

## INTRODUCTION

### *“A Fault Line of Pain”\** *Colonization, Enslavement, and the Futures of Climate Justice*

In October 2018, on our way to Africatown, Alabama, my students and I stopped at the Equal Justice Initiative’s (EJI) National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery and also visited EJI’s Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration.<sup>1</sup> The students were enrolled in an immersion class as part of a long-term collaboration I have helped create between Africatown and Oberlin College.<sup>2</sup> I included the memorial and museum in the course in order to frame our environmental justice work in Africatown within a wider dialogue about anti-Black racism and persistent structures of enslavement.<sup>3</sup> My understanding of this connection has been shaped by my time in Africatown. During my first visit to Alabama, Major Joe Womack, an Africatown community organizer, took my students and me on a tour of important sites. I listened to stories of how the survivors of the Middle Passage had bought land, built homes and a school, and called their place “African town.”<sup>4</sup> Staring at industrial sites juxtaposed with historic homes, I felt disoriented. I had seen environmental justice maps that show how free Black towns were surrounded by industries; but this

\* The title of this chapter, “A Fault Line of Pain,” is taken from Jemisin (2017, 7).

<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Robertson (2016) and Edgemon (2016) as well as the Equal Justice Initiative’s website: <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum>.

<sup>2</sup> My thanks to Major Joe Womack for reading this reflection on Africatown and the visit to the memorial, and even more for everything I have learned from him over the past six years. My thanks also to the community of Africatown and to student participants in the Africatown collaboration, especially the students in my fall semester 2018 classes ENVS 230: Environmental Justice and Local Knowledge; ENVS 330: Africatown Immersion, and ENVS 430: Environmental Justice Methodologies.

<sup>3</sup> When speaking of people of the African diaspora in the United States, I use the terms *Black* and *African American*. When referring more widely to peoples of the African diaspora, I use the term *Black*. In the context of farming by enslaved peoples, I use the term *Black* to include Africans enslaved in the United States and the Caribbean, and enslaved African Americans. Following the lead of scholars like Monica White, I refer to the history of and contemporary farming by Africans and African Americans in the United States as “Black Agrarianism” (White 2018).

<sup>4</sup> For an account of the founding of Africatown by a survivor of the Middle Passage, Cudjo (Kazoola or Kossula) Lewis, see Hurston (2018). On page 68, Kazoola says, “We call our village Affican Town.”

was the first time I was walking through this landscape.<sup>5</sup> The abstract idea – that structures of enslavement are embedded in the contemporary geography of the American South and Gulf Coast – was real from the ground under my feet to the bridge that loomed over my head. The plantation, I realized, has not gone anywhere.

Walking through the memorial with my students, the enduring violence of enslavement was all around us. EJI is an organization that defends incarcerated people and has established the first memorial to victims of lynching and other forms of anti-Black violence as part of their work for transformative justice,<sup>6</sup> offering “a sacred space for truth telling and reflection about racial terrorism and its legacy” (EJI).<sup>7</sup> The memorial consists of 800 rectangular sculptures, some hanging from the ceiling, evoking both coffins and bodies. I noticed that the monuments were weathering irregularly, rusting in streaks and patches that reminded me of both blood and tears. I asked a docent what the monuments were made out of, and he explained that they were built from corten steel, which becomes stronger as it rusts.<sup>8</sup> The corten steel suggests that survival itself is a form of resistance – but it comes at a cost.<sup>9</sup> The memorial is a sculptural and material form of truth telling that is essential to reparations work. As the website explains, “The museum and memorial are part of EJI’s work to advance truth and reconciliation around race in America and to more honestly confront the legacy of slavery, lynching, and segregation” (EJI). By speaking truth about the past, the memorial and museum honor the enslaved, lynched, and incarcerated, and help us to understand the impact of this terror on the present.

Just as historical links and persistence of what Michelle Alexander terms “racial caste” are evident in the system of mass incarceration, they are also visible in built and natural landscapes (2012, 2). The line from enslavement and terrorism to polluting industries runs through Black bodies and neighborhoods. The plantation landscape is still visible in the South by tracing the history of enslavement, convict labor, and Jim Crow to the current situation of environmental racism (Alexander 2012).

<sup>5</sup> I will return to the connections between plantations and environmental racism in Chapter 2. Foundational work in this area has been done by environmental justice scholars like Robert Bullard, Dorceta Taylor, and Beverly Wright; see the works cited for a complete listing. See also Allen (2006) and Colten (2005).

<sup>6</sup> <https://eji.org/national-lynching-memorial>. <sup>7</sup> <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org>.

<sup>8</sup> See also <https://eji.org/national-lynching-memorial>.

<sup>9</sup> My thanks to Santiago Roman and other students in the Africatown collaboration for continuing conversations about the memorial that have enriched my thinking about its impact. See Roman (2018).

Environmental racism followed the Great Migration to the north and west, where toxic industries surround African American communities: Camden, New Jersey; South Central Los Angeles, California; Flint, Michigan.<sup>10</sup> The links between structures of enslavement, segregation, and environmental racism, especially in the South, have been articulated by environmental justice scholars like Robert Bullard, Dorceta Taylor, and Beverly Wright from the beginning of the movement.<sup>11</sup> Environmental justice activists and scholars have further linked these embedded histories to vulnerability to climate change, “calling for environmental, climate, economic, energy and racial justice” that addresses the structural conditions of inequality and “unequal protection,” as Bullard describes (2019, 1996). In *Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice*, I place climate disruption in the context of colonization and enslavement and look to direct actions and expressive cultures of frontline communities for the articulation of ethical approaches to climate justice. Julie Sze writes that “Rebellion and resistance stories are part and parcel of restorative environmental justice, grounded in *more* . . . Radical visions for art, beauty, practice, and revolution already exist in many places if we look” (2020, 80). I dialogue with visions of emancipated futures and revolutionary pasts through speculative fiction, literature, poetry, dancing and demonstrations, as well as through the communities that are formed around blockades and in the streets. I engage with thinkers and activists who theorize through expressive culture, academic writing, political actions, labor, poetry, ceremony, and daily inhabitation, utilizing decolonial and critical race theories to shift imaginations of the future.

### Apocalypse and Revolution

Climate change is portrayed as an apocalyptic event in environmental discourse and popular media, with urgent calls for policy changes and technological innovation to save civilization.<sup>12</sup> After the 2018 IPCC report explaining the pressing need for warming to be limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius, media sources and climate organizations repeated that “we have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe” (see, e.g., Watts 2018).

<sup>10</sup> See Pomar (2005); Hamilton (1994); Clark (2018).

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Bullard (2000, 102), which uses the term “environmental apartheid”; Bullard (1996); Taylor (2014); Wright (2005). I discuss the links between enslavement and environmental racism more fully in Chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> For the most recent assessment report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, see [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch).

The impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations, including Indigenous, African American, lower-income, and island and coastal communities, will be severe and disproportionate and are already under way (IPCC 2018; Whyte 2017c; Bullard 2019). However, placing climate change within the longer histories of enslavement and settler colonialism reveals that contemporary society is not only reliant on the stable climate of the Holocene, as the term Anthropocene might suggest.<sup>13</sup> “Settler-industrial” civilization,<sup>14</sup> the driver of climate change, is built on what N. K. Jemisin calls “a fault line of pain”: enslavement, genocide, imperialism, white supremacy, state violence, mass incarceration (2017, 7). In “Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises,” Kyle Powys Whyte (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) reframes the discourse of climate change to take into account the many apocalypses that Indigenous peoples have already survived as a result of colonization: “ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration” (2018b, 226).<sup>15</sup> Whyte argues that the current discussion of the Anthropocene by settler colonial scholars and environmentalists assumes a “transition from stability to crisis,” failing to recognize that settler colonialism is a sustained crisis for Indigenous peoples (236). This imagination of current structures as stable allows settler colonial activists to escape responsibility for past and present colonization and to cast ourselves as “protagonists” in a narrative where we are “saviors of Indigenous peoples” from a dystopian climate change future (236, 237; see his discussion pp. 234–238). Through this analysis of the metanarrative of climate discourse, Whyte interrogates settler colonial academic and activist ideologies, including the use of the term “Anthropocene.” Whyte develops, in contrast, an Indigenous philosophical practice, “living Indigenous science (fiction),” an “intergenerational dialogue that unfolds through finding and empowering those protagonists who can inspire and guide us through the ancestral dystopias we continue to endure” (233). The essay articulates a clear critique of settler allies who deny that we are living in the domination fantasies of our ancestors (237).

<sup>13</sup> The idea that the collapse of civilization is imminent with the end of the Holocene and the advent of the Anthropocene is widespread in climate discourse. See Chapter 1 for further discussion of the rhetoric of “collapse.” For critiques of the discourse of the Anthropocene, see Whyte (2018b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e).

<sup>14</sup> I adopt the term *settler-industrial* from Whyte (2015).

<sup>15</sup> Throughout this book I have followed the author’s use of terms such as Native American and Indigenous. I use the terms *Indigenous*, *Native American*, and *Alaska Native* when referring to communities within the United States. I refer to communities located in Canada as *Indigenous*, *First Nations*, *Métis*, and *Inuit*. I have left the term *Aboriginal* within quotations.

Whyte further warns against the illusion of an “allyship of innocence” from white activists and scholars within the climate movement, and the environmental movement more broadly, that denies these fantasies while “claiming moral high ground as saviors” (2018b, 237, 238). This book began with my excitement about the resurgence of direct action in the climate justice movement. As an undergraduate at a Quaker college, I had first learned about nonviolent civil disobedience from elders and professors whose conscientious objection to war and all forms of violence shaped my understanding of the centrality of dissent to democracy. In the spring of 2010, as I was teaching my first class on climate change, youth activism at COP (the UN’s conference on climate change), and the rise of 350.org (a climate action group founded by college students and author Bill McKibben in 2008 (350.org, “About”)), brought direct action to the forefront of the emerging climate justice movement. In addition, many of my students were active in resistance to mountaintop removal in West Virginia, and their activism encouraged me to integrate analysis of direct action into my teaching about climate change. Since that time, as I have thought about these issues, taught classes, written, and collaborated, environmental justice communities have continued to gather in prayer and civil disobedience (Gilio-Whitaker 2019, 4). I continue to believe in the importance of disruption and dissent and to have faith in the power of coalitions to bring about meaningful change. I see this radiant hope in my students. I return again and again to Rebecca Solnit’s luminous accounts of the paradises that can arise out of disasters (2009).

But one of the dangers of utopian desires, for those of us who are settler colonials, is the desire to be set free from the sins of the past.<sup>16</sup> In her reflection on haunting, *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon highlights Toni Morrison’s observation about the peculiarly American desire to escape the past: “The American dream is innocence and clean slates and the future” (Morrison, quoted in Gordon 2008, 184). This desire for innocent utopian futures, as Whyte warns, appears in settler colonial imaginaries (2018b). Mike Hulme, in his analysis of climate narratives, identifies “Celebrating Jubilee” as a “myth” that expresses a “desire” for “justice, freedom, and celebration” (2009, 353). The term “Jubilee” is taken from

<sup>16</sup> I use the term *settler colonial* to refer to the descendants of European imperialists in the context of continuing colonization of Indigenous lands in the United States and Canada. (This term could also be applied to settlers of countries like Australia and New Zealand, but those countries are not my focus in this book.) The term therefore does not refer to all white or European peoples or to immigrants of color. My thanks to Ted Toadvine for discussions of the connection between the move to innocence and apocalyptic thinking. See Toadvine (2020).

the tradition described in the Torah, where every fifty years, the enslaved were freed and debts forgiven (353). Within the Jubilee climate narrative, the crisis of climate change offers the opportunity for a new society to be built, free of the injustices of the past (354–355). However, this particular form of narrative can become a way for settlers to seek to escape responsibilities for this past by focusing on building a new society with a clean slate.

Furthermore, the rhetoric of the collapse of civilization encodes racialized anxieties: settler colonial fears of being surrounded by hostile Indigenous nations, when in fact settlers were the invaders (Estes 2019a, 184); enslavers' fears of revolt and insurrection (Ulysse 2015); white environmentalists' fears of non-Western nations expressed by language and imagery of population bombs; and xenophobic fears of invasion by immigrants on the United States/Mexico border. All of these racialized fears of the collapse of Western dominance can be activated by the language of white environmentalists who fear for the future of civilization under a changing climate regime, and we should be cautious about the ways our language might invoke these imaginaries.<sup>17</sup> For example, histories of Africana resistance are often repressed or distorted as threats to civilization. In analyzing Haiti's representation in mainstream media, Gina Athena Ulysse observes: "Haiti and Haitians remain a manifestation of blackness in its worst form because, simply put, the unruly *enfant terrible* of the Americas defied all European odds and created a disorder of things colonial. Haiti had to become colonialism's *bête noir* if the sanctity of whiteness were to remain unquestioned" (2015, 28).<sup>18</sup> Karen Salt discerns "ecological chains of unfreedom" in Haiti's struggle for sovereignty, describing a history of "racialization, appropriation and dispossession... that entwines racialized notions of power with racialized notions of sovereign rights" (2015, 267, 269). Salt describes these histories as a kind of "haunting" tied to "land and seas" "that live on in battles over sovereignty and attempts at making and unmaking freedom" (275). In contrast with these histories of racialized distortions and dispossessions, Afrofuturism's speculative fictions imagine utopian societies built on histories of insurrection. Speculative visions of Black utopias formed out of revolution are locations for agency and imagination of worlds within and beyond white

<sup>17</sup> Solnit (2009) details the destructive impacts of media distortions and panic by white elites during Hurricane Katrina. See "New Orleans: Common Grounds and Killers," 232–304.

<sup>18</sup> See also Karen Salt's monograph on Haiti, *The Unfinished Revolution: Haiti, Black Sovereignty and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2019b).

supremacy, histories and futures that remain responsible to the past. Understanding climate disruption and thinking through climate justice requires settler scholars and activists to reflect on how apocalyptic and utopian imaginaries can reinscribe the erasures and ideologies of colonization and racial anxieties. Antiracist and decolonial speculative resistance, lived out through everyday inhabitation, offers visions of justice that escape the racialized erasure of the past.

### **Ceremonies of Dissent, Mourning, and Repair**

Decolonial and emancipatory social movements led by Indigenous and Black communities such as Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, and Standing Rock imagine and inhabit different worlds where they develop “revolutionary theory” (Estes 2019a, 14; see also Coulthard 2014b; Simpson 2017; Sze 2020; Streeby 2018).<sup>19</sup> Yet, the vocabulary of much mainstream protest and activism is inadequate to understand these movements, and, further, can recenter whiteness and settler colonial value systems. As the Water Protectors at Standing Rock articulated, Indigenous peoples call themselves protectors, not protestors. Clayton Thomas-Muller (Pukatawagan/Mathias Colomb Cree Nation) emphasizes that the Tar Sands Healing Walk is a prayer and ceremony, not a typical protest (2013b). Idle No More members dance in celebration, not only or always in protest (Crow 2015). In African American communities, dancing through the streets of New Orleans resists the domination of white supremacy, but begins and ends beyond the comprehension of racist structures (Turner 2009; Breunlin and Regis 2006). Similarly, Monica White’s *Freedom Farmers* warns against seeing Black farming as only defined by the exploitation and pain of enslavement and oppression: “If pain was all there was,” White argues, then Black farmers would not have held so fiercely to the promise of land as a basis for autonomy and resistance (2018, 141; see her discussion 141–147). White and other Black agrarian theorists and practitioners disclose land as a location of resistance and dissent, but also as a source of joy and spiritual connection, a location to “practice freedom” (White 2018, 5; see also Penniman 2018; Baxter et al. 2017).

<sup>19</sup> My thanks to the reviewer who suggested organizing material with the theme of “ceremonies of dissent and repair” that also became part of the title for this book.

Just as Black farming is both a space of imagining a different world and a real place to grow freedom (White 2018), ceremonies of prayer and healing and mourning cannot be reduced to reactions to white supremacy or expressions of protest. As practiced in the round dances of Idle No More and the second lines in post-Katrina New Orleans, dancing remembers the traumas and horrors of the past and calls on the strength of ancestors in constructing better futures, including those futures disrupted by climate change. Elder John Cuthand describes the story of the round dance within Cree tradition. The round dance began as a ceremony for a daughter's grief after her mother's death. Her mother returns to teach her daughter the dance, explaining that "*when this circle is made we the ancestors will be dancing with you*" (Cuthand, quoted in Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014, 24). The Kino-nda-niimi Collective describes the presence of ancestors in the actions of Idle No More: "In the winter of 2012–2013, our Ancestors danced with us. They were there in intersections, in shopping malls, and in front of Parliament buildings. They marched with us in protests, stood with us at blockades, and spoke through us in teach-ins" (24). Memory and resistance are expressed through ritual and in material acts of care for the dead: neighbors tended the drowned bodies that floated in the streets of New Orleans after Katrina (Carleton). Their sacramental care defended the humanity of those who had been abandoned by the state and treated as subhuman by the military and in media stories.

Mourning is an act of hospitality to ghosts, to the lives and histories that haunt us (Brogan 1998; Derrida 2000; Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000; Gordon 2008; Morrison 2004). In *Ghostly Matters*, Gordon describes haunting as "a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (2008, 8). In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler suggests that we remain in the presence of grief instead of trying to escape the unbearable, linking the repression of affect to the eruption of violence (2004, 30). Butler asks a compelling question: "Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence?" (30). Although Butler is referring to the turn to nationalism and violence after 9/11 by the United States government and populace, the necessity of dwelling with grief is crucial to thinking through the event of climate change. She suggests that a focus on grief can open us up to our shared



bodily vulnerability (30).<sup>20</sup> Butler asks a question appropriate to a world structured by loss: the loss of glaciers and entire biomes as well as the traumatic displacement of Indigenous, island, and coastal communities. Mourning is not despair. Many environmentalists fear that despair will lead to paralysis, and therefore emphasize hope as a response to climate change. Allen Thompson, for example, warns that without a commitment to “radical hope” we are disposed toward giving up “resistance and the struggle for change” and giving in to “reluctant acquiescence” with the “inevitability” of climate change (2010, 51).<sup>21</sup> Other environmental humanists have noted the limitations of both apocalyptic rhetoric and the rhetoric of hope (see, e.g., Ray 2018, 310). Butler articulates both the anxieties that underlie the imperative of hope and the possibilities opened up by mourning: “If we stay with a sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another?” (2004, 30). Perhaps willingness to remain in the presence of grief can help us move from individual powerlessness to a sense of collective vulnerability, responsibility, and agency, and to a focus on our shared responsibility for lives and bodies, expressed through social care. We see this shared responsibility in the neighbors who lifted each other out of the floodwaters of Katrina; in the demands of Idle No More to remember missing and murdered Indigenous women; in the kitchens and schools of encampments and blockades.

In this way, the collective practices of mourning, resistance, and hospitality offer an ethics for environmental justice and climate change. The affective responses of grief, rage, and love are not something to be escaped and do not lead inevitably to despair. Instead, blockades, encampments, and occupations express joy and solidarity. These affective flows are not the result of repressing the pain of grief but emerge from lived experiences of connection. Bodies articulate a vision of community and enact a different world through collective actions and inhabitations. These communities recognize that what Solnit calls the “social disaster” of privatization – of love, imagination, public life, and public goods – underlies what Rob Nixon calls the “slow violence” of climate disruption (Solnit 2009, 3;

<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Gerda Roelvink and Magdalena Zolkos (2011) see the possibility of ecocentric solidarity with “earth others” through actions that arise from sorrow and hope, a “post-humanist ethics [that] uses this shared condition of vulnerability to unsettle the ecological centrality of the human” (53, 47).

<sup>21</sup> Thompson adopts the term “radical hope” from Jonathan Lear’s study of Indigenous leader Plenty Coups (43).

Nixon 2011). As studies of revolution have shown, “post-conflict visions” of alternative societies are essential to the success of overthrowing oppressive regimes, particularly when revolutionary movements are constituted by “diverse coalitions” (Lawson 2015, 465). These visions of alternative societies are generated by the arts of revolution: “stories, rituals, banners, songs, cartoons, graffiti, and posters that mobilize protest through affective cultural performances” (463). In her analysis of speculative and “visionary” futurisms by “activists, artists, and writers” in the context of climate change, Shelley Streeby writes that “direct action has moved to the center stage in the world-making projects of many social movements” (2018, 31, 41). Expressive culture, performance, and encampments collectively envision and enact better worlds.

There are many affective responses available to us in facing climate change and the long histories of racism and injustice that undergird this event, including horror, grief, rage, memorial, mourning, joy, solidarity, and love. In her study of disaster utopias, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, Rebecca Solnit describes a “sense of immersion in the moment and solidarity with others caused by the rupture in everyday life... We don’t even have a language for this emotion, in which the wonderful comes wrapped in the terrible, joy in sorrow, courage in fear” (2009, 5). Solnit sees the spontaneous collectives that form after disaster as a model for what could be possible and calls for us to deprivatize our imaginations and social desires in order to imagine a different world (9). Similarly, Gerda Roelvink and Magdalena Zolkos identify the “affective encounter” as a place where “new possibilities for action” can arise out of the dialectic of “sorrow and hope” (2011, 53, 53, 52). And furthermore, Adrian Parr argues that the political crisis of climate change under neoliberalism involves “the new collective arrangements that the utopian imagination and social unrest create when brought into proximity with each other” (2013, 7).

Susan Leigh Foster’s essay “Choreographies of Protest” offers a framework for interpreting and understanding the significance of these actions. Foster calls bodies “articulate matter” (2003, 395). In nonviolent direct actions, blockades, and encampments of the climate justice movement, bodies articulate the violence of climate change. Foster focuses on what Gene Sharp identifies as methods of “physical intervention,” such as “sit-ins, walk-ins, pray-ins, and occupations” (395). Judith Butler further develops the significance of the body in public demonstrations in her book *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015). Thinking through demonstrations in public squares like those in the Arab Spring, Butler writes: “Sleeping on that pavement was not only a way to lay claim to the

public, to contest the legitimacy of the state, but also, quite clearly, a way to put the body on the line in its insistence, obduracy, and precarity" (98). As Naomi Klein documents in *This Changes Everything* (2014), occupations have spread across the globe as a method of nonviolent direct action and a performance of community, playing a key role in the public imagination of climate change futures. Taking up this attention to articulate matter and physical interventions, I examine the ways bodies trace the routes of pipelines across the United States and Canada. Protest and occupations reveal the unjust laws that govern both built and natural environments, public spaces and nonhuman natures (Foster 2003; Maira and Sze 2012). This dynamic was evident at Standing Rock, when Oceti Sakowin mapped the unceded lands of their nation, demonstrating that the pipeline crossed historic territories as well as disturbing sacred sites and endangering water and the health of the local community (Estes 2019a, 43–44; Harrison 2019). The map of unceded and treaty territories framed the struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline as a defense of land and water grounded in a long history of resistance. The bodies standing on the ground traced the boundaries of the traditional territories, making justice claims that linked the current action to the dispossession of ancestors and the protection of future generations.

Dissent communities live out everyday acts of repair. Through writing this book, I have come to think of encampments less as utopian experiments and more as moments when the process of constructing decolonized worlds through daily life are brought into view (Estes 2019a; Solnit 2009, 285; White 2018, 5). In the final section of this book I look at cooking, writing, and teaching as part of this labor of social care.<sup>22</sup> In her examination of the contributions of Black farmers to the civil rights movement in *Freedom Farmers*, Monica White expands upon the concept of "everyday strategies of resistance" from James Scott and Benedict Kerkvliet to argue for recognizing "constructive" actions that "build alternatives" (2018, 6). White argues that "The acts of building knowledge, skills, community, and economic independence have a radical potential... is it possible to conceptualize these ways of building self-sufficiency and self-reliance as resistance in their own right?" (6). Nick Estes (Lower Brule Sioux Tribe) uses the figure of the mole (drawing on both Lakota ceremony and knowledge and Karl Marx) to depict the way that "The most dramatic moments come when the mole breaks the surface: revolution.

<sup>22</sup> My thanks to the students in ENV5 925: Landscapes of Resistance, especially Kerensa Loadholt, for conversations that enriched my thinking about these questions.

But revolution is a mere moment within the longer movement of history... It is from everyday life that the collective confidence to change reality grows, giving rise to extraordinary events" (2019a, 18–19).<sup>23</sup> He describes the way the prayer camps at Standing Rock "performed another critical function: caretaking, or providing nourishment, replenishment, comradery, encouragement, warmth, songs, stories, and love... This was the underground work of the mole and the foundation of any long-term struggle" (Estes 2019a, 19). Indigenous blockade communities model the governance, values, and epistemologies of Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led coalitions (Coulthard 2014b; Estes 2019a; Gilio-Whitaker 2019; Simpson 2017). Current movements against fossil fuel extraction and for environmental justice are locations of revolutionary theory that emerge from long histories of resistance (Estes 2019a). This theory is articulated through lived practice.

In the current context of neoliberal capitalism and precarity, social care and revolutionary thinking are intertwined in daily life and labor. Worker writers, in a workshop facilitated by poet Mark Nowak, collectively composed a *renga* (a Japanese poetic form used by working-class writers) to write "about our daily working lives in New York City" (Nowak 2020, 193, 195). One writer, Lizeth, contributed the question: "Who brings you / a glass of water?" (197). Nowak reflects on this question, written by a domestic worker in a precarious economy where workers' bodies perform care labor at great cost, but are not themselves cared for: "It's such a basic question to consider and such a keen critique of the state of paid labor under contemporary capitalism, a system that grinds so many of our first-person singulars to dust in order to produce more and more profit for the very, very few" (199–200). Dissent communities come into being in blockades and demonstrations, and also in these workshops where worker writers claim their knowledge as wage workers in a precarious economy, as well as through their labor as writers critiquing neoliberal capitalism and envisioning more just worlds.

### Reparative and Decolonial Justice

*Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice* brings together reparative justice and decolonial theory to offer a framework for climate

<sup>23</sup> My thanks to Abbey Chung for bringing Nick Estes's *Our History is the Future* to my attention.

justice that seeks to be responsible to histories of colonization and enslavement.<sup>24</sup> By reparative justice, I mean the necessity of reparations to African Americans for enslavement and the continuing violences of white supremacy (Coates 2014). The connection between enslavement and environmental racism was articulated in 2005 by one of the first environmental justice leaders, Beverly Wright. In describing the legacy of enslavement in the South, she writes: “the region became an environmental sacrifice zone, a dump for the rest of the nation’s toxic waste. A colonial mentality exists in the South... This mentality emerged from the region’s earlier marriage to slavery and the plantation system – a brutal system that exploited both humans and the land” (88). Reparations involves truth telling, apology, compensation, and structural change (Burkett 2009, 2007). By decolonial justice, I mean the repatriation of Indigenous lands, honoring treaties, and recognition and support of Indigenous sovereignty and self-governance (Tuck and Yang 2012; Estes 2019a). Indigenous defense of the land and water began with colonization. Furthermore, Indigenous theorists and activists have been foundational to the environmental justice movement from the very beginning through activism, organizing, and scholarship. In her book *As Long as Grass Grows*, Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) argues for “Indigenizing” environmental justice through an engagement with decolonial theory (12, 26). She explains that “the underlying assumptions of environmental injustice as it is commonly understood and deployed are grounded in racial and economic terms and defined by norms of distributive justice within a capitalist framework” (12). In contrast, Gilio-Whitaker describes “a project to ‘Indigenize’ environmental justice. Indigenizing EJ by centering Native issues means it should conform to principles outlined in decolonizing theories and Indigenous research methodologies... From an Indigenous standpoint, justice must transcend the distributive, capitalist model. Indigenous modes of justice typically reflect a restorative orientation” (26). Esme Murdock further questions the assumptions about relationships to land that underlie distributive justice frameworks: “Part of what needs precisely to be decolonized in relation to environmental justice and environmental justice education is incorporating and attending to the various ways in which lands are distinct and relations to land are distinct because they are

<sup>24</sup> My thanks to the reviewer who gifted me with the language of “reparative environmental justice” and “repair.” This language has been essential in helping me to conceptualize this project.

informed by different cosmological purviews and attendant values” (2019, 9).<sup>25</sup> Decolonial and reparative justice together offer a formulation that moves past distributive justice, defined as the equitable sharing of benefits and burdens, toward a more transformative framework.

Just as Indigenous scholars call for theories of environmental justice that move beyond distributive justice based on Indigenous philosophies and relationships, Black land and prison justice theorists offer models for thinking through questions of environmental and climate justice within reparative frameworks. Recent work by Black agrarian theorists traces the history of land dispossession through enslavement, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and USDA policies (White 2018; Penniman 2018). In *Farming While Black*, Leah Penniman argues that land reparations are a necessary part of addressing this ongoing history of injustice (23, 301). Land reparations would allow elements of reparative justice: opportunities for Black farmers to strengthen or repair relationships with land ruptured by kidnapping, enslavement, forced labor, and the Great Migration. Here it is important to recognize the Equal Justice Initiative’s analysis of the Great Migration. Contrary to the bootstraps narrative that interprets the Great Migration as primarily driven by African Americans seeking economic opportunity, signage at the EJI’s Memorial for Peace and Justice describes the terrorism that forced African Americans from their homes: “With no protection from the constant threat of death, nearly six million black Americans fled the South between 1910 and 1970. Many left behind homes, families, and employment to flee racial terror as traumatized refugees” (EJI Memorial signage). Civil rights advocates like Michelle Alexander (2012) and Bryan Stevenson (2014) trace the economic and political structures that began in enslavement and continue today. Environmental justice scholars like David Pellow and Julie Sze bring together critiques of the prison industrial complex with environmental justice.<sup>26</sup> Sze develops a theory of “restorative environmental justice,” drawing on Jason Moore’s “reparations ecologies” (2020, 78). Sze combines theories of restorative justice from criminal justice work with the science and philosophies of restoration ecology to articulate a restorative environmental justice framework that “widens the scope” of reparations

<sup>25</sup> Murdock draws here on Dina Gilio-Whitaker (2019). My thanks to Esme for sharing her conference paper with me and for bringing Gilio-Whitaker’s critiques of distributive justice to my attention. Kyle Whyte also develops these critiques of distributive justice in his work; see 2016a, 2016b, 2017f, 2018a, 2018c, and 2018d. My thanks also to fellow panelists Carla Dhillon, Esme Murdock, Karen Salt, and Ingrid Waldron and the audience at ASLE 2019.

<sup>26</sup> See Pellow (2019, 2018a, 2018b); Sze (2020); Dillon and Sze (2016).

ecologies “to centralize Indigenous and black perspectives and, crucially, culture and community” (78). I draw on environmental justice theorists in conversation with Alexander to illuminate the connections between enslavement, segregation, and environmental racism, including vulnerability to climate disasters and impacts. African Americans are more vulnerable to climate change because of the histories of environmental racism coded in the landscape (Bullard 2019; Bullard and Wright 2009a). The work for prison justice and against mass incarceration by activists and movements like #BlackLivesMatter shows how essential it is to theorize climate disruption within the context of reparations. Approaching climate change through the history of enslavement and colonization widens the range of our historical and current responsibilities and requires us to think through the structural and social transformation necessary to the work of environmental repair. Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* tells us that the United States is haunted by the ghosts of enslavement (Brogan 1998, chapter 3). However, as Kathleen Brogan explains through her reading of *Beloved* and other contemporary American ethnic literatures, literature can perform reparative work and provide healing for traumatized descendants (8, 17, 18–24): “Through the agency of ghosts, group histories that have in some way been threatened, erased, or fragmented are recuperated and revised” (5–6). Literature can imagine alternate histories and better futures; Brogan describes how literature can also help to mourn, tell the truth, and bring suppressed pasts into “historical consciousness” for the nation (5–6, 8).<sup>27</sup> Throughout this book, I return to practices of mourning, resistance, and hospitality as articulated through poetry, dance, film, and literature as forms of truth telling that can welcome ghosts in hopes of creating better futures.

*Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice* is organized by three themes: speculative pasts and futures; ceremonies of dissent, mourning, and repair; and social care. In the first section, I examine speculative histories and possible futures, including eugenic and white supremacist ecotopias in Chapter 1, speculative fiction and neoslave narratives in Chapter 2, and Acoma poet Simon Ortiz’s deep history of the Pueblo Revolt in Chapter 3. This section interrogates ecotopian imaginaries and places climate justice within decolonial and reparative theories of justice. Critically examining the eugenic and utopian underpinnings of central narrative frameworks in climate change discourse, Chapter 1, “Fear of a

<sup>27</sup> On environmental racism and ghosts in the Caribbean and African diaspora, see Karen Salt’s work on Africville (2019a), Haiti, and “twilight islands” (2017, 2020).

Black Planet,” argues that our imagination of the future requires different forms of engagement with the past.<sup>28</sup> I first interrogate the rhetoric of collapse, particularly in environmental discourse, and look at two primary climate narratives, “the lifeboat” and “the collective,” which engage eugenic ideologies and utopian imaginaries. Through a reading of Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia Butler, the chapter examines how disability theory can disrupt narratives of survival and offer possibilities for thinking through the defamiliarization of place, bodies, and identities under climate disruption. In the final section of Chapter 1, I turn to the genre of alternative history through readings of Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* (2016b) and Terry Bisson’s *Fire on the Mountain* (1988). Whitehead’s and Bisson’s speculative histories are revolutionary acts of memory, reimagining history in ways that shift the trajectories of shared futures (Spaulding 2005; Wegner 1999).

Chapter 2, “Ghosts and Reparations,” argues that climate justice must be understood in the context of reparations for enslavement and requires a speculative recentering of history. At the start of this chapter, I place climate justice in the context of reparations for enslavement. Climate ethics often employs the lenses of *corrective* justice, the payment of debt, and *distributive* justice, the equitable sharing of benefits and burdens of greenhouse gas production (Burkett 2009). Placing climate disruption in the history of diaspora and enslavement allows for a theorization of *reparative* justice. In making this argument, I dialogue with the work of Octavia Butler, whose novels *Kindred*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *Parable of the Talents* imagine climate futures without seeking to escape responsibilities to the past. Furthermore, Butler’s speculative fiction places African American resistance, and especially Black American women’s creation of freedom, at the center of history and the construction of more just and sustainable futures.

Chapter 3, “Mapping and Memory,” explores the link between Indigenous resistance and memory and looks at the potential for alliance made possible by what Nick Estes names “Indigenous generosity” (2019a, 59). I begin with Simon Ortiz’s *Fight Back*, written in commemoration of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt against Spanish imperialism. *Fight Back* asserts that memory is essential to contemporary resistance, including resistance to radioactive colonization by uranium mining (Adamson 2001). The poem remembers “the darkest and most despairing era when disease, famine, loss of

<sup>28</sup> I draw this title from Public Enemy’s album *Fear of a Black Planet* and also from Kevin Dunn’s 2004 article “Fear of a Black Planet: Anarchy Anxieties and Postcolonial Travel to Africa.”



land and spirit burdened the Aacqumeh people from 1880 to the 1920's," but notes that there was no second revolt against colonization because "most of the memory of that courageous liberation struggle had been erased from them" (348). Ortiz reclaims the history of the Revolt to restore this history to the people. Next, I bring Chela Sandoval's concept of "coalitional consciousness" (2000, 71) into dialogue with *Fight Back* to show how Ortiz countermaps the landscape (Huhndorf 2009), offering a model for contemporary alliances between Indigenous peoples and allies (Adamson 2001). Following Ortiz's generous vision of alliances among communities of color and workers, I turn to Nick Estes's contemporary examples of pan-Indigenous expressions of solidarity and Indigenous-led coalitions at Standing Rock. Then, in the final part of the chapter, I bring two writers, Kazim Ali and Rita Wong, into dialogue to think through the responsibilities of alliance.

Chapter 3 transitions to the next section on ceremonies of dissent, mourning, and repair in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4, "Bodies Tell Stories," interprets funerals and second lines performed since Hurricane Katrina to articulate an ethics of mourning and hospitality (Ward 83). Second lining is a tradition derived from jazz funerals, where musicians first process from the church to the funeral home to celebrate the life of the departed. The procession is followed by a second line parade of dancers (Backstreet Cultural Museum). In the context of post-Katrina New Orleans, these second lines are a form of "vernacular" memorial for all those who died or were dispossessed during the storm and have been unable to return (Doss 2008, 8). They are simultaneously forms of mourning and protest, occupying public space in resistance to government policies of diaspora. Drawing on trauma theory, I argue that Katrina can only be understood from a morally and politically engaged position, and "collective healing" can only happen within this context (Saul 2014). Furthermore, I build on Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality to link mourning and repair in post-Katrina New Orleans (Derrida 2000). The people of New Orleans enact the impossible, what Derrida describes as a "hospitality [that] can only take place beyond hospitality" (2000, 14). This hospitality beyond hospitality emerges in the absence of structures like houses and institutions (Derrida 2000, 14), offering an ethics for climate disruption.

Katrina reveals a deep history of how land use patterns from enslavement were recolonized by petrochemical industries, creating Cancer Alley and New Orleans's position at the center of the environmental justice movement. Performances of grief recall the series of diasporas that underlie environmental racism in Louisiana, from the Middle Passage to Cancer Alley and Katrina. In this context, mourning ties social and ecological

justice together, illuminating the futures of those displaced by climate change and revealing a radical form of hospitality. Following this discussion of resistance and assertion of citizenship through memorial, I conclude with a reading of Jesmyn Ward's novel *Salvage the Bones*, which depicts the empathy, care, and courage of an African American family in the bayou during the storm.

Inspired by Susan Leigh Foster's insight that bodies are "articulate matter," Chapter 5, "Round Dance and Resistance," engages with tactics of movement and stillness that illuminate contemporary Indigenous resistance and solidarity (2003, 395). I take up Foster's analysis to describe the signifying power of demonstrations in Idle No More, at the Elsipogtog blockade, and in the Healing Walk (396). Idle No More formed in 2012 in opposition to legislation that undermined environmental protections and Indigenous rights in Canada and continues into the present as a global movement for Indigenous sovereignty (Idle No More). The Tar Sands Healing Walk is a ceremony of prayer for the healing of the earth led by First Nations communities in the Athabasca River watershed (Thomas-Muller 2013b). Through these interventions in public spaces and the sacrifice zones of settler-industrial civilization, Indigenous demonstrations articulate continuance in the center of the violence of climate disruption and global capital (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014, 22). In this chapter, I focus in particular on forms of solidarity between Indigenous nations and the ways that these movements express the power of Indigenous resistance.

Chapters 6 and 7 and the epilogue turn the focus of this coalitional work to everyday inhabitations and acts of social care in the third section of this book. In Chapter 6, "Slow Insurrection," I bring Mark Nowak's documentary poetics into conversation with relational aesthetics and dissent encampments to explore the emergence of new democratic forms in the interstices of neoliberal capitalism (Nowak 2020, 107). In *Coal Mountain Elementary*, Nowak makes coal miners and their labor central agents in a project of radical history. In the facilitation of workshops in the Worker Writers School (WWS), as described in his work *Social Poetics*, writing is a site of political theorizing about labor and precarity. Following the discussion of Nowak's work, I bring Jacques Rancière's theorization of aesthetics and politics into conversation with Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* to think about dissent encampments. I examine the ways that the Occupy movement made the imagination of more just, caring, and sustainable social institutions part of the daily practice of inhabitation and central to its challenge to the political and economic

institutions of neoliberalism. I argue that these inhabitations offer examples of Bourriaud's "micro-utopias" (31): ephemeral futures in the "*interstices*" of global capitalism (57). The inhabitation of Occupy and dissent encampments, based on radical concepts of equality and direct democracy, embraced disruption and favored what Rancière calls "dissensus" (2010). This is where the social practice of poetry converges with the encounter of relational aesthetics, illuminating the power of both literary texts and artistic interventions to offer new modes of democratic process.

In Chapter 7, "Cannibal Spirits and Sacred Seeds," I describe Indigenous food practices as forms of historical and contemporary decolonial care. The chapter remembers the starvation regimes imposed by settler colonial governments in the United States and Canada as modes of subjugation. In this context, the writings of Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Band) and Winona LaDuke (Mississippi Band) focus on the significance of food sovereignty to Indigenous resistance. Erdrich's novel *Tracks*, set in the early twentieth century, centers resistance to colonization and dispossession. *Tracks* depicts the construction of hunger and the destruction of Indigenous foodways. LaDuke's collection of essays, *All Our Relations*, offers case studies of protection of land and struggles under ongoing settler colonialism. LaDuke describes land seizure and toxic pollution, but continues into the present with the reclamation of food sovereignty. Through these works the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous bodies, communities, and practices is made visible. But these writers also depict Indigenous foodways as centers of knowledge, life, and continuance. Food sovereignty is central to ongoing resistance in the context of climate disruption, visible in the kitchens of pipeline blockades, where Indigenous peoples oppose the most recent forms of dispossession and hunger. Daily acts of cooking, in these communities, are practices of decolonial care.

The epilogue, "Everyday Micro-utopias," recapitulates themes in *Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice* through an examination of pedagogy as a form of what Rebecca Solnit calls "building paradise" in the classroom (2009). I draw on my experience teaching a class on climate change over the past several years, where my students and I remain in the presence of the unbearable grief of climate change, displacements, relocations, and extinctions, diverging from the problem-solving mindset that often characterizes environmental studies as a field.<sup>29</sup> The course functions as a laboratory for imagining collective responses to climate change that carve what Bourriaud calls "micro-utopias" within the status

<sup>29</sup> I adapt the term *unbearable grief* from Judith Butler's (2004, 30) language of "unbearability."

quo (2002, 31). I offer a notated syllabus with readings, assignment notes, and the narrative that binds the course together. In the final pages of the epilogue, I turn to N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* speculative trilogy, which imagines revolutions of the enslaved that end the world and make possible a new beginning anchored in the archaeology of past insurrections.

Climate disruption draws our gaze toward the future. Novels, films, environmentalist organizations, popular media, and activists generate visions of possible ecotopias or pending apocalypse. But this focus on the future can obscure the racist and colonial structures of our past and present. In order to construct the future, we must reimagine and take responsibility for the past. As Kyle Powys Whyte explains, responsibilities of intergenerational ethics must be conceptualized in terms of ancestors as well as descendants (2018b, 224). This book tries to understand these things: encampments and solidarities, ceremonies and mourning, and everyday inhabitation and social care. These are the places where better worlds come into being. However, there is not a linear progression through these moments. Blockades, prayers, speculative pasts and futures, dancing, insurrections, cooking, and writing, as possibilities and practices, are all constantly lived out and renewed.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> My thanks to the many friends who have read this introduction and vastly improved it: Wendy Kozol, Shelley Lee, Charles Peterson, Sarah Jaquette Ray, Ted Toadvine, and Sarah Wald.