



RICHARD WRIGHT

IN A POST-RACIAL IMAGINARY

Edited by Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow
Associate Editor: Yoko Nakamura

B L O O M S B U R Y

Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary

Edited by
Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow

Associate Editor: Yoko Nakamura

With a Foreword by Amritjit Singh

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc

B L O O M S B U R Y
NEW YORK • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published 2014

First published in paperback 2016

© William E. Dow, Alice Mikal Craven, Yoko Nakamura and Contributors, 2014, 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Richard Wright in a post-racial imaginary / edited by Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow ; associate editor, Yoko Nakamura ; with a foreword by Amritjit Singh.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-62356-231-1 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Wright, Richard, 1908–1960 — Criticism and interpretation. 2. Wright, Richard, 1908–1960 — Political and social views. 3. Race in literature. 4. Blacks in literature. 5. African Americans in literature. 6. Alienation (Social psychology) in literature. I. Craven, Alice Mikal, editor of compilation. II. Dow, William (William E.) editor of compilation. III. Nakamura, Yoko, editor of compilation.

PS3545.R815Z8163 2014

813'.52—dc23

2014006808

ISBN: HB: 978-1-6235-6231-1

PB: 978-1-5013-1269-4

ePub: 978-1-6235-6232-8

ePDF: 978-1-6235-6625-8

Typeset by RefineCatch Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk
Printed and bound in the United States of America

Richard Wright in a Post-Racial
Imaginary

To Olivier and Zoe Serafinowicz
Alice Mikal Craven

To Anne-Marie and my family
William E. Dow

To Tadao and Hatsuko Nakamura
Yoko Nakamura

Foreword

Richard Wright is undoubtedly a writer for the ages and he must have known that when he was writing thousands of haiku, fast and furious, at the end of his relatively short and checkered career in the United States and France. It is evident from our expanding engagements with his biography, writings, and travels that Wright continues to challenge us to think beyond our ever-shifting constructions of categories around race and region, nation and transnation, local vs. global, or in Wright's own words, "Tradition vs. Progress; Personality vs. Collectivity; the East (the colonial peoples) vs. the West (exploiters of the world)." The conference that Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow organized at the American University of Paris in 2008 was one of many engagements marking Wright's birth centennial. The conference demonstrated and celebrated Wright's powerful presence in the new century.

Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary, the second of the two volumes to emerge from the Paris Conference, offers an array of responses and readings that point to the diversity of contexts in which Wright speaks to us. Essays in the opening section examine Wright's intellectual trajectories in relation to Modernism, the Chicago School of Sociology, *Négritude* and such. But these essays by James Smethurst, Cynthia Tolentino, and Anthony Dawahare, in conjunction with other pieces spread throughout the volume, also show how Wright remains central to the tradition of African American literary expression that is closely tied to the lived realities of black life in the United States and in the African diaspora. In twentieth-century classics such as *Uncle Tom's Children*, *Black Boy*, *Native Son*, and *The Long Dream*, Wright exposed the limited spaces within which African Americans, especially those in the South, were expected to perform the ordinary human dance of life—to find love and nurture from individuals and communities, as well as to grow and provide for a family against the horrendous patterns of exclusion, rejection, and hateful violence. Wright highlights the absence of citizenship rights for black Americans often by not mentioning them at all, sharing instead with us his searing portrayals of the "essential bleakness of black life in America," in which "Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization," not permitted to foster and struggle for "clean, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty, and the capacity to remember" (*Black Boy*, Chapter 2). And long before "post-racial" became a buzzword with the 2008 election of Barack Obama as US President, many commentators had argued that Wright's writings and perspectives had become mostly items of historical value, after the legal restoration of rights that was inaugurated, but not completed, through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as by the Voting Rights Act and the Immigration and Nationality Act, both passed in 1965.

The work included in this volume is part of the exciting new scholarship on Wright that would scuttle any thought of relegating Wright's writings to a museum.

Re-reading a well-known story or novel by Wright in a classroom with young students or in your armchair at home is always full of surprises. And we have been fascinated by the voice that shapes Wright's many posthumously published works including *Rite of Passage* and *A Father's Law*. In many of his later writings, Wright comes through as one of Maxim Gorky's "unusual individuals . . . [who] are not quite achieved, who are not very wise, a little mad, 'possessed.'" He was self-consciously one of those "lonely outsiders who exist precariously on the clifflike margins of many cultures," men (and women) to whom he had dedicated *White Man, Listen* in 1957. And we are barely prepared for the shocks of recognition that we will likely experience when the remaining unpublished works come out (I hope soon)—works such as *Black Hope* (see Barbara Foley's essay in this volume); *Island of Hallucination*; and Wright's letters not only to his editors and to other writers, but also to all kinds of figures around the globe.

In Wright's integral and empathetic imagination, as it captures the impact of colonialism in places such as the Gold Coast and Indonesia, in the continental realities of Africa and Asia that he evokes so powerfully in *Black Power* and *Color Curtain*, the figure of his father "standing alone upon the red clay of a Mississippi plantation," that we witness in the last two paragraphs of *Black Boy*, Chapter 1, merges with that of a farmer in the Ghanaian hinterlands, or with a street peddler in Jakarta. To me, Wright's career as an artist and man of letters displays an amazing level of unity and design, marked by his intense interest in the emerging patterns of modernity against the background of the many disenfranchising forces at work and the socioeconomic and psychic consequences they caused for millions around the world. This figure in the carpet shaped all his work, and his writings in the 1950s are very much of a piece with early works such as *Uncle Tom's Children*, *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, and his WPA-supported documentary history, *Twelve Million Black Voices* (1941). The perspectives he fashioned in the 1950s in his self-chosen new role as a global intellectual resonated well with his earlier perspectives. As early as the late 1940s, Wright began to meditate on the relationship between US racism and the global realities of colonialism and capitalism, viewing the African American as more than "America's metaphor." In 1946, he described the problem of 15 million black Americans as "symbolic" of the situation faced by over 1.5 billion people of color throughout the world.

It is against this awareness of Wright's reach into the rest of the twenty-first century that I welcome this new collection of essays. I have witnessed since 2008 the growth of both Alice and William into becoming the (W)right scholars to bring together these essays (including their own well-researched pieces). They help us appreciate Wright's layers and complexities as a man and artist; a global traveler; and a conflicted intellectual. Most of the essays are engagingly comparative (Michel Feith, Charles Scruggs, Shoshana Milgram Knapp, amongst others), compelling us to consider new connections and contexts for Wright's individual texts. Bruce Dick and Steven Tracy invite us into unexplored territories—sharpening our sense of Wright's relationship to drama and music, Blues in particular. Sandy Alexandre helps us to receive Wright's haiku with new ears, even as Marc Mvé Bekale and Sudhi Rajiv energize us for reading

Wright in relation to Senegalese writer Cheikh Hamidou Kane's novel *L'aventure ambiguë* (*Ambiguous Adventure*) and Sharankumar Limbale's life narrative, *The Outcaste*.

I hope other readers will enjoy and learn as much from this volume's many gifts as I have.

Amritjit Singh, Ohio University

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the American University of Paris for its generous support during the editing of *Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary*. We would especially like to thank Amritjit Singh for his very generous support throughout our work on this project.

An earlier version of Marc Mvé Bekale's "The Negro Intellectual and the Tragic Sense of Hybridity: A Study in Postcolonial Existentialism" was published as "Cultural Hybridity and Existential Crisis in Richard Wright's *The Outsider* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'aventure ambiguë*" in *Transatlantica* 1/2009 (<http://transatlantica.revues.org/4255>). An earlier version of Alice Mikal Craven's "Richard Wright's 'Island' of Silence in *The Long Dream*" appeared in *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora* 11.2 (2010): 95–106. An earlier version of Barbara Foley's "'A Dramatic Picture . . . of Woman from Feudalism to Fascism': Richard Wright's *Black Hope*" was published in *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora* 11.2 (2010): 43–54. Cynthia Tolentino's "Sociological Interests, Racial Reform: Richard Wright's Intellectual of Color" is reprinted from *America's Experts: Race and the Fictions of Sociology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 1–30. The lyrics of Richard Wright's "King Joe (Joe Louis Blues)," used in Steven C. Tracy's "A Wright to Sing the Blues: King Joe's Punch," is from "The Life and Work of Richard Wright" copyright © December 1971 by *New Letters*, edited by David Ray, first published in *New Letters*, volume 38, number 2, 1971. It is printed here with the permission of *New Letters* and the Curators of the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow

Contents

Foreword	<i>Amritjit Singh</i>	ix
Acknowledgments		xii
Introduction	<i>Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow</i>	1
Part 1 Wright as Global Intellectual and Racial Reformer		
1	After Modernism: Richard Wright Interprets the Black Belt <i>James Smethurst</i>	13
2	Sociological Interests, Racial Reform: Richard Wright's Intellectual of Color <i>Cynthia Tolentino</i>	27
3	The Negro Intellectual and the Tragic Sense of Hybridity: A Study in Postcolonial Existentialism <i>Marc Mvé Bekale</i>	57
4	Richard Wright's <i>Native Son</i> and the Dialectics of Black Experience <i>Anthony Dawahare</i>	65
Part 2 The Pursuit of Sovereignty in Wright's Political and Artistic Odyssey		
5	Richard Wright and his Editors: A Work under the Influence? From the <i>Signifyin(g)</i> Rebel to the Exiled Intellectual <i>Laurence Cossu-Beaumont</i>	83
6	Recontextualizing Richard Wright's <i>The Outsider</i> : Hugo, Dostoevsky, Max Eastman, and Ayn Rand <i>Shoshana Milgram Knapp</i>	99
7	"A Dramatic Picture . . . of Woman from Feudalism to Fascism": Richard Wright's <i>Black Hope</i> <i>Barbara Foley</i>	113
Part 3 Wright's Other Destinies: Gothicism and the Neo-Baroque		
8	"Forged in Injustice": The Gothic Motif in the Fiction of Ernest Hemingway and Richard Wright <i>Charles Scruggs</i>	129
9	Pulp Gothicism in Richard Wright's <i>The Outsider</i> <i>William E. Dow</i>	141
10	Working the Underground Seam: Richard Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground" in the Light of Percival Everett's <i>Zulus</i> <i>Michel Feith</i>	161

Part 4 Richard Wright's Sweet Airs: Experiments with Performance Genres

- 11 Forgotten Chapter: Richard Wright, Playwrights, and the Modern Theater
Bruce Allen Dick 179
- 12 A Wright to Sing the Blues: King Joe's Punch *Steven C. Tracy* 197

Part 5 Transnational Shifts: Silence and Sentiment

- 13 Richard Wright's "Island" of Silence in *The Long Dream*
Alice Mikal Craven 215
- 14 Expanding Metaphors of Marginalization: Richard Wright,
 Sharankumar Limbale, and a Post-Caste Imaginary *Sudhi Rajiv* 229
- 15 Culmination in Miniature: Late Style and the Essence of Richard
 Wright's Haiku *Sandy Alexandre* 245

- Contributors 263
- Index 269

Introduction

Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow

Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary builds upon the idea that Richard Wright is not only a *possible* literary and political prophet of his time, but that he is perhaps one of the most *plausible* prophets of America's potential to transform from a deeply racist nation to a nation where the terms *white* and *black* no longer dominate national discourses about race. The changes that took place in America during Wright's lifetime involved civil strife, political upheaval, and gender revolution. It would be counterproductive for a critical volume featuring his works to pretend that an African American man in the United States was incapable of understanding such turmoil *less* well than any of the other authors who hold prominent positions in the literary canon of twentieth-century American literature today. Nonetheless, Wright's legacy has been notoriously inhospitable to classification and definition precisely because he was a black man living in a racist society. Contemporary reassessment such as is evidenced in this volume insists upon Wright's complex and comprehensive awareness of US history in that he constantly positioned himself against any kind of essentialist approach to race, class, and American culture despite prevailing tendencies to peg him as exclusively a spokesman for his race.¹

In what many are now calling the beginning of a post-racial America, Wright's legacy is in need of updating in terms of its value for international scholarship and his writing about race and beyond race.² Rethinking Wright's place as a global intellectual, as a professional writer, and as an international humanist should be taken as a priority for American studies today. Such a rethinking, as this volume argues, asserts the status of Wright as a major world-class author and explores his continuing impact on American culture as well as his anticipatory grasp of new theoretical trends concerning race and gender discourses.

Editorial choices for essays included in this volume are indeed guided by a questioning of the claim that America is currently host to a post-racialized sociopolitical environment—a concept that has garnered increasingly urgent scrutiny in the age of an Obama presidency.³ *Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary* essentially asks if American *readers* have yet to appreciate the fruits of labor of those authors whose writings have rendered this post-racialized world *imaginable*, including, most importantly, Wright.⁴ As Ramon Saldivar argues, “the relationship between race and social justice, race and identity, and indeed race and history requires a new ‘imaginary’

for thinking about the nature of a just society and the role of race in its construction" (574). Saldivar posits that the "post" of post-racial is indicative of a conceptual rather than a chronological shift, a position adhered to in our volume. Essays included here implicitly grant that such a new "imaginary" has its roots in the works of Wright amongst others who were writing long before the concept of post-racialization was entertained in critical circles.

Racism has by no means disappeared from America's social landscape, but this does not preclude the idea that racist trends have diminished. Indeed, race remains a central concern but it can no longer be defined exclusively in terms of a black and white binary—and this binary's attendant discourses. Given the rapidly shifting racial demographics of the United States and the world, a new "racial imaginary" is needed to explain the significance of race as a key element in American and global culture. Thus, our use of the prefix "post" in post-racial, rather than marking a final superseding of racial significance and categories, signifies an aspiration that one day the world will get beyond race as a potentially dangerous trope and that such a move will be facilitated by a thorough re-examination of Wright's works. "The political will to liberate humankind from race thinking," as Paul Gilroy argues, "must be complemented by precise historical reasons why these attempts are worth making" (12). Wright anticipated such a position by producing work that portrayed and presumed black difference as a distinct and necessary element, even as he wished to overcome the environments that created that difference.

The prefix "post" in post-racialization further entails an epistemological shift to the question of what race means for the twenty-first century. As Wright presciently understood, race as a trope provides a timely test for the democratic nature of today's cosmopolitan imaginings. Wright's racial thinking ultimately emerges as a self-conscious renunciation of "race" when this term is used in ways that divide and harmfully define human beings. As this collection emphasizes, Wright provides both a framework for a forward-looking racial imaginary and maps out possibilities for richer and larger conjectures about race, narrative theory, and narrative form in a future projection of a post-racial America.

Wright's literary and cultural hybridity is inseparable from this terminative vision. His fiction and nonfiction demand to be taken beyond borders and boundaries, to be interpreted in relation to what it means to write the African American literary text into a world literary history. Wright's strategies create discourses between distinct literary genres—between modernist, naturalist, and high cultures on the one hand, and popular, pulp, and low cultures on the other. That he writes about feeling at home (racially, culturally, and socially) *neither* in his native land (America) *nor* in his land of exile (France) is a successful form of hybridity that is only now beginning to be fully appreciated by Wright critics. Wright's literature, travel writing, and literary journalism responded both to a social world defined by the system of Jim Crow segregation *and* to a world that was increasingly diasporic, transatlantic, and global. As several essays in this volume attest, Wright accentuates "a crisis of hybridity" between America and Europe, France and Africa, Western and non-Western ways of conceiving knowledge.

Wright plugged into a cinematic bird's-eye view of his own country, its limitations, and its potential for development in relation to the rest of the world. That an African

American man raised in the South could go through a process of escaping the limitations of his environment (thereby becoming capable of identifying his heroes); fixing his preferred genres; and taking journeys into the territories in which a poor black man from the South would not be expected to travel (i.e., the European, Asian and African continents) was phenomenal. Wright accomplished all of this precisely because he was acutely mindful that race was a superimposed category, rather than a biological reality. He was aware that race consciousness had always been linked to the idea of nationality and that discourses based on a black-white binary in the United States were only ever concerned with *white Americans* and *African Americans*. His thinking here anticipated Kirin Wachter-Grene's assertion that in order to think post-racialization, American discourse about blackness "needs to invite a larger cultural conversation of different articulations of blackness in America, one in which immigrant blacks are considered and given voice" (1). Wachter-Grene implicitly calls for a separation of race and nationality in discourses about social identity in America.

Wachter-Grene further claims that taking this direction would facilitate America's need to fulfill its "social legitimacy" in its disruption of "bichromatic racialization" (2). As a celebrated author, Wright spoke differently about race and identity formation during his period of exile from the United States, and these writings need to be folded back into contemporary discourses on a post-racial imaginary in America. Wright's experiences outside the United States and his writings about them give the contemporary reader an idea of the paths he chose in carving out a space for a global humanist vision.

Wright drew from a wide array of disciplines, movements, and genres in insisting on such a vision, including sociology, proletarian literature, existentialism, popular culture, and Marxism. His recourse to these disciplines is the focus of Part 1, "Wright as Global Intellectual and Racial Reformer." The essays in this section place Wright in the context of modernism and its aftermath.⁵ In this context, Wright subverted the "Negro problem" as a central problematic and contributed to, one could even suggest created, the professionalization of the black author—a creation that was successfully harmonized with the professionalization and racial "uplift" of black subjects during his lifetime and beyond.

James Smethurst's "After Modernism: Richard Wright Interprets the Black Belt" explores Wright's use of complex sources throughout crucial stages in his career in relation to the hybridic challenges he had introduced in his earlier fiction, especially in *Lawd Today!* and *Native Son*. "The result," according to Smethurst, "was a fascinating mixture of alienation, fragmentation, despair, confinement, a sense of inevitable social fate and revolutionary possibility . . . [which] employed cultural forms and ways of feeling that widely circulated in US society and that were publicly accessible."

Cynthia Tolentino's "Sociological Interests, Racial Reform: Richard Wright's Intellectual of Color" likewise insists upon the need for examining Wright's literary ties to his racialized culture. Departing from entrenched views of Wright as a "proletarian writer," she interrogates "Wright's preoccupation with the professionalization of black subjects" at a moment when "the United States postwar international ascendancy was increasingly being tied to the resolution of what was known as . . . the 'Negro problem.'"

Tolentino argues that Wright, "as a figure of the intellectual of color," emerges as a paradigm of "being at once the subject and the object of global processes of racial uplift." In the main, Wright's foundation for inventing a new imaginary, in which individualized questions of race feature prominently, is reliant upon the unique relationships he drew between race and modernism, race and sociology, and indeed race and the professional black writer.

Anthony Dawahare's "Richard Wright's *Native Son* and the Dialectics of Black Experience" continues this investigation by exploring how Wright "both depicts a uniquely *black* experience and surpasses it through characterization and a narrative technique that reveals black experience as a moment in an historical dialectic of social relations governed by political and economic power." Dawahare reads *Native Son* as a hybridic work that while mediating through "non-racial class forces," "both affirms and negates the very notion of black experience and presents a challenge for those . . . who want to affirm black experience as self-contained and others who want to liquidate it in some universal category." Such a revisionist reading of the canonical *Native Son* allows for a reassessment of Wright's anticipation of a post-race paradigm.

In Marc Mvé Bekale's "The Negro Intellectual and the Tragic Sense of Hybridity: A Study in Postcolonial Existentialism," Wright's notions of hybridity, as articulated in *The Outsider*, are woven into a closer relation to the literary works of Cheikh Hamidou Kane and the theoretical tracts of Homi K. Bhabha. Bekale's essay approaches the question of hybridity as a factor in "cultural-mongrelization" and the need for an individual's "constant adjustments to the complex forces of the post-modern world." In keeping with the idea that Wright is a plausible prophet of a post-racial imaginary, Bekale asserts, in reference to *The Outsider*: "Having written bitter novels indicting American racism, Wright was now trying to create a literary space through which he could translate and articulate his post-racial idealism."

The volume's second part, "The Pursuit of Sovereignty in Wright's Political and Artistic Odyssey," focuses on re-contextualizing Wright from a global perspective that must be complemented by examining the literary, political, and socioeconomic paratexts of Wright's work in the 1940s and 1950s. Whereas Wright may have been anticipating the black professional writer, the editorial and marketing apparatus surrounding the publication of his works lagged far behind his literary vision. Laurence Cossu-Beaumont establishes new connections between Wright's aesthetics, his (extra-)literary influences and his growing disenchantment with the limitations of social realism for depicting black experience. The editorial history of Wright's best sellers, *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, is replete with practices of censorship and influence studies which would have been considered justified only as applied to the study and categorization of a black man's writing in Wright's time period. Cossu-Beaumont argues that the constraints in understanding Wright's full contribution to the American modernist literary tradition are largely rooted in the uncontested application of such practices.

By the same token, Wright was continually relegated to a minor role when it came to innovations in influential philosophical and sociopolitical movements of the twentieth century. Shoshana Milgram Knapp revalorizes Wright as a strong voice in mapping out an existential tradition within the context of world literature by

re-examining *The Outsider's* relation to the ideas and aesthetics of Hugo, Dostoevsky, Max Eastman, and Ayn Rand. Dismissing the critical constraints that have traditionally prevented his novel from being valued as highly as the canonical existentialist writers, due to his racial, social, and economic origins, Knapp effectively argues for a post-racial critical assessment of Wright's contribution to a race-blind scholarly debate. As a literary and philosophical movement, existentialism does not prioritize discussion of racial issues, and as a result, any author whose commentary is evaluated on the basis of the color of their skin would not initially be considered a primary contributor to the existentialist discourse (Todorov 177).

In a post-racial imaginary, obstacles to treating Wright as a key player to the existentialist debate are eradicated. Wright recognized early on "the untenability of a literary color line" (Warren 120). Like Ellison and Du Bois, Wright insisted on "a manifold literary inheritance ... as both a demonstration of the irrationality of segregation and a refutation of charges that black cultural expression was inferior to works produced by whites" (Warren 120). Knapp pushes the reader to refocus the existential literary tradition by placing Wright's previously underestimated literary work, *The Outsider*, in its rightful place with respect to that tradition. Knapp's ultimate claim is that re-contextualizing *The Outsider* in this way also allows for a deeper reading of the questions of death and suicide in the novel.

Barbara Foley, in "A Dramatic Picture ... of Woman from Feudalism to Fascism: Richard Wright's *Black Hope*," engages with the arguments of Cossu-Beaumont and Knapp by claiming that the editing and publication practices of Wright's time were largely responsible for keeping crucial aspects of his thought process from the public view. Therefore, those practices were directly responsible for a systemic misinterpretation of his positions on social, economic, and most importantly, gender issues. As she suggests, his failure to bring his "overwritten and redundant" manuscript of *Black Hope* to public light contributed to reinforcing his legacy as an author "oblivious to gender issues." She argues that this assessment could be rectified if his focus on "the condition of women as an issue in its own right as well as in its broader social and political connections with racism, capitalism and fascism" had been taken more seriously and *Black Hope* had been published. That "the novel was to take the alienation of its female protagonist as a means of getting at fundamental problems in modern life" signals not only the radical political value of Wright's literature but could provide our allegedly "postidentitarian" era today a basis for reassessing Wright's views on gender. Like most of Wright's fiction, *Black Hope* offers an opportunity to conceptualize race as extending beyond *whiteness* or *blackness* and to retheorize the social order that constitutes race.

Part Three focuses on the Gothic and neo-baroque strains in Wright's fiction. These peculiar strains provide insight into Wright's choices of the generic frames he should use in his exploration of African American self-fashioning and self-representation. In "Forged in Injustice": The Gothic Motif in the Fiction of Ernest Hemingway and Richard Wright," Charles Scruggs examines Wright's "complex simplicity" in relation to the trademark straightforward prose of Hemingway. Scruggs highlights the influence of Hemingway's "horrific-past" Gothicism on Wright's writing and signals this influence as an indicator of Wright's modernity.

William E. Dow's "Pulp Gothicism in Richard Wright's *The Outsider*" shows how *The Outsider*'s "generic hybridity" reveals new epistemological possibilities that focus on "representative relations of the Gothic to the 'interior life' of black Americans and to the social relations engendered by American capitalism." Congruently, *The Outsider* engages the effects of being denied access to social spaces of power and its privileges, and of being part of a community historically represented as deviant and dangerous. Michel Feith's "Working the Underground Seam: Richard Wright's 'The Man Who Lived Underground' in the Light of Percival Everett's *Zulus*" establishes more comparative connections in Wright's and Percival Everett's "underground," interpreted as both typography and symbol, and their respective portrayals—in Everett's *Zulus* and in Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground"—of dystopian, neo-baroque societies. Feith explores a full range of dystopic lines of force and creates a base for new appreciation of Wright's influence on the literary tradition of taking the underground, with all of its attendant Gothic and neo-baroque tendencies, as its central theme.

Wright's experimentation with literary and artistic forms—freeing him to explore his own increasingly hybridic directions—is yet another proof that his later years afforded him a space for moving beyond the genealogical meanings of *black* and *white* and their connotative threat to individual identity. In Part Four, "Richard Wright's Sweet Airs: Experiments with Performance Genres," Bruce Allen Dick's "Forgotten Chapter: Richard Wright, Playwrights, and the Modern Theater" focuses on such theatrical productions as Wright's five-act satire, *Daddy Goodness*, and argues for a reappraisal of Wright's work in relation to his "dramatic" writing and the tradition of American and African American theater. Wright's interest in modern drama and his writing for the theater from the late 1930s until his death are rarely analysed in Wright criticism given their marginal relation to his over-determined role as a writer of protest fiction. Dick examines Wright's theatrical writing in conjunction with his constant experimentation and his nascent positioning as a global intellectual who also happened to write in performative artistic modes.

This first overview of Wright's lifelong interest in drama adds yet another dimension to understanding Wright as a thinker able to transcend imposed limits. For Wright, "the paradox and pain of having 'suffered containedly,'" as Kenneth Warren asserts, "is that he ... has come to possess a depth of experience and complexity of vision clearly superior to the dominant society he is supposed to value and emulate" (25). In taking up the forgotten or underplayed ways in which Wright wrote beyond the spaces allotted to him by mainstream publishers, this essay evaluates the influence that deeply rooted components of African American culture had on Wright's works and life while also insisting that Wright's singular experimentation with such components led him on to undiscovered creative spaces.

In like fashion, Steven C. Tracy's "A Wright to Sing the Blues: King Joe's Punch" presents the ways in which Wright's literature has been influenced by the blues tradition and details Wright's own experimentation with blues lyrics through his collaboration on a commercial recording of "King Joe." Joining Wright in this exercise were Paul Robeson, Count Basie, and John Hammond. Tracy's close analysis of the structure, language, and imagery involved attests to Wright's blending of Leftist politics and