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## Mapping Black and Brown L.A.: Zoot Suit Riots as Spatial Subtext in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*

THE VIOLENT CLASHES THAT TOOK PLACE ON THE streets of Los Angeles from June 3–10, 1943—collectively referred to as the “Zoot Suit Riots”—were enabled by the city’s unique history of metro-regional development. As previous scholars have suggested, though many view L.A. as a quintessentially urban region—a reputation perpetuated by its history of urban-style riots—Los Angeles’ fragmented and sprawling pattern might more aptly be described as the geographic inevitability of a suburban-style investment in the ideologies of privatization and racial segregation.<sup>1</sup> From imperial conquest to contemporary development, race has framed the vision of what Los Angeles should be and for whom it would be a “promised land.” Margaret Marsh writes that “the white, middle-class, midwestern Protestants who wrested Los Angeles from its original settlers had the opportunity to create the kind of city that they believed represented the hopes and dreams of people like themselves. Their world view, which in the words of one historian ‘everywhere dominated the layout of greater Los Angeles,’ was suburban” (165). Beginning in the 1920s, this tide of white, middle-class migrants transformed Los Angeles into “one of the most ‘Anglo’ of all American metropolises—overwhelmingly ‘white’ and native-born” (Abu-Lughod 134).

But in the 1930s and 1940s, the displacement of working-class families by the Dust Bowl and an influx of African American migrants, primarily though not exclusively from the south, mitigated this middle-class “Anglo-cizing” of Los Angeles. Describing the effect of World War II on the city’s population, historian Josh Sides notes, “Between

1940 and 1946, more than 70,000 African Americans moved to Los Angeles, causing a 109-percent increase in the city's black population" (252). The creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee and the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 were perhaps the two most significant factors inspiring migration to Los Angeles. The FEPC was created on June 25, 1941 when President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802. The order "barred discrimination in war industries and became the impetus for many African Americans to migrate to war production centers." Undoubtedly, the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941 had the more far-reaching effect. The ensuing "military conscription . . . created a desperate labor shortage" (*ibid.*) and unprecedented opportunities for African Americans seeking work in the defense industries. Certainly, some industries resisted the policies of the FEPC, engaged in discriminatory practices, and restricted African Americans to the most menial jobs, but the promise of change and opportunity drastically altered the population of Los Angeles. "By 1950," according to Eric Avila, the black population "reached 171,209, giving Los Angeles the West's largest concentration of African Americans" (30). As a result of the sudden changes to L.A.'s demographics, "racial lines began to harden and a formidable array of forces had the practical effect of herding African-Americans into designated areas of the city. The factor of intense, forced residential segregation contributed more than anything else to the deterioration of the quality of black life in Los Angeles" (Anderson 342).

Though segregation persisted as a deeply embedded aspect of Los Angeles' wartime geography, those who could not afford the economic exclusivity of racially segregated suburbs encountered a terrain of fluid boundaries in which border transgressions occurred on sidewalks and streetcars as part of the rhythm of day-to-day living.<sup>2</sup> This fluidity is the essential spatial characteristic for the fighting that took place in 1943 between white servicemen, Mexican Americans, and African Americans, violence made possible by the uneasy borders between racially, ethnically, and economically segregated neighborhoods. Comparing Los Angeles to the metro-regions of New York and Chicago, Janet Abu-Lughod writes that the city's "pattern of development, which, instead of spreading gradually outward from a single center, was fragmented almost from the start into a crazy quilt stitched out of literally dozens of small towns and independently formed subdivisions, nestling in clusters

that were not necessarily contiguous" (134). This "crazy quilt" laid the groundwork, literally, for the riots. As a physical conflict and spatial transgression, the Zoot Suit Riots attested to the intrinsic tensions of segregated living in Los Angeles and belied the cartographic abstractions of space that appear to isolate neighborhoods, races, and ethnicities.

This article examines Los Angeles' history of wartime violence in light of the metro-region's unique pattern of segregated development. I read Chester Himes' World War II-era novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* against the media response to the Zoot Suit Riots, paying particular attention to coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and Himes' essay "Zoot Riots Are Race Riots," which he published in the July 1943 issue of *The Crisis*. The conflicts that swept through the city in late-May and early-June 1943 were the culmination of frequent, smaller scale clashes between white servicemen, police officers, and African and Mexican Americans living throughout the greater Los Angeles area.<sup>3</sup> Luis Alvarez, who dates the origins of the conflict back to "the mid-1930s" (157), notes that "the confrontation between servicemen and zoot suiters was . . . fueled by their routine contact around the city" (158). Perhaps the most significant catalyst for the Zoot Suit Riots, and the greatest source for this "routine contact," was the construction of the National Reserve Armory in 1940 in the Mexican American district of Chavez Ravine. "The mostly Mexican American, working-class residents of Chavez Ravine lived separately in a very different cultural and economic world than the white, middle-class officers who staffed the training school," writes Eduardo Obregón Pagán. Citing the symbolic function of the site, he adds, "The armory furthermore looked every bit the frontier outpost standing watch over the surrounding enclaves of the local population" ("Los Angeles Geopolitics" 233).

Pagán's provocative image invokes the central political tension of the Zoot Suit Riots: the conflation of the war abroad and the war at home in a U.S. city where the desire to define a white national identity found an easy symbol of otherness in the non-white "zoot suiter." As Alvarez posits, "zoot suiters were a lightning rod for popular conversations about the success or failure of the war effort and, ultimately, the boundaries of the wartime national polity" (2). Questions of identity, nationalism, and the limits of government to police its own citizens prove central both to Himes' response to the riots and his conception

of L.A.'s wartime geography. *If He Hollers* draws upon the threat of more pervasive, violent eruptions in the metro-region—echoed in Bob Jones' reference to the Zoot Suit Riots and his own legitimate fears of mob violence and police brutality—to frame an ongoing, mutually constitutive struggle between the homogenizing lens of a white imperialist worldview and the repressed, differential spaces and borderlands of Los Angeles. I see in Himes' work what the philosopher Henri Lefebvre calls the “*violence intrinsic to abstraction*” (289), the deceptive “*transparency*” (287) that creates the illusion of a cohesive, easily categorized and managed understanding of space by obscuring more complex, on-the-ground conflicts and differences.<sup>4</sup> Himes' work, like the riots themselves, disrupts that illusion.

As I will discuss in the next section, one of the more striking conflicts to emerge in response to the Zoot Suit Riots centers upon whether or not politicians and writers acknowledged the “racial” basis of the riots. Though most historians agree that the riots began as isolated encounters between white servicemen and Mexican American zoot suiters in the Alpine barrio and near the Armory, the fighting gradually expanded until, near the end of the rioting, cohorts of white civilians and soldiers were venturing into East Los Angeles, downtown L.A., and Watts in search of non-white Angelenos, zoot-suited or otherwise. The worst night of fighting occurred on June 7th when, as Eduardo Pagán documents, a combination of soldiers and civilians “divided into two groups. The first pushed southward along Central toward the predominantly African American neighborhoods in Watts, and the second drove eastward into the predominantly Mexican neighborhoods in East Los Angeles” (*Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon* 179). The racial “litmus test” that led white mobs to attack anyone with dark skin seems obvious, but there was intense resistance by the authorities and in the popular press to label the “Zoot War”—as the *L.A. Times* dubbed the fighting—a “race riot.”

This resistance can, in part, be linked to the historical patterns of segregation in Los Angeles. Though Los Angeles would become a model for postwar development in metro-regions across the United States, on the ground during the 1930s and 1940s, L.A. challenged the oppositional racial geography that pits black inner cities against white outer-ring suburbs.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite the spatial and racial challenge Los Angeles posed, the recalcitrance of U.S. racism forced perceptions

of the region back into an urban/suburban, black/white frame. This perception clearly informs the elision of race in the mainstream media, as well as the downplaying of attacks against African Americans. Mexican Americans introduced a third term that disrupted the prevailing binary mode of thinking, limiting race riots to confrontations between whites and blacks. To label the Zoot Suit Riots “race riots” would be to call attention to the fragile equipoise of L.A.’s borderlands and the way the city’s segregated pattern of development broadened and exacerbated racial hostilities within the domestic wartime culture. In short, to echo Margaret Marsh, the omission of race as a term attempts to preserve, at least for white Angelenos, the “world view” of Los Angeles as a “promised land.”

Chester Himes understood that acknowledging the racial aspect of the riots jeopardized precisely this worldview, and I will show how his definitive stance in “Zoot Riots are Race Riots” concerning the racist nature of the attacks leads him to the racial and spatial subtext of his novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. In both works, Himes deconstructs the homogenizing lens of the white worldview by exposing the fraught heterogeneity of the multi-racial, multi-ethnic city. Central to this deconstruction are the border negotiations and transgressions that occur in ambiguous spaces, such as barrooms, sidewalks and, especially, streetcars. In his essay for *The Crisis*, Himes describes an encounter on a streetcar that epitomizes the dilemma faced by non-whites living in 1940s Los Angeles, and I argue that this scene functions as the subtext, or frame of “referentiality,” for the racial territories and enclaves Bob Jones must navigate in the novel. Each recurrence or variation of this streetcar scene produces an intertextual effect, successively revealing the crosscurrents of racist practices, white nationalism, and U.S. imperialism that give shape to the city’s wartime geography.<sup>6</sup> Through this intertextuality, Himes brings the geopolitical legacy of the Zoot Suit Riots to bear on the Los Angeles of *If He Hollers*. In his quest to “to be accepted as a man” (*If He Hollers* 153), free from the limits and boundaries of racial tags, Bob Jones maps the pervasive threat of violence intrinsic to the repressed, differential spaces of black and brown L.A.



The Editorials page of the July 1943 issue of *The Crisis* featured a single article entitled “The Riots.” In 1943, in the midst of America’s

involvement in the Pacific and European theaters of World War II, the United States experienced a considerable spike in domestic unrest along racial and ethnic lines throughout the country, most notably in the cities of Detroit, Beaumont, Mobile, and Los Angeles. After laying out a set of staggering statistics and evidence about the role of law enforcement in these urban riots, as well as the disproportionate number of African Americans either killed, injured, or arrested, the editors of *The Crisis* devoted the remainder of the response to answering these questions: “What made the riot possible? What monsters built up the idea that at times it is all right for a hundred men to beat up one? That ‘killing niggers’ is not wrong, but sport? That dragging innocent people from trolleys, buses and private automobiles and beating them to a bloody pulp with bricks, bottles, iron pipes, and clubs is perfectly in order? . . . Who plants seed which bring this flowering?” (199). The piece identifies several culprits, including newspapers whose headlines—anticipating tropes that inform the work of Ann Petry and Langston Hughes—depict African Americans as “‘black brutes,’ ‘fiends,’ ‘killers,’ ‘rapists,’ ‘muggers,’ [and] ‘gorillas.’” The editorial proceeds to indict the segregated school system, the government, industries and offices that refuse to hire blacks for anything more than custodial work, and banks that engage in discriminatory loan practices. In addition to these familiar perpetrators of institutionalized racism, *The Crisis* also points the finger at less frequently noted purveyors of racist discourse and representations, calling out “novelists like Margaret Mitchell, fictionizing history as suits their prejudices,” and the cinema for “spreading caricatures and stereotypes calculated to ‘freeze’ a status for Negroes into the minds of scores of millions of people” (199).

The editors frame their list of accusations and evidence with an appeal to the Constitution and a call to reevaluate the meaning of citizenship as befits the current realities of America. Paraphrasing the words of Pearl Buck—quoted at the outset of the editorial—they write, “Until America decides whether the Negro is to be a full citizen or not, eruptions will take place. For unless told otherwise and unless the democratic theory is completely discarded, the Negro will continue to resent and resist proscription, basing his actions upon the Constitution and the federal laws” (199). The editorial consistently draws the reader’s attention to “the Negro” and “the Negro American” and devotes a substantial amount of time to the Detroit riot of June 20–22, 1943. The

editors briefly reference the Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles, but they make no mention of Mexicans or Mexican Americans. Admittedly, the next page features Himes' essay on the Zoot Suit Riots, but the end of the editorial's third column pushes the reader ahead some twenty pages to read the final eleven lines of the piece. An innocent and familiar formatting device to be sure, but such hanging columns are one of the primary ways magazines construct the scene of reading for their audience and, in this case, that particular construction takes you right past the Zoot Suit Riots and the attack against Mexican Americans.

As suggested above, whether or not the violence on the streets of Los Angeles constituted a "race riot" was an issue of debate among politicians and in the press, and it is possible that even the editorial board of a progressive publication like *The Crisis* could not completely distance itself from the contested nature of the riots. Other publications were more direct. Charlotta A. Bass, publisher of the *California Eagle*, claimed that the "terror spree" in Los Angeles was "reminiscent of Nazi mobs or the lynch fiends of Dixie America" (qtd. in Leonard, *Battle for Los Angeles* 179). Writing for the *Militant*, Philip Blake argued that Mexican Americans living in Los Angeles were "the victims of discrimination in much the same way that Negroes are in the South" (255), a point that Himes will pick up in his article as well. Noting that both "Mexican and Negro youths and adults have been beaten senseless" (254), Blake echoes charges leveled by *The Crisis*: "The capitalist press helped to incite these attacks, and many police stood by laughing while they were carried out" (255).

The *Los Angeles Times*, on the other hand, was thoroughly dismissive in its response to the racial aspects of the riot. The pages of the *Times* in June 1943 were, as one would expect, filled with stories about the war, specifically between the United States and Japan. The term "Japs" appears repeatedly in both headlines and stories that range in their coverage from military conflicts to domestic efforts to prevent the release of Japanese Americans from internment camps and to deny them citizenship.<sup>7</sup> The Zoot Suit Riots do not occupy a prominent spot in the *L.A. Times* until June 7, 1943, when the headline "Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson in Fights With Servicemen" appears on the front page of the "City News" section of the paper.<sup>8</sup> This first detailed account of the events sets the tone for subsequent articles on the riot and the newspaper's overt support for the servicemen involved. The writer boasts that

“those gamin dandies, the zoot suiters, having learned a great moral lesson from servicemen, mostly sailors, who took over their instruction three days ago, are staying home nights” (“Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson” II, 1). Set alongside stories about internment camps and fighting in the Pacific, the implication is clear: U.S. military forces have taken time from the international front in order to contain the foreign threat living within the country’s borders.

Indeed, the *Los Angeles Times* makes every effort to construct the fighting between servicemen and Mexican Americans as a domestic war between the “zoot suiters” and the military. On the front page of the June 8, 1943 edition, under a larger headline about the war in Europe, the newspaper announces, “Riot Alarm Sent Out in Zoot War,” and beneath a photograph of “beaten and stripped” Mexican Americans the caption reads, “Unconditional Surrender.” War continues as the predominant metaphor for the riot over the next three days, complete with photographs of injured servicemen on the front pages of the June 9th and June 10th editions. A June 9th headline reads, “City, Navy Clamp Lid on Zoot-Suit Warfare”; a front-page article on June 10, 1943 references the riot as an “international incident” (“Warren Orders Zoot Quiz I, 1); and, citing a downturn in violence, the *Times* declares “Clashes Few as Zoot War Dies Down” on the front page of the June 11, 1943 edition. In short, throughout the paper, the indication is that the United States military has brought the good fight for freedom and democracy home to the streets of Los Angeles.

Though the designation “zoot suiters” carries clear racial overtones, race as a contested issue does not appear in the *Times* until June 10, 1943, when the newspaper ran a small article, “Groups Assert Zooters Being ‘Pushed Around,’” in which representatives from “Latin American Youth” and “American Civil Liberties” organizations cited abusive treatment of Mexican Americans by military servicemen. Dealing with the racist implications of the riot, however, soon became a priority for the newspaper, the city of Los Angeles, and the state of California. On the Editorial page of the June 11th edition, the *L.A. Times* reported that “attempts by any group, faction or political philosophy to use the clashes for the purpose of stirring up racial prejudice are unwarranted and are serving the aims of Axis propagandists” (“Time for Sanity”). While remaining resolute in their position and devout to the rhetoric of American nationalism, the editors of the *Times* could not deter politi-

cal outsiders from offering a different perspective on the peace being restored by servicemen in Los Angeles.

Writing from Washington, D.C., Eleanor Roosevelt expressed her concern “about the Mexican racial situation” in the United States and claimed that “the question goes deeper than just suits. It is a racial protest”—a charge which the *Times* was again quick to refute.<sup>9</sup> The June 18th edition of the newspaper featured a scathing editorial dismissing Roosevelt’s comments, as well as an article in which the president of the California State Chamber of Commerce, Preston Hotchkis, directly refuted the claim that the Zoot Suit Riots were “race riots.” Hotchkis argues that “these so-called ‘zoot suit’ riots have never been and are not now in the nature of race riots . . . . The statement that the citizens of California have discriminated against persons of Mexican origin is untrue, unjust and provocative of disunion among people who have lived for years in harmony” (qtd. in “Mrs. Roosevelt” I, A). Taken together, the coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and Hotchkis’ defensive, altogether benighted rebuttal expose a penchant for containing racial violence within an exclusively black-and-white framework and, indeed, a very abstract notion of “harmony.” Though the militaristic overtones and the multi-racial nature of the violence in Los Angeles posed a challenge to popular conceptions of what a “race riot” meant in 1943, the city itself and the state of California were unwilling to acknowledge it.

As is clear from the very title of his essay, “Zoot Riots are Race Riots,” Chester Himes was not the least bit ambivalent about the nature of the conflict in Los Angeles or the role of the military. “I suppose you have been reading about the birth of the storm troopers in Los Angeles,” he writes:

the reincarnation, or rather I should say the *continuation* of the vigilantes, the uniformed Klansmen; and all about the great battle which took place on Main Street and points east wherein the combined forces of the United States navy, army, and marine corps, contacted and defeated a handful of youths with darker skins. (“Zoot Riots” 200)

For Himes, as evident in this barrage of indictments, the events of June 1943 connect regional racist practices to national identity and the

imperial ambitions of U.S. international policy. He refuses to overlook the symbolic resonance of uniformed, World War II servicemen carrying clubs down the streets of Los Angeles in search of “youths with darker skins,” and his essay effectively undercuts the celebratory rhetoric of military heroism in the *L.A. Times*.

The key moment of Himes’ response concerns a scene he witnessed on a streetcar, “a Red car coming from Watts,” between three sailors and “a couple of Mexican kids,” including a beautiful young woman. The sailors, obviously drunk and apparently on leave from fighting in the Pacific, “were boasting of how they had whipped the Japs” and about how “uh white man” in Japan can have his way with any of the “native gals” (“Zoot Riots” 200). In the context of this anecdote, the streetcar becomes a contained site for a particularly sexualized, white imperial worldview. The sailors’ drunken boasting localizes the politics of international conquest through the threat of sexual aggression against dark-skinned, “native gals”—in this instance, against a Mexican girl in an L.A. streetcar. But the setting of the streetcar also serves a more discrete purpose for Himes as a shared public space, a kind of mobile borderland that marks the limits of interracial community in Los Angeles and a specifically regional triumph of white supremacy. The incident on the streetcar, and the Zoot Suit Riots more generally, mark a concerted effort on behalf of a “police-state” to reclaim Los Angeles for its white residents, one that carries with it the specter of slavery and lynching.<sup>10</sup>

Streetcars were an obvious differential space in which the white, suburban “world view” that Margaret Marsh describes had to confront the demographic and economic realities of wartime Los Angeles. As Robin D. G. Kelley writes:

The commoditized nature of public transportation, the growing number of black and white working-class passengers, and the highly charged political atmosphere caused by the war turned busses and streetcars into theaters in the sense of small war zones . . . They provided microcosms of race, class, and gender conflict that raged in other social spaces throughout the city (i.e. sidewalks, parks, and streets) but otherwise rarely found a place in the public record. (62)<sup>11</sup>

Extending Kelley's observation, Eric Avila identifies streetcars as a marker of Los Angeles' "heterosociality" (192) during World War II, but adds the caveat that "while providing a venue for social contact, [streetcars] sometimes became a stage for confrontation, which occasionally led to brutal acts of violence" (191). In Himes' essay, the streetcar serves as a metonym for race relations in Los Angeles as a whole: a precarious balance between whites and people with "darker skins," a relationship always on the verge of dissolution and confrontation. The physical violence of the riots further reveals the specifically regional biases of the white worldview for Himes, only now it seems that a southern ideology has trumped Anglo, Midwestern Protestantism: "the outcome is simply that the South has won Los Angeles" ("Zoot Riots" 222).

Himes' "Zoot Riots Are Race Riots" reveals an urban region in the throes of a tumultuous transition, when regional tensions (such as those linked to the migration of African Americans from the south) and the national and international interests of a country at war—a United States on the verge of establishing itself as *the* world power—are giving shape to the modern and contemporary geopolitical history of Los Angeles. He writes his essay on the Zoot Suit Riots and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* from within this pivotal moment in history, in the midst of a racial and ethnic transformation that threatened to reverse the previous "Anglo-cizing" of Los Angeles. Bob Jones, the narrator of *If He Hollers*, identifies himself as one of the city's many black migrants, telling the reader that he "came out to Los Angeles in the fall of '41" to start work at the Atlas Shipyard, and it was the attack on Pearl Harbor that made him realize that "maybe [he'd] been scared all [his] life" (3). For a time, a shared sense of this pervasive fear created an environment for interracial cooperation and social change in L.A. Kevin Allen Leonard has argued that "the character of the war as well as the Japanese American internment encouraged some blacks to perceive themselves as participants in a larger struggle for worldwide democracy. In describing this struggle, some black writers began to blur the distinctions between African Americans, Africans, Latin Americans, and Asians" ("In the Interest of All Races" 318). Though Leonard mistakenly claims that "Himes did not mention the [Zoot Suit] riots in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*," and that "the passions they aroused in him seem to have faded" (325), my reading will show how the events of 1943 and, perhaps more critically, how the responses to the riots discussed above offer an impor-

tant, un-remarked context for our understanding of the novel's geopolitical concerns.

In the next section, I will focus specifically on Bob Jones' "mapping" of Los Angeles and his attention to the threat of violence that lingers at the surface of the region's newly entrenched racial lines. This sense of violence always on the verge of eruption most clearly aligns Himes' reading of the Zoot Suit Riots with the way Jones reads the nebulous borderlands produced by Los Angeles' segregated geography. In his analysis of L.A. geopolitics in 1943, Eduardo Pagán claims that the Zoot Suit Riots represented a conflict "between competing fictional geographies that shaped [whites' and Mexican Americans'] sense of place and their responses to one another" ("Los Angeles Geopolitics" 225). Himes' "Zoot Riots are Race Riots" seems to arrive at a startlingly similar conclusion, an insight he extends to all individuals with "darker skins." *If He Hollers* makes this negotiation of "competing fictional geographies" an axiom of Jones' experiences within the segregated patterns of Los Angeles. Jones and his narrative inhabit, so to speak, the tempting fluidity and potentially fatal recalcitrance of the city's racial and ethnic borderlands, and I want to suggest that the novel connects Jones' quest for a "sense of place" in these differential sites to a growing awareness of his own conspicuous racial presence. His inability "just to be accepted as a man" (*If He Hollers* 153), apart from categories of racial distinction, is inseparable from the spaces he inhabits and the limits he transgresses. Drawing upon media representations that enframe a white ideology of place and identity, the novel offers up Jones' conspicuous racial presence as the obverse side of the city's repressed heterogeneity.



*If He Hollers* opens with one of the several dream sequences that punctuate Jones' narration.

I dreamed a fellow asked me if I wanted a dog and I said yeah, I'd like to have a dog and he went off and came back with a little black dog with stiff black gold-tipped hair and sad eyes that looked something like a wire-haired terrier. I was standing in front of a streetcar that was just about to start and the fellow led the dog by a piece of heavy stiff wire twisted about its neck

and handed me the end of the wire and asked me if I liked the dog. (1)

The dream is provocative for a couple of reasons: it immediately foregrounds the way Jones' unconscious mind processes the fear of his waking life, but it also situates the reader in an ambiguous space at the outset of the novel. We are simultaneously in the private room where Jones is sleeping—he bothers to mention, for example, that he “turned over and dreamed on the other side” (1)—and in the shared public space of his dream. Jones dreams himself on a Los Angeles street and, more interestingly, a streetcar which he will soon board with the dog. As the novel develops and the reader comes to understand just how important Jones' automobile is to his identity, the presence of the public streetcar in this initial dream seems all the more conspicuous. The symbolism of the “black dog” and the threat of lynching implied in the “heavy stiff wire twisted about its neck” are rich but clearly overdetermined; it is their co-presence with the streetcar that renders them more compelling. At the risk of making much ado about the presence of the streetcar in “Zoot Riots are Race Riots” and here at the beginning of *If He Hollers*, the negotiation of private identity in public space, paired with the threat of violence, makes for a natural connection between the two works and perfectly captures the relationship between Jones' tragic undoing and the ambiguous borderlands he inhabits.

Roughly a third of the way into the narrative, Jones describes a chain of events that threatens to fulfill the violence implicit in the image of this “lynched” black dog in the opening dream. The sequence establishes the ways in which a conspicuous racial and ethnic presence leads to the pervasive threat of violence that lingers at the surface of Los Angeles' geography. It begins with a quarrel between Jones and his light-skinned, upper-middle class girlfriend, Alice. Alice and her parents, Dr. and Mrs. Harrison, embody the economic and cultural tension in the novel between working-class and middle-class African Americans. The Harrisons live on the West Side of Los Angeles in a two-storey house that was once complete with servants and even a chauffeur until the draft and the defense industry took most of them away. “When you asked a Negro where he lived, and he said on the West Side,” Jones remarks, “that was supposed to mean he was better than the Negroes who lived on the South Side; it was like the white folks giving a Beverly

Hills address" (48). In *If He Hollers*, middle-class blacks want to segregate themselves from working-class blacks as much as, if not more than, white Angelenos. Dr. and Mrs. Harrison complain about the working class and how "Southern Negroes are coming in here and making it hard for us" (52); Alice passes among her white friends and, without irony, expresses her desire "to go slumming down on Central Avenue" (54). More pressing for Jones are Alice's repeated efforts to make him "conform to the pattern of segregation" (168). This undercurrent of intra-racial, residential and economic antagonism within Los Angeles' wartime transformation to a predominantly non-Anglo city makes Jones' demise seem all the more inevitable.

Following his quarrel with Alice, Jones jumps in his car and drives "to get away from the so-called respectable people of the world, the decent people" (72). His car provides him with the closest approximation of agency and private identity in the novel, allowing him temporarily to transgress the borders of his own racial isolation.<sup>12</sup> Yet everywhere he travels, Jones remains acutely aware of neighborhood demographics, mapping a pattern of segregation in Los Angeles with each street he turns down and each district he navigates. The Los Angeles of Himes' novel is a world of nodal points and sequestered territories which dark-skinned men like Jones pass through at their own peril. Anticipating Eduardo Pagán's depiction of the National Reserve Armory as a "frontier outpost," Robert Crooks has characterized this segregated landscape in terms of the "frontier": "no longer enemy territory to be attacked and conquered or vacant land to be cultivated, it now constitutes in mainstream European-American ideologies pockets of racial intrusion, hence corruption and social disease to be policed and contained—in so far as the 'others' threaten to cross the line" (71). We can read in L.A.'s patterns of development the urban fulfillment of Turner's "frontier thesis": imperial discourses and strategies of conquest and expansion serve both to define and contain the "foreign" threat within the nation's borders.<sup>13</sup>

As Jones moves about the city, Himes draws on traditional tropes of the automobile in American fiction to call attention to these frontier "pockets" and the threat posed by the transgression of their borders. "Ever since [Los Angeles] emerged in the 1920s and 1930s as the city on wheels," writes David Fine, "the car has offered itself to the novel-

ist as either death instrument or metaphor for the illusory promise of mobility. The fast car on the coast highway represents in much of the fiction the betrayed promise of West Coast freedom" (24). Whether moving from the South Side to the West Side, or from Central Ave. to 7th and Broadway, Jones' geographic mobility negotiates the fine line of that "betrayed promise" and, thus, it is certainly no coincidence that Himes has Jones apprehended near the end of the novel while driving his car through a white neighborhood. The arresting officers are not aware that Jones was being pursued as a suspect in an attempted rape charge at the time. As Jones glosses the situation, "they'd just stopped me because I was a black boy in a big car in a white neighbourhood" (*If He Hollers* 195). Though a form of private transportation, Jones' Buick Roadmaster appears subject to the racial politics of the public streetcar Himes describes in his essay for *The Crisis*. The car that allows Jones fleeting moments of private agency throughout the novel becomes the instrument of his undoing; the automobile is a liminal space that underscores his conspicuous and intrusive racial presence within the metro-region.<sup>14</sup>

On the night Jones takes off in his car "to get away from the so-called respectable people of the world," he drives "downtown toward Little Tokyo, where the spooks and spills had come in and taken over," and he stops at a hotel bar for a drink (*If He Hollers* 72). Though the idiom is less than cosmopolitan, Jones offers us a portrait of L.A.'s differential sites. The bar takes on a "borderland" quality in which people of different races and ethnicities co-exist in sustained tension. After Jones flirts with a girl he had previously stood-up and drinks his brandy, he notes that two white soldiers and a white woman enter the bar together. Citing the "general wave of xenophobia" that set off the Zoot Suit Riots, Luis Alvarez claims that the fighting "stemmed from the particular conflict between zoot suiters and servicemen over the nature of race, masculinity, and sex during the war and the ways that entry of nonwhites into the armed forces challenged many military men's inter-related racial, gender, and national identities" (198). The white soldiers and the white woman who enter the bar in *If He Hollers* transport these racial, sexual, and national anxieties with them and, just as in the streetcar in "Zoot Riots," a sense of precarious, undetonated violence takes shape against a set of "imagined boundaries."<sup>15</sup>

As the scene unfolds, a sense of what is at stake in negotiating and transgressing these boundaries comes into focus. “All the coloured women in the place sneered at the [white] chick” Himes writes.

. . . But the men had different reactions. Some studiously ignored her; a couple of black boys at the bar kept turning around to look at her; two Filipinos sitting directly in front of her stared at her with hot burning eyes and forgot to eat their scoff.

A couple of beers made the chick high and she got that frisky white-woman feeling of being wanted by every Negro man in the joint; she couldn’t keep still. (*If He Hollers* 75)

Later, as the soldiers try to leave bar and abandon the girl, the tension spills over into direct confrontation when the manager insists the servicemen take the girl with them. Throughout it all, Jones remains in place at the bar, reflecting on how the presence of the white woman would be enough to get any black or brown man in the bar sent to prison which, in turn, reminds him of the white co-worker he fought with at lunch and of the racist sexual tension brewing at the shipyard between him and Madge Perkins, a thoroughly provincial white woman from the deep South. Watching the scene in the bar unfold, Jones says, “The cold scared feeling started clamping down on me; it nailed me to my seat, weak and black and powerless” (76). As the confrontation escalates, Jones hopes that the manager will strike one of the soldiers because he knows what the result would be:

. . . there wouldn’t be any way at all to stop a riot—the white GIs would swarm into Little Tokyo like they did into the Mexican districts during the zoot suit riots. Only in Little Tokyo they’d have to kill and be killed, for those spooks down there were some really rugged cats; the saying was they wouldn’t drink a white cow’s milk. I wanted it to come and get it over with. (77)

The riot does not, in fact, come to fruition for Jones—not yet at least—and the scene defuses uneasily. But this expressed desire for the violence “to come and get it over with” will serve as a kind of leitmotif as the narrative proceeds. At the end of the night, when he returns to

Alice's house, Jones quietly seethes as he listens to her friends disparage the culture of lower-class African Americans and the migration of "Southern Negroes" into the city, and again as they weigh the benefits of public housing and debate whether "Mexicans are white in California" (84) or if it is "an insult to mention light Negroes' colour to 'em" (86). After Tom Leighton arrives and offers his advice on "our Little Tokyo problem" (86) and his reading of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Jones finally says: "I don't know about any other minority group problem . . . but the only solution to the Negro problem is a revolution. We've got to make white people respect us and the only thing white people have ever respected is force" (89). The scene at the bar does not incite the kind of eruption Jones describes here, but it does awaken his passion for wide-scale revolution and keeps the promise of violence at the surface of L.A.'s borderlands as he continues to move about the city.

In this sense, the presence of the soldiers and the threat of racial violence in the barroom scene effectively re-stage the streetcar confrontation that Himes describes in "Zoot Riots are Race Riots" and, at the very least, the scene echoes the zeal with which he denounces the fascist overtones of the 1943 riots. But what happens after Jones leaves the bar, especially in light of his direct reference to the "zoot suit riots," is in many ways a more telling representation of wartime Los Angeles. He gets back in his car and drives, eventually deciding to head back downtown to see a movie. Walking in the Sixth and Hill neighborhood, he notices "the rows of white faces on the magazine covers at the book stand" (78). At Seventh and Broadway, he finds himself on a sidewalk "heavy with pedestrian traffic, mostly white, a sprinkling of Mexicans, here and there a coloured face. Every second man was in uniform; four out of five women were unescorted" (78–79). Thinking about the magazines and in the presence of the predominantly white crowd, Jones refers to himself for the first time as "conspicuous"—visibly out of place in "the white folks' world" (79). This is exactly the kind of scene we can imagine the "Mexican kids" walking into after they exited the streetcar in "Zoot Riots are Race Riots": the threat of immediate violence dissipates, replaced by a more sinister and pervasive system that establishes difference in juxtaposition to the default identity of "whiteness" as portrayed in the media and policed by a military presence in the streets.

When he finally does make it to Loew's theatre for the movie and finds an open seat between two couples, Jones is made to feel even more

conspicuous by a woman who changes seats to avoid sitting next to him. The film itself is the final straw in the sequence of events that began when he left Alice's house after their initial argument and drove to the hotel bar. "I never found out the name of the picture or what it was about," he says. "After about five minutes a big fat black Hollywood mammy came on the screen saying: 'Yassum' and 'Noam,' and grinning at her young white missy; and I got up and walked out" (79). Jones decides to drive back toward the West Side, to Alice's house—where she and her friends are busy debating economics and the race "problem"—a decision which typifies the double bind Himes places him in throughout the novel: there is no single direction Jones can turn that is not shot through with the "pattern of segregation" (168). And in this instance, Himes specifically brings these segregated patterns to bear through the enframed and enshrined ideology of "the white folks' world." The narrative even re-deploys the very critiques issued by the editors of *The Crisis* in response to the 1943 riots in cities across the United States. The novel indicts both the default American identity of whiteness as displayed on magazine covers and the racist cinematic image of blackness that, in the words of *The Crisis*, is "calculated to 'freeze' a status for Negroes into the minds of scores of millions of people" ("The Riots" 199).

This series of events illustrates that, throughout the novel, the same thing that is at stake for African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Japanese Americans in Los Angeles during the 1940s is at stake for Bob Jones: a sense of an authentic American identity inextricably tied to a sense of place.<sup>16</sup> In Himes' fiction, as Robert Skinner argues, Los Angeles "is a place where racism is no longer held in check, but given free rein by the murderous attack of other brown men, the Japanese, on Pearl Harbor. It is a place where Japanese-Americans have been locked up without trial, and Blacks and Chicanos symbolically lynched in 'zoot suit' riots" (228). Lynn Itagaki sees a similarly striking affinity between Jones' experience of segregated, literally policed space in Los Angeles and the Japanese American internment that began in 1942. She writes, "Both racial groups are thereby effectively interned: the Japanese Americans in desert prisons, the African Americans in neighborhoods constrained by residential ordinances and segregation" (68).<sup>17</sup>

Though Skinner and Itagaki effectively articulate the heterogeneity of oppression in Los Angeles during World War II, it is worth point-

ing out that Bob Jones' tragic undoing stems from precisely the kinds of transgression that the borders of an internment camp would never allow. In other words, the threat of violence exists in the streetcar in "Zoot Riots are Race Riots" and in the hotel bar, on the street, and in the movie theater in *If He Hollers* because these public spaces are ambiguously inter-racial yet subject to the imperial ideology of a white worldview, as purveyed in the media and practiced in the streets by the police force and the military. In *If He Hollers*, African American "internment," especially in Jones' case, is the byproduct of a conspicuous mobility not afforded to "Japanese Americans in desert prisons."<sup>18</sup> The "cold scared feeling" that "nailed [Jones] to [his] seat, weak and black and powerless" (76) stems from the violence that threatens to erupt around his conspicuous presence in the liminal, heterogeneous spaces he occupies.

What Jones' narration "maps" for the reader, then, is a metro-region that seems always on the verge of revolution, and we are meant to see that threat of violence as inseparable from the entrenched fluidity of Los Angeles' segregated geographies. That is to say, Jones is free to cross boundaries and move through public spaces, but only in a way that calcifies his conspicuous presence as a threat to the tenuous equilibrium of racial tension held in check by the segregated patterns of development. This territorial violence offers the spatial subtext for Jones' desire to break free from his conspicuous otherness, to be looked upon and treated as just "a man." "I'd settle for a leaderman job at Atlas Shipyard—" he says,

if I could be a man, defined by Webster as a male human being. That's all I'd ever wanted—just to be accepted as a man—without ambition, without distinction, either of race, creed, or colour; just a simple Joe walking down an American street, going my simple way, without any other identifying characteristics but weight, height, and gender. (153)

Though this testament to visible traits of "weight, height, and gender" aligns perfectly with the thick, sexually charged physical descriptions Jones offers of other characters in the novel, the entire narrative questions the possibility of such a discursively constructed, non-spatial norm of identity for Jones. The quick nod to "Webster" ironically

underscores this fact. It is difficult to conceive that Noah Webster, a man who set himself the task of codifying the proper use of the English language in America, could possibly have imagined that his definition of “man” would equally apply to someone like Jones when *An American Dictionary of the English Language* debuted in 1828. In other words, even in this appeal to a standardized norm of identity and decency, we should read yet another register of Jones’ conspicuous otherness. Like the “white faces on the magazine covers” and the framed image of the black “mammy” on the movie screen, this dictionary definition would certainly place Jones at the margins of “the white folks’ world” (*If He Hollers* 79).

But this appeal to Webster and a standardized definition of “a male human being” is of a piece with Jones’ belief in a Revolutionary-era sense of American identity. Once again thinking about Alice and her family, Jones reflects:

But my mind kept rebelling against it [a nigger limit]. Being black, it was a thing I ought to know, but I’d learned it differently. I’d learned the same jive that the white folks had learned. All that stuff about liberty and justice and equality. . . . All men are created equal. . . . Any person born in the United States is a citizen. . . . Learned it out the same books, in the same schools. Learned the song too: “. . . o’er the land of the free and the home of the brave. . . .” I thought Patrick Henry was a hero when he jumped up and said, “Give me liberty or give me death,” just like the white kids who read about it. I was a Charles Lindbergh fan when I was a little boy, and thought George Washington was the father of my country—as long as I thought I had a country. (151, ellipses original)

Jones is an astute reader of space and the segregated patterns he inhabits, but as the novel draws to a close and he begins literally to run out of space, his insistent “mis-reading” of this Revolutionary rhetoric of equality compounds his difficulties.<sup>19</sup> While Jones continues to stake his identity on a sense of his place within a national discourse, his eventual demise bears out the impracticality of these Revolutionary-era ideals of citizenship and equality, and it does so specifically as a product of L.A.’s unique spatial matrix. In the novel, Jones can never simply “[walk]

down an American street" (153). At a time when the fluid borders of race, ethnicity, and national identity in Los Angeles are being renegotiated and re-inscribed, every space Jones occupies seems to delineate the "nigger limit" (151) of the identity he hopes to trump through the sheer physicality of "weight, height, and gender" (153). And, in this regard, *If He Hollers* offers a counterpoint to the editors of *The Crisis* who list "the Constitution and the federal laws" as a basis for African Americans "to resent and resist proscription" ("The Riots" 199). In the end, Himes' novel denies Jones even this theoretical refuge.



*If He Hollers* ends with Bob Jones being shipped off to war as punishment for the trumped-up rape charge leveled against him by Madge. Jones is accompanied by "two Mexican youths" (203) who also await conscription in the Army for unstated offenses. "They were both brown-skinned," Jones says, "about my colour, slender and slightly stooped, with Indian features and thick curly hair. Both wore bagged drapes that looked about to fall down from their waists, and greyish dirty T shirts" (203). Those same details could be used to describe any number of the anonymous Mexican American youths who appeared in newspaper and magazine photographs after having been beaten, stripped of their jackets, and arrested for disturbing the peace during the course of the Zoot Suit Riots. As the three men prepare to be inducted into the Army, one of the Mexican youths scans Jones' bruised and hobbled body and remarks, "Looks like this man has had a war" (203). The violence and revolution Jones longed for earlier in the novel has, in its own way, arrived. Like the African and Mexican American youths in June 1943, he finds himself subject to the oppressive mechanisms of the law and the U.S. military, and it would seem that this carefully crafted image of dark-skinned young men being sent out as fodder for the war effort should at least evoke Jones' earlier reference to the "zoot suit riots" (77).

As is evident from his essay for *The Crisis*, Himes viewed the Zoot Suit Riots as a confluence of Southern-style racism and fascist imperialism, an effort to deploy the international tactics of warfare at home and re-assert an Anglo-national identity in the face of Los Angeles' changing demographics. In *If He Hollers*, the Zoot Suit Riots provide Jones with a recent and haunting reminder of the violence facilitated

by enforced patterns of segregation and perpetrated under the auspices of military heroism and national defense. Through their celebratory coverage of the soldiers and sailors who “took over [the] instruction” (“Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson” II, 1) of zoot suiters, the *L.A. Times* and the Los Angeles authorities perpetrated a distortion of justice, eliding the fact that Mexican Americans were, as Himes and others suggested, victims of lynch law. The conclusion of *If He Hollers* sees Jones victimized by a similar distortion of justice. In the end, everyone knows Madge lied and that Jones is innocent of the rape charge, but no one in a position of authority, neither at the shipyard nor in the judge’s chambers, will admit they are wrong. Jones must inevitably be removed from the picture, and he is literally “framed” as a black man who has committed the unspeakable “crime of uncontrolled lust—the act of an animal” (202)—against a white woman. As the Hollywood camera does to the black “mammy” on the cinema screen, the abstract lens of a racist perspective effectively erases Jones. His previous ability to navigate the segregated patterns of L.A.’s wartime geography merely frames him as the conspicuous underside of the white worldview.

This is the spatial and racial legacy of the Zoot Suit Riots for *If He Hollers*. Jones’ various “mappings” of Los Angeles reveal the heterogeneous spaces and borderlands obscured by the pervasive iterations—at the shipyard, in the newspapers, in school books, on magazine covers and movie screens—of “the white folks’ world” (79) that he must exist within and struggle against. “Zoot Riots Are Race Riots” and *If He Hollers* re-frame Los Angeles as a nexus of regional, national, and international ideologies, a metro-region shaped by dueling, wartime impulses toward isolationism and imperialism, impulses that are exercised on streetcars and in hotel barrooms, on the streets of Little Tokyo and inside the homes of middle-class African Americans. *If He Hollers* arrives on the literary scene near the end of World War II, at a moment in which the kinds of racial, ethnic, and class boundaries that Jones confronts will become established principles of urban reconstruction and suburban development, not just in Los Angeles but throughout the postwar nation.<sup>20</sup> The novel stands as a harbinger both to the violence intrinsic to patterns of segregation and the way national identity will continue to evolve in terms of competing spatial ideologies in the postwar era.

In her historical study of the 1965 and 1992 riots, Susan Anderson contends, "Los Angeles has now become identified as the city whose contemporary history is bracketed by two violent, large-scale riots that have provided revelation of the plagues in America's social reality. This, perhaps is L.A.'s perverse gift: the city as oracle, the prophetic urban place that utters a message no one wants to hear" (357). In his response to the Zoot Suit Riots and in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Chester Himes prefigures the city's prophetic burden, and the novel's final scene offers an image that promises both newfound unity and enduring inequality. "They fell in beside me," Jones says of the two Mexicans, "and we went out and started up the hill toward the induction centre, the three of us abreast and the cop in the rear" (203). The three young men walk off together, but they remain subject to a system of justice that devalues them as individuals and willingly sacrifices them under the guise of patriotic duty.<sup>21</sup> At a time when the poor of all colors are enlisting to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, this moment should resonate with contemporary readers.<sup>22</sup> Himes' work takes up a critical position against the violence endemic to the borders of race, ethnicity, and economics. Though the terms may have shifted, we are still working through the implications of this critique for America's national identity and for the metro-regions that continue to bear the marks and scars of segregation.

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#### NOTES

I gratefully acknowledge Charles Scruggs for his comments and revision suggestions.

1. Weinstein calls Los Angeles the "first consequential American city to separate itself decisively from European models and to reveal the impulse to privatization embedded in the origins of the American Revolution" (22).

2. Palos Verdes offers a famous example of such upscale, suburban exclusivity. Designed in the 1920s as a segregated enclave for the upper-middle class, Palos Verdes was conceived as a kind of "Suburban City Beautiful" (Marsh 165), complete with restrictive covenants that excluded African Americans and Mexican Americans while requiring its white residents to build their homes in the style of "Mexican inspired architecture" (172).

3. Historians often cite two violent encounters in late-May between white sailors and Mexican American "zoot suiters" as the most immediate cause for the rioting that began in Los Angeles on June 3rd. Alvarez writes, "On Sunday, May 30, a group of zoot suiters fought with eleven sailors in the Mexican American barrio

of Alpine. The next night, a group of soldiers and sailors clashed with zoot suiters near Chinatown" (167). Leonard also points to confrontations between African Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department in May 1943, specifically over the shooting death of "Lenza Smith, an African American shipyard worker. The shooting nearly led to a riot outside the house where Smith was shot" (*Battle for Los Angeles* 149).

4. My analysis of Los Angeles' geography as it pertains to Himes' work draws on Lefebvre's distinction between "abstract" and "differential" spaces. He contends that abstract space is, in a sense, the space of illusion in which the mirage of coherence and homogeneity is produced and reproduced by practices that ensure the power of the state and the flow of capital. "On first inspection," he writes, "[abstract space] appears homogeneous; and indeed it serves those forces which make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them—in short, of differences" (285). The illusion of homogeneity disguises the repressed (and oppressed) fragmentation of differential spaces. Abstract space "has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its 'lens,'" Lefebvre contends. "And, indeed, it renders homogeneous. But in itself is multiform" (287). Or, more simply stated, "The space that homogenizes thus has nothing homogenous about it" (308). Lefebvre claims that the insidious—even violent—nature of abstraction lies in its deceptive "transparency": "there is a violence intrinsic to abstraction, and to abstraction's practical (social) use" (289).

5. Avila claims that "although suburbanization profoundly transformed the nature of urban life throughout the nation, Los Angeles debuted as the 'it' city of postwar America, accommodating a vast influx of newcomers and garnering a disproportionate share of federal investments" (7). With white flight and the economic and commercial abandonment of urban centers in a number of cities, metro-regions across the country gradually take on the sprawling, autonomous "crazy quilt" (Abu-Lughod 134) pattern that distinguished the development of Los Angeles' geography.

6. This claim concerning the intertextual effect of the novel's racial and spatial subtext is informed by Riffaterre's work on referentiality and subtext, particularly what he calls the "the paradigmatic nature of subtext recurrences" (63). He writes, "each [recurrence] signifies in terms of the previous one and all are recognizable as variants of one another. They therefore convey the same symbolism throughout. Each variant, by the very fact that it is variable, adjusts at the diegetic level to any situation, event, or character it may fit. As a result, character, event, or situation is permeated with the invariable symbolism, repeating its lesson or message under the successive disguises of the story's progress" (63–64).

7. For example, the article "Mothers Ask Citizenship Be Denied Japs" reports that "an organization of mothers of men in a Coast Artillery unit" have urged President Roosevelt to reject requests by Japanese Americans for citizenship because "their racial ideologies prevent them from ever becoming strictly loyal Americans" (I, 12).

8. Leonard notes: “Only one daily newspaper, the Spanish-language *La Opinión*, suggested when the rioting began that the violence might be serious” (*Battle for Los Angeles* 154). For an insightful look at the racial debates—and racial elisions—surrounding the Zoot Suit Riots in various Los Angeles newspapers, see Leonard, *The Battle for Los Angeles*, 147–97.

9. These lines come from Eleanor Roosevelt’s newspaper column for 16 June 1943. See “Race—Are We So Different? A Project of the American Anthropological Association,” <<http://www.understandingrace.org/history/society/nazism.html>>. 4 Nov. 2008.

10. Thurgood Marshall will address this idea of a U.S. police state even more pointedly in the next issue of *The Crisis*.

11. Kelley’s discussion of the public transportation system focuses primarily on Birmingham during the 1940s. Kelley’s study also provides an important reminder that “zoot suiters” were prevalent among African Americans; see especially 161–81.

12. Itagaki reads the car as an extension of Jones’ transgressive body and the spatial dynamics of race relations in the novel. “Already a metaphor for racial and class transgression,” she argues, “the 1942 Buick Roadmaster also becomes a vehicle of physical transgression; Bob challenges white drivers in duels over space and superiority along the highways—a metonymic expression of the larger hostility and competition of social and economic racism” (73).

13. Thomas argues that Turner’s 1893 “Frontier Thesis” remains pertinent to contemporary cultural studies as a narrative of reconstruction. He writes that the frontier serves “as a space of displacement in which something or someone is reconstructed as something or someone else” (118).

14. This argument about the liminality of the car can be tied back to Thomas’ reading of Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” referenced above. Turner’s declaration that the frontier is closed moves us from the physical space of the “closed” frontier to the continually reopened, metaphorical “in-betweeness” of space. That is to say, the frontier is itself a liminal space that offers the possibility for the reconstruction and renewal that Thomas argues on behalf of in his article. Though as we see in *If He Hollers*, such spatial ambiguity can also lead to the impossibility of staking a sense of identity to a sense of place.

15. Pagán argues that “there was perhaps no other issue more incendiary between military and civilian men than transgressing the imagined boundaries of male responsibilities toward, competition for, and prerogatives with women” (“Los Angeles Geopolitics” 238).

16. Pagán discusses what he calls the essential “‘othering’ of Americans during the war years . . . which all too often translated ‘black,’ ‘Mexican,’ or ‘Japanese’ as meaning ‘not white,’ and therefore ‘not American’” (“Los Angeles Geopolitics” 244).

17. We should not, however, assume that this shared experience of “internment” was experienced in similar ways. In fact, the Japanese American internment created housing opportunities for African Americans in Los Angeles, as we see in Himes’ reference to Little Tokyo in the novel. Itagaki points out, “Given the overcrowded residential areas near the war industries, African Americans moved into the hastily abandoned residential and business districts of the Japanese American community” (67).

18. Bob Jones obviously is “interned,” so to speak, at the end of the novel through his conscription in the military. I disagree with the metaphor of internment here because it is Jones’ ability to keep crossing and re-crossing borders in the novel that allows for his continual transgressive movement in the Foucauldian sense, which Itagaki insightfully articulates elsewhere in her project (67).

19. In this sense, Jones bears a striking similarity to another African American literary figure of the era. In Ann Petry’s *The Street*, Lutie Johnson’s efforts to situate Benjamin Franklin’s ethic of hard work and self-determination within Harlem ends with tragic consequences. Thinking back to her own schooling at the end of the novel, Lutie recalls the “exasperated voice” of her teacher saying, “I don’t know why they have us bother to teach your people to write” (435). On a train bound for Chicago, having just killed a man and about to abandon her son to the juvenile detention system in New York, Lutie fatalistically echoes her teacher’s racist assessment: “What possible good has it done to teach people like me to write?” (436).

20. According to Avila, “The blackening of Los Angeles during the war years and their aftermath sparked a reactionary effort to delineate a new set of spatial and racial boundaries that materialized throughout the course of postwar suburbanization” (31).

21. Reading the scene as a potential moment of redemption, Itagaki writes, “While their circumstances most obviously show the subjection of racialized bodies to military and economic structures, their final gesture of solidarity simultaneously offers the possibility for future interracial mobilization and shared community” (76).

22. Kleykamp argues that “the military does not simply fill its ranks from the bottom rungs of society” (277), and she establishes that socioeconomic status is only one factor influencing military enlistment. That said, she does conclude that “the socioeconomically disadvantaged are more likely to enlist,” noting: “Previous studies show that those with lower family incomes, larger family sizes (more sharing of scarce resources), and less-educated parents are more likely to join the military” (277). Importantly, Kleykamp also notes that “African Americans no longer appear more likely to enlist than their white peers” (287), suggesting that socioeconomic disadvantage influences the decision to enlist among women and men of all colors.

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