirl above their heads with the ascending axe before it begins that accurate and bird-like descent….It is a magnificent sight to watch the marvelous co-ordination between the handsome black torsos and

the twirling axes" (MM 66). Given the grace and aesthetics of their labor, these men take on superhuman proportions, their "sweating black bodies, muscled like gods, working to feed the hunger of the great tooth," the cutting blade of the sawmill (DT 147). Notwithstanding the romanticized tone, Hurston finds the beauty of these men's work, seeing their outdoor labor as an aesthetic connection with the environment that does not hinge on social privilege or the passive observation of nature. So committed is she to redefining the natural experience that Hurston even depicts the industrial sawmill blade's cutting a log in the natural terms of a "lion making its kill" (DT 147).

Although she aestheticizes the beauty and danger of this laborious life, Hurston provides a counter to this tendency by highlighting the cultural and economic importance of this work. If the labor is not purely a reflection of an exploitative system, the workers' willingness to perform labor that others refuse to do reveals the workers to be crucial parts in the economic machine. Not only does society take their labor for granted, but the undesirability of the work means that labor camps are occasionally populated with "malefactors" notwithstanding their criminal activities (DT 146). Hurston remarks, "The wheels of industry must move, and if these men don't do the work, who is there to do it?" (DT 146), a sentiment that pays tribute to the laborers while, like the anecdotes of

Mules and Men, hinting at the social processes which determine what group of people performs labor. Unlike Harriet Beecher Stowe's question in *Palmetto Leaves*, "Who shall do the work for us?" (279), which projects a social hierarchy in which laborers are inherently subservient, Hurston's question champions these African-American laborers as individuals whose work is an economic necessity.

The closest Hurston comes to denouncing the labor system as exploitative is when she focuses on the workers' detachment from the final product, created with the raw materials that the workers extract, that reaches the shelves of stores hundreds of miles from the labor camp. They may be necessary parts in the production process, but in this detachment from the goods they help to produce, the laborers are also desensitized cogs in an economic machine. The phosphate miners dirty themselves "to make rich land in far places, so that people can eat" (147). Their involvement with the process is overlooked, Hurston suggests, even while it is essential to ensuring the wealth and creature comforts of the distant consumers. In perhaps the most striking description of the detachment between labor and marketplace, she contrasts the men extracting turpentine from pine trees with the products they help produce. The worker's "swift, slanting stroke to bleed the trees for gum" results in "Paint, explosives, marine stores, flavors, perfumes, tone of a

violin bow, and many other things which the black men who bleed the trees never heard about" (148). Acknowledging the laborers' exploitable position in this economic dynamic, this statement rivals the anecdotes of *Mules and Men* for its incisiveness.

The blood and sweat of these men, whom Hurston has humanized and allowed us to understand as individuals in her other works, produce goods that white society purchases without recognizing the labor that went into the creation of the goods. It is a striking contrast with the other writers I have examined in this project. The other writers' need to aestheticize nature results in depictions of labor that are either racist (*Palmetto Leaves*) or romanticized (*The Yearling* and *Cross Creek*), and yet Hurston, who trumpets the work of the marginalized men and women and allows us to see the significance of their toil, rarely aestheticizes nature in the Romantic tones so common to Stowe and Rawlings. On the rare occasion that she does foreground the beauty of nature, she uses it to accentuate a character's inner change, as when Janie is "summoned to behold a revelation" by observing the lyrical and erotic beauty of the pear tree (TE 11). The revelatory scene with the pear tree, as Stein says, "conflates the sexual and the sacred, and locates both within nature" ("Remembering" 40). Hurston's highly charged use of the pear tree stands out, perhaps, because she so rarely stresses the beauty of nature. Instead, as McKnight observes, nature

serves “as an ahistorical, apolitical form,” “the backdrop against which utopian revelations are made visible” (86). This allows Hurston to focus on the lives and customs of the men and women in rural communities without allowing the beauty of the environment to overwhelm the human subjects.

Were Hurston to aestheticize the natural environment of Florida on a regular basis, she would fall prey to the Edenic trope which assumes a life of leisure lived entirely free of the hardships of labor. Clearly, her work strives to reveal that not only are there people of color laboring in “tropical” Florida, but their lives are a humanized mixture of enjoyment, resentment, leisure, and labor. The foregrounding of aestheticized nature and correspondingly the Edenic trope would only serve to detract from her efforts to explore the complex overlap of labor and leisure in rural African-American communities.

CHAPTER FIVE

EPILOGUE: LABOR AND LEISURE IN THE MODERN-DAY FLORIDA THEME PARK

Since the late-twentieth century, Florida's tourism industry, especially its theme parks and resorts, has marketed its leisure activities as possessing a romanticized relationship to labor and nature, not unlike what is found in the texts of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and Zora Neale Hurston. The satirical crime writer and journalist Carl Hiaasen's 1991 novel *Native Tongue* evinces a familiarity with the tourist industry's romanticized leisure-labor-nature dynamic while lampooning the destructive artifice of the Florida theme park industry, particularly its wanton disregard for its employees and the indigenous natural environment. The novel depicts a fictional Walt Disney World competitor named the Amazing Kingdom of Thrills, a theme park located on the environmentally fragile Key Largo. The initial catalyst for the plot is the theft of two endangered blue-tongue mango voles, which are eventually revealed to be a common vole species whose tongues are dyed blue by Francis Kingsbury, the park's corrupt mobster owner. Kingsbury plans to expand his recreation kingdom by building a golf course until this project is undermined by an environmentalist group, a rebellious former Florida governor who lives off the grid, and a couple of Amazing Kingdom employees,

all of whom heroically and subversively object to the further endangerment of the Key Largo natural environment.

Hiaasen's Amazing Kingdom is a blatant parody of the artificiality of actual theme parks like those at Walt Disney World that project an image of happy employees, delighted customers, and pleasant surroundings.[11] In Disney parlance, theme park employees are "Cast Members," and their jobs are "roles." This terminology romanticizes their labor inflating the value of the tedious menial work of a low-paying job performed for a multibillion-dollar global corporation. Hiaasen's critical eye is drawn to this discrepancy between the theme park's image and treatment of its employees. When Carrie Lanier, a female employee in a Robbie Raccoon costume, is injured during the theft of the voles, her superiors will not allow her to remove the headpiece since that would admit the artificiality of the costume. "It's gotta be ninety-eight degrees out here," one of the tourists marvels while watching the injured human-sized raccoon. "You'd think they'd get the poor guy out of that raccoon getup" (NT 11). Later, Carrie complains that the costume "weighs a ton….It's about a hundred

[11] In a similar vein, Andrew Ross's *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Property Value of Disney's New Town* recounts a year he spent living in the theme-park-influenced and Disney-constructed city of Celebration. Andrew Blechman's book *Leisureville: Adventures in a World Without Children* discusses the strictly planned retirement communities found in Florida, among other places. The gulf between the business of leisure and disappointing reality, so central to Hiaasen's work, is also a major theme in Karen Russell's novel *Swamplandia!*

twenty degrees inside, too. OSHA made them put in air conditioners, but they're always broken" (NT 32). She relates the story of another Amazing Kingdom costumed employee, a veteran of the Disney parks where he learned the trade, who died from overheating in a costume. The comfort of the employee is, of course, totally overlooked by park management who wants to preserve the illusion that the costumed characters are real. Carrie laughs off the company's devotion to the illusion, pointing out she has been not-so-innocently groped by children and men. Told that her work playing a costumed character makes many children happy, she expresses embarrassment and an unwillingness to let her parents know her line of work.

Unconvinced by the shallow, contrived jargon of the company's script, the labor force does not pride itself on the fanciful work of operating a theme park; instead, the workers see their labor as menial, pitiful, and dehumanizing. Leisure exists here in a profitable vacuum: the tourists wander mindlessly about the park, accepting the "many colorful and entertaining distractions" (NT 19) without any thought about the labor that makes their leisure possible. As if to underscore this distinction, one of the Amazing Kingdom's managers advises that, when driving golf carts around the park, "If you're going to crash, aim for a building…or even a park employee. Anything

but a paying customer" (NT 19). The tourist and, by extension, leisure are at the top of the food chain here.

Native Tongue also shows that nature is at the mercy of leisure in the business of Florida's tourism. The corrupt park owner Kingsbury wants to build a golf course development, a challenge since the building area is a protected nature preserve. He finds legal loopholes, pays bribery money, and promises housing units in order to get his project approved, but the resistance force in the novel undermines his plans by creating bad publicity for his company. They manufacture a story about a "hepatitis epidemic among Uncle Ely's Elves" at the theme park (NT 291), an ingenious ploy that forces the tourists to consider the consequences of their leisure activities. In the comic tradition, the novel ends with the vindication of the natural environment: Kingsbury's theme park is destroyed by the rogue ex-governor and the golf course development is halted with both places eventually becoming part of a nature preserve. The fantasy of the novel's ending is not replicated in Hiaasen's writings about Disney's real-life treatment of nature. In *Team Rodent*, his critique of the Disney Company's public persona and business dealings, he recounts the appearance of black vultures at Disney World in the late 1980s. While he acknowledges they serve a valuable ecological purpose, the birds were "deemed disruptive of the Disney ambience" around

the theme parks and hotels (TR 70). The company and a number of its employees were charged with taking illegal measures to rid the property of these birds. For Hiaasen, this episode underscores Disney's (and perhaps the entire tourism industry's) belief that "Nature is nothing but trouble. Wild creatures don't get with the program. They've got their own agenda" (TR 72).

At least one Florida hotel has managed to recreate a romanticized version of the Florida environment that equals the absurdity of anything found in Hiaasen's work. The Gaylord Palms Resort in Orlando is a sprawling hotel that embraces the artificiality associated with Disney's aesthetic but uses it to exoticize various regions of Florida. In a nearly five-acre atrium, the Gaylord Palms features recreations of areas throughout the state including St. Augustine, Key West, and the Everglades. In addition to a replica of the Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine and an indoor bay replete with sailboats in the Key West section, the hotel is home to thousands of real and artificial plants, live alligators, snakes, and fish. The Gaylord Palms is the ultimate sanitization—which is to say the ultimate romanticization—of labor and leisure in the "tropical" Florida environment. The breadth of Florida myth can be found here: the intermingling of the mythical Fountain of Youth with the actual colonial history of Spanish rule, the laidback island

leisure associated with the Jimmy Buffet brand, and the rustic outdoor lifestyle of an Everglades frontier wilderness. In recreating these various archetypal Florida settings, the hotel's architects and builders have accomplished the decidedly postmodern task of recreating "Florida" in Florida.

These recreations of Florida regions are every bit as mythical as a Tarzan movie's depiction of an actual jungle environment. For every indigenous sabal palm tree planted in the hotel's atrium, there are dozens of exotic (literally, introduced) plants that populate this recreation of Florida's landscape. With its reptiles in glass cases and a steakhouse restaurant in a faux weathered shack, the Everglades section resembles a zoo and fishing camp more than the National Park's famed River of Grass. Hotel guests navigate the Everglades space using the kind of boardwalks found on nature trails, but the labor associated with farming, fishing, and hunting in the Everglades is neatly sidestepped. It is the muck of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* filtered through theme park fantasy. The outdoors are indoors. Air-conditioning keeps the wetlands at a comfortable temperature. Hurston's characters never had it so good. The hotel's Everglades represent a mixture of Rawlings's rustic fantasy and Stowe's fascination with Edenic flora and fauna. But it does not capture anything remotely "real," which is perhaps unsurprising if Hiaasen's writings about the tourism

industry are any indication. In this resort setting, the confluence of labor, leisure, and nature defines the tropical atmosphere as it has for many writers throughout Florida’s history. Given the task of recreating Florida’s environments, the land developers and landscape architects of the Gaylord Palms Resort offer a Florida defined by exotic palm trees native to Asia, Jimmy Buffet lyrics, and a Disney World aesthetic. In so doing, these designers follow what so many writers have done when confronted with the Florida landscape: they see it not as it is, but as they want it to be.

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