

UC Santa Barbara

Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

Layered Maps: Carceral and Fugitive Archipelagos in Walter Mosley's Down the River Unto the Sea

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/36p422dv>

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 14(1)

Author

Waller, Nicole

Publication Date

2023

DOI

10.5070/T814160711

Copyright Information

Copyright 2023 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Layered Maps: Carceral and Fugitive Archipelagos in Walter Mosley's *Down the River Unto the Sea*

NICOLE WALLER
University of Potsdam

In recent times, the archipelagic lens, frequently associated with Caribbean and Native Pacific studies, has inspired new approaches to the study of African American literature. Brian Russell Roberts has traced Zora Neale Hurston's creation, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, of what he calls an "archipelagic diaspora" of "planetary connectivity" that moves beyond conceptions of the US nation-state.¹ In a similar vein, Cherene Sherrard-Johnson reads the island spaces in Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* and *Winona* as sites that both draw on and subvert imperialist narratives of paradisiac islands.² Building on the work of scholars in archipelagic and island studies, Sherrard-Johnson extends "an open invitation to landlocked scholars to reread other quintessentially African American narratives on island time, within the diverse framework of scholarship resulting from archipelagic, oceanic, and hemispheric American studies."³

This essay takes up the call to pay attention to the archipelagic in African American literature via a reading of Walter Mosley's detective novel *Down the River Unto the Sea* (2018). I argue that the spatial imaginary of the novel constitutes a layered map of the Americas that registers continental visions of the US nation-state but cognitively remaps and breaks up this space into various archipelagic constellations layered underneath. I understand "mapping" as a practice that plays across a range of techniques, from indexical topographies to the metaphorical tracing of relations. Sămi Ludwig has argued that "non-mimetic cognitive map[s]" which are referential, but do not directly imitate material realities, constitute "an important and integral part of the African American aesthetic sensibility."⁴ The spatial imaginary of Mosley's novel, in my reading, references New York's ocean and island sites and their connections beyond the nation, but what it predominantly measures and maps are relationships, systems

of immobilization and surveillance, and ontologies. Negotiating this range of engagement with land- and seascapes beyond a simple division into “materialist” or “metaphorical” acts of mapping is a hallmark of archipelagic studies. I read the novel as contributing to a specifically African American mode of the archipelagic, which I will trace along two trajectories: a focus on the immobilities resulting from what Michel Foucault has called the “carceral archipelago,” and a negotiation between what David Chandler and Jonathan Pugh have called “interstitial” and “abyssal” geographies. In my reading, both trajectories sit firmly within the concerns of archipelagic studies but significantly extend the paradigm’s scope.

In its focus on carceral archipelagos, the novel intervenes into a longstanding debate in archipelagic studies about possible imperial functions of archipelagic constellations. Scholars have argued that the archipelagic is not only a resistant vision that stands in contrast to the continental logic of empire. Rather, empires themselves can be constituted by, and operate through, archipelagic forms. Mosley’s work centers what Michel Foucault has called the “carceral archipelago” by highlighting issues of immobility, incarceration, and surveillance.⁵ But unlike Foucault’s work, Mosley’s text emphasizes enslavement and racialization as central components of carceral archipelagos. My essay thus begins by contextualizing Mosley’s take on the carceral archipelago with approaches in mobility studies and Black geographies that have paid special attention to the emplacement of Black people in North America. In this way, I hope to highlight the specificities and contributions of what I understand as African American approaches to the archipelagic, which highlight issues of incarceration rather than transoceanic movement. My reading of the novel outlines the ways in which it maps the US nation-state both as imperial continent *and* as racialized carceral archipelago and sets these layers off against visions of alternative, fugitive archipelagos that afford Mosley’s characters temporary islands of safety or respite, but never grant them the contiguity that undergirds Western fantasies of nation-state sovereignty.

In its archipelagic approach, the novel also negotiates between what David Chandler and Jonathan Pugh suggest calling “interstitial” and “abyssal” geographies, both of which they see as having developed from thinking with/from island spaces to critique colonial Western conceptions of race, subject, nation, and world.⁶ Interstitial approaches, according to Chandler and Pugh, “employ islands as exemplars of understandings of boundary permeability and of relations of entangled becoming” to create “a *relational* ontology.”⁷ Abyssal approaches, often influenced by Black studies, center the “understanding of the world as ontologically inseparable from its violent forging through antiblackness.”⁸ Black resistance to this world, then, “refuses the lure of relational ontology” and exists only through “holding together, in suspension, opaque or indistinct, that which the cuts and separations of a modern ontology would rend apart.”⁹ In Chandler and Pugh’s reading, the Caribbean in particular functions not only as a pivot for reading interstitial relationality, but also as a “punctum” or gateway of abyssal geographies.¹⁰ Mosley’s work, I argue, employs both relational and abyssal

ontologies in the creation of his fugitive archipelagos, but centers them in North America rather than the Caribbean. Through and around the novel's protagonists, the detective Joe King Oliver and the prisoner A Free Man, Mosley envisions fugitive communities that play across the spectrum of relational and abyssal approaches to ask what an "imagined community" can mean in a starkly antiblack world. Via the intertwined stories of the two men, Mosley's novel envisions African American responses to systemic betrayal within the US—being sold *Down the River*—and pushes, geographically and ideologically, beyond constellations of the nation-state and citizenship—*Unto the Sea*.

Approaching the African American Archipelagic: Black Geographies, Mobility Studies, and Incarceration

A crucial paradigm in my reading of African American modes of the archipelagic is the field of Black geographies, which, in the words of Camilla Hawthorne, opposes the "dangerous understanding of space as *transparent*—of geographies as static, inert, and self-evident, and of current spatial arrangements as natural, innocent, and ahistorical."¹¹ As Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods assert, a key dimension of Black geographies is the analysis of the ways in which Black people in North America have been confined to marginalized spaces or erased altogether from dominant maps, serving as foils for the construction of white space, citizenship, and modernity. In addition to analyzing the processes of African American enslavement, marginalization, and incarceration, work in Black geographies emphasizes the political dimensions of "the situated knowledge" and the "real and imagined geographies" of Black communities.¹² Black geographies, then, both interact with white oppression and provide alternative approaches to space. In this way, they exist both "[w]ithin and against" dominant geographies and colonial models.¹³

The attention to power connects Black geographies to mobility studies, which seek to understand "the power of discourses, practices, and infrastructures of mobility in creating the effects of both movement and stasis, demobilization and remobilization, voluntary and involuntary movement."¹⁴ In the words of Mimi Sheller, mobilities "simultaneously presuppose and reproduce immobile 'others.' Mobilities are never free but are in various ways channeled, tracked, controlled, governed, under surveillance, and always unequal. They are striated by gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste, color, nationality, age, sexuality, differential abilities, etc.—both in the past and today."¹⁵ As Sheller observes, liberal conceptions of the human include the freedom to move and have frequently served to marginalize and immobilize "women, the enslaved, queers, and the differently abled."¹⁶ Referencing the work of Katherine McKittrick, Sheller points to the ways in which Black people in the Americas have resisted enslavement, containment, and incarceration via "moves" that created both "fugitive" and "furtive" mobilities, refashioning and remapping space.¹⁷

The fugitive and the furtive mark many approaches to Black mobilities and spacemaking. Historians of enslavement have shown that nineteenth-century plantation spaces were designed to monitor and contain the enslaved, who nevertheless secretly navigated, traversed, and remapped these sites. Scholars have pointed to the ways in which self-liberated fugitives created “geographies of resistance,”¹⁸ “fluid frontiers,”¹⁹ and “maroon landscapes.”²⁰ Building on the work of Ralph Ellison, McKittrick argues that such “fugitive geographies radically subverted the question of captivity through mapping a new and different understanding of geographic freedom, an unknown ‘spatialization of secrecy’ that is enacted outside white supremacist cartographic rules precisely because these rules cannot lead the way to ethical sites of being.”²¹ Secrecy is thus a way of protecting and nurturing these maps, shielding them against being appropriated by dominant acts of mapping that depict Black liberation as a finished process that fits neatly into the contours of the US nation-state.

With McKittrick, I read these resistant processes as the creation of layered maps, representations which chart dominant cartographies and their implications, but add or suggest something more. One of the metaphors employed by McKittrick and Woods for envisioning the existence of Black people in North American geographical space is the ocean, which carries with it connotations of the Middle Passage, enslavement, and death. However, McKittrick and Woods also evoke the ocean as a space which fully exists on official maps but has an underwater topography that is frequently unmapped and unknown. “This tension,” they write, “between the mapped and the unknown, reconfigures knowledge, suggesting that places, experiences, histories, and people that ‘no one knows’ do exist, *within our present geographic order.*”²² As I want to show, the archipelagic is one of the ways in which such spatial knowledge is reconfigured in African American texts.

Archipelagic studies intersect with attempts to study space and movement, material and imagined geographies. Initiated by the work of Caribbean and Native Pacific scholars, the archipelagic, in the words of Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, “takes the geographical and political as a point of departure, as a physical context in which colonial/imperial meanings, structures, practices, and resistances are inscribed or take place.”²³ It is this concrete interaction with land, water, and islands that constitutes the force of archipelagic thinking. At the same time, following the work of scholars like Édouard Glissant and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, the archipelagic also describes something more abstract, the ability to conceive of fragments as related in dynamic and not fully knowable ways that can extend from small island spaces to the “tout-monde” or the “meta-archipelago” of a planetary vision.²⁴ As a paradigm, the archipelagic has thus frequently been associated with the transnational in its critique of both continental and insular models of the nation-state and its deconstruction of narratives of origin, fixed cultural boundaries, and territorial contiguity.

Rather than merely providing celebratory visions of the archipelagic, however, archipelagic studies have also used the archipelagic lens to analyze and critique manifestations of empire that themselves function as archipelago, as in Lanny Thompson's analysis of the US as an "imperial archipelago."²⁵ This tension between imperial and non-imperial manifestations of the archipelagic is centrally addressed in Craig Santos Perez's conception of "transterritorial currents." Building on the work of Thompson, Perez engages the idea that the US can be understood as an imperial archipelago of so-called "island possessions," prisons, and military bases. In Perez's argument, this imperial archipelago employs a dynamic and flexible, but nevertheless territorializing logic. As an "American imperial terripelago,"²⁶ it connects land and ocean, continent and island discourses in ways that maintain *both* the narrative of continental integrity *and* the reality of an imperial archipelago: a transnational empire employing the rhetoric of a continental nation-state.

The difference between this imperial terripelago and the archipelagic as non-imperial is, in Perez's work, theorized via currents. In contrast to the logic of the imperial terripelago, which functions through "the surface and rip currents of American colonialism, capitalism, militarism, nuclearism, tourism, urbanism, missionization, and plantationism,"²⁷ Perez asserts that "[a] focus on territorial undercurrents and countercurrents draws our attention to the indigenous cultures of the Pacific Islanders, as well as to the customs and practices of native land tenure, resource management, and alternative territorialities of ecological sustainability and care."²⁸

Perez's insight into the ways in which the US imperial archipelagic logic actually integrates—and exists in conjunction with—the idea of continental territoriality is crucial to my approach. So is his conception of surface and undercurrents, which, as I will show in this essay, reverberates with the layeredness of the literary maps created in Mosley's text. *Down the River Unto the Sea* begins by applying an archipelagic analytic to the North American continent, creating a vision which dissolves the coherence of the nation-state and reverberates outward into the larger world. However, the novel engages not primarily the tension between the imperial and the non-imperial, but the tension between incarceration and mobility, a central theme of contemporary African American literature. In this way, it addresses another strand of the archipelagic: the carceral archipelago.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault famously claims that since the eighteenth century, punishment in Western societies "has become an economy of suspended rights."²⁹ In Foucault's observation, this form of punishment exerts a normative power that traps the incarcerated in a network of altered sentences, observation, education, and medical treatment designed to "alter his criminal tendencies," all of which "continue even when this change has been achieved."³⁰ In Foucault's reading, this form of disciplining literally produced the criminal and created a network of disciplining institutions and scientific disciplines that were connected as a "carceral archipelago."³¹ Thus the prison became multiplied via sites of discipline (including schools, charity organizations, the training sites for workers of all kind, hospitals, and

universities) that shot through, and in Foucault's reading, determined the shape of modern societies. In this way, "the carceral archipelago transported this [punitive] technique from the penal institution to the entire social body."³²

Critics have extended Foucault's observations in order to show how this carceral archipelago was implicated in multiple colonial mechanisms. Ann Laura Stoler has argued that "it was really a *carceral archipelago of empire* that connected penal colonies to agricultural relief and to reformatories. It connected strategies of confinement from metropole to colony and across the imperial world."³³ Moreover, particularly in the United States, critics have laid bare how the carceral archipelago was, and is, heavily racialized, connecting enslavement with the contemporary imprisonment of African Americans via intermittent historical phases that served, again and again, to produce race.³⁴ Critics have also pointed out that histories centering the experiences of Black Americans unsettle the smooth transition between punishment as violent spectacle and punishment via disciplining mechanisms that Foucault's work suggests. In the words of Simone Browne, "the violent regulation of blackness as spectacle and as disciplinary combined in the racializing surveillance of the slave system."³⁵ Browne's work traces the range of these mechanisms of surveillance but also points to African American resistant moves of what she calls "dark sousveillance."³⁶

Down the River Unto the Sea, I argue, cognitively maps and remaps North American space to feature simultaneously the landscapes made to marginalize, immobilize, and incarcerate African American characters and the—often secret—networks allowing for Black movement. In this way, the text engages the full scope and complexity of the archipelagic. It delineates a continental and national logic that is compatible not only with prison islands as sites of isolation and incarceration but also with the networked space of a carceral archipelago. These structures are set against literal and virtual islands of temporary respite for Black characters who, in contrast to their white counterparts, never have the option of claiming contiguous continental land masses as fully "theirs" or as "safe space." However, these nonsovereign and temporary spaces still affirm relations with land, water, and community, spinning fugitive movement into fugitive archipelagos. In this way, the novel envisions the contours of the US imperial terripelago as a carceral archipelago and moves on to delineate the counter-currents of Black movement.

"This was still America": Tracing the Carceral Archipelago

Down the River Unto the Sea is a story of multiple betrayals. The protagonist and focalizer, "Detective First Class Joe King Oliver,"³⁷ is a Black policeman, happily married, and father to a daughter he adores. Joe prides himself in his professional ethics as a cop but simultaneously and regularly betrays his wife. On the verge of making an arrest that could result in the uncovering of a major drug ring, Joe is sent instead to arrest an attractive white woman for not returning the car of her lover. Joe has what he

understands to be consensual sex with the woman and returns home without arresting her. When she subsequently accuses him of rape and a small but compromising scene of their interaction is caught on a surveillance tape, Joe loses his job and is imprisoned on Rikers Island, believing himself to have been framed. Released without explanation after more than three months, Joe—now divorced by his wife—works as a private detective but seems to be permanently paralyzed by his prison experience and the loss of his status as a policeman: “My life since those ninety-odd days in Rikers had been what I can only call vacant. I didn’t feel comfortable in the company of most people, and the momentary connection with my daughter, or the few friends I had, left an aftermath of isolation. Human connection only reminded me of what I could lose.”³⁸

The narrative initially links Joe’s experiences of surveillance, betrayal, incarceration, and isolation to his imprisonment on Rikers Island, a prison island in New York’s East River. Joe is attacked and wounded by other prisoners, beaten by prison guards, put in solitary confinement, and chained to a chair. Experiencing filth, hunger, and darkness, Joe reacts with desperation and rage: “It was in that stink that I became a murderer-in-waiting.”³⁹ Literally produced as a “criminal” at Rikers, Joe nevertheless holds on to his belief in US-American society and “the system,” symbolized by his faith in the law.⁴⁰ Even when he is told that he has “powerful enemies that can reach in here and snuff [him] out,” Joe muses: “I knew that this was still America and that people who worked for the law did not execute without the will of the courts, but I was no longer sure of that knowledge. They might execute me because they knew I had become an unrepentant murderer behind their prison walls.”⁴¹ Joe understands even his own possible death not as a failure of the law, but as punishment for the murderous rage he develops during his imprisonment. He knows “The law is a flexible thing—on both sides of the line—influenced by circumstance, character, and, of course, wealth or lack of same.”⁴² But despite his own experience of the dire consequences of such legal “flexibility,” he asserts: “I still considered myself a cop.”⁴³ Thus Joe’s experience of incarceration and betrayal leaves him socially isolated and vulnerable to flashbacks, marking him as a traumatized man.

Given this exposition, the narrative initially seems to suggest that the only trajectory that can set Joe on a course of recovery is his rehabilitation within the system. His chance comes when a young white law intern named Willa Portman asks him to investigate the case of Leonard Compton, called *A Free Man*, a radical Black journalist who is about to receive the death sentence for killing two policemen. Willa works as an intern for Stuart Braun, a celebrity lawyer who seemed on the verge of being able to prove *A Free Man* innocent but then suddenly dropped him. The young woman has made copies of Braun’s files and hires Joe on her own money to secretly investigate the case. The evidence suggests that the two policemen killed by *A Free Man*, officers Valence and Pratt, had attacked him and murdered or maimed his associates for trying to uncover a ring of child prostitution and drug trafficking that the two officers were

running and that had far-reaching ties into New York City's police force and political elite.

At the same time that Joe is confronted with A Free Man's case, he receives a letter from Beatrice Summers, the woman who accused him of rape and who is now a reformed Christian. In this letter and a subsequent phone conversation, she explains that she was arrested on a drug charge, raped, and forced to frame Joe by a policeman who called himself Adamo Cortez. Struck by the parallels between his own fate and the apparent framing of A Free Man, Joe decides to investigate both cases side by side, aiming to prove a conspiracy against both A Free Man and himself. Joe understands the cases themselves are not connected, but their parallel structures offer two insights: First, Joe hopes to save A Free Man's life and thereby gain the strength to regain his own good name. When asked by a companion what it is that he wants for himself, Joe answers: "I want to be exonerated."⁴⁴ The second insight, however, questions and unsettles this desire as Joe begins to understand that the parallel structure of the two cases indicates a systemic problem that cannot—and will not—be resolved by the two men's exoneration.

Laura Quinn has argued that Mosley's earlier detective fiction is marked by parodic elements that undermine the ultimate restoration of the social order that the protocol of standard, often white, hardboiled detective fiction calls for. Quinn states that while Mosley's famous detective figure Easy Rawlins never fully leaves behind the genre's and the nation's "American Dream ideology," Mosley's "parodic and racialized troubling of the hard-boiled genre ... continues to vex not only the form's conservative law-and-order politics, but also the contemporary politics of a racially unreconciled nation."⁴⁵ In *Down the River Unto the Sea*, Mosley takes this a step further. Joe's story is not a tale of individual betrayal and subsequent exoneration within an existing system that is critiqued as flawed, but ultimately marked as dependable or amendable. When Joe learns from Beatrice how he has been framed, we read: "I knew, of course, that there had been a conspiracy behind my arrest, but it was so well done and I had come so close to being locked in a cell forever that I let that truth fade until it was almost completely hidden behind the memories of those prison walls."⁴⁶ The narrative exposes its readers to the same move by prominently featuring Joe's prison experience and personal trauma, initially obscuring the systemic issues lurking in the background. Even though it seems as though Rikers Island is the experience that breaks Joe and leaves him isolated forever, *Down the River Unto the Sea* tells the story not of a single prison island, but of a carceral archipelago of more widespread systemic regulation

E. Lâle Demirtürk has argued that from the moment of Joe's framing via "the white stereotype of black rapist," the novel "astutely demonstrates how carceral regimes of control both inside and outside prison are employed to uphold the social construct of white safety and justify the ongoing regulation and domination of black male bodies."⁴⁷ Reading the story as an exemplification of Michelle Alexander's insights into "the racialization of crime,"⁴⁸ Demirtürk observes: "The carceral spatiality

of whiteness in neoliberalism and its articulation in the criminal justice system as a form of racial domination has manifested in the form of authoritarianism and punishment in contemporary American society.”⁴⁹ In Demirtürk’s argument, literary characters like Joe King Oliver, in realizing that they are ultimately not protected by the law, begin to appropriate the very strategies labeled as “criminal,” transgressing the law in order to achieve justice.⁵⁰ Demirtürk’s focus lies on the ways in which Joe employs subversive strategies against antiblackness and racially scripted conceptions of the subject,⁵¹ but her argument also zooms outward to argue that the novel ends up critiquing and “mapping the carceral state’s racialized spaces.”⁵²

Taking my cue from Demirtürk’s observations, I argue that this process of mapping creates the contours of an archipelagic space that is layered in complex ways. On the one hand, Joe’s work on the two cases opens his eyes to the state as a racialized carceral archipelago. In Demirtürk’s reading, the official “construct of racialized criminality” that upholds the policing and surveillance of Black people is “undermined occasionally by the criminal practices enacted by violent and corrupt white police officers, prosecutors, and forces with a hidden agenda of deliberately targeting innocent blacks.”⁵³ However, *Down the River Unto the Sea* suggests that this demimonde layer of corrupt police officers and politicians is fully compatible with the official narrative of law and order, a token of the “flexibility” of the law that Joe initially observes. In the same way that Perez’s conception of the imperial terripelago enables us to see how an imperial archipelago can coexist with, and even affirm, a national, continental logic, the narrative of the US as a system of law and order—expressed in Joe’s belief that “this was still America”—can coexist with a racialized carceral archipelago that enables flexible networks of corruption in its central institutions while disciplining and incarcerating its Others.

The mapping of this carceral archipelago begins as Joe is released from prison: “When I got off the bus at the Port Authority on Forty-Second Street I stopped and looked around, realizing how hollow the word *freedom* really was.”⁵⁴ While Joe attempts to continue “look[ing] around,” building a life as secret investigator and moving into a third-floor apartment with huge windows designed to permit him to look without being seen, he himself is under intense and constant surveillance by the people in the police force who had originally framed him. Time and again, he is forced into underground spaces that resemble the prison cell he has escaped. Between his resistant descent into the subway, described as a sinister “hole in the ground,” his climb into a hidden crypt where the bodies of victims are disposed, a “subterranean cell” in which he feels trapped, and a visit to a women’s prison, Joe begins to chart the ways in which the state he has served, a state he identifies with the law, is a carceral archipelago.⁵⁵ In one of his anguished nights, the “underground cell” in which he lies merges in his dream with the prison cell on Rikers Island, pointing to the manifold ways in which these spaces are connected.⁵⁶

Michelle Alexander has argued that in the contemporary US, criminalization serves as a cover for racialization: “Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice

system to label people of color ‘criminals’ and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind.”⁵⁷ Alexander describes this “new caste system,” in a Foucauldian vein, as extending from the prison through the entire social structure to permanently remove those labeled criminals from their political and social rights:

It may be helpful ... to think of the criminal justice system—the entire collection of institutions and practices that comprise it—not as an independent system but rather as a gateway into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization. This larger system, referred to here as mass incarceration, is a system that locks people not only behind actual bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls—walls that are invisible to the naked eye but function nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship. The term *mass incarceration* refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison. Once released from prison, people enter a hidden underworld of legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion.⁵⁸

The racialization of imprisonment in *Down the River Unto the Sea* is suggested via subtle but insistent references to enslavement. When Joe is imprisoned he is “chained” and put in “bonds,” and when he struggles, both guards and inmates turn on him “like a pack of dogs.”⁵⁹ In solitary confinement, Joe’s incarceration and near immobilization in a cramped space echoes the Middle Passage, and even when released, he finds himself “at sea.”⁶⁰ Both the violence he is exposed to and his eventual release are arbitrary and unpredictable, and he is relentlessly marginalized and surveilled throughout. But if Alexander speaks of a “hidden underworld” that engulfs those who are criminalized even outside of prison, *Down the River Unto the Sea* extends this logic even further: through the prison as gateway, Joe also begins to perceive the networks that, due to their entanglement with government and police, are not criminalized despite their breaking of the law. The carceral state, with its disciplining through the law, and a sinister shadow world of people that break the law, function together smoothly, targeting workers, women, children, and people of color. Alexander uses the trope of vision to describe the new caste system as “an optical illusion” in which “the embedded image is impossible to see until its outline is identified.”⁶¹ Joe’s act of “look[ing] around” enables him to see even beyond this, exposing the layer of crime and corruption that is compatible with it. When Adamo Cortez catches up with Joe and imprisons him in yet another dark basement space, Joe kills his guards in self-defense. Mapping the city as a carceral archipelago, Joe is “on the verge of becoming someone, something new.”⁶²

The case of A Free Man follows a similar pattern. In a painful clash with his chosen name, he remains imprisoned for most of the narrative, facing the death penalty. The legal system, in this case, affords no protection to the accused—rather, it works to shield the police officers, politicians, and criminals whose profitable operations of drug trafficking and child prostitution were disturbed by the efforts of Man and his allies, a group called the Blood Brothers. Significantly, the Blood Brothers are immobilized on various levels: the members are killed, incarcerated, or wounded to the point of paraplegia. In the words of Gladstone Palmer, Joe’s former boss and old-time friend, Man cannot escape imprisonment even if he acted in self-defense: “you cannot exonerate a man who killed two cops.”⁶³ Thus Man becomes, in Willa’s words, a “victim of the law,” an embodiment of the connectedness of the state and its underworld.⁶⁴ Man’s case, too, is narratively linked to the history of enslavement when Willa remarks to Joe that Stuart Braun, Man’s initially enthusiastic lawyer, “is about to sell him down the stream.”⁶⁵ This central scene subtly marks the differences between Joe’s positioning as a Black man and Willa’s as a white woman: Willa’s use of the quaint word “stream” is corrected by Joe, who explains that “[t]he saying is ‘sell him down the river’.”⁶⁶ Even though she crucially participates in the attempt to save Man, the implications of the expression in the context of histories and geographies of enslavement seem to be lost on Willa. Betrayal, being sold down the river—the key theme of the book—is thus connected to the question of enslavement and racialization “hidden” just beneath its surface.

In the figure of Gladstone Palmer, this complex carceral archipelago is conceptually linked to the imperial terripelago as outlined by Perez, marking the US as a site of transnational “island possessions” that are relentlessly incorporated into a continental nation-state logic. Gladstone turns out to be a crucial nexus of the legal and illegal carceral archipelago Joe discovers in New York. In Gladstone’s words, “Back then there was a kind of a club that shared all that money swirling around.”⁶⁷ While he betrayed Joe to the members of this “club” to prevent the large drug bust that Joe was preparing, Gladstone simultaneously had him framed in order to spare his life. After Joe’s imprisonment, Gladstone follows a similar logic in order to get Joe out of the way without having to kill him: he offers to help Joe relocate to Hawai’i to resume working as a police officer. Reluctant to leave his daughter, Joe objects that Hawai’i is “five thousand miles from here.”⁶⁸ Employing the logic of the imperial terripelago, Gladstone proposes to take full advantage of Hawai’i’s specific positioning as both a state of the US and an island “far away” by arguing that Joe could become “a resident” after a year while the distance to New York would simultaneously make it unlikely that anyone would find out and reveal information about his time in prison.⁶⁹ In this logic, Hawai’i, as an island nation occupied by the US and incorporated as a state, becomes the nexus around which a US national narrative of continental contiguity is flexibly combined with the outlines of the US as an imperial archipelago. Gladstone positions Hawai’i as “far away” but still “inside” the nation-state logic that would enable a smooth transfer of Joe as police officer from one site to the next. As Jens Temmen has

shown, this flexible positioning of Hawai'i as both a faraway island space and a space close enough to be incorporated into US continental contiguity has been a hallmark of US colonialism since the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom.⁷⁰ In this way, Hawai'i becomes one of the quintessential examples for the imperial terripelago, which, in the figure of Gladstone, is linked to the carceral archipelago.

The Interstitial and the Abyssal: The Transnational Work of the Fugitive Archipelago

Joe's mapping of the city, however, also traces and produces countercurrents to the imperial and carceral archipelagos. Some of these structures obviously hark back to fugitive histories of the Underground Railroad. "It didn't take long to become a fugitive, just a few days of pretty good police work," Joe remarks.⁷¹ This fugitivity is itself linked to the history of enslavement. Joe's helper Melquarth lives on Staten Island, and the secret room he uses to capture and interrogate a man who had been sent to kill Joe lies beneath "a station house of the Underground Railroad."⁷² But the fugitive and furtive archipelagos that enable Joe's survival and cooperation with others are, more frequently, rendered in the language of the aquatic, the oceanic, and the insular. Like McKittrick and Woods's use of the ocean, this brings to mind the horrors of the Middle Passage but also the existence of spaces beneath the surface of ordinary maps. Joe traverses a landscape in which allies and places offer him an archipelago of temporary respite, set on New York's various island spaces, in an apartment with a "lichen-cruste'd" door, on docks and bridges across the water, in an aquarium and a fish shop, on ferries, and in the "Aramaya Rest Home on Neptune Avenue" with a "deck that overlooked the ocean."⁷³ Joe's landscape becomes one of connected small stops, each space defined by its relation of land and water and by the persons helping him out. In this landscape, his will to survive rises "to the surface like some long-dead deep-sea creature."⁷⁴

In this way, fugitivity ties together geographic and human connections into multiple relations, resonating with Martínez-San Miguel and Stephens's description of the archipelagic

not only as a system of islands but also as a set of humanly constructed relations between individual locations (islands, ports, cities, forts, metropolises, communities). The archipelagic is conceived, therefore, as a set of relations that articulates cultural and political formations (collectivities, communities, societies), modes of interpreting and inhabiting the world (epistemologies), and symbolic imaginaries (as a poetic but also as a habitus). ... [T]he archipelagic has a material foundation that is geographical, geological, and spatial. It is also significant that the archipelagic defines inhabited spaces through the networks of human relations that make them signify in a specific way.⁷⁵

Mosley's archipelagic aesthetic grounds itself in land- and seascapes but centers their imaginary and symbolic dimensions by tracing relations and constellations. This relationality, which Chandler and Pugh describe as "interstitial," transnationalizes its US setting: It deconstructs the discourse of US nation-state sovereignty by rejecting what Joe initially attempts to uphold as "the law"; it sets adrift celebratory notions of citizenship in pointing to the connection between enslavement and incarceration; it evokes the transnational histories of African American fugitivity via the Underground Railroad. The fugitive archipelago that Joe traverses creates alternative communities in reconnecting Joe with people he loves and respects, many of them outcasts and fugitives themselves. If Joe initially could not interact with his daughter without being reminded of what he could lose, he now uses the money and information he gains to extend his care for her even beyond his possible death and encourages her to "listen to what I say but do what you want."⁷⁶ As Joe traverses this fluid world that enables him to see and commit to links he previously missed, we read: "The days I followed down my expulsion from the police and the Man conviction I was also learning that I had a multifaceted life with many planes of beauty to it."⁷⁷ When Joe helps Man escape prison and sends him into hiding in Panama City, Man reaches out to his wife and daughter with a memory chip that records him speaking his love and affirming their relation. While he cannot tell his family his location, he affirms their connection: "I will be in touch and if you need to get to me all you have to do is remember that North Blue thing we used to do."⁷⁸ North Blue is an oceanic space in the manga and anime series *One Piece*, which charts an oceanic world of pirates and treasure, enslavement, resistance, and prison breaks. It is a decidedly archipelagic world that Man furtively layers under the standard map of the world to locate himself for his family beyond even the grasp of the reader, but it affirms his dedication to his family and his desire to care.

On the other hand, the layered map the novel creates, and the journeys the protagonists undertake, also resonate with what Chandler and Pugh describe as "abyssal work."⁷⁹ In this reading, abyssal thought denies both modern conceptions of subject and world, since "[t]his 'world' presupposes antiblackness as the disavowed ground for its hierarchical binaries of humans and nonhumans, for its fungible objects and masterful subjects."⁸⁰ While the "repeating island" of the Caribbean meta-archipelago can be read to evoke the potential of transnational and transcultural syncretism beyond narratives of origin, it also embodies the cuts and distinctions created by a violent and proliferating colonial world order. Thus "[a]n 'abyssal' grammar works to deconstruct a modern ontology rather than to add to it or to improve it."⁸¹ What interests me here, and what Mosley's text seems to deliberate, is the question of community among those excluded. Building on the work of Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Édouard Glissant, Fred Moten, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman and others, Chandler and Pugh argue that the abyssal subject created by exclusion "necessarily exists through what we call 'abyssal sociality', holding together what would be cut and made distinct under modern and colonial reasoning ... through

maintaining differences in *suspension*.”⁸² Thus, despite being a “force of negation,” the abyssal “is generated via a holding together with the disavowed.”⁸³

In *Down the River Unto the Sea*, the abyssal makes itself known particularly via a central intertext, Dante Alighieri’s *Divina Commedia*. Through Dante’s work, Mosley maps yet another layer underneath his setting: a hellish landscape of punishment and incarceration beyond salvage. Initially, Beatrice Summers, the born-again Christian who wants to help Joe get exonerated, echoes Dante’s Beatrice, who guides Dante through Paradise at the end of his journey. Joe’s partner and helper Melquarth Frost, who guides him through the underworld of New York, seems to be Virgil and icy Satan rolled into one, accompanying Joe through the inferno with both immense intelligence and ruthlessness. Melquarth (whose name suggests a Phoenician deity associated with the underworld) is a skilled hitman who appears to Joe from the underground, climbing out of a subway grate after an armed robbery.⁸⁴ Melquarth’s mother named him “after the demon,” and he is described as being “so evil no crime deterred him.”⁸⁵ At the same time, Joe’s “satanic sidekick” is a trained watchmaker and master chess player and Joe’s truest helper, who drives him “Across the river Styx” and offers him sanctuary in his home, a deconsecrated church.⁸⁶

Many elements of the story resemble Dante’s journey through the nine circles of hell, at the end of which, in the ninth circle, a special place is reserved for traitors, echoing the novel’s central motif of betrayal. As Joe searches for a Blood Brother survivor who is paralyzed and lives in a retirement home, we read about the residents there: “I walked down the aisle of tortured souls, a modern-day Dante wandering through a half-hearted beach resort in hell. The inmates reached and called out to me. They watched as I went by, wishing, I believed, that they had the strength to walk away from their private damnation.”⁸⁷ And when Gladstone finally corners Joe, he tortures him “like some minor demon from Dante’s hell.”⁸⁸

The most striking echo of Dante’s text, however, occurs when Joe and Melquarth manage to liberate A Free Man from imprisonment. Having taken a pill that Joe smuggled to him via Willa and that gives him severe symptoms of illness, Man lies unconscious in a guarded hospital room. In Dante’s text, Virgil shows Dante that the only way out of hell is through Satan, climbing downwards through the center of the earth in order to be able to ascend again on the other side. Virgil finds an opening in the rock, and the two men enter a new plane that enables light and ascent. Melquarth and Joe climb into Man’s hospital room from the neighboring building, making their transition “between the eighth and ninth floors.”⁸⁹ As they wait to cross over, Joe realizes that Man and himself will “never receive justice from law enforcement or the courts.”⁹⁰ Joe is frightened by his decision to seek justice outside the system: “taking these steps brought me to a place I had never been, a place that I had always thought was wrong. ... My demon friend and I were executing an honest-to-God prison break.”⁹¹ As they prepare to take the plunge, Joe feels “as if [he] was damned,” but proceeds nevertheless.⁹² In the course of these events, the two friends manage to free Man and bring him on board of an airplane that takes him into hiding outside the US,

in Panama City. As Joe contemplates Man's freedom, we read: "I felt that I was set free along with Man. It was a deep grinding feeling that hurt but at the same time felt like the hand of some momentary apparition of God."⁹³

Joe's strategy for gaining this temporary freedom for Man and himself is refusal, symbolized in the figure of Beatrice. Unlike Dante, Joe does not choose to follow Beatrice Summer's call to Christianity, nor does he need her to testify for him in court. Unlike Dante, Joe does not enter the Paradise of rehabilitation that he initially seems to desire, even though he had previously argued that "Law for me was scripture."⁹⁴ Unlike Dante, who needs to give up Virgil to enter Christian Paradise, Joe holds on to Melquarth and all the others who helped him navigate the underworld. He thus ends up rejecting the US legal system, the state's law enforcement, and, by placing Man in Panama City, the state's boundaries. As Joe himself remarks, he has "plotted against the state."⁹⁵ In this state of refusal, Joe's connections to others echo the abyssal socialities Chandler and Pugh trace in the work of Glissant and Moten, a holding in suspense rather than an individuating becoming. Although he risks everything for A Free Man, Joe observes that his "only interaction with [him] was with his unconscious body. It was as if, I suppose, I was his dream."⁹⁶ Many of his interactions with others likewise seem suspended between dream and awakening. At the same time, we are reminded that Joe King Oliver is named after a jazz musician, "Louis Armstrong's mentor," gifting Joe with a "christening ... close to jazz."⁹⁷ Building on the work of Moten and R. A. Judy, Chandler and Pugh point to jazz as one of the quintessential examples of abyssal ontologies, where "the players in a jazz ensemble ... lose their individuality and give themselves over to the rhythm where everything is held in suspension against cuts and distinctions."⁹⁸ Mosley's narrative employs a similar imagery to describe the relation between Joe and Man. After having freed Man, Joe listens to Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, remarking that "[t]hey played those horns like maniacs finally released from the asylum of humanity."⁹⁹

While the narrative thus offers fugitive archipelagos constituted both by relation and refusal, it also suggests the potential for change. However, this change happens not within the US, but on a far larger scale. Foucault argues that the "carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside. It takes back with one hand what it seems to exclude with the other. It saves everything, including what it punishes. It is unwilling to waste even what it has decided to disqualify."¹⁰⁰ *Down the River Unto the Sea* seems to suggest that even the intertext of Dante's hell cannot point to an "outside": everything is bound into the carceral archipelago. But once Joe has traversed this world and fully refused it, the act of flying Man to Panama City means that "the world had moved ever so slightly off its axis."¹⁰¹ Unlike Hawai'i, which Gladstone Palmer seeks to appropriate into the imperial archipelago, Panama City becomes a space outside the reach of the US nation-state, even if it is only a space of momentary freedom. This is all the more significant since Panama, as various critics have shown, has historically been co-opted into US imperial designs.¹⁰² With this shifting of the world, Joe can remain in the US and still partake in

a temporary respite: “My time in the prison cell, Gladstone Palmer’s betrayals, even the loss of my shield no longer had a hold on my soul.”¹⁰³

Conclusion: “Unto the Sea”

My reading of Mosley’s novel understands it as an expression of African American approaches to the archipelagic that register but deconstruct a continental nation-state logic while also laying bare the oppressive potential of archipelagic formations via a racialized carceral archipelago that is layered underneath. Against these immobilizing formations, the novel sets fugitive archipelagos that reverberate with both interstitial and abyssal ontologies and critically engage not only with questions of citizenship and the nation-state, but with conceptions of the world. Despite its abyssal gestures of refusal, which reverberate with the Afropessimist call for the end of the world, Mosley’s text suggests a different nuance in that the hellish world that seems to permit no “outside” has been moved “ever so slightly off its axis.”¹⁰⁴ For all its transformative language, however, the novel does not actuate this world, leaving its readers, with its very last words, under the influence of a feeling described to be “like the hand of some momentary apparition of God.”¹⁰⁵ The multiple qualifiers—“like,” “some,” “momentary,” and “apparition”—foreclose any easy happy ending.

In this way, the narrative moves beyond a dichotomy between the interstitial and the abyssal, as well as beyond dichotomies of inside/outside the nation. While relational fugitive archipelagos beckon toward the transnational as entanglement, abyssal socialities seem to suggest that transnational entanglements themselves cannot escape the cuts and categories underlying an antiblack world, and that holding off these cuts temporarily is itself an immense act of defiance. In my understanding, Mosley’s project closely resembles Christina Sharpe’s definition of being “in the wake” as being confined by the afterlife of slavery, as watching or holding vigil beside the dead, and as an awakening or consciousness.¹⁰⁶ Sharpe writes: “I want *In the Wake* to declare that we are Black peoples in the wake with no state or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected, and to position us in the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, despite Black death: to think and be and act from there.”¹⁰⁷ Sharpe asks what happens if the awareness of this antiblackness becomes, for Black people, the position from which to “attempt to speak, for instance, an ‘I’ or a ‘we’ who know, or an ‘I’ or a ‘we’ who care?”¹⁰⁸ In *Down the River Unto the Sea*, this positioning results in fugitive archipelagos that likewise attempt constellations and relations of care among those excluded even as the world is revealed to be a living hell—but only after this world has been seen, rejected, and shifted “off its axis.” In all of these senses, then, the protagonists, after being sold down the river, move outward, unto the sea.

Notes

A heartfelt thank you goes to the editors of this special forum, to Stefan Berti, and to the contributors to this special forum for collegial support and suggestions, to the peer reviewers, and to the entire *JTAS* team.

- ¹ Brian Russell Roberts, "Archipelagic Diaspora, Geographical Form, and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *American Literature* 85, no. 1 (2013): 125.
- ² Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, "Insubordinate Islands and Coastal Chaos: Pauline Hopkins' Literary Land/Seascapes," in *Archipelagic American Studies*, ed. Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 234.
- ³ Sherrard-Johnson, "Insubordinate Islands," 253.
- ⁴ Sāmi Ludwig, "Grotesque Landscapes: African American Fiction, Voodoo Animism, and Cognitive Models," in *Mapping African America: History, Narrative Formation, and the Production of Knowledge*, ed. Maria Diedrich, Carl Pedersen, and Justine Tally (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1999), 189.
- ⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 297.
- ⁶ David Chandler and Jonathan Pugh, "Interstitial and Abyssal Geographies," *Political Geography* 98 (2022): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102672>. Chandler and Pugh's use of the term "abyssal" differs significantly from Boaventura de Sousa Santos's earlier use of the term to denote and critique Western colonial exclusionary thinking. See Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 30, no. 1 (2007): 45–89, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40241677>.
- ⁷ Chandler and Pugh, "Interstitial and Abyssal," 1, emphasis original.
- ⁸ Chandler and Pugh, "Interstitial and Abyssal," 1.
- ⁹ Chandler and Pugh, "Interstitial and Abyssal," 2–3.
- ¹⁰ Chandler and Pugh, "Interstitial and Abyssal," 1.
- ¹¹ Camilla Hawthorne, "Black Matters Are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-first Century," *Geography Compass* 13, no. 11 (2019): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12468>.
- ¹² Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, "No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean," in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 4.

- ¹³ McKittrick and Woods, “No One Knows,” 5.
- ¹⁴ Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (London: Verso, 2018), 10.
- ¹⁵ Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 95.
- ¹⁶ Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 39.
- ¹⁷ Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 57.
- ¹⁸ See Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014).
- ¹⁹ See Afua Cooper, “A Fluid Frontier: Blacks and the Detroit River Region. A Focus on Henry Bibb,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30, vol. 2 (Summer 2000): 127–48.
- ²⁰ See Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 6.
- ²¹ Katherine McKittrick, “Freedom Is a Secret,” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 104.
- ²² McKittrick and Woods, “No One Knows,” 4, emphasis original.
- ²³ Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Michelle Stephens, “‘Isolated Above, but Connected Below’: Toward New, Global, Archipelagic Linkages,” in *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking: Toward New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations*, ed. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Michelle Stephens (Oxford: Blackwell’s, 2020), 20.
- ²⁴ See Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997); Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James E. Maraniss, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
- ²⁵ See Lanny Thompson, *Imperial Archipelago: Representation and Rule in the Insular Territories under U.S. Dominion after 1898* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010).
- ²⁶ Craig Santos Perez, “Transterritorial Currents and the Imperial Terripelago,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015): 620.
- ²⁷ Perez, “Transterritorial Currents,” 622.
- ²⁸ Perez, “Transterritorial Currents,” 622. My thanks go to Julia Szevs for pointing out this difference.
- ²⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 11.

- ³⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 18.
- ³¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 297.
- ³² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 297.
- ³³ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 131.
- ³⁴ See, for example, Loïc Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'Race Question' in the US," *New Left Review* 13 (2002): 41–60.
- ³⁵ Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 42.
- ³⁶ Browne, *Dark Matters*, 45.
- ³⁷ Walter Mosley, *Down the River Unto the Sea* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2018), 4.
- ³⁸ Mosley, *Down the River*, 23.
- ³⁹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 11.
- ⁴⁰ Mosley, *Down the River*, 10–11
- ⁴¹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 14; 16.
- ⁴² Mosley, *Down the River*, 14.
- ⁴³ Mosley, *Down the River*, 46.
- ⁴⁴ Mosley, *Down the River*, 204.
- ⁴⁵ Laura Quinn, "The Mouse Will Play: The Parodic in Walter Mosley's Fiction," in *Finding a Way Home: A Critical Assessment of Walter Mosley's Fiction*, ed. Owen E. Brady and Derek C. Maus (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 123; 132.
- ⁴⁶ Mosley, *Down the River*, 32.
- ⁴⁷ E. Lâle Demirtürk, *African American Novels in the Black Lives Matter Era: Transgressive Performativity of Black Vulnerability as Praxis in Everyday Life* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 157.
- ⁴⁸ Demirtürk, *African American Novels*, 160; 156.
- ⁴⁹ Demirtürk, *African American Novels*, 155.
- ⁵⁰ Demirtürk, *African American Novels*, 22.
- ⁵¹ Demirtürk, *African American Novels*, 16.

- ⁵² Demirtürk, *African American Novels*, 187.
- ⁵³ Demirtürk, *African American Novels*, 156.
- ⁵⁴ Mosley, *Down the River*, 17.
- ⁵⁵ Mosley, *Down the River*, 188; 275.
- ⁵⁶ Mosley, *Down the River*, 250.
- ⁵⁷ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010; repr., Dublin: Penguin 2019), 2.
- ⁵⁸ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 15, emphasis original.
- ⁵⁹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 11–13.
- ⁶⁰ Mosley, *Down the River*, 27.
- ⁶¹ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 14.
- ⁶² Mosley, *Down the River*, 51.
- ⁶³ Mosley, *Down the River*, 280.
- ⁶⁴ Mosley, *Down the River*, 102.
- ⁶⁵ Mosley, *Down the River*, 46.
- ⁶⁶ Mosley, *Down the River*, 46.
- ⁶⁷ Mosley, *Down the River*, 273.
- ⁶⁸ Mosley, *Down the River*, 25.
- ⁶⁹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 25.
- ⁷⁰ Jens Temmen, “From HI-SEAS to Outer Space: ‘Hawai’i as Mars’ and the U.S. Legal Discourse of Hawaiian Annexation,” in *Maritime Mobilities in Anglophone Literature and Culture: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Alexandra Ganser, Meg Samuelson, and Charne Lavery (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2023), 131–32.
- ⁷¹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 187.
- ⁷² Mosley, *Down the River*, 154.
- ⁷³ Mosley, *Down the River*, 227; 162–63.
- ⁷⁴ Mosley, *Down the River*, 275.
- ⁷⁵ Martínez-San Miguel and Stephens, “Isolated Above,” 13.

- ⁷⁶ Mosley, *Down the River*, 307.
- ⁷⁷ Mosley, *Down the River*, 229.
- ⁷⁸ Mosley, *Down the River*, 322.
- ⁷⁹ Chandler and Pugh, “Interstitial and Abyssal,” 3.
- ⁸⁰ Chandler and Pugh, “Interstitial and Abyssal,” 3.
- ⁸¹ Chandler and Pugh, “Interstitial and Abyssal,” 5.
- ⁸² Chandler and Pugh, “Interstitial and Abyssal,” 3, emphasis original.
- ⁸³ Chandler and Pugh, “Interstitial and Abyssal,” 5.
- ⁸⁴ Mosley, *Down the River*, 73.
- ⁸⁵ Mosley, *Down the River*, 114; 111.
- ⁸⁶ Mosley, *Down the River*, 113; 153.
- ⁸⁷ Mosley, *Down the River*, 11; 162–63.
- ⁸⁸ Mosley, *Down the River*, 272.
- ⁸⁹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 311.
- ⁹⁰ Mosley, *Down the River*, 312–13.
- ⁹¹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 313.
- ⁹² Mosley, *Down the River*, 313.
- ⁹³ Mosley, *Down the River*, 322.
- ⁹⁴ Mosley, *Down the River*, 74.
- ⁹⁵ Mosley, *Down the River*, 281.
- ⁹⁶ Mosley, *Down the River*, 318.
- ⁹⁷ Mosley, *Down the River*, 29.
- ⁹⁸ Chandler and Pugh, “Interstitial and Abyssal,” 6.
- ⁹⁹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 305.
- ¹⁰⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 301.
- ¹⁰¹ Mosley, *Down the River*, 294.
- ¹⁰² See, for example, the article by Gabriele Pizarz-Ramirez in this special forum.

- ¹⁰³ Mosley, *Down the River*, 294.
- ¹⁰⁴ Mosley, *Down the River*, 294.
- ¹⁰⁵ Mosley, *Down the River*, 322.
- ¹⁰⁶ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 17.
- ¹⁰⁷ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 22.
- ¹⁰⁸ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 7.

Selected Bibliography

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. 2010. Dublin: Penguin, 2019.
- Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Translated by James E. Maraniss, 2nd ed. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Chandler, David, and Jonathan Pugh. “Interstitial and Abyssal Geographies.” *Political Geography* 98 (2022): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102672>
- Cooper, Afua. “A Fluid Frontier: Blacks and the Detroit River Region. A Focus on Henry Bibb.” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 127–48.
- Demitürk, E. Lâle. *African American Novels in the Black Lives Matter Era: Transgressive Performativity of Black Vulnerability as Praxis in Everyday Life*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019.
- Diouf, Sylviane A. *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Traité du Tout-Monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- Hawthorne, Camilla. “Black Matters Are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-first Century.” *Geography Compass* 13, no. 11 (2019): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12468>
- LaRoche, Cheryl Janifer. *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014.

- Ludwig, Sämi. "Grotesque Landscapes: African American Fiction, Voodoo Animism, and Cognitive Models." In *Mapping African America: History, Narrative Formation, and the Production of Knowledge*, edited by Maria Diedrich, Carl Pedersen, and Justine Tally, 189–202. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1999.
- Martínez-San Miguel, Yolanda, and Michelle Stephens. "'Isolated Above, but Connected Below': Toward New, Global, Archipelagic Linkages." In *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking: Toward New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations*, edited by Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, 1–44. Oxford: Blackwell's, 2020.
- McKittrick, Katherine. "Freedom Is a Secret." In *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, 97–114. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007.
- McKittrick, Katherine, and Clyde Woods. "No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean." In *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Adrian Woods, 1–13. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007.
- Mosley, Walter. *Down the River Unto the Sea*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2018.
- Perez, Craig Santos. "Transterritorial Currents and the Imperial Terripelago." *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015): 619–24.
- Quinn, Laura. "The Mouse Will Play: The Parodic in Walter Mosley's Fiction." In *Finding a Way Home: A Critical Assessment of Walter Mosley's Fiction*, edited by Owen E. Brady and Derek C. Maus, 121–32. Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2008.
- Roberts, Brian Russell. "Archipelagic Diaspora, Geographical Form, and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *American Literature* 85, no. 1 (2013): 121–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-1959562>
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. "Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 30, no. 1 (2007): 45–89.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40241677>.
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Sheller, Mimi. *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in the Age of Extremes*. London: Verso, 2018.
- Sherrard-Johnson, Cherene. "Insubordinate Islands and Coastal Chaos: Pauline Hopkins' Literary Land/Seascapes." In *Archipelagic American Studies*, edited by Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, 232–58. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

- Temmen, Jens. "From HI-SEAS to Outer Space: Discourses of Water and Territory in U.S. Pacific Imperialism and Representations of U.S. Mars Colonization." In *Maritime Mobilities in Anglophone Literature and Culture: Maritime Literature and Culture*, edited by Alexandra Ganser, and Charne Lavery, 119–42. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- Thompson, Lanny. *Imperial Archipelago: Representation and Rule in the Insular Territories under U.S. Dominion after 1898*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.
- Wacquant, Loïc. "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'Race Question' in the US." *New Left Review* 13 (2002): 41–60.