

PANTHER NATION: BIG CATS AND BIOPOLITICS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICA

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Tracing the presence and function of big cats—panthers, especially—in multicultural American literature, this study reveals how that particular species group functions as a point of entry for disparate American cultures into Foucauldian biopolitical negotiation, that is, acts of forming one’s own or forcing on others socially-constructed subjectivities in the name of achieving social gains. Drawing on biopolitical theory and animal studies methodology, the study performs a comparative reading of American-Indian, Anglo-American, and African-American texts that feature big cats and speak to issues of social ordering. Taking this approach puts these different American cultures’ biopolitical strategies into conversation with one another and reveals how nineteenth-century inter- and intracultural power struggles were in part facilitated by big cat imagery and figurative language.

Previous scholarship has regarded much of early American animal imagery as an ideological weapon that upheld the removal of American Indians from their lands, reduced African Americans to the status of chattel slaves, and severely restricted women’s rights; however, moving beyond the recognizable Anglo-American big cat tradition, which largely asserts white male dominance, this study establishes scholarship on the big cat literature of women and ethnic minorities, segments of American society that challenge social exclusion through their own seldom-studied, yet rich, big cat texts. More precisely, this study reveals that women and ethnic minorities in nineteenth-century America used their own big cat literature and oral traditions to construct

arguments in favor of their full and equal inclusion in the American social order.

By comparing big cat narratives from different U.S. cultures, this study, which departs from the trend of applying biopolitical theory to population control in the strictly genetic sense, shows that the human/nonhuman border, a border that resonates with ancient fables and structures race, gender, and class relations, can be manipulated via narrative into a potent biopolitical tool. Exploring texts that bear this out furthers our understanding of how American cultures position themselves relative to nonhumans, how that positioning informs subject formation processes, and how those processes contribute to the framework of American society.

DEDICATION

This is for you, Sara.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Spanish dogs eating Native North American men and women; Natives riddling a Spanish dog with arrows for revenge; Natives feeding their dogs Spanish men; Spanish men leading Native carriers by collars as if dogs; Spanish men eating Native dogs but not their own; and Natives enforcing tribal discipline by feeding their own people to dogs. These scenarios constitute a sampling of the various combinations of human-animal interactions found within the colonial context of *The Florida of the Inca* (1605), Garcilaso de la Vega's history of Hernando de Soto's attempted conquest of the southeastern portion of the United States. Since these narrated encounters revolve around power struggles—whether intra- or intercultural—they provide insights into the role nonhumans play in several human political processes, namely the negotiation and deployment of sovereignty and other forms of social order and power. Ostensibly a historical document, Garcilaso's retelling of the many violent clashes between Spanish explorers and Indigenous tribes of Florida, for its inaccuracies and second-hand nature, performs more of a literary function than a historical one.¹ It therefore illuminates the relationship between dehumanization tactics, narrative, and contests for power, the latter of which involves to varying degrees a cultural group's subject formation processes and social structuring practices. More specifically, Garcilaso's text demonstrates how scenes in which nonhumans participate in human acts of violence or humans use animal-based figurative language to dehumanize others form the micro-aggressions that, in the aggregate, amount to large-scale cultural warfare.

Since the animal representations in *The Florida of the Inca* speak to the denial of and, less often, the granting of social equity, they fall squarely within the realm of biopolitics.² As first conceived by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, “biopolitics” refers to an “entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls*” aimed at supervising the biological processes of a particular population in the name of achieving social gain, what Foucault called a “*biopolitics of the population*” (*History of Sexuality* 139, original emphasis). In practice, biopolitics centers on the sovereign, who once exercised his “power of life and death” by “exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 136) but now exercises his sovereign right by “*foster[ing] life or disallow[ing] it to the point of death*” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 138, original emphasis). This new strategy effectively removes population control from the public arena and allows the state sovereign, operating more covertly than ever before, to intervene into the processes that determine the size and well-being of the population under his control. Such processes even take place on a genetic level through the manipulation of “the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, [and] the fertility of a population” (Foucault, *Society* 243). Conceived more broadly, biopolitics refers to the social condition in which “politics is the continuation of war by other means.” Inverting Carl von Clausewitz’s phrase “War is the continuation of politics by other means,” Foucault emphasizes the underhanded mechanisms by which politics facilitates war waged in arenas that go beyond literal battlefields. As he states, “the role of political power is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to reinscribe that relationship of force, and to reinscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even

the bodies of individuals” (Foucault, *Society* 15-16). From this perspective, language and narrative reflect and inform the very real power struggles that work to uphold or, conversely, challenge the political status quo.

Waged on an ideological level, this narrative-driven form of warfare contributes to biopolitical population management since literature can condone or resist the acts of social hierarchization reflected in its pages. Animal narratives in particular come into conversation with biopolitical negotiation—the term I use to describe the acts of forming one’s own or forcing on others raced, gendered, and otherwise socially-constructed subjectivities in the name of achieving social gains—since social hierarchies constructed on the basis of somatic and behavioral differences often take shape when one party dehumanizes another. This perspective follows the work of Giorgio Agamben, who challenges Foucault’s assertion that political man emerges out of nonpolitical life by arguing that nonhuman, or nonpolitical, life always already existed within political man. To support his claim, Agamben examines the distinction between *zoe*, a Greek term meant to express the “simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods),” and *bios*, the Greek term that denotes the “form or way of living proper to an individual or group” (*Homo Sacer* 1). Modern man, Agamben contends, differs from classical man in that the former includes *zoe* into the *polis*, or political arena, whereas the latter attempted to exclude “simple natural life” from political processes (*Homo Sacer* 2). This process by which political power manifests itself parallels the similarly incomplete exclusion that human subjectivity performs on its nonhuman, or primal, component. As Agamben argues:

It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place.

(The Open 15-16)

Stated otherwise, the negotiation of the existential meaning of the term “human” rests on a fluid line of separation between humans and nonhumans that drives the formation of liberal subjectivity, specifically the form capable of operating politically. Finding the nonhuman within the human therefore propels individual subject formation and resulting collective social structures. As I argue throughout this study, since the reorganization of such structures cause certain subsets of the human populace to be labeled inferior—whether in terms of race, gender, or other social identifier—for their supposed proximity to animality, I consider animal narratives biopolitical sites where real or desired social orders get articulated, often to the detriment of those outside the prevailing political order.

Because the nineteenth century, which had significant implications for race, gender, and class relations in America, saw increasing urbanization and the attendant rise in the domestication of animals and pet keeping, critics have turned to this period to examine the intersections of animality, subject formation, and the American social order. Jennifer Mason, in *Civilized Creatures: Urban Animals, Sentimental Culture, and American Literature, 1850-1900* (2005), examines the “[American] population’s feeling

about the ostensibly civilized creatures present in the built environment” and argues that “understanding the dynamic relationship between people’s lived relations with animals and the multiple, species-specific, and often markedly affective discourses relating to these animals is essential for understanding the contests for power in the human social order played out in literary texts” (1). Case in point, Mason’s reading of Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) reveals the interplay between equestrianism and Ellen Montgomery’s subject formation: “Through [Ellen’s] equestrian education she becomes the right kind of horsewoman—that is, the right kind of horse and the right kind of woman” (50). Colleen Glenney Boggs, in *Animalia Americana: Animal Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity* (2013), follows suit, arguing that “On the one hand, animals function as the absolute other of the human subject; they are the negatively defined nonhuman. On the other hand, animals serve as mediators between the subject and its others” (19). This binary provides the connective thread between biopolitics and the human/nonhuman divide since “the modern state does not limit its reach to human bodies but also exercises power over animal bodies; and second, the differentiation between human beings and animals is the fundamental mechanism by which biopolitics exerts power” (Boggs 11). Whereas Boggs makes use of biopolitical theory and Mason does not, they both view animal scenes in literature as sites that reveal how subject formation processes, especially those that contribute to social hierarchization, rest on cross-species affinities between humans and domesticated nonhumans.

Mason’s and Boggs’s studies provide useful interpretative tools for furthering our understanding of the cultural politics of animal representations, yet their disproportionate

focus on domestic animals and on the work of white, canonical authors disregards the role one wild nonhuman plays in the subject formation processes and related social structuring practices of diverse American cultures.³ To fill in this gap in scholarship, this study draws on biopolitical theory and animal studies methodology to perform readings of multicultural American texts that feature the American panther and other big cats. The American panther holds a preeminent place among the multitude of nonhumans in American literature and culture. This bears out in the earliest exploration narratives of the Americas, which reveal a fascination with the big cats that inhabited the so-called New World. Two early European explorers of the Americas, Amerigo Vespucci and Christopher Columbus, encountered panthers that they misidentified as “lions.” In North America, specifically, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca made a similar misidentification in 1513, and John Smith would do the same years later when describing the “Lions” he encountered in Virginia (Parker 19-20). Among the Indigenous American population, several tribes tell cultural stories in which tribal members identify with panthers portrayed as deities, as agents acting on behalf of superior beings, and as participants in cultural rituals. In Anglo-American literature, male and female characters adopt big cat characteristics in order to affirm their relative social power. The same holds true for male characters in the subset of African-American literature that contrasts with the slave narratives in which narrators denounce any associations with big cats. As I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter and the ones that follow, these big cat texts more often than not function as a means for diverse American cultures to articulate their actual and desired social orders—principally in their raced and gendered manifestations.

Early Encounters

Since Garcilaso's *The Florida of the Inca* contains a multitude of scenes in which humans leverage animals, both domesticated and wild, for social power, the text demonstrates how nonhumans figure prominently in the biopolitical negotiation taking part on both sides of the Spanish-Indigenous conflict. Because these scenes display multiple combinations of human-animal encounters that reveal intricate and ever-changing exchanges of power, the victor in the power struggles in which animal representations serve as tools of oppression—or liberation, on the other hand—at times remains obscure. This problematization is to be expected, for, as Foucault explains, the status of power is nothing short of precarious: “Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power” (*Society* 29). In other words, the direction in which power flows, from the top in the form of oppression, from the bottom in the form of resistance or survival, or from somewhere in between, resists precise calculation. Nonetheless, the biopolitical picture in any text becomes clearer when one applies Cary Wolfe and Jonathan Elmer's “species grid,” which identifies the four human/nonhuman varieties used to influence social structuring. Wolfe and Elmer define *animalized animals* as fully animalized beings who bear the brunt of violent speciesism; *humanized animals* as those nonhumans endowed with human characteristics and more often than not exempt from speciesism; *animalized humans* as persons reduced to the status of animals; and *humanized humans* as those that enjoy complete and untroubled sovereignty (146-147). Thus by determining where authors and oral storytellers place

their human and nonhuman characters in relation to each other on the species grid, we often discover their means of hierarchizing the natural world.

This methodology proves useful for analyzing Garcilaso's text, for the Spanish and Indigenous Floridians alike animalize their combatants. Spanish explorers show their contempt for the Indigenous population by mutilating them and feeding the severed parts to dogs (Garcilaso 87). The Spanish likewise dole out this dreadful fate to Indigenous guides who "led their captors into difficult passes and places where Indians lying in ambush came out to hurl arrows at them." As punishment for this specific double-crossing, the "Spaniards permitted the dogs to kill four of [the guides]" (Garcilaso 105). In these instances, the fully humanized Spaniards exert their violent will on the Indigenous population whom they animalize to a degree that positions the latter as game fit for consumption by dogs.⁴ On the other hand, Garcilaso describes how Natives kill Spaniards and convert them from humans to "sustenance for birds and dogs" (576). Even in contests for power devoid of the presence of literal animals, one party in this conflict uses animal-based figurative language to dehumanize the other. Garcilaso, for instance, reveals another of De Soto's strategies for animalizing the Natives: "[De Soto] was known to have severed the heads of fainting carriers rather than bother to untie the collars by which they were led" (87). With or without the symbolically-loaded collars by which the Spanish lead the Natives around like dogs, the Spanish animalize Natives through unfavorable comparisons to dogs. In a scene in which the Spanish take a Native hostage, the latter repeatedly misunderstands his captors' requests for information about their surroundings, causing one of the frustrated captors to say, "Go to the devil, you

dog” (Garcilaso 613). Whether the participants in this intercultural conflict use actual nonhumans in their acts of violence or use disparaging animal-based figurative language, they mean to affirm their own social power by dehumanizing their adversaries.

The scenes in *The Florida of the Inca* in which the Spanish humanize their companion dogs achieve the same political end as the scenes discussed above. Take, for instance, the humanizing rhetoric used to describe the Spanish greyhound Becerrillo, who, as one among several greyhounds that “In the conquest of the New World . . . have accomplished feats that are worthy of great respect” (Garcilaso 126), supposedly possesses the ability to “distinguish between a peaceful Indian and a warrior” (Garcilaso 127). As Garcilaso writes, “the Spaniards manifested their admiration for a dog named Becerrillo by giving him a part of their winnings, or rather by leaving the dog’s portion with his master” (Garcilaso 126). A similar breakdown of the human/nonhuman divide occurs when Garcilaso writes of one of Becerrillo’s sons, Leoncillo, who “received five hundred pesos in gold as his share in one of the divisions made after the famous Vasco Núñez de Balboa had discovered the Sea of the South.” One of Garcilaso’s contemporaries even recorded that “in addition to gold, dogs received allotments of slaves as well as other things of importance” (Garcilaso 127). Here the Spanish reverse the natural order and humanize canines they allow to accrue monetary wealth and own animalized Natives.

Garcilaso continues the trend of humanizing dogs and animalizing Natives when he describes the exploits of another particularly violent and aggressive Spanish dog, Bruto. In one such scene, Indigenous captives feign contentment, convince their Spanish

captors to drop their guards, and flee on foot, only to be pursued by Bruto. For its exaggeration of Bruto's supposedly human characteristics, the scene is worth quoting at length:

Then just *as if possessed of human understanding*, this dog rushed by the first three Indians he came to and on reaching the fourth, who was in advance of the others, threw a paw to his shoulder and knocked him to the ground, holding him there until the next man approached. And now as each successive Indian came near and attempted to pass, the animal released the one he was holding and tossed another to the ground. And when he had thrown the last, he went back and forth among the four of them with such skill and trickery, turning loose one to hurl down another who was attempting to rise and frightening them all with great barks as he lay his paw upon them, that he was able to detain them until the Spaniards arrived and took them back to the camp.

(Garcilaso 125, emphasis added)

The Spanish likewise grant Bruto human understanding in a scene in which the dog pursues a group of Indigenous men into a body of water. Bruto singles out the man who committed the original offense against the Spaniards then, "striking this man with his paw, he proceeded to tear him to pieces in the water." In contrast with the previous scene, this one ends in bloodshed, bloodshed that the Natives, who themselves buy into the exceptional quality of Bruto, repay when they shoot Bruto "most eagerly" full of arrows (Garcilaso 126). Able to outsmart and generally outmatch their Indigenous rivals, these humanized canines rank higher on the Spaniards' social hierarchy than those upon

whom the dogs prey.⁵

As this array of human-animal encounters demonstrates, the work of outlining the relationship between subject formation and animal representations requires special attention to the intricacies of power dynamics. After all, as the Spanish and the Indigenous population of Florida face off, each group uses actual nonhumans and animal-based figurative language to exert power over the other at different times and in different contexts. To further complicate the matter, the Indigenous population shows its willingness to incorporate nonhumans into its own intracultural disciplinary processes, as evidenced by its use of dogs to regulate its social order. If a man suspects or receives information that his wife has committed adultery, he can kill her if “two or three other witnesses” confirm his suspicions or produce evidence (Garcilaso 391). Only after the cuckolded man kills his wife does he present his case to the province lord and judges, who then rule on the veracity of the witness testimony. If they find insufficient evidence or inconsistencies in witness statements, the husband receives a death sentence that his wife’s relatives carry out by shooting him with arrows. On the other hand, if the judiciary deem the husband’s actions justified, the ruling body, along with granting the husband the permission to remarry, proclaim that “under penalty of death, no person, whether relative, friend or acquaintance of the deceased shall dare give her burial or remove a single shaft from her body, but instead, they shall leave her to be eaten by the birds and dogs as an example and a punishment for her wickedness” (Garcilaso 392). In the process of establishing a patriarchal social order, an unjustified (male) murderer gets his just due but a convicted adulteress dies two deaths, one literal one at the hands of her

husband and another symbolic one at the beaks and teeth of animals.

Felis Concolor

Applying Wolfe and Elmer's species grid to Garcilaso's representation of another nonhuman, the American panther (*Felis Concolor*)⁶ reveals how wild animals, similar to their domesticated counterparts, inform the inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies within a culture's social structuring practices. Garcilaso describes the plight of Juan Ortiz, an animalized Spanish captive of the Yustaga people, who regains his humanity in the eyes of his captors by facing off against and killing a grave-robbing panther. Ortiz, one of four Spaniards to be captured by a tribal leader named Cacique Hirrihigua, finds himself at times closer and at times farther away from occupying the fully humanized position that his captors enjoy within their community.⁷ Hirrihigua, upon first capturing the Spaniards, incorporates dehumanization tactics into his strategy for torturing them. When the time for the Spaniards' deaths arrived, Hirrihigua "commanded that the captives be taken naked to the plaza and there made to run in turn from one side to the other while the Indians shot arrows at them as if they were wild beasts" (Garcilaso 63). When Hirrihigua's wife and daughters ask that he be content with the three deaths, Hirrihigua spares Ortiz's life, but the chief's magnanimity soon dissipates, as he hardens his heart to his family's pleas of mercy and decides to roast Ortiz, pig-like, on a spit (Garcilaso 64). Twice animalized by his captors, Ortiz at this point occupies the lowest position within the tribe's social order.

When the pleas of Hirrihigua's wife and daughters once again spare Ortiz's life, the chief sentences Ortiz to a dangerous task that will send him out of the former's sight.

In so doing, he helps the animalized captive regain his humanity. Hirrihigua tasks Ortiz, whom he arms with four darts, with defending the tribal sepulchers from “lions or any other wild beasts that might come to desecrate the place” (Garcilaso 66).⁸ Ortiz gets a chance to test his bravery when he discovers the panther devouring the contents of a fresh grave that holds the remains of a child. The panther escapes with the corpse, but, out of fear of punishment by Hirrihigua, Ortiz decides to pursue the animal. When he hears a sound “much like that of a dog gnawing bones,” Ortiz blindly hurls a dart at the animal and miraculously pierces it through the “center of its heart” (Garcilaso 67). Ortiz then drags the dead panther back to the tribe in triumph, and the tribe welcomes him back as someone more human than before, as someone nearly “sacred and even superhuman” (Garcilaso 68). But Hirrihigua’s memory of how the Spanish fed his mother to dogs haunts the chief, who promptly strips Ortiz of his newfound human status and resumes his plans to animalize and kill his captive. By fully animalizing the panther with extreme violence, the slave Ortiz temporarily restores his humanity in the eyes of the Yustaga, but, taking into account the imbalance of power at play in this captor/captive scenario, the scene ends with Ortiz occupying a position somewhere in between the full humanity of Hirrihigua and the complete animality of the panther he killed.

Not only does Ortiz’s encounter with the panther have biopolitical consequences for him personally, it also prefigures a string of panther scenes that can be traced over American literature of the long nineteenth century. As Matthew Wynn Sivils argues, “Garcilaso pens what is probably the first in a series of American Gothic panther-killing

scenes that would echo down through Brown, Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms, Harriet Prescott Spofford, and Ambrose Bierce” (“Indian Captivity” 87). Sivils shows the gothic and ecological threads that connect these works, yet they also share the theme of male dominance.⁹ Each of these authors depict male characters killing panthers violently and forming particularly masculinist subject positions in the process. In Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* (1799), the novel’s eponymous protagonist, lost and famished in the wilderness, encounters a panther, kills it with a tomahawk, and proceeds to feed on its carcass (160). Most critics find in this scene Brown’s comment on the white man’s potential for the savagery his character Edgar often ascribes to the “red man,” but Edgar’s European-American male status nonetheless guarantees that his foray into savagery does not have permanent or long lasting consequences.¹⁰ Cooper’s *The Pioneers* (1823), on the other hand, portrays a female panther that threatens Elizabeth Temple and the wilting Louisa Grant before Natty Bumppo appears and fearlessly quells the threat by discharging his rifle at point-blank range (340). A more gruesomely violent panther scene plays out in Simms’s *The Cub of the Panther* (1869) when a male panther stalks the pregnant, doe-like Rose Carter across a snowy plain and hunters Mike Baynam and Sam Fuller rescue her by shooting, stabbing, and letting their dogs loose on the animal (167). Even Harriet Prescott Spofford’s “Circumstance” (1860), which makes attempts at representing gender equity, depicts a panther shot out of a tree by the husband of the woman held captive by the animal. Uniquely, Bierce’s “The Eyes of the Panther” (1891) presents a female werepanther in the character of Irene Marlowe, who loses her life at the hands of her domineering would-be-fiancée Jenner Brading when she

stands outside his cabin window in the dead of night in panther form (26). In each of these cases, albeit to varying degrees, male characters subordinate panthers, women, and even nature itself in acts that establish or reinforce a white male-dominated social order.

But these exclusively Anglo-American texts contain only a fraction of the panther scenes found in nineteenth-century American literature and provide only partial insight into the biopolitical strategies of diverse American cultures. This study therefore performs a comparative reading of American-Indian, Anglo-American, and African-American texts that feature big cats and speak to issues of social ordering on the basis of somatic or behavioral differences. It demonstrates that, in texts as varied as American-Indian sacred stories, frontier and wild west narratives, antislavery narratives, and black power literature, the American panther functions as the means by which a culture articulates its real, imagined, or desired social structure.

Previous scholarship has regarded much of early American animal imagery as an ideological weapon that upheld the removal of American Indians from their lands, reduced African Americans to the status of chattel slaves, and severely restricted women's rights; however, moving beyond the recognizable Anglo-American big cat tradition, which largely asserts white male dominance, this study establishes scholarship on the big cat literature of women and ethnic minorities, segments of American society that challenge social exclusion through their own seldom-studied, yet rich, big cat texts. More specifically, this study reveals that women and ethnic minorities in nineteenth-century America actually used their own big cat literature and oral traditions to construct arguments in favor of their full and equal inclusion in the American social order.

Not only did the American panther see its numbers reduced dramatically throughout the nineteenth century, the period had significant implications for race and gender relations, as the longstanding practice of removing American Indians from their lands resulted in the *Indian Removal Act* of 1830 and the various *Indian Appropriations Acts* to follow. During the antebellum period, the American slave culture and the gender-based “separate spheres” ideology were at their respective heights. As I argue throughout this study, tracing the presence and function of the American panther in the multicultural literature and oral traditions that reflect these social issues best reveals how inter- and intracultural power dynamics, informed by each culture’s respective relationships to big cats, governs the acts by which they construct subjectivity for themselves and others. More broadly, by exploring such texts we further our understanding of the relationship between biopolitics and the human/nonhuman border, a border that resonates with ancient fables and structures nineteenth-century race and gender relations; we also begin to answer questions that have yet to be asked of multicultural texts that feature panthers or other big cats, namely, how do different American cultures position themselves relative to the big cats they encounter, what role do these encounters play in biopolitical negotiation, and how does literature and narrative facilitate that negotiation?

Chapter Summaries and Methodology

Scholars have at times focused their attention on how panthers and other big cats figure into the mythoi of various world cultures. In *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (1998), Lorraine J. Datson and Katharine Park reference a thirteenth-century bestiary that describes panthers as having breath so sweet (perfumed) that other animals,

with the exception of the dragon, follow them. This depiction extends back to pre-Christian traditions, or pagan-influenced forms of Christianity, that refer to Jesus Christ as the true panther, who repels Satan, the dragon figure (Datson and Park 43). Boria Sax, in *The Mythical Zoo: An Encyclopedia of Animals in World Myth, Legend and Literature* (2001), references the same bestiary but broadens his analysis of panthers to other ancient belief systems. As he observes, the goddess Astarte (the Aphrodite figure of Mesopotamia) considered the panther a sacred animal, as did Osiris, the god of the dead in ancient Egypt. Sax also observes that a panther appears at the beginning of Dante's *Divine Comedy* as the first of the three animals of the dark wood to threaten the poet. Bringing his analysis of big cats to the North American continent, Sax discusses the importance of the jaguar to early Indigenous American tribes: "Perhaps the most mysterious big cat of all is the jaguar, which is native to Latin America. The motif of the jaguar appears so often in the arts of early Native American communities that historians of religion believe it may have been the master of animals or even the supreme god" (180). Joanna Overing likewise focuses on big cats in Latin America in "Who Is the Mightiest of Them All? Jaguar and Conquistador in Piaroa Images of Alterity and Identity." Part of the collection *Monsters, Tricksters, and Sacred Cows: Animal Tales and American Identities* (1996), Overing's essay examines the presence and significance of the jaguar figure in the mythology of the Piaroa, a people indigenous to present day Venezuela (50).

Scholars have also examined more contemporary figurations of the panther. Sax, for instance, explores the lament for the loss of primeval wilderness in Rainer Maria

Rilke's "The Panther" (1902). He also states that, "The iconographic use of the panther in recent times has veered between anger and nostalgia," noting its use as an emblem of the Black Panther Party (Sax 180). In "Who's Looking? The Animal Gaze in the Fiction of Brigitte Kronauer and Clarice Lispector," an essay in *Figuring Animals: Essays on Animal Images in Art, Literature, Philosophy and Popular Culture* (2004), Jutta Ittner examines the interrelationship of the human gaze and the animal gaze in Clarice Lispector's 1973 *Stream of Life*, which features a telling scene in which a panther and a human lock eyes in an extended stare (109). And, in "Who May Speak for the Animals? Deep Ecology in Linda Hogan's *Power* and A.A. Carr's *Eye Killers*," another essay of the same collection, Catherine Rainwater examines Indigenous American panther mythology in Linda Hogan's 1999 *Power*, which features a woman shape shifter who possesses the ability to transform into a panther (265).

In American literary studies, however, the opportunity remains for an extended study on the literary presence and function of the American panther (and other big cats). As I argue in chapter 2 of this study, a stark contrast exists between the animal-based biopolitical tactics of Anglo-American authors and those found in American-Indian oral traditions. Since American Indians largely reject the notion of speciesism, they actively include the American panther in their respective social orders. On the other hand, in some of the more prominent Anglo-American big cat texts, speciesism—animosity toward panthers, more specifically—signals a parallel hatred of supposedly inferior human races, such as American Indians themselves. This interrelationship between racism and speciesism produces biopolitical consequences since speciesism perpetuates

racism and racism emerges, as Foucault argues, from the biopolitical state. As Foucault argues, racism certainly predates biopolitics, but the latter facilitates the former in ways unique to the biopolitical state. First, a biopolitical state performs the fundamental function of racism, that is, to “subdivide the species it controls, into the subspecies known, precisely, as races” (*Society* 255). Second, the biopolitical state establishes a divisive ideology that convinces the now-divided races of the existence of racial purity that one “pure” race must defend against degenerate races. This antagonism lays the foundation for ideological and even literal war that uses racism to justify state-sponsored oppression and murder (*Society* 255-256), and this process is made all the more possible by constructing a “pure” race in opposition to dehumanized ones.

Since Foucault’s initial formulation of biopolitics, scholars have applied biopolitical theory to examinations of racism on an ideological rather than genetic basis. Ellen K. Feder argues that Foucault’s notion of biopower can “illuminate the reproduction of ‘whiteness’” (62) propped up by constructions of race and gender otherness. This (particularly masculinist) manifestation of subject formation is on full display in one of the most, if not the most, infamous panther texts in Anglo-American writing. In Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly*, the novel’s eponymous protagonist establishes his racial and gender dominance by killing American Indians and panthers that are both literally and symbolically female.¹¹ Edgar’s dominant subject position comes into question when, in an act of brutal savagery that contrasts with his “civilized” status, he kills then consumes a panther raw. Nonetheless, his European-American ancestry ensures that his savage act is of little consequence to his future prospects. In

contrast to how Edgar Huntly constructs his white male subjectivity in opposition to nonhumans and, by extension, in opposition to the supposedly inferior American Indian, Indigenous American oral and written traditions abound with examples of tribal members who form their subjectivities in conjunction with humanized panthers and panther-like creatures portrayed at times as chthonic deities, at times as progenitors of tribes, and at other times as participants in tribal manhood rituals. This active inclusion of nonhumans in the processes of human subject formation can largely be attributed to the American Indian practice of granting animals prominent and sacred roles in their world beliefs. Rather than drawing a strict demarcation between humans and animals, Indigenous American oral tradition emphasizes cooperation and kinship with animals. As Dave Aftandilian observes regarding some the lessons conveyed through Indigenous American stories:

These teachings include the concept that animals are people too, with agency and the ability to act consciously in this and other worlds; that we humans have a kinship or familial relationship to other animals; that we depend upon other animals for both sustenance and spiritual assistance, and hence ought to act humbly towards them; and because of these concepts and others, we ought to adopt principles of restraint and reciprocity in our dealings with animals.

Building on the work of Irving Hallowell, who uses the term “other than human persons” to describe how Indigenous Americans view animals and natural forces,¹² Aftandilian adds, “These other than human persons think and act in the world just as humans can. They also have souls, just like us” (81). This statement more than any other demonstrates

how Indigenous American tribes, in contrast with European Americans, actively included, not excluded, animals from their respective social orders. Thus by and large their respect for nonhumans precludes the use of socially-damaging dehumanization tactics.

As one among the many nonhumans Indigenous Americans venerate, the American panther figures largely in their sacred stories, most of which cast the panther as a *humanized animal*, one that actively participates in a tribe's social order. Along with serving as the symbol for the underworld deity known as the Underwater Panther, panther figures also appear in sacred stories as mythic progenitors and as natural force essences. One particular Choctaw story positions a humanized female panther as the tribe's savior. According to tradition, when a massive epidemic wiped out all but one of the original Choctaw people, the Great Spirit created out of the ashes of the dead four infants who suckled a panther for nourishment. Once grown, they fulfilled their roles as human progenitors of the tribe (Claiborne 518-519). In other Indigenous American sacred stories, especially those that speak to issues related to tribal gender norms, panthers and panther figures play more explicit biopolitical roles. In a well-known Cherokee origin story, a cooperative and therefore humanized panther serves as a means of asserting masculinity when the two archetypal sons born to Selu, a corn goddess, and Kanati, the "Great Hunter," leave home on a quest to find their father. Upon leaving, the two boys face a succession of trials over which they prevail, one of which is an encounter with a panther from which the boys escape unscathed due to their violent masculinity (Mooney 247). The construction of violent masculinity through an encounter

with a panther appears in a Seneca tale as well. When a woman with two young children in need of aid appears before a young Seneca man ostracized from his tribe on account of his inability to hunt, the young man provides his assistance to the woman, who then reveals herself to be a panther with two cubs. As a gesture of appreciation, the panther-woman (an obvious *humanized animal*) helps the young man to become the tribe's best hunter and restore his lost masculinity (Curtin 66-67). As these select examples demonstrate, the American-Indian kinship model of human-animal interaction provides a prime example of a form of biopolitical negotiation in which nonhumans *explicitly* play a role in subject formation processes.

Chapter 3 of this study extends the biopolitical implications of the panther scenes in *Edgar Huntly* to other well-known and lesser-known Anglo-American texts that feature the American panther. More specifically, the chapter traces the development of the strategic application of panther (and other big cat) characteristics to nineteenth-century literary and historical characters. Whereas this strategy applied mostly to male characters in the early nineteenth century, the advent of the women's movement initiated a trend of applying big cat characteristics to female characters. Frontier heroes Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, along with their literary counterpart Edgar Huntly, best represent how this strategy worked early in the century in service of white masculinity. Edgar Huntly, as noted above, proves his dominance over the animals and Indigenous Americans with whom he shares the Pennsylvania wilderness. For Boone and Crockett, two skilled panther hunters, they take on panther characteristics in their acts of courtship that reflect a predator-prey dynamic. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, the

appearance of female characters who displayed big cat characteristics became more frequent. Calamity Jane of Edward L. Wheeler's *Deadwood Dick* series, for instance, exhibits wildcat characteristics that help her to thrive in the male-dominated Wild West. The trend continues with Ambrose Bierce's "The Eyes of the Panther" and Yda H. Addis's "A Human Tigress" (1893), both of which feature feline-like female protagonists who resist patriarchy to differing degrees. In "The Eyes of the Panther," a disgruntled woman/panther hybrid tricks her would-be fiancée, who ignores her pleas for independence, into killing her by appearing before him in panther form. Addis reinterprets Bierce's themes in "A Human Tigress," in which the inhabitants of Mexico attribute a string of gruesome attacks on men to a fierce black jaguar that is in actuality a part-woman/part-jaguar hybrid. When a male character severs the tigress's arm during an altercation, the story's male narrator preserves it but hides it so the "women folks can not see it" (Addis 5). This act implies that the narrator wishes to hide the evidence of the "human tigress," an *animalized human* who embodies powerful and independent female sexuality.

Over the course of the nineteenth-century, then, a distinct shift occurs in Anglo-American literature from big cat texts in which white masculinity reigns supreme to texts in which female protagonists take on big cat characteristics in order to appropriate male power. This feline-driven inversion of the male/female, or predator/prey, dynamic challenges the tactics of dehumanization that devalue women by associating them with animals, both in everyday social practice and in literary representations. As Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan observe in the introduction to their collection *Animals &*

Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations (1995), male-dominated societies since the time of Aristotle have subjected women to associations with animals in order to assign women lesser value in the white male-dominated societies in which they live (1). In Adams's *The Pornography of Meat* (2003), she links one specific tactic of oppression leveled at women—sexual exploitation—to associations between women and animals. As she writes, “Women are called names of other beings who are not free to determine their own identity, ‘pets,’ (sex) kitten, (Playboy) bunny, dog, beast, bird, bitch, heifer, sow, lamb, cow. Abusive epithets for young women have included hen, bird, flapper, quail, columbine, and, of course, chick—tasty or otherwise” (Adams, *Pornography* 31). According to Adams, this tactic counts as one among many that establishes male dominance in relation to speciesism: “Species is gendered (animals are feminized) and gender, that is, woman, who carries gender identification, is animalized. Man transcends species; woman bears it. So do the other animals” (*Pornography* 149). Adams's observation brings to mind the litany of nineteenth-century female characters whom male characters animalize in the service of sexual conquest: Rebecca Bryan in the Daniel Boone frontier stories, Rose Carter in William Gilmore Simms's *The Cub of the Panther*, and Irene Marlowe in Ambrose Bierce's “The Eyes of the Panther,” to name of few.

Along with critiquing the American literary tradition characterized by narratives of panther-like men who hunt women, and by men who establish their dominance over women and nature by killing panthers, female big cat narratives offer a challenge to masculinist animal narratives at large. Not only have critics observed how gender relations in some folklore play out in such a way as to favor male characters, they have

also shown that the field of animal studies itself tends to be masculinized. As Mary A. Johnson observes regarding the former claim, even in female-dominated cultures, male animals in folklore more often than their female counterparts exhibit attributes associated with men in male-dominated societies, such as authority, high intelligence, and strength. Johnson also observes that as the real life authority of women increased in a given society, so did the number of male folklore characters who displayed higher intelligence than the female characters of the same narratives (175-179). Furthermore, as Susan Fraiman has pointed out, the discipline of animal studies itself contains masculinized threads. She argues that Jacques Derrida's most recognizable contribution to animal studies, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," rests on a masculine primal scene that some critics have used as a template for masculine mediations on animal narratives. Fraiman charges, specifically, that Cary Wolfe, among others, marginalize animal studies methodologies that incorporate lessons from cultural studies, which some have stigmatized as overly feminine (92). Thus the wildcat Calamity Jane's "hunting" of the lecherous Arkansas Alf, the werepanther Irene Marlowe's intent to harm the domineering Jenner Brading, and the challenge Addis's tigress mounts against male sexual dominance means that these characters embrace big cat associations in order to derive from them social power afforded mostly to male characters, human and nonhuman alike.

Chapter 4 of this study focuses in part on slave narratives that offer insights into how animalized slaves interacted with the wild animals they encountered on their respective plantations. More specifically, these narratives, along with a small subset of

slave narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, reflect a form of biopolitical negotiation through which slave narrators claim their core humanity by emphasizing the difference between themselves and the animals they encounter. For instance, former slave Daphne Williams recounts the time a panther pursued her as she traveled with her child through the woods. She and her baby escape danger but members of the community hunt down the panther and boil it down into soap (D. Williams 162-163). On the other hand, former slaves John Sneed and Frederick Shelton introduce into their narratives the theme of playing dead in order to escape a panther attack. In Sneed's case, he buys enough time by playing dead to reach his gun and kill his attacker. On the other hand, Shelton tells the story of the time an unnamed man in his community evaded a panther by playing dead long enough for the panther to cover him with foliage, leave, and return with more panthers. By that time, however, the man had replaced himself with a log, and, once the panthers discovered the ruse, the group attacked and devoured the panther that called the rest. Rather than relying on his own wits or strength for deliverance from an attack by an unidentifiable animal (which he presumed to be a panther), Moses Grandy, in *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy: Late a Slave in the United States of America* (1847), lies still and prays to God, who delivers Grandy from harm (39). Whether granting themselves the right to kill panthers or recounting instances where they escaped attacks by outsmarting panthers or praying to God, former slaves in these narratives declare their humanity by positioning the panthers they encounter as fully *animalized animals*. Themselves forced out of the American social order, these slaves exert their own brand of biopower by highlighting their superiority to the animals

with whom dominant American society associates them.

Rather than shy away from animal associations, Frederick Douglass, whose work also receives attention in the fourth chapter of this study, embraces big cat associations in order to grant his social causes divine authority. In the debate over slavery that raged in antebellum America, political combatants on both sides of the ideological divide drew on the Christian Bible to justify their respective positions. Whereas proslavery advocates widely circulated Bible-based arguments in favor of the continued enslavement of African-descended people, abolitionists turned to Bible-based ethical principles to fortify their moral suasion campaigns. As is well documented, Douglass engages with the Bible on this and several other points: he compares proponents of slavery to the evil influence represented by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, he exposes the false logic of the “Curse of Ham” slavery justification, and he often chastises those who profess to be Christians yet refuse to free fellow human beings from bondage. Considerably less attention, however, has been paid to how Douglass intervenes in the slavery debate through his use of lion metaphors. On more than one occasion in his writings and oratory, Douglass compares the North to a mighty lion that should show more fierceness and less restraint in its dealings with the rebellious South. He likewise creates positive associations between lions and antislavery forces in his novella, *The Heroic Slave* (1852), in which he valorizes rebel slave Madison Washington by comparing him favorably to a powerful and noble lion. In contrast, Douglass compares the slave-owning Auld family in particular and proslavery forces in general to malicious, destructive lions. When read against the Bible, which constructs a dualism between divine or divinely-

avored lions—Jesus Christ is the “lion of the Judah tribe”—and wicked ones—Satan prowls like a “roaring lion”—it becomes apparent that Douglass appropriates the Bible’s system of lion metaphors in order to signal to his Christian audiences and readers that the noble lion, linked symbolically to abolitionists and rebel slaves, must slay the destructive lion of slavery before America, carrying out its divine duty, can fulfill the promise of social equality laid out in its founding documents.

Founded on the act of reducing African Americans to the status of property, not unlike cattle and other livestock, the American plantation system provides us with yet another example of a social arena in which one culture systematically dehumanizes another for social gain. This process was made possible in part because of the speciesism that came to be intertwined with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racial theories, especially those that attempted to account for the varieties and origin of mankind. According to Ezra Tawil, the theory of monogenesis—which proposed that humankind as a species shares a single point of origin—traces back to Carl Linnaeus, the “thinker most often credited with the first classificatory exposition of the races.” In his work *Systema Naturae* (1735), Linnaeus defined “four ‘varieties’ of *homo sapiens*” (Tawil 42) whose differences, he argued, were “not functions of biology or morphology but rather of geography” (Tawil 43). *Systema Naturae* thus marks the emergence of the geography-based racial theory of monogenesis, the “dominant eighteenth-century account of human origins” that proposed that “all the diverse ‘nations’ descended from a single human pair” but differed on the basis of the geographically influenced elements such as climate, diet and “mode of life” (Tawil 44-45). Linnaeus’s successors, other European naturalists

such as French naturalist George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon and his German counterpart Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, adopted similar systems of classification.

Despite monogenesis's claim that all mankind shares a common ancestry, and Linnaeus's, Buffon's, and Blumenbach's arguments against the use of their respective theories as a basis for a racial hierarchy, the theory hardly had egalitarian implications. Robyn Wiegman, referring to Linnaeus, his predecessor, François Bernier, and his successors, Buffon and Blumenbach, hints at the implied inequality in the theory when she states, "the assumptions underlying their methodologies—their reliance on observation and notions of orders based on comparisons of identity and difference—evinced more complicated and contradictory positions about the origin and meaning of race" (Wiegman 28). Blumenbach, for instance, argues for humankind's shared ancestry yet establishes white skin as the ideal skin tone: "*Five principal varieties of mankind may be reckoned. As, however, even among these arbitrary kinds of divisions, one is said to be better and preferable to another [...] I have allotted the first place to the Caucasian... which make me esteem it the primeval one*" (264, original emphasis). Credited with coining the term "Caucasian," Blumenbach rationalizes his decision to grant white skin preeminence because of the ease with which white skin can turn brown, whereas the opposite remains "very much more difficult" (269). Blumenbach also states, however, that "*no doubt can any longer remain but that we are with great probability right in referring all and singular as many varieties of man as are at present known to one and the same species*" (276, original emphasis), which negates the notion of difference among human varieties needed to justify a racial hierarchy.

Although Blumenbach's statements on the division of mankind seemingly contradict each other, the former establishing a racial hierarchy and the latter arguing for a single origin of mankind, his theory of "degeneration"—that certain groups of people degenerate from their original state—repairs the rift between those statements. As Blumenbach argues, the skin color from which all others degenerates is the "white colour," which "holds the first place" (209) among the racial varieties of skin color: "in clear-complexioned men, where they are stained with no pigment, they permit the natural roseate whiteness of the corium to be seen through" (208). White, the supposed natural color of skin, therefore only degenerates—that is, darkens—when the skin produces a subcutaneous buildup of carbon rather than releasing it through the pores (211). However discriminatory, Blumenbach's theory of degeneration does allow for racial convertibility, that is, the ability to shift between races. According to Blumenbach, not only can skin color darken, or degenerate, it can whiten. For instance, Blumenbach relates accounts of dark-skinned persons whitening their skin by means of modifying their diet and limiting their exposure to their climate (214). Similarly, Tawil relates the theory of monogenesis to the several documented instances of a person undergoing a "shift" in race as a result of changes in lifestyle or location, observing that "By the end of the eighteenth century, stories of people undergoing what we would regard as fundamental physiological changes were readily available in American culture" (46). Monogenesis, then, allows for a certain amount of racial flexibility. Nevertheless, by positing white as the natural color of skin, and by arguing for the degenerate state of darker skin tones, Blumenbach, however unintentionally, reinforces a racial hierarchy

that grants those with white skin the dominant position.

Predicated on the belief that different races have different points of origin, the theory of polygenesis stands counter to that of monogenesis. Largely developed and supported by Americans such as Charles Caldwell, Samuel George Morton, Josiah C. Nott, and Louis Agassiz, polygenesis deemphasized the effect of social and environmental factors such as climate and diet on racial difference and argued for the internal and immutable nature of such differences. And although polygenesis arguments were “still idiosyncratic in 1830” and did not become commonplace until the middle of the century, they were available and appealed to American racial purists of the 1830s (Tawil 47). As Dana D. Nelson observes, “Beginning especially in the 1830s, various arguments for Anglo racial superiority gained wide acceptance in England and throughout the United States” (93), most likely because, as George Fredrickson notes, “[polygenesis] raised prejudice to the level of science; thereby giving it respectability” (89). The term “race,” then, which up until the nineteenth-century did not refer to the transmission of genetic material, came to refer to the basis of dividing humankind on those grounds (Tawil 40). As a result, skin color became biologically determined, which solidified its permanence and discounted changes in diet or geography as a means of altering it. This laid the foundation for the notion proposed by Caldwell, among others, that races of distinct color and of different origin must be of separate species (Frederickson 73).

This separation of races into distinct species had major consequences for social marginalization since racial purists such as Arthur Comte de Gobineau, departing from

the Aristotelian tradition of contrasting humans with animals, placed the animality of supposedly inferior races “squarely within the human.” From Gobineau’s perspective, humans considered inferior, or “degraded,” are “not only given to animal-like behavior, but also possessed of specific, identifiable animal characteristics” (Roberts 20). Gobineau applied this reasoning to those in the nineteenth century of African descent, which propelled forward a series of acts in the U.S. meant to degrade, submit, or otherwise oppress African Americans. Marjorie Spiegel makes this case compellingly in *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (1988), in which she outlines how animalizing African-descended peoples facilitated the restrictions placed on their lived during slavery—whether restrictions of freedom, movement, family, etc. As Spiegel points out, since many of the restrictions placed on the black body rested largely on the dehumanization of those subjected to them, those forms of restriction have transferred into the present day in the treatment of farm animals bred for consumption and economic gain. Moreover, Roberts notes how this animal-based racial oppression extended to the policing of female sexuality, which some viewed as a bestial threat to male-dictated sexual norms (29). The supposed animality of African-descended peoples therefore laid the foundation for the innumerable racial and gender abuses that took place in the American slave system.

The animal-like, inferior human proposed by Gobineau parallels in some ways the form of life Agamben terms “bare life,” a living being excluded from the prevailing political order on account of its position between the fully animal and the fully human. This “non-man,” a human figure, the likes of the “slave, the barbarian, and the

foreigner” that embodies the “animal in human form” (*The Open* 37), exists in a biopolitical state. When Agamben writes, “Perhaps concentration and extermination camps are also an experiment of this sort, an extreme and monstrous attempt to decide between the human and the inhuman, which has ended up dragging the very possibility of the distinction to its ruin” (*The Open* 22), he shows how, through the manipulation of the human/nonhuman divide, biopolitics becomes inextricably linked to racism in its most destructive form. However, critics have rightly noted that Agamben’s analysis of biopolitics falls short of outlining the full extent of the relationship between biopolitical power and racism. Achille Mbembe, for one, agrees with Foucault that biopower and racism work in concert to facilitate biopolitical negotiation (17), and with Agamben that the Nazi death camps constituted the “culmination of a long process of dehumanizing and industrializing death” (18), yet he extends his analysis of biopolitics to the system of plantation slavery. Mbembe rightly points out that American plantation slavery “could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation,” during which slaves experienced “absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether)” (21). It is against these odds that enslaved peoples escaped or were freed from bondage and through their personal testimonies, especially those that contain panther scenes and big cat figurative language, challenge animal-based social hierarchies.

Serving as the project’s epilogue, the final chapter of this study addresses the question of why, given the centuries-long practice by whites of dehumanizing African Americans through comparisons to animals, the Black Panther Party (BPP) chose an

animal as its icon of black revolution. To move toward resolving this seeming paradox, I trace the party's use of the panther as a symbol of militant self-defense back to the longstanding cross-cultural American literary and oral traditions that feature panthers and other big cats. At times the party seems aware of the paradox of claiming one's humanity while using an animal as one's representative to the world, but, knowing that the practice of dehumanizing African Americans through animal comparisons did not end with emancipation but instead extended to the "black brute" stereotype of the Reconstruction era (and well beyond), the party's choice to represent themselves with a nonhuman nonetheless seems curious. As I argue, however, since party founders chose the panther emblem in response to a white supremacist group represented by a white rooster, they took a calculated risk to appropriate a white supremacist tactic and use it for their own black revolutionary purposes. Moreover, by adopting the panther emblem, party members drew parallels between their socioeconomic oppression and the legacy of persecution against the American panther that dates back to the colonial period and is reflected in American frontier literature. They also, similar to Indigenous Americans before them, find power, not weakness, in embracing the nonhuman. They position themselves as regal panthers in comparison to the racist "dogs" and "pigs" they oppose, thereby demonstrating that, when accompanied by an animal scheme that favors a culture's chosen animal representative, animal iconography and figurative language can be an effective means of prompting political action and radical thought.

Furthermore, as much as contemporary mass-media portrayals and early scholarship of the Black Panther Party suggest that Panthers represented little more than

violent, gun-toting thugs, recent scholarship on the party has eschewed this one-dimensional characterization in favor of a more comprehensive look at the party's sixteen-year run as one of America's most influential and noteworthy black power movements. Following this development, BPP scholars have examined how the party's rhetoric—whether sexist, masculinist, violent, unifying, liberatory, etc.—evolved over time as its national profile, as well as the fortunes of its leaders, alternately rose and fell. While these studies offer valuable insights into the party's evolving rhetorical strategies, they pay little or no attention to how the party's changing rhetoric coincided with the political usefulness of American panther comparisons. As I demonstrate in the final chapter of this study, as the Panthers transformed from an anti-imperialist, militant group to a more pacifist, community-focused one, American panther comparisons became less and less a political asset for them. By the time of the demise of the party and its official newspaper, the *Black Panther*, party members had largely relegated the comparisons they drew between themselves and the American panther—whether its persecution, its self-defense instinct, or its supremacy over lowly animals—to the past. Ironically, this change of tactic diminished the rhetorical force of slogans such as “Panther Power,” which early BPP members used to embrace their associations with the American panther and announce their arrival as a force to be reckoned with on the national political stage.

From early Indigenous American sacred stories to Black Panther Party speeches and literature, narratives that include big cat scenes and big cat figurative language demonstrate how various American cultures shape their identities and define their respective relationships to the world in which they live. In *Edgar Huntly* and the Anglo-

American texts that follow its lead, panthers are detested animals often associated with the Indigenous Americans with whom they share the American “wilderness.” Thus by association panthers and Indigenous Americans are pests who do not deserve to share the new republic with those of European descent who fought to “civilize” it. Indigenous Americans, on the other hand, incorporate panthers into their belief systems, often emphasizing their kinship with the revered animal. Whether cooperating with animals or inhabiting the nonhuman themselves, Indigenous Americans resist the strategy of excluding nonhumans from social structuring practices. For African Americans in the nineteenth century, comparisons to animals served as part of the justification for their enslavement. Nonetheless, some African Americans constructed claims for their core humanity by highlighting the human qualities that they possess and that the animals they encountered on their plantations lack. In contrast, Frederick Douglass embraces associations between enslaved peoples and the mighty, noble lion in order to grant his social causes the same divine authority he denies his political opponents. Nearly a century after the Emancipation Proclamation, the Black Panther Party would adopt a similar strategy and choose the American panther as its symbol of black revolutionary action, a choice that gives new resonance to the legacy of the Black Panther Party and the motto “Power to the people, black power to black people, and Panther power to the panthers.”

CHAPTER II

“THAT DETESTED RACE”: THE PANTHER AND THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

The American frontier has long been seen as a physical and imaginative space where the very idea of Americanness gets articulated, questioned, and even revised. It is where violent contests for power play out, leaving the victor to claim mastery over his human and nonhuman foes alike. A curious 1864 London publication by Sir. Frederick Charles Lascelles Wraxall, titled *The Black Panther; or, A Boy's Adventures Among the Redskins*, engages in this frontier trope decades after its heyday in American literature and culture, thereby showcasing the dominance of the theme in the early half of the nineteenth century. With some notable exceptions, especially in regard to depictions of American race relations, Wraxall's *The Black Panther* conforms to the generic conventions of frontier romances.¹³ The story revolves around the Taylors, an English family who loses the rental rights to their farm and depart for the American frontier for a fresh start. After a series of hardships, the family finds peace and prosperity on the very edge of the frontier, mostly because of the talents and knowledge of Walter Arden, Mr. Taylor's son, and the family's African-American servant Daniel, the “Black Panther” of the novel's title. Under Daniel's mentorship, Walter soon becomes a skilled marksman and horseman, and the two, true to the frontier literary tradition, prove their might against wild animals and “savage” men. Walter proves his manhood by facing off against and killing a panther on three separate occasions, and Daniel, through his descriptions of the time he and his parents were held captives by Delaware Indians, establishes a dichotomy, reminiscent of the work of James Fenimore Cooper, between

the relatively “good” Delaware Indians and the more savage, relatively “bad” Waco Indians. Told from a perspective sympathetic to the Taylors’ plight and laudatory toward the masculine achievements of Walter and Daniel, the novel caricaturizes American Indians and makes little to no attempt at understanding the motives that drive their actions.

This erasure of the American Indian perspective, which is common to frontier literature, reminds us of the challenges that surface when navigating portrayals of American race relations in early American literature. American Indian writings and oral culture from this period remain especially obscure since few mainstream avenues for its dissemination existed. William Apess (aka William Apes), the part-Pequot writer and activist, understood this very point, as evidenced by his 1835 treatise *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts*. To reinforce his own arguments regarding the ineffectiveness of Christian missionaries, Apess reprints the words of Benjamin F. Hallet, who defends Apess’s position:

Let me remind you also, of the fable of the Huntsman and the Lion, when the former boasted of the superiority of man, and to prove it pointed to a statue of one of the old heroes, standing upon a prostrate lion. The reply of the noble beast was, “there are no *carvers* among the lions; if there were, for one man standing upon a lion, you would have twenty men torn to pieces by lions.” Gentlemen, by depressing the Indians, our laws have taken care that they should have no *carvers*. The whites have done all the *carving* for them, and have always placed them *undermost*. (235, original emphasis)

Hallet's big cat analogy serves a similar purpose as the allusion Wendell Phillips uses to introduce Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) (see chapter 4). Both lion references illustrate how the socially oppressed in nineteenth-century America, whether American Indian or African American, had little to no means of recording or publishing their histories from their own points of view. Both remarks are ironic as well, since Hallet and Phillips engage in the very same cultural practice they criticize.

Under these cultural conditions, scholars worked to record American Indian oral culture as faithfully as possible. Most who did expressed an awareness regarding the limitations of their studies yet stressed the need for them nonetheless. As anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber says of the tales he collected at the Oklahoman Cheyenne Agency in 1899, "They were all secured in English. Some were recorded from dictation, and others written out by the Indians. The versions thus obtained have been altered as little as possible even though uncouthness of style resulted at times. This roughness may seem unnecessary, especially as the tales were not even told in the narrator's native tongue. But the less of the original character remains, the greater the need for its preservation" ("Cheyenne" 161). Kroeber expresses a similar sentiment about the materials he collected from the Northern Californian Wishok tribe when he laments, "Most of what could have once been learned about them ethnologically has perished, and the broken and incomplete nature of their myths, as they remain, is only too evident from the material here presented" ("Wishok" 86). Along with having to contend with the complications associated with recording an ever-changing culture, scholars had to deal

with obstacles posed by language barriers. Journalist Charles F. Lummis points to this difficulty in his work on Pueblo Indian sacred stories. As he says, “I have been extremely careful to preserve, in my translations, the exact Indian *spirit*. An absolutely literal translation would be almost unintelligible to English readers, but I have taken no liberties with the real meaning” (Lummis 6, original emphasis). A few sentiments among many similar ones, these statements exemplify the challenges scholars faced when attempting as outsiders to record a culture unfamiliar to them.

Although plagued with questions of authenticity and accurate representation, nineteenth-century American Indian sacred stories recorded by ethnographers and cultural anthropologists nonetheless provide useful insights into how nonhumans participate in American-Indian biopolitical negotiation. As several scholars have observed, the human-animal relationship in Indigenous cultures differs fundamentally from that of other American cultures. Linda Hogan summarizes the human/nonhuman relationship in the majority of animal-based American-Indian sacred stories thusly: “This is how many stories begin: Long ago, when animals and human beings were the same kind of people, they understood each other. When the world was young, the animals, people, and birds lived together peacefully and in friendship. In these early days of the world, in some locations, animals and humans were equals and, it was said, they spoke a common language, across species bounds.” Beyond being equal to humans, nonhumans in many American-Indian belief systems were considered the first *people* created, which earned them the apt moniker “first people” (Hogan 8). Brian K. Hudson makes a similar observation regarding the equal status of human and nonhumans in

American-Indian culture but also examines how that relationship intersects with the work of animal studies theorists. He notes how Agamben's posthumanist stance aligns with Indigenous ideas about the similarities between humans and nonhumans and how theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Donna Haraway derive their posthumanist arguments from the study of Indigenous cultures' belief in a deep kinship between humans and nonhumans (Hudson 5-6). This kinship model also applies to Indigenous concepts of nature at large. Not only do American Indians grant humans equal standing with nonhuman animals, they consider humans "at an equal standing with the rest of the natural world; they are kindred relations" (Salmón 1331). In American Indian big cat narratives, this belief system, which Enrique Salmón calls "kincentric ecology" (1332), reveals a departure from the antagonistic relationship in early Anglo-American frontier narratives between humans and the nonhuman animals with which they share the natural world.

In Anglo-American frontier narratives—Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, especially—acts of killing panthers and animalized American Indians establish the frontiersman as a fully *humanized human* who reigns supreme over nonhumans and supposedly inferior races. In *Edgar Huntly*, Brown raises questions about the strict demarcation between the civilized and the savage, and he does so by having the novel's title character kill a panther and consume its raw flesh. Although the act demonstrates how the civilized Edgar possesses savage tendencies similar to those he ascribes to American Indians, his European descent guarantees him the possibility of future prosperity. The novel denies, of course, this same possibility to American Indians and

those of mixed ancestry with whom Edgar interacts. Edgar's aversion to animality showcases how he forms his subjectivity in opposition to nonhumans, which effectively safeguards his white privilege. In contrast, American-Indian big cat narratives from tribes across the United States emphasize a type of human/nonhuman kinship that fosters the formation of tribal subject positions in conjunction with nonhumans. Tribes from the same northeastern U.S. region as Brown's Pennsylvania-set novel, such as the Iroquois, Erie, and Seneca, include the American panther, which tribal members often humanize, in their social structuring practices. The same holds true for the southeastern Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee, as well as for the Huron and Wyandot of the Great Lakes region and the Pacific Northwest Maidu, all of whom tell panther narratives in which the animal plays a proactive role in tribal lawmaking and social structuring.

Panther Nation

For a project titled *Panther Nation*, there are few better places to begin the investigation into gendered and raced panther narratives than the literature and culture of Pennsylvania. The state played a pivotal role in the formation of the new nation, serving as the site of the first two meetings of the Continental Congress and as the temporary home of the U.S. capital from 1790-1800. Along with its prominent position in the new republic, Pennsylvania at the turn of the nineteenth century was home to a healthy population of panthers that figured prominently in the lives and imaginations of Philadelphians, non-Indigenous and Indigenous alike (Shoemaker, *Extinct* 24). For one particularly prominent Philadelphia author, Charles Brockden Brown, the panther, associated through derogatory descriptors and imagery with the Delaware tribe (Lenni-

Lenape), loomed large over his 1799 frontier novel *Edgar Huntly*. The novel follows Edgar Huntly, a farmer-turned-reluctant panther and American Indian hunter, who, during the course of an investigation into the murder of his friend Waldegrave, finds himself on the trail of his mysterious sleepwalking neighbor, the Irishman Clithero Edny. Though innocent of the charges, Clithero has a dark history that leads him to retreat into the Pennsylvania wilderness for solace. Edgar, during a bout of his own sleepwalking affliction, finds himself in Clithero's wilderness, where he encounters, fights, and kills Delaware Indians and the menacing panthers with whom he associates them.

Edgar Huntly has long garnered critical attention, but no study yet exists that contrasts the representations of panthers and American Indians in *Edgar Huntly* with American Indian panther narratives. This chapter therefore demonstrates how, in contrast to Brown's novel, the human/nonhuman kinship model exhibited in the sacred stories of Pennsylvanian American-Indian tribes—the Delaware, Shawnee, Iroquois, Erie, and the neighboring Seneca, namely—form the basis for the explicit and active biopolitical role panthers play in the oral culture that reflects and informs their social structuring practices. In the former, white male subjectivity is formed in opposition to panthers that are linked symbolically to inferior nonwhite races. On the other hand, the latter narratives emphasize social power on the part of tribal members who worship panther-like deities or who benefit from their interactions with humanized panthers. Ultimately, whereas the humanist position in the Anglo-American big cat tradition dictates that man assert his supremacy over animals and even nature itself, the

posthumanist position in American-Indian sacred stories grants animals equal standing with humans, which in turn informs how tribal members learn to honor their pasts, to operate in their respective communities, or to engage in cultural exchange.

Critics have partly accomplished the work of teasing out the relationship between panthers and white male subjectivity in *Edgar Huntly*, the most obvious “panther text” in American literature. Captivated by one particular site of biopolitical negotiation, the American frontier, Brown makes the case in the preface to *Edgar Huntly* that American authors should distinguish themselves from their British counterparts by making use of the real or imagined dangers of the American wilderness—“incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness” (Brown 29), for instance. In the narrative proper, Brown makes use on multiple occasions of one uniquely American peril: the panther. In a scene that furnishes numerous insights into Edgar’s relationship to nonhumans, he encounters the first of two panthers he will face before the novel’s close. Of the two encounters, the first poses the most danger since Edgar finds himself without his weapon of choice, an American-Indian tomahawk, with which he has had success against panthers. As he says, “As hunting was never my trade or sport, I never loaded myself with fowling-piece or rifle. Assiduous exercise had made me master of a weapon of much easier carriage, and, within a moderate distance, more destructive and unerring. This was the tomahawk. With this I have often severed an oak-branch, and cut the sinews of a catamount, at the distance of sixty feet.” What at first seems like a contradiction—that Edgar does not classify himself as a hunter but acknowledges his adeptness at killing panthers—instead reveals a distinction in Edgar’s mind between

animals killed for sport and those that simply deserve eradication. Edgar creates this distinction when he elaborates on his hunting practices:

My temper never delighted in carnage and blood. I found no pleasure in plunging into bogs, wading through rivulets, and penetrating thickets, for the sake of dispatching woodcocks and squirrels. To watch their gambols and flittings, and invite them to my hand, was my darling amusement when loitering among the woods and the rocks. It was much otherwise, however, with regard to rattlesnakes and panthers. These I thought it no breach of duty to exterminate wherever they could be found. These judicious and sanguinary spoilers were equally the enemies of man and of the harmless race that sported in the trees, and many of their skins are still preserved by me as trophies of my juvenile prowess.

(Brown 127)

Edgar goes on to express his surprise at encountering a panther since, as he says, “The industry of our hunters has nearly banished animals of prey from these precincts” (Brown 126). Emblematic of the savage nature Edgar detests, eradicating panthers from the Pennsylvania wilderness therefore means civilizing it.

Edgar’s hostility toward panthers reflects the negative attitudes toward frontier animals of prey held by settlers in the colonial period. In Pennsylvania specifically, bounty laws aimed at eradicating panthers led to their “speedy extermination” (Shoemaker, *Extinct* 11). The massive hunt that took place near Pomfret Castle around 1760, just eleven years before Brown’s birth, is further evidence of the extreme persecution of the panther in Pennsylvania. According to Henry W. Shoemaker,

Pennsylvania settlers concerned with the presence of panthers and wolves planned an “animal drive” during which hunters cleared a plot of ground thirty miles in diameter and drove the area’s animals to the middle of the circle using fire and gunshots. As Shoemaker writes, “When they [hunters] reached the point where the killing was to be made, they found it crowded with yelping, growling, bellowing animals. Then the slaughter began, not ending until the last animal had been slain.” As documented by the hunt’s leader, a man by the name of “Black Jack” Shwartz, the hunt resulted in the slaughter of forty-one panthers (Shoemaker, *Extinct* 30). Brown comes of age in this culture of hatred toward panthers and, accordingly, represents the culture well in the actions of his character Edgar Huntly.

Although Edgar at times humanizes the first panther he encounters, he falls well short of displaying any sympathy for the animal. During one of Edgar’s treks to seek out Clithero in the wilderness, Edgar comes face to face with a male panther he describes as having a “gray coat,” “extended claws,” and “fiery eyes,” and whose human-like cry identifies it as one of the “most ferocious and untamable of that detested race.” Brown’s note to this episode identifies the animal as a relatively small yet nonetheless formidable “gray cougar” (126).¹⁴ Most likely following the taxonomic principles of Buffon, whose work Brown knew well, Brown uses the term cougar and emphasizes the animal’s appetite-driven nature and its practice of drinking blood.¹⁵ But whereas Buffon restricts his comments to the cougar’s animal nature, Edgar Huntly grants it some human-like cognitive ability, which hints at a kinship, however minimal, between humans and panthers. He says, for instance, of the male panther he encounters, “His sagacity was

equal to his strength, and he seemed able to discover when his antagonist was armed and prepared for defense” (Brown 127). Along with granting the panther the ability to discern whether or not its enemy is armed, Edgar finds the panther “apparently deliberating” whether or not he should cross the tree that acts as a bridge between the cliffs on which Edgar and the panther stand. When the panther falls to its death after the tree collapses and the animal cannot make the jump to Edgar’s side, Edgar expresses his immense relief and effectively dispenses with any kinship between him and the panther.

During this first panther encounter, Edgar foreshadows his second, more violent encounter with a panther. Faced with the first panther, Edgar says, “Of all kinds of death, that which now menaced me was the most abhorred. To die by disease, or by the hand of a fellow-creature, was propitious and lenient in comparison with being rent to pieces by the fangs of this savage” (Brown 128). This statement is ironic since Edgar soon finds himself in a desperate situation that awakens the very savage nature he ascribed earlier to panthers. After a bout of sleepwalking, Edgar wakes to find himself enclosed in darkness and extremely famished and dehydrated. Ravished by hunger, his mind soon turns to the delight he would experience in assuaging his hunger by any means necessary: “My hunger speedily became ferocious. I tore the linen of my shirt between my teeth and swallowed the fragments. I felt a strong propensity to bite the flesh from my arm. My heart overflowed with cruelty, and I pondered on the delight I should experience in rending some living animal to pieces, and drinking its blood and grinding its quivering fibers between my teeth” (Brown 157-158). Edgar’s extreme hunger associates him with the first panther he encountered, about which Edgar says of its near-

attack, “Nothing but the pressure of famine could have prompted this savage to so audacious and hazardous an effort” (Brown 129). Pressured by famine himself, Edgar, armed with his trusty tomahawk, acts out his own audacious and hazardous effort when he encounters a second, female panther. In a scene that echoes the dart-throwing episode of Juan Ortiz in *The Florida of the Inca*, Edgar, aiming at the spot between the glowing eyes of the panther, throws the tomahawk through the darkness and “It penetrated the skull, and the animal fell, struggling and shrieking, on the ground.” What comes next has garnered much critical attention:

The first suggestion that occurred was to feed upon the carcass of this animal. My hunger had arrived at that pitch where all fastidiousness and scruples are at an end. I crept to the spot. I will not shock you by relating the extremes to which dire necessity had driven me. I review this scene with loathing and horror. Now that it is past I look back upon it as on some hideous dream. The whole appears to be some freak of insanity. No alternative was offered, and hunger was capable of being appeased even by a banquet so detestable. If this appetite has sometimes subdued the sentiments of nature, and compelled the mother to feed upon the flesh of her offspring, it will not excite amazement that I did not turn from the yet warm blood and reeking fibers of a brute. (Brown 160)

As Edgar here links himself to the mother panther who would, out of extreme hunger, eat her own young, critics, mostly following Richard Slotkin’s argument that Edgar “has become a hunter and a killer, like the panther, and is . . . mistaken for an Indian” (388), remark upon how eating the savage panther transforms Edgar into a savage himself.¹⁶

This act of savagery aligns Edgar for the time being with two of the novel's other characters, the Irishman Clithero Edny and the Delaware Matriarch Old Deb, who possess hybrid identities that occupy the space between the entirely savage and the entirely civilized. In Clithero's case, his foreignness marks him as an outsider within the white settlements of Solebury and associates him with the settlement's persecuted panthers. In the course of Edgar's investigation into the murder of Waldegrave, his process of identifying suspects reveals his anti-foreign prejudice. Edgar reasons that the suspect might be one of his neighbor Inglefield's two servants. Edgar describes the first, an American man by the name of Ambrose as "a native of this district, simple, guileless, and incapable of any act of violence. He was, moreover, devoutly attached to his sect. He could not be the criminal." Inglefield also employs Clithero, about whom Edgar says, "I perceived that the only foreigner among us was Clithero . . . Clithero was a stranger, whose adventures and character, previously to his coming hither, were unknown to us . . . An actor there must be, and no one was equally questionable" (Brown 39). With no other evidence against him, Edgar suspects Clithero of murder on the grounds of his foreignness alone. Edgar also marks Clithero as inferior on account of his regressions into animality. Not only does Edgar equate Clithero's walking speed to the "swiftness of a deer" (Brown 258), he associates him with the panthers of the Pennsylvania wilderness: "My eyes were fixed upon the entrance [of Clithero's cave hideout]. The rustling increased, and presently an animal leaped forth, of what kind I was unable to discover. Heart-struck by this disappointment, but not discouraged, I continued to watch, but in vain" (Brown 44). Although Edgar cannot identify the animal, Jared Gardner

presumes the animal to be a panther and argues that “the panther—referred to almost exclusively as the ‘savage’—has emerged from Clithero's den, suggesting the Irishman's transmutation into this ‘savage’ form” (443). Inferior to Edgar because of his foreignness and animality, Clithero occupies a social space similar to the “bare life” beings who find themselves oppressed in American society because of their supposed animal nature.

Old Deb, the Delaware matriarch who coordinates the attacks on the white settlers of Solebury, likewise possesses a hybrid identity that places her social value somewhere between her fellow tribe members and the white settlers against whom she conspires. On account of her “birth, talents, and age,” Old Deb possesses much “authority among her countrymen.” She also gains notoriety by forcefully resisting the encroachment of Delaware land by white settlers. When attempts at diplomacy failed and the settlers emerged victorious from the contest for land, Old Deb burned empty wigwams on the lost territory rather than surrender them to her combatants (Brown 193). But rather than retreat to the caves of the wilderness, as do her wandering kinsmen, she moves in to an out-of-the way hut once occupied by a Scottish emigrant that Edgar presumes lost his life at the hands of the Delaware. In line with the novel's civilized-savage scheme, by inheriting the Scottish emigrant's “hut, his implements of tillage, and his cornfield” (Brown 196), Old Deb establishes herself as more civilized than her Delaware counterparts. She also sets herself apart by her knowledge of English, even though she “always disdained to speak” the language. Whereas Edgar describes the language of Old Deb's kinsman as unintelligible grunts, Deb knows enough English for Edgar to “discourse with her on the few ideas which she possessed” (Brown 195). But

Old Deb's language still retains an aspect of the savage since she discourses with "Her only companions," three hybrid dogs of the "Indian or wolf species" (Brown 193). In fact, Old Deb's "chief employment" is to talk to her dogs: "Though in solitude, her tongue was never at rest but when she was asleep; but her conversation was merely addressed to her dogs." Whereas Edgar struggles to understand Old Deb, her dogs understand and obey her perfectly (Brown 194). This form of human-animal kinship is a boon for Old Deb, but Edgar perceives the woman's communion with dogs as a signal of her inferior, animal nature.

Edgar may admit to some level of kinship between himself and Old Deb, but he frames her fellow tribe members as only degrees less savage than the panthers he encounters. More ambivalent about American Indians than about panthers, Edgar at times expresses how the former's abilities impress him, and at other times he communicates his disdain for them. As he did when faced with the male panther, Edgar grants American Indians superhuman abilities, albeit those based on sensory faculties and physicality and not on intellect or reason. In a statement that echoes Edgar's previous one regarding the panther's ability to determine whether or not it faces an armed enemy, he says the following regarding the keen sight of the Delaware Indians: "The optics of a *Lenni Lenape* I knew to be far keener than my own. A log or a couched fawn would never be mistaken for a man, nor a man for a couched fawn or a log. Not only a human being would be instantly detected, but a decision be unerringly made whether it were friend or foe" (Brown 204). Clearly Edgar means to illustrate the shared animal instinct of his two greatest foes. Earlier, when Edgar faces off against a group of

three Delaware tribe members and manages to kill all of them, he seems to lament their deaths on account of their “noble” characters: “The destruction that I witnessed was vast. Three beings, full of energy and heroism, endowed with minds strenuous and lofty, poured out their lives before me. I was the instrument of their destruction. This scene of carnage and blood was laid by me” (Brown 183). On the other hand, Edgar reveals that a band of Delaware Indians killed his parents and he has since “never looked upon or called up the image of a savage without shuddering” (Brown 165). Here Edgar reveals his revulsion toward American Indians, a revulsion not unlike the animosity he holds towards panthers.

Edgar also deems American Indians inferior on account of their inability to farm and domesticate animals.¹⁷ Speaking of the “American savage” of the new world, Buffon makes the case that their inability to tame their surroundings constitutes a clear sign of their inferiority. As he says, “These extensive regions [the Americas] were thinly inhabited by a few wandering savages, who, instead of acting as masters, had no authority in it; for they had no controul over either animals or elements . . . they were themselves nothing more than animals of the first rank, mere automatons, incapable of correcting Nature, or seconding her intentions” (Buffon 38-41). Buffon also makes a more explicit connection between civilized society and the practice of domesticating animals when he says, “It appears singular, that in a world, occupied almost entirely by savages, whose manners somewhat resembled those of the brutes, there should be no connection, no society existing between them and the animals by which they were surrounded; and this was absolutely the case, for there were no domestic animals,

excepting where the people were in some degree civilized” (25). By equating American Indians with the uncultivated wilderness, along with using signs of land cultivation to find his way home when lost, Edgar lends credence to Buffon’s assertions. When Edgar escapes from a cavernous region after wandering aimlessly for some time, he expresses his fear that he has been transported far from civilized settlements, asking himself, “Had some mysterious power snatched me from the earth, and cast me, in a moment, into the heart of the wilderness? Was I still in the vicinity of my parental habitation, or was I thousands of miles distant?” (Brown 164). Although Edgar is within walking distance of his estate, the sight of the “wild” American Indians convinces him otherwise. Ultimately, Edgar considers the Delaware Indians so far removed from “civilization” as to be irredeemable or granted a higher position in the area’s social order.

Despite the marginal signs of civilized nature in Clithero and Old Deb, the novel denies them the promise of future prosperity that it grants Edgar. Implicated in attacks against the settlers of Solebury, Old Deb and her dogs disappear from her hut (and from the story as well). That Clithero comes to occupy Old Deb’s hut suggests their shared exclusion from future prospects. After living in Deb’s hut for a time and surviving on the wages of farm work, Clithero travels to New York presumably to kill Sarsefield, who has taken Clithero’s former love interest, Mrs. Lorimer, as a bride. After being captured by the New York authorities who have been made aware of the potential threat by Sarsefield, Clithero escapes his captors and dives from the ship that holds him, only to drown in the waves. Although the misdeeds of Clithero and Old Deb, both of whom have committed murder, seem to justify their unceremonious exits from the narrative,

Edgar's own heinous acts do not permanently diminish his chances at a prosperous future. He has savagely ingested panther blood and raw flesh, murdered three Delaware tribe members, and incurred the wrath of Sarsefield when Edgar carelessly sends a letter containing disturbing information to Mrs. Lorimer, who subsequently miscarries Sarsefield's child. Nonetheless, as Sarsefield says in his chastising letter to Edgar, "I find it hard to forbear commenting on your rashness in no very mild terms. You acted in direct opposition to my counsel and to the plainest dictates of propriety. Be more circumspect and more obsequious *for the future*" (Brown 260-261, emphasis added). Unlike Old Deb and Clithero, whose deeds were unforgivable, Edgar maintains his prospects for the future. Both Clithero and Old Deb share a "foreignness" and a kinship with animals, which precludes their integration into dominant American society. Edgar, on the other hand, maintains his position in society on account of his white, European-American ancestry, which trumps any of his acts of savagery.

The dehumanization tactics on display in *Edgar Huntly* appear in other fictional and semiautobiographical frontier narratives that feature the American panther and animalized American Indians. In James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), the scene in which a female panther threatens Elizabeth Temple and Louisa Grant and Natty Bumppo effectively quells the threat by fearlessly discharging his rifle into the panther at point-blank range (340) serves to establish male Anglo-American superiority over the other human and nonhuman inhabitants of the American wilderness. Well aware and even critical of Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, which, according to Cooper, "contains an American, a savage, a wild cat, and a tomahawk, in a conjunction that never did, nor

ever will occur” (*The Spy* 31), Cooper writes what he believes to be a more realistic panther scene, yet he does not depart from Brown’s construction of white male superiority. After all, Natty Bumppo’s act of killing the female panther and rescuing the helpless women positions him as the completely sovereign and quintessentially masculine *humanized human*. Moreover, since the panther in *The Pioneers* represents the subjected “other,” that is, “bad” American Indians and other vilified literary figures (D. Cody 308), the panther scene also establishes Natty Bumppo’s superiority over American Indians. The many associations Cooper makes between Natty Bumppo and nonhumans problematize this reading, but critics have observed how Cooper employs an animal scheme that ultimately absolves Natty Bumppo from damaging association with animals:

Perhaps it can then be seen that Natty is said to resemble other animals either by people who lie or by those with imperfect grasp of his real character, or in a way that Cooper clearly intends for us not to take seriously. Natty is not really like an animal, but is, as his name proclaims, a killer of animals. As such, he gains ascendancy over the Indians, who are compared to animals time and time again. In fact, he is the first person to kill another human being in the book [*The Deerslayer*]. Cooper wants us to identify Natty not with an animal, but with a killer of animals, animals (the Indians) who proliferate to a point of being nameless and numberless, like the deer in his sobriquet. (Starobin 70)

Like that of Edgar Huntly, whose foray into savagery does not permanently diminish his white male privilege, Natty Bumppo’s association with animals only enhance his

position as someone of superior race and gender. Natty's act of killing the panther in *The Pioneers* does just this: by killing the female panther and rescuing the endangered women, he proves his masculine dominance over nonhuman and human feminine nature.

Tribal Panthers

American Indian tribes of Pennsylvania largely reject the outright contempt for panthers on display in *Edgar Huntly* and other Anglo-American frontier stories, yet at times they frame the animal as a nuisance that requires wholesale removal. In a history of the Delaware tribe, published in 1832 for the American Sunday School Union of Philadelphia, we see echoes of the treatment of panthers by Edgar Huntly, which seems to suggest that some Pennsylvania tribes shared the hatred of panthers held by white settlers. As the history relates, the "Indians" (a blanket word for Delaware and Iroquois) conducted area hunts similar to the Pomfret Castle hunt described by Shoemaker, which causes the history's anonymous writer to lament the change from "former times," when Indigenous Americans "killed only as much game as they wanted for food and clothing," to the flourishing of the fur trade that ran counter to such a conservationist ethic (96). According to the history, American Indians have even less regard for panthers, which have nothing to offer in terms of the fur trade, than the deer and other animals hunters killed in droves:

There are many other animals, which the Indians were accustomed to hunt, some of them on account of their value, and others because of the mischief they did.

Among these the *panther* is a very terrible animal . . . It possesses astonishing strength and swiftness in leaping and seizing hogs, deer, and other animals.

When pursued, even with a small dog, it leaps into a tree, from which it darts upon its enemy. If the first shot misses, the hunter is in imminent danger. They do not, in common, attack men; but if hunters or travellers approach a covert, in which a panther has its young, their situation is perilous. Whoever flies from it, is lost. (97-98, original emphasis)

Shoemaker, however, raises doubts about the accuracy of such reports, and he provides at least one piece of evidence that shows how not all Pennsylvania tribes wholly sanctioned the practice of overhunting panthers.¹⁸ “After the great slaughter of Pomfret Castle,” Shoemaker writes, “many backwoodsmen appeared in full suits of panther skin. For several years they were known as the ‘Panther Boys,’ and in their old days they delighted to recount the ‘big hunt’ to their descendants.” These “Panther boys” inhabit the nonhuman in a particularly gruesome way and in so doing earn the ire of neighboring American Indian tribes. According to Shoemaker, “The savages, infuriated by the arrogance of the white newcomers, spared persons falling into their power occasionally, but gave no quarter to a ‘Panther Boy’” (*Extinct* 31). Shoemaker argues that the Panther Boys’ main offense is arrogance, yet it is just as plausible that American Indians took offense with the group’s practice of mockingly wearing the skin of an animal the tribes consider sacred.

Among these accounts of collective panther hunting, there are oral traditions that venerate individual American-Indian panther hunters. Seneca Jesse Logan, for instance, gains notoriety when, as a child, he defends his family from a panther attack. Born in 1809 into the Seneca Wolf clan, Jesse would grow up to become a skilled hunter. As an

adult he would refrain from killing wolves but, following the tradition of his tribe, had no qualms about killing panthers. “The Senecas,” writes Shoemaker, “hunted panthers with long, oaken stakes, sharpened at the ends. They tracked their quarry in the snow, following their trails for days on snow-shoes. On coming up with the lions of Pennsylvania, they rushed forward courageously and speared them through the heart with the sharp, strong stakes” (*North Mountain* 275). Jesse would test the effectiveness of this technique one day when his father left the family cabin for an elk hunt. When a panther enters the family cabin, Jesse initially requires the protection and comfort of his mother, but he shortly thereafter takes it upon himself to return to the cabin and, in the absence of his father, assert his manhood by protecting his family through the use of violence:

The panther, which was evidently waiting for the arrival of his mate, and possibly cubs, before attacking the inmates of the cabin, was unaware of their departure until some time later. Then, instead of taking their tracks, he entered the hut, laid down and fell asleep. Some time afterwards little Jesse Logan slipped away from his mother and ventured back. Seeing the sleeping panther, he deftly seized one of his father’s sharpened stakes, which stood by the door, and pierced the monster’s heart. (Shoemaker, *North Mountain* 275-276)

This encounter establishes Jesse as a courageous panther hunter and a “magnificent specimen of manhood” (Shoemaker, *North Mountain* 274). Although Jesse provides us with an example of an Indigenous Daniel Boone-type (see chapter 3 for a discussion of Boone’s own childhood panther hunt), Shoemaker suggests that Jesse’s white ancestry

contributes to his daring spirit. Shoemaker describes Jesse's grandfather, the Seneca orator known as Cornplanter, as a "half-breed" whose father was a "white trader from Albany, New York" with uncertain ancestry. According to legend, Cornplanter inherited "much energy and determination" from his white ancestors (Shoemaker, *North Mountain* 272). The suggestion that Jesse, like his grandfather before him, owes his prowess to his white ancestry therefore frames his heroic deeds as originating from white male subjectivity, which mostly rejects the kinship model of human/nonhuman interaction.

In the case of the neighboring Iroquois, they provide a justification for their panther hunting practices in their sacred story "The Hunter." The tale begins by outlining a division between "gentle" and "vicious" animals. The Iroquois God of the chase, Kanistagia, is said to be "loved by all the animals with gentle natures. He never pursued them in wantonness, and he took the life of none except in case of stern necessity." In regard to the panther, the wolf, the wildcat, and "other strange and vicious animals at war with the red men," Kanistagia was a "constant foe, and so swift was the flight of his arrow, so powerful the blow of his hunting club, so unerring his knowledge of their haunts in the mountains, that they feared him deeply and hid away with low and sullen mutterings when they heard his ringing shout upon the chase" (Canfield 129). This division parallels the division between animals constructed by Edgar Huntly, who refrains from killing the woodcocks and squirrels he encounters in the wilderness but relishes in killing panthers (Brown 127). It therefore provides an example of tribal justification for the persecution of panthers with whom tribal members should share kinship.

Another Iroquois sacred story, “Why the Animals Do Not Talk,” uses the Indigenous kinship model of human/nonhuman interaction to explain why the panther can no longer claim an alliance with humans. As related in the story, in a time so long in the past that the “books of the white men cannot tell the time,” the animals of the forest and the Iroquois shared a common language (Canfield 103). Through this language, the animals would join the Iroquois in council-fires and share the knowledge of the wilderness for the benefit of the tribe. Since each animal taught the Iroquois its particular skill, the panther, for its part, taught tribe members “how to conceal themselves in the thicket, on the branches of an overhanging tree or behind the ledge of rocks, and to rush forth upon their enemies like the sudden burst of the whirlwind” (Canfield 103-104). At this point, no division between gentle and vicious animals exists, as the Iroquois classify the panther alongside the beaver, bear, wolf, dog, raccoon, and horse. But the harmony and cooperation between the animals and tribe members soon comes to an end, for the animals realize that the Iroquois have absorbed their lessons and surpassed them in all abilities. In response to this development, the animals hold a clandestine council-fire from which they exclude the Iroquois and at which the eternal rift between the tribe and vicious animals begins. After the more gentle animals rebuke the “jealous wolf” (Canfield 107) for proposing that the animals completely eradicate the Iroquois, the panther, linked to the wolf by its jealousy, seconds the wolf’s proposal. Echoing the sentiments of the wolf, the panther advocates an “immediate advance upon the villages” and recommends that the animals deny quarter to the tribe members (Canfield 110). Importantly, the text suggests that the panther’s chief complaint, what it calls

“molestation from the red men” (Canfield 109), amounts to little more than simple taunting. Take, for instance, the panther’s reaction to man’s mastery of the panther’s skill at navigating the woods: “The panther was jealous and raged through the forests with fury. Sometimes, to his surprise and wrath, when he had taken every precaution to conceal himself from his brother, the red man, the branches of the young trees would part as silently as if swayed by the breath of summer, and between them would appear his red brother, laughing at him for hiding himself so ill” (Canfield 106). This positions the plot put forth by the wolf and the panther as petty and unjustified, for although the Iroquois may taunt the panther, they have yet to take up arms against it.

As a result of the council-fire, the Great Spirit, disappointed by the actions and words of the animals, decides to solidify the dominance of humans over nonhumans. As the Great Spirit reveals, it hoped initially that “all would dwell together in the Happy Hunting-Grounds,” but “Now he would be compelled to alter his plans.” The Great Spirit therefore informs the Iroquois of the animals’ plot and drives a rift between the two groups by granting the tribe a new language from which the animals are excluded. From that point on, each animal would no longer teach the Iroquois but instead serve specific purposes for the tribe: “The bear might be counted as an honorable antagonist, and the red men would be ready to fight him in open battle whenever the opportunity offered . . . The beaver and raccoon, on account of the heartless plan they had set forth for the vanquishing of their brethren, should be considered the prey of the Indian and should yield their thick furs to keep his children warm. The fox would be looked upon as a thief” (Canfield 116). For those animals that most opposed the various plots against the

Iroquois, the domesticated horse and dog, the Great Spirit allowed them to retain understanding of the Iroquois language but denied them the ability to speak it. Nonetheless, they “should be the companions and brothers of the Indians forever” (Canfield 117). For the wolf and panther, who proposed the complete eradication of the Iroquois, their punishment was much harsher: “For all time the wolf and panther should be hunted and killed by the Indians. They should be looked upon and warred against as the most dangerous of foes” (Canfield 116). Although the Iroquois display disdain for panthers, they provide a justification for that hatred, one that is missing from *Edgar Huntly*, the early history of the Delaware and Iroquois, and the Iroquois story “The Hunter.” Whereas the fictional Edgar Huntly and the white settlers that perpetrated the Pomfret Castle animal drive persecute the panther on the grounds of its perceived threat to their lives and their livestock, and Kanistagia in the “The Hunter” is hostile to panthers without justification, the Iroquois story “Why the Animals Do Not Talk” demonstrates how the tribe’s persecution of panthers stems from lost kinship and betrayal rather than from some fundamental belief in the superiority of human beings.

The justification in “Why the Animals Do Not Talk” for persecuting panthers does not, however, have universal applicability for American Indian tribes of the Northeast and beyond (the Iroquois included). For several tribes panthers serve as revered deities, tribal participants, or representatives who play an active role in the tribes’ respective (and sometimes shared) social orders.¹⁹ The Erie tribe of Pennsylvania, for instance, most identified with the American panther, as evidenced by their use of the animal as a tribal representative: “The Erie tribe . . . were called the Yenresh, or ‘the

long tailed,' which was Gallicised into 'Eri,' hence Erie, 'the place of the panther.' The French called the Erie, 'Nation du Chat,' or Cat Nation, which was simply a translation of Yenresh, the name of the panther. Nation du Chat means 'Panther Nation'"

(Shoemaker, *Extinct* 9). The Erie, whose clan figure was the cat, were a kindred tribe of the Iroquois, but incurred the wrath of the latter tribe in 1695 when a vengeful tribe member sentenced a chief of the Onondaga (an Iroquois ally) to die. As a result, the Iroquois set upon and executed a near-eradication of the Erie. Some survivors of the slaughter assimilated into the neighboring Seneca tribe, later relocated voluntarily to Ohio, and ultimately settled in the Oklahoma Indian territories after forced relocation by the American government. The slaughter of the Erie also led to a supernatural blurring of the human/nonhuman border that, according to superstitious Northeasterners, lingers to this day: "The clan of the cat was gone from the shores of Lake Erie, and the panther was known by the Seneca conquerors as the reincarnate spirit of the unfaithful" (Swope 87). In their reincarnated forms, members of the "Panther Nation" inhabited the form of their tribal animal and returned to haunt the European settlers who built homes on the land they once called home.

In addition to using the American panther as a tribal representative, Pennsylvania American Indian tribes revere panther-like deities. The Delaware, Shawnee, and Iroquois, for instance, share a reverence for a deity known as the Underwater Panther, a chimerical panther granted rule over the underwater world (Lankford, "Great Serpent" 113). The Underwater Panther shares so many characteristics with another figure, the Horned Water Serpent that, under the title of the Great Serpent, the two figures exist as

different manifestations of the same being. As George E. Lankford observes, “Although Western eyes might readily identify the two creatures as quite different species, the native view, rooted in shape-shifting and symbolic imagery, seems to find much less distinction between the two. It appears, in fact, that the two quite different images would be better envisioned as the two ends of a pole, with various morphs possible between the extremes” (“Great Serpent” 116). Of the several possibly manifestations of the Great Serpent, Lankford describes one form of the Underwater Panther as having the body of a panther, a long tail, horns, and, sometimes, a human head (Lankford, “Great Serpent” 111). In this figure the human and the nonhuman meld into one being that is “above all the guardian of the waters and, by extension, all that is beneath the surface of the earth” (Lankford, “Great Serpent” 116). This guardianship role granted to the Underwater Panther, which includes protecting, and, in some cases, harming humans,²⁰ signals a willingness by the Pennsylvania tribes to maintain a kinship with panthers and therefore shape their identities in conjunction with, and not in opposition to, nonhuman beings.

Stories about the Horned Serpent and Underwater Panther abound across the New World and most likely date back to antiquity (Grantham 28). This would explain how the Creek, who populated the southeastern U.S., tell their own sacred stories that feature a panther figure to which we can compare those revered by the Delaware, Shawnee, and Iroquois. The Creek revere a figure known as the Water Panther, which is described as having “four legs, no feet, long hair, and a long fishlike tail” and, similar to the Underwater Panther, as being associated with the underworld. In one version of the story of how the Water Panther destroyed the Creek town of Coosa, an orphaned woman

living with relatives comes across a Water Panther on one of her many trips to a spring for water. The encounter results in the woman becoming impregnated and later giving birth to three Water Panthers. After a debate among her people about whether or not to kill her Water-Panther children, they decide to spare them on account of their mother's human being status. When the woman reports the debate to her "Water Panther husband," the being instructs her to have those of her people who argued for their children's clemency to remove themselves from their town. Once done, the Water Panther mercilessly destroys the town (Grantham 210). More than a spirit deserving of reverence but inaccessible to its worshippers, the Water Panther in Creek tradition not only bears children with a human, but also intervenes on the behalf of his half-human/half-nonhuman family.

Further evidence of the preeminence of the panther among the Creek tribe's animal-based pantheon appears in other sacred stories and documented tribal practices as well. One story from the Yuchi tribe, which consolidated with the Creek tribe in the first half of the nineteenth century, explains the role the Panther played in the genesis of the physical world. At a point when the earth existed but was not illuminated, the animals of the earth convened and appointed Panther to make the first to attempt at bringing light to the world (Grantham 96-98). Although the Panther fails in the endeavor, the story demonstrates the foremost position the Panther holds among the Yuchi's sacred animals. In an account of the Creek migration into the Southwest, the Cussitaw people travel to the town of Coosaw, where they kill a panther that had been preying on the town's inhabitants. Out of respect for the panther, the Cussitaws fast when preparing for war. In

return, good fortune comes to those who carry the panther's bones with them into battle (Grantham 112-116). In the Yuchi story "Four Men Visit the Spirit Land to Recover Their Wives (and Death Originates)," four Yuchi men kill their wives then rationalize "There is no such thing as death. So let us go and hunt them" (Grantham 170). Before they reached their "Creator," a sun deity in the form of an elderly woman, the three men transform into animals—a deer, and panther, and a bear, respectively—in order to pass through a great cloud that obstructs the path to the spirit realm. The fourth man insists "I am a man, and I'll be a man" and the sun deity denies him access to the realm (Grantham 172). In a similar story from the Alabama peoples, "The Men Who Went to the Sky," two men attempt to travel to the afterlife to retrieve a woman's deceased child. When they reach "the end of the land" and find a piece of the sky moving up and down, one man declares, "I am a panther," the other asserts, "I am a wildcat," and the two men ride the sky to the afterlife. That the highest deity for each of these tribes allows members who take on panther characteristics to enter the spirit realm shows the divine favor granted to panthers.

Sacred stories from across a multitude of American Indian tribes also establish a human/nonhuman kinship model that casts the American panther as a *humanized animal* that more explicitly facilitates tribal biopolitical negotiation. In one myth from the Saponi tribe, another of the Iroquoian tribes, dangerous panther-women inhabit the version of the afterlife reserved for the wicked. As recorded by William Byrd from a Saponi informant named Bearskin, the souls of those departed travel together for a time in the Saponi afterlife. When they arrive at a fork in the road, a flash of lightning separates

souls. “Good” souls are swept toward the path on the right, and the “bad” souls are swept to the path on the left. The path to the right of the fork leads to a paradisiacal realm replete with game, where departed souls take on the bodies of their youth, the weather is constantly pleasant, and “woman are bright as stars, and never scold.” Conversely, the barren realm to which the left-hand side of the fork leads experiences perpetual winter and darkness. As for the women of this realm, Byrd says, “Here all the woman are old and ugly, having claws like a panther, with which they fly upon the men that slight their passion. For it seems these haggard old furies are intolerably fond, and expect a vast deal of cherishing. They talk much, and exceedingly shrill, giving exquisite pain to the drum of the ear, which in that place of torment is so tender, that every sharp note wounds it to the quick” (Byrd 52). Here the presence of these dangerous panther-women in the Saponi afterlife serves as a behavioral deterrent for the living. This cultural bogey(wo)man shapes intracultural tribal relationships and practices by encouraging behavior that will result in admittance into the idyllic, nonthreatening version of the Saponi afterlife.

The Seneca tale titled “Whirlwind and Panther,” on the other hand, presents a scenario in which a panther-woman helps a male tribal member gain acclaim as a hunter. The story tells of a young Seneca man whose companions deny him the chance to join them on a hunting expedition because they believe him to be “foolish, not strong of mind.” When a Seneca woman takes pity on him and says to him, “Let us marry and go hunting” (Curtin 66), the subsequent hunt reveals the man’s ineptitude at hunting, as he fails to trap deer and only manages to kill small game. Upon checking one of his traps,

he comes across two young boys and their crying mother, who pleads for the man to rescue them from their predicament. One of the boys had stolen and destroyed a feather belonging to a large, disembodied head known as Whirlwind, who now seeks revenge upon the family. The worried mother asks the Seneca man to remedy the situation by killing and offering a hawk to Whirlwind, and when the plot works, the panther family reveals itself to be a woman and her two male children. In return for his assistance, the panther-woman declares “Hereafter I will help you and you will get more game than any of the hunters” (Curtin 67), and the young man does indeed go on to become the tribe’s most successful hunter. Recorded in 1922, the tale provides a counter narrative to the changes in Seneca gender roles that took place over the course of the nineteenth-century. Although the Seneca, like other Iroquoian tribes, subscribed to a matrilineal society (Scheckel 87), a set of historical circumstances early in the nineteenth-century catalyzed a shift to a nuclear family model that, against tribal custom, recast the husband, and not his wife, as the primary and rightful agriculturist. At mid-century, the formation of the Seneca Nation of Indians led to the further disenfranchisement of Seneca women, as contemporary white customs influenced the Seneca to adopt a political model in which only male members of the tribe possessed the rights to vote and hold office (Bilharz 107-109). “Whirlwind and Panther” therefore presents a scenario in which a tribal woman, who possesses a literal kinship with a panther, asserts her tribal power by acting as the guiding hand that reestablishes the young man’s rightful place in the tribe (as a hunter and not an agriculturalist).

For the Choctaw tribe, the retelling of their panther-related origin story in 1880

by John Francis Hamtramck Claiborne, underscores the misunderstanding of that tribe's gender roles. Claiborne describes how an epidemic decimated the tribe as they traveled from the West. The remaining living tribal members burned the bodies of the dead and carried the ashes with them until all remaining members died out as well. Years after this cataclysmic event, the "Great Spirit created four infants, two of each sex, out of the ashes of the dead," which were "suckled by a panther" (Claiborne 519). Claiborne relates this origin story to the tribe's "strong local attachments" (518). As he says, "It is not surprising that a people having this notion of their origin—created, as it were, out of the very *dust of their fathers*—parcel of the soil they occupied—under the injunction of mysterious guardian never to leave it, should be devoted to their country, and anxious to die in its embraces" (Claiborne 519, my emphasis). Claiborne, however, ignores how the story's act of animal kinship (the suckling of the panther) relates to the matrilineal and matrilocal nature of Choctaw society. According to Fay A. Yarbrough, "Choctaw Indians determined clan membership, traditionally a key part of Choctaw identity, matrilineally; that is, children became members of their mother's, not their father's, clan" (124). The tribe therefore has a mother panther, and not the tribe's fathers, as Claiborne asserts, to thank for its resurgence. Moreover, Claiborne misses the opportunity to read the tribe's panther mother as the point of origin for the tribe's matrilineal tribal structure. Perhaps Claiborne found resonances between this myth and masculine Western myths of feral children, such as that of the twin boys Romulus and Remus, who suckled a wolf and went on to found Rome.

In the case of the neighboring Cherokee, panthers appear in myths that reinforce

the practice of hunting as a masculine endeavor. One of the most recognizable Cherokee myths, “Kana’ti and Selu: The Origin of Game and Corn,” establishes agricultural and hunting responsibilities for tribal women and men respectively. As explained by Nathaniel Sheidley, “Selu (whose name means ‘corn’) and her husband Kanati (the Great Hunter) came down to this world shortly after its creation. Here they became the first parents of human children (the two Thunder Boys). Each possessed the power to provide for their children’s sustenance in a different way. Selu brought forth corn and beans as she brought forth life: from her womb. Kanati, by contrast, took life by killing the deer with which he returned each day” (170). In a version of the myth published by James Mooney in 1902, the son of Kanati and Selu encounters a boy who emerges out of a river near their house, and Selu and Kanati surmise that he was created out of the blood of the game that the former had washed in the river. The boy, named Wild Boy, claims Kanati and Selu as his parents and proceeds to entice the couple’s other son into a series of mischievous deeds. After one of their exploits leads them to kill their mother after discovering that she is a “witch,” a furious Kanati attempts to kill the boys by setting wolves upon them, but the boys escape, which causes Kanati to leave home. The boys then leave home to find their father and, in response to his surprise at their finding him, declare, “we always accomplish what we start out to do—we are men.” A series of trials follows this episode, including encounters with a tribe of cannibals and a fierce panther. In the case of the latter encounter, the panther cooperates with the boys, allowing them to take turns shooting arrows into its head (the panther remains unscathed despite the assault). To Kanati’s surprise at the boys’ escape, they once again proclaim, “we found it

[the panther], but it never hurt us. We are men” (Mooney 246-247). Not only does this episode establish the boys’ manhood through their defeat of the panther, it also shows how, within the tribe’s human/nonhuman kinship model, a nonhuman plays a cooperative role in establishing the processes by which tribal gender roles are defined.

The cooperative role of panthers in the manhood rituals of the Cherokee is likewise demonstrated in “The Underground Panthers,” which tells of an instance in which a panther initiates a tribesman into its group. When one of the tribe’s hunters encounters a panther in the woods, he lifts his weapon to shoot, but the panther speaks to him, explaining that there “was no difference between them, and they were both of the same nature.” This convinces the hunter to refrain from killing the panther, and the pair goes on a joint deer hunt. After a successful hunt, the hunter follows the panther to its “townhouse,” where a group of panthers prepare for a dance. Once the hunter decides to leave the party, he leaves the warmth of the townhouse for the bitter cold of winter. Upon finding a band of fellow tribesmen in search of him, the hunter learns that he has been missing for days, even though he feels as if only a brief period of time has elapsed. Within a week of his return to his people, the hunter dies, for he “had already begun to take on the panther nature, and so could not live again with men.” This development, along with the tribe’s belief that “If he had stayed with the panthers he would have lived” (Mooney324), demonstrate how the Cherokee human-animal relationship in this particular story allows for deep (masculine) kinship but not for species interchangeability. Nonetheless, the pair’s hunting exploits show a type of human-animal relationship that facilitates the masculine act of hunting, the activity through

which, “more than any other activity, young Cherokee men established and apprehended their place in the architecture of the world they inhabited” (Sheidley 171).

In the Great Lakes region, mythology from the Huron and Wyandot likewise tells of instances in which panthers help tribal men to assert their manhood by demonstrating hunting prowess. The tale “The Lion and the Hunter” tells of a hunting party that, out of jealousy, abandons one of their own while on an island hunting expedition. Frightened by the dangerous “lions and wolves” that roamed the island, the abandoned man climbs a tree and remains there overnight. The next day the man sees a large lion approaching him and producing howls “like that of dogs when they cry” (Barbeau 106). The lion then speaks to the man, explaining that he has a sharp object stuck in his paw. As in the story of Androcles and the lion, the man in the tree extracts the object from the lion’s paw, and in return the lion protects the hunter from harm and provides him with a “charm with which he was enabled to accomplish anything whatsoever at his own fancy” (Barbeau 107). The hunter eventually rejoins his tribe after a search party returns to the island, and, thanks to the protection and charms provided by the lion, “The man became a far better hunter than he had ever been before, and he became so wealthy that really nothing was beyond his desire” (Barbeau 109). According to Huron marriage structures, tribal men must exhibit hunting proficiency before obtaining a wife. Young men could at any time obtain an *Asqua*, that is, a “companion,” but they would need to prove their hunting and warring skills before obtaining an *Atenoha*, or wife (K. Anderson 115). “The Lion and the Hunter” therefore provides an example of a story in which a tribal man establishes his marriageability with the help of a humanized panther.

The California Maidu tribe also tell panther myths that reflect their tribe's marital structures. Although the majority of Maidu men contented themselves with one wife, some men practiced polygamy, especially the wealthy or those in positions of power (Kroeber, *Handbook* 402). In the Maidu myth "Mountain-Lion and his Wives," a story of a lion and his multiple wives reflects the tribe's practice of polygamy. The story tells of Mountain Lion, who provides hunting game for two "girls" who then share his bed. Mountain Lion subsequently declares, "This is the way we marry. If we sleep together, and find ourselves here in the morning, we shall be married." Mountain Lion then has offspring by each of the girls. When the offspring begin to wander about, they encounter another set of "good-looking girls" (R. Dixon 105) that their father claims for himself as well, saying, "People can leave their wives and children, and get others. That is how it will be in this world" (R. Dixon 106). After Mountain Lion's original two wives become disgruntled and train their offspring in hunting and flute playing, two of their father's noteworthy skills, Mountain Lion returns to his original family's camp and says, "If a man leaves his wife, after a while he can come back to her. That is what people will say about it by and by" (R. Dixon 109). Since the marriage structures in this tale parallel those of the tribe to which it belongs, we have here a case in which the American panther serves as the authority on how tribal members should conduct their marriages.

Whether explaining the origin of their tribes or articulating tribal laws and customs, American Indian panther narratives demonstrate how nonhumans play a prominent role in tribal social structuring practices. Tribal members learn from these panther narratives how to honor their past and how to operate in society. This type of

narrative function rests on a human/nonhuman kinship model in which nonhumans, even those considered wild and dangerous by the Western world, hold preeminence in the nonhuman pantheons from which tribal members learn life lessons. Conversely, in Anglo-American panther narratives, such as those exemplified by Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, the American panther does not rise above a detested animal that, because of its irredeemable savagery, becomes symbolically linked to American Indians and others of mixed ancestry. Edgar Huntly's reputation as a panther killer and his multiple acts of killing or outsmarting panthers establish his supremacy over the American panther specifically and, implicitly, over races he deems inferior. And, despite his foray into savagery, he nonetheless remains superior to the panthers and American Indians of the frontier. By animalizing his American Indian foes, as well as by persecuting the American panther, he constructs his racial superiority and speciesist dominance in opposition to nonhumans. On the other hand, the deliberate inclusion of nonhumans in subject formation processes and social structuring practices is central to American Indian sacred stories and myths, especially those that feature the culturally-significant American panther.

In both the Anglo-American texts and American Indian sacred stories discussed above, the American panther serves as the means by which these respective cultures put forth real or desired social structures. One critical point of distinction between the two approaches, however, is that Anglo-American writings deploy the panther to meditate on intercultural power struggles, whereas American Indian panther narratives use the animal to establish intracultural law or social practices. In the broader context of the

struggle between these two cultures for land, goods, and power on the frontier, each also reveals distinct biopolitical strategies. The work of Brockden Brown and Cooper symbolically links the “savage” American panther with “savage” American Indians, thereby emphasizing the supposed racial inferiority of the latter. On the other hand, since American Indians count the panther as one among many of the “first people” to inhabit the world, they limit their use of the animal to intracultural social issues and refrain from using the animal to disparage other cultures. The American frontier as a biopolitical site therefore produced at least two distinct traditions of panther texts, the Anglo-American one which took advantage of the view of panthers as detested pests in order to assert cultural supremacy over other races, and the American Indian one which refrained from that practice on account of the sanctity of the American panther in Indigenous belief systems.

CHAPTER III

FROM “MANTHERS” TO LADY WILDCATS: THE GENDERED USE OF BIG CATS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Seventeen years prior to the publication of Charles Brockden Brown’s frontier novel *Edgar Huntly*, which features a “civilized” farmer who descends into savagery when he becomes a hunter (of both panthers and American Indians), J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur commented on the moral difference between farmers and hunters in the New World wilderness. In “What is an American?” the third letter in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), Crèvecoeur disparages frontier hunters by equating them with “savage Indians” and says, “In a little time their success in the woods makes them neglect their tillage . . . That new mode of life brings along with it a new set of manners, which I cannot easily describe. These new manners being grafted on the old stock, produce a strange sort of lawless profligacy.” Written over the seven years leading up to the American Revolution, Crèvecoeur’s comments reflect the popular pre-Revolution opinion that hunters posed a threat to an American society whose virtue lay partly in the civilizing practice of taming the wilderness via agricultural production. Daniel Justin Herman notes, however, that this attitude began to change with the onset of the American Revolution, during which Americans adopted “buckskin-clad hunters” as symbols of their defense against the “heavy hand of Parliament and the Crown” (49). Of these new arbiters of civilization and freedom, none had a stronger or longer lasting influence on the American imagination than Daniel Boone, the famed pioneer of Kentucky lore who became “the most significant, most emotionally compelling myth-

hero of the early republic” (Slotkin 21) and spawned a number of similar mythic figures.

As American attitudes held toward hunters and their frontier exploits became increasingly favorable, Boone-like men, real and literary, who faced the perils of the American frontier with the weapons and will needed to tame it, became more and more popular. Following the publication of the popular narrative “The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boon,” which John Filson appended to *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucke* (1784), Boone’s exaggerated characteristics—his heroism, his hyper-masculinity, and his hunting skills, to name a few—appear to various degrees in countless male adventure stories of the American frontier. Popular in their own time, these male adventure stories generated by the Boone myth have also garnered much critical attention. Sandra Wilson Smith points out, however, that, while “scholars of American literature and culture have consistently studied male adventure stories,” the “adventure stories featuring a female protagonist were virtually absent” in scholarship until relatively recently. In response to studies that focused almost exclusively on the “frontiersman who penetrates the wilderness,” Smith shifts the critical discussion towards the “many narratives in which a female character conquers the frontier” (269-270). She cites the Crab Orchard mini-narrative that appears near the end of Filson’s account of Boone, in which a woman violently defends her frontier cabin from an attack by American Indians, as an example of a narrative that features a “tough frontierswoman who expertly wields a weapon and confronts violence with violence” (272). Using the Crab Orchard narrative as a starting point, Smith traces the development of the trope of the masculine frontierswoman across the nineteenth century, proving that narratives of

female heroism existed from the very beginnings of the American frontier literary tradition.

Although Smith proves that the male and female frontier hero story developed simultaneously, some features of early frontier narratives remain unique to stories of male heroes. When comparing early accounts of male adventurers with those of female adventurers, a trend emerges in the case of the male adventurers only of both associating them with panthers and emphasizing their adeptness at killing panthers. In these narratives, male heroes identified as panthers/panther killers rule over the frontier to a larger extent than female protagonists in early adventure stories, however much the latter exert their own power and agency over the frontier: Daniel Boone meets his future wife when stalking through the woods panther-like on a deer hunt, and Davy Crockett takes on wildcat characteristics and expresses his desire to “hunt” down a wife. Since these panther-men establish white male subjectivity as the preeminent subject position to the social detriment of women, their narratives participate in biopolitical negotiation. As Giorgio Agamben writes, “In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man.” (*The Open* 80). In the Boone and Crockett narratives, the negotiation of the conflict between animality and humanity gets resolved in a very specific way: panther-like men draw power from their animality, power that enables them to dominate the frontier and its human and nonhuman inhabitants. Boone, Crockett, and their counterparts therefore participate in the “anthropomorphic legendary tradition suggested by the coinage ‘manther,’” which refers to men whose aggressive sexuality associates them with the

panther (Steinhagen 209).

With the advent of the women's movement in America, however, came narratives about female characters, who, through their own appropriations of big cat characteristics, challenge patriarchy to varying degrees. Writers, such as Louisa May Alcott, Susan Coolidge, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who imagined new roles for women in literature employed one literary figure in particular, that of the tomboy, as a championing figure of white womanhood. The figure of the tomboy would go on to become a stock character, even for male writers such as Edward L. Wheeler, whose character Calamity Jane would become central to his *Deadwood Dick* series and go on to become a pop culture phenomenon in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Abate xv). In response to Jane's "penchant for masculine garb and vernacular," which "flouted codes of propriety" (K. Jones 40), characters in Wheeler's texts often compare Jane to a wildcat. Although the term "wildcat" can refer derogatorily to a ferocious or hot-tempered woman, those characteristics not only enable Jane to survive but to thrive in a male-dominated Wild West. Wheeler's contemporaries Ambrose Bierce and Yda H. Addis likewise create female characters who find resistance to patriarchy in big cat embodiment. In Bierce's "The Eyes of the Panther," the werepanther Irene Marlowe tricks her would-be fiancée, Jenner Brading, into killing her when she lurks outside his window in panther form, thereby relieving herself of the pressures of marriage he forces upon her. In Addis's "A Human Tigress," a part-jaguar woman challenges male sexual authority by seducing then viciously killing libidinous men. As Wheeler does with his Calamity Jane character, both Bierce and Addis (Addis to a much stronger degree)

intervene in the American big cat literary tradition dominated by panther-like men who hunt panthers and women alike.

“Manthers” and the Panthers They Kill

Attitudes toward panthers in the early Republic ranged from respectful and reverent to fearful and hateful. In *The Westover Manuscripts* (1841), an account by William Byrd of early eighteenth-century expeditions through Virginia and North Carolina panther territory, Byrd describes panthers as “untamable” (47) beasts with “contemptible” voices but also acknowledges that the panther “reigns absolute monarch of the woods” (56). Because of the panther’s status as “monarch of the woods,” William Tryon, governor of the Province of North Carolina from 1765-1771, saw it fit to send a panther overseas via William Petty, the Marquis of Lansdowne, as a gift for King George III. In a March 28, 1767, letter from Tryon to Petty, Tryon echoes Byrd’s statements about the regal nature of the panther: “As the Panther of this continent I am told has never been imported into Europe, and as it is the King of the American forests, I presume to send a male panther under your Lordships patronage to be presented for his Majesty’s acceptance . . . I am very solicitous for his safe arrival, as I am ambitious that he may be permitted to add to his Majesty’s collection of wild beasts.” We learn from a December 12th letter of the same year of the King’s “most gracious acceptance of the panther” (Tryon). Although Byrd cites reasons why one should fear panthers, he, like Tryon, observes how American panthers, not unlike the lion in the eastern hemisphere, can claim noble status in the animal kingdom. The detestation of panthers displayed in Garcilaso de la Vega’s *The Florida of the Inca*, on the other hand, translated over a

century after the text's publication in the form of colonial laws that encouraged the excessive hunting of panthers:

Early fear of predators brought swift action in the form of incentives designed for their eradication. In the west, early Jesuit priests in California offered anyone killing a mountain lion a reward of one bull . . . The state of Massachusetts was paying bounty on panthers in 1764. South Carolina, in its 1695 'Act for destroying Beasts of Prey,' ordered every Indian Bowman to hand over each year either two bobcat skins or the pelt of a wolf, panther or bear. Laggards were to be 'severely' whipped. (Parker 46)

Add to that the action of the North Carolina General Assembly, which as early as 1715 passed "An Act to Encourage the Destroying of Vermin," offering five shillings for every panther killed ("Acts" 71), and a strong pattern of persecuting panthers in the early republic emerges.

This ambivalence toward panthers in American culture informs literary scenes in which male characters establish their dominance over their surroundings by taking on big cat characteristics, demonstrating their adeptness at killing panthers, or both. In the literary corpus surrounding Daniel Boone, the "archetypal hero of the American frontier" (Slotkin 268-269), several of his life's episodes, from his slaying of a panther as a child to the fire-hunt that resulted in an engagement to Rebecca Bryan, position him as a figure worthy of the fear and reverence associated with the American panther.

Although authors tend to observe the differences in temperament and morality between Boone and fellow frontiersman Davy Crockett (Clarke 19-20; W. Cody 158), Crockett

likewise battles panthers and “hunts” the women he courts. In the case of the fictional Edgar Huntly, whose panther-killing exploits I discuss in chapter 2 of this study, he holds nothing but animosity for panthers, referring to them as “that detested race” and describing his role as one of the local hunters who have “nearly banished” all panthers from their share of the Pennsylvania wilderness (126). Edgar likewise shows little sympathy for the Delaware Indians whose lands the Pennsylvania settlers encroach upon. In fact, Edgar kills several tribal members whom he dehumanizes through unfavorable comparisons to nonhumans. Whether panther-like men establishing dominance over women, or panther killers establishing dominance over supposedly inferior races, these characters exemplify the masculinist tendencies in early American panther narratives.

Following John Filson’s 1784 “The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boon,” John Trumbull’s “retelling and repackaging” of the same narrative launched the Boone myth to new heights (Kopacz 144). The Boone myth has produced many enduring tropes, including scenes in which characters achieve true manhood by way of violent tests of mettle. Since such tests against panthers and American Indians alike abound in Boone narratives, introductory statements about his life often hold him up as a model of pure masculinity. As a general comment on Boone’s life, for instance, Frank Tripplett adopts a regal view of Boone, saying, “Truly of him might Anthony’s oration over Caesar’s body be pronounced: ‘His life was gentle and the elements / So mixed in him that nature might stand up / And say to all the world, *‘This was a man’*” (67, emphasis added). Charles W. Webber likewise emphasizes Boone’s masculinity, yet he makes more of the

effeminacy that a life like Boone's would eradicate: "'He might have been civilized!' as a *gentleman* of Chestnut or Broadway—inspecting through an eyeglass his powerful frame and ruddy cheeks—may be supposed to lisp; but that would have spoiled a *man!*—a man of might!—the father of a state" (92, original emphasis). Though several of Boone's hunting exploits appear in the various Boone narratives that followed Filson's, authors depict the panther scenes as the most impressive and therefore as the best measure of Boone's unquestionable masculinity.

Boone enters manhood and differentiates himself from his childhood friends early in his life by killing a panther. In Timothy Flint's 1833 *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone: The First Settler of Kentucky*, Boone and his childhood companions come across a panther during a hunting excursion. Whereas Boone's companions "fled from the vicinity, as fast as possible," Boone "coolly surveyed" the panther and shot it through the heart at "the very moment it was in the act to spring upon him" (Flint 21). The details of this encounter remain mostly consistent in later accounts of Boone's life, with more than one author making the point that this early encounter launched Boone's famed hunting career.²¹ John S. C. Abbot, author of *Daniel Boone: The Pioneer of Kentucky* (1872), argues that the veracity of the story "makes but little difference" since it at the very least shows the "estimation in which he was regarded, and the impression which his character produced in these days of childhood" (41). William Frederick Cody (aka Buffalo Bill), on the other hand, lends credence to the story by observing the following: "This adventure must have occurred at a time before he had reached his teens, because the fact of killing a panther in those days was an incident so commonplace that

it would hardly have been preserved in tradition as a [sic] evidence of Boone's valor had he been more than a youth" (22). In any case, the episode serves to establish in readers' minds Boone's uncanny ability as a hunter, an ability that figuratively makes him a man among boys. Even in scenes in which an adult Boone hunts in the company of other men, he displays superior masculinity when faced yet again with the American panther. While on a hunting expedition, Boone and his companion Holden hear the telltale scream of the panther, described as "resembling the shriek of a frightened woman or child more nearly than any other sound" (Flint 45). Holden, an inexperienced backwoodsman, verbally expresses his concern, to which Boone responds "do not wake the rest. *It is nothing but the cry of a panther*" (Flint 45-46, emphasis added). In a later account, Boone offers a stronger statement of his own fearlessness, when he slightly modifies his response to Holden and says "it is only a panther" (Hawks 32). In both accounts of the encounter, however, Boone, and not the more fearful Holden, takes the shot that eventually kills the fleeing panther and ensures the safety of the hunting party. Virtually from birth, then, Boone exemplifies frontier masculinity, a subject position he forms largely through hunting and killing panthers.

In the case of Davy Crockett, another famed panther hunter, he set out in his autobiography to correct what he terms the "catchpenny errors" found in Mathew St. Clair Clarke's popular *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee* (1833). Part of Crockett's displeasure with the text lays in how people influenced by Clarke's work perceive Crockett as altogether nonhuman. "They have almost," Crockett writes, "in every instance expressed the most profound astonishment

at finding me in human shape, and with the *countenance, appearance, and common feelings* of a human being” (5, original emphasis). Although Crockett means to counter these notions, his indignation aimed at those who perceive him as nonhuman is mostly ironic considering how he compares himself in his autobiography to a wildcat on multiple occasions. When recounting the time he dealt with a school bully, Crockett describes how he waited in ambush for the bully in a grouping of bushes and “set on him like a wild cat” (30). On another occasion, Crockett describes his victory against a competing suitor in his courtship of a young lady thusly: “he didn’t dare to attempt any thing more, for now I had gotten a start, and I looked at him every once in a while as fierce as a wild-cat” (62). Even when lamenting how others dehumanize him, Crockett finds strength in taking on the characteristics of the fierce and feared wildcat.

Like Boone, Crockett forms a particularly masculinist identity through the act of killing panthers. Clarke’s *Sketches and Eccentricities* establishes Crockett as a panther killer by describing an encounter in which Crockett, along with several other men, aim their guns and fire at a wounded panther (197-199). However, Richard Penn Smith’s account of Crockett’s hand-to-hand combat with a “Mexican cougar” best exhibits Crockett’s adeptness at killing panthers. The episode appears in *Col. Crockett’s Exploits and Adventures in Texas* (1836), a text that William Bedford Clark credits with offering the American reading public, which had come to associate Crockett with buffoonery, with a “new, *sanitized* Crockett as a figure worthy of emulation” (Clark 67, original emphasis). Purportedly based on Crockett’s diary, the text, “in reality a clumsy fabrication assembled immediately after the fall of the Alamo” (Clark 66), follows

Crockett's exploits as he travels from Tennessee to Texas to play his part in the Texas Revolution. Upon his arrival in Texas, Crockett becomes separated from his party and finds himself lost in the Texas wilderness. With night closing in he finds potential shelter in a felled tree, unaware that an "enormous Mexican cougar" already occupies it (152). Whereas Crockett in his autobiography speaks metaphorically about his willingness to fight "a whole regiment of wild cats" if it means the object of his affection would reciprocate his love (50), Penn Smith imagines Crockett getting his chance to test himself against an actual wildcat. Of all the Boone and Crockett panther encounters, Penn Smith describes the most epic one, as he tells of how Crockett emerges victorious after a vicious fight with a cougar that forces Crockett to abandon his rifle and engage in hand-to-hand combat (154-155). The fight with a "Mexican" cougar, which Crockett bests, foreshadows the tenacity with which Crockett will fight the Mexican army at the Battle of the Alamo and further serves to establish his masculine dominance.

Beyond proving their masculinity by hunting panthers, Boone and Crockett establish patriarchal dominance by "hunting" women. Soon after Crockett's entry into manhood, he expresses his desire to obtain a wife using explicit hunting terms: "I should have continued longer [attending school], if it hadn't been that I concluded I couldn't do any longer without a wife; and so *I cut out to hunt me one*" (49, emphasis added). Crockett's statement evokes an earlier example of a frontiersman hunting for a wife: the fire-hunt that results in Daniel Boone's marriage to Rebecca Bryan. The episode, as Michael A. Lofaro observes, is "patently false" and one that "None of the Boone children ever believed" (16). Nonetheless, it demonstrates how adopting big cat

characteristics, as Crockett does in his autobiography, establishes Boone as the dominant force in his acts of courtship. According to Flint, Boone and a companion set out one night to “shine the eyes” of a deer, which refers to the practice of using a torch light to fascinate a deer long enough for the hunter to take a clear shot. Boone soon sees the “mild brilliance of the two orbs” he takes for the eyes of a deer, but a unknown, near-primal feeling keeps Boone from firing his aimed rifle. After a foot-race in which the prey bests Boone, the hunter realizes that he had “mistaken the species of the game” (27). Determined to identify the game, Boone follows the mysterious animal to a nearby farm, where he learns that the deer is Rebecca Bryan, the daughter of Boone’s neighbor, who herself believed she was pursued by a “*painter*,” a colloquial term for a panther (Flint 28, original emphasis). Famed for “*never being beaten out of his track*” by game, Boone continues his pursuit of Rebecca. “In a word,” Flint writes, “he courted her successfully, and they were married” (29). The predator/prey dynamic in this episode, that of the panther-like Boone conquering Rebecca Bryan, his “pet deer” (28), places Boone atop the patriarchal order his violent masculinity reinforces.

Although Flint’s conclusion to the Boone fire-hunt story suggests that the Boone’s achieve marital bliss, his description of standard fire-hunts undermines that notion by implying that any marital bliss will come at the expense of Rebecca Bryan, the “victim” of the hunt. As Flint describes, “The deer, reposing quietly in his thicket, is awakened by the approaching cavalcade, and instead of flying from the portentous brilliance, remains stupidly gazing upon it, as if charmed to the spot. The animal is betrayed to its doom by the gleaming of its fixed and innocent eyes. This cruel mode of

securing a fatal shot, is called in hunter's phrase, *shining the eyes*" (26, original emphasis). Clarke, who writes about Crockett in *Sketches and Eccentricities*, similarly describes the fire-hunt as a particularly cruel method of hunting. "The sight," he writes, "is calculated to have much effect upon a human being; and I cannot reconcile it to myself to see even a deer fall by so treacherous a plan . . . Nearer still it [the torch light] approaches,—and they gaze with rapture at the beautiful sight; a redder light bursts forth, and the dread crack of a rifle rings through the forest. The mother falls, and lies weltering in her blood. Her tender infants lick from her wound the crimson fluid as it exudes" (Clarke 141-142). Both of these accounts of the fire-hunt, which sympathize much more with the deer than with the hunter, cast doubt on any balance of power in the Boone marriage. Some authors, such as Francis L. Hawks, who contends that "Rebecca Bryan completely *shined his* [Boone's] *eyes*" (23, original emphasis), attempt to grant Rebecca Bryan more equal footing in her courtship with Boone, yet she remains passive in her own history and wholly dependent on Boone's actions.

Whereas taking on the characteristics of the American panther makes the likes of Boone and Crockett more dominant than those around them, associations between nonhumans and the American Indians of the same frontier narratives justifies violence against America's Indigenous population. Stewart Edward White's early twentieth-century account of Boone, *Daniel Boone: Wilderness Scout* (1926), describes the "two schools of opinion about the Indian," the one that "paints him as a fiend incarnate" and the other that "depicts him as the 'noble redman' possessed of all the primitive virtues" (82). White argues that both of these position bear some truth, but early accounts of

Boone, such as Filson's, shy away from the "noble" portrayals of savages, making it easier for men and women on the frontier to justify the violence they enact their Indigenous neighbors. On more than one occasion, Filson conflates the American Indians of the Kentucky frontier with the region's wildlife. "Thus we behold Kentucky," he writes at one point, "lately an howling wilderness, the habitation of savages and wild beasts, become a fruitful field" (34). Flint continues this trend when he describes Boone pausing between axe strokes to "see if the echoes have startled the red men, or the wild beasts from their lair" (vii). Even white men who fight for the American Indian cause draw unfavorable comparisons to panthers, as is the case with Simon Girty, a "renegado" and "cowardly villain" who fights against white Kentuckians. In some accounts of his story, a white Kentuckian disparages Girty by saying, "His father was a panther and his dam a wolf. I have a worthless dog, that kills lambs. Instead of shooting him, I have named him Simon Girty" (Flint 119). In Webber's Boone narrative, Webber describes a frontiersman debating whether or not to shoot a "meek-looking" panther and declaring his answer: "Dead panthers tell no tales!" (194). The frontiersman's declaration applies as well to the animalized American Indians and their allies, whose narratives remain buried or misrepresented in most frontier narratives, and whose panther characteristics, as in the case with Simon Girty, provide the justification for the violence perpetrated against them.

In Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, Edgar displays some ambivalence toward American Indians, yet his multiple acts of associating them with nonhumans, generally, and panthers, specifically, likewise serves to justify violence against his

Indigenous neighbors.²² Most noticeably, Edgar refers to both panthers and members of the Pennsylvania Delaware tribe as “savages.” Faced, moreover, with the surviving tribe member from the faction he fights early in the novel, Edgar more explicitly associates American Indians with animals. As he says, “My eye was now caught by movements which appeared like those of a beast. In different circumstances, I should have instantly supposed it to be a wolf, or panther, or bear. Now my suspicions were alive on a different account, and my startled fancy figured to itself nothing but a human adversary” (187). Although Edgar grants this particular tribe member “human” status, several other moments where Edgar subtly associates American Indians with panthers undermines that solitary act. For instance, Edgar believes he can understand the emotions of panthers and tribe members, with whom he does not share a common language, by reading their gestures. During his first encounter with a panther, Edgar avoids death when a felled tree bridges the gap between him and his enemy collapses. At this, according to Edgar, the panther “testified his surprise and disappointment by tokens the sight of which made my blood run cold” (129). In a later scene that echoes this one, Edgar describes the emotional state of the American Indians who come across Edgar and the tribe’s female captive, whom Edgar rescued from them: “The fire on the hearth enabled them to survey the room. One of them uttered a sudden exclamation of surprise. This was easily interpreted. They had noticed the girl who had lately been their captive lying asleep on the blanket. Their astonishment at finding her here, and in this condition, may be easily conceived” (179). In both these cases, the civilized Edgar possesses the power to “interpret” the emotions of savages.

Edgar creates another association between American Indians and panthers when he justifies to himself the murder of the tribal member he erroneously suspects killed his uncle and sisters. As he says:

Why should he be suffered to live? He came hither to murder and despoil my friends; this work he has, no doubt, performed. Nay, has he not borne his part in the destruction of my uncle and my sisters? He will live only to pursue the same sanguinary trade: to drink the blood and exult in the laments of his unhappy foes and of my own brethren. Fate has reserved him for a bloody and violent death. For how long a timesaver it may be deferred, it is thus that his career will inevitably terminate. (188)

This attitude of preventative violence first surfaced in Edgar's recollection of another farmer's discovery of a pair of panthers in his field:

I now recollected what, if it had more seasonably occurred, would have taught me caution. Some months before this farmer, living in the skirts of Norwalk, discovered two marauders in his field, whom he imagined to be a male and female panther. They had destroyed some sheep, and had been hunted by the farmer with long and fruitless diligence. Sheep had likewise been destroyed in different quarters; but the owners had fixed the imputation of the crime upon dogs, many of whom had atoned for their supposed offenses by death. He who had mentioned his discovery of panthers received little credit from his neighbors, because a long time had elapsed since these animals were supposed to have been exiled from this district, and because no other person had seen

them.

(130)

Allowed to escape persecution, these same panthers return to threaten Edgar's life, which makes him determined to not let the potentially dangerous animal-like Delaware live to threaten someone else's. Over the course of the novel, Edgar reacts to these perceived threats in a similar manner: he watches one panther die, violently kills another, and takes the lives of several Delaware tribe members.

In the texts discussed above, white men dominate the American frontier; they justify violence against American Indians by animalizing them, and the women in their lives, at times animalized as well, remain passive agents in their own destinies. The texts play out as one would expect, with the white, hyper-masculine man conquering the frontier itself and its inhabitants. Edgar Huntly, for one, retains his prospects for the future despite his acts of savagery. Ironically, those same acts of savagery (his hunting of panthers and panther-like American Indians) help him to achieve his return to civilized society and forever position the savage panthers and Delaware Indians outside the American social order. In the case of Davy Crockett, the self-proclaimed wildcat, he hunts women and kills Mexican cougars and soldiers alike. Daniel Boone, hunter of women and noted panther-killer, had such a lasting impact on notions of American masculinity that the Boone myth served as a rallying cry for American men during World War I. Published in 1914, Everett T. Tomlinson's *Scouting with Daniel Boone* states, "There never has been a time when the development of a true patriotism was more needed than it is to-day. Our perils and problems are not concerned with savages and wild beasts, but they may be no less dangerous than those which confronted our

forefathers” (vii). “In the midst of it all,” Tomlinson writes, “I have placed the great scout [Daniel Boone]. The qualities he displayed are the same that are necessary for success in our day or any day. The problems may vary from generation to generation, but the elements of true manhood are ever the same” (v-vi). Tellingly, Tomlinson imagines a scene in which Boone’s son James saves his friend Peleg from a panther attack with the use of his rifle (10-15). Evidently, panther killing, the source of Daniel Boone’s masculine dominance, is a trait that is and should be passed from one male generation to the next.

The Lady Wildcats

In the wake of the highly influential Boone and Crockett narratives, frontier and local color stories continued the trend of portraying panther encounters as tests of manhood. In Henry Clay Lewis’s *The Swamp Doctor’s Adventures in the South-West* (1858), a young medical student means to test his mettle and prove himself in the world by responding to a medical emergency in the absence of the local doctor. When his chance comes, he mounts his horse Chaos (whose name foreshadows the upcoming trials the student must overcome) and traverses the area swamps. The difficulties of crossing the swamps delay the student, however, and he arrives too late to the emergency site to provide any assistance. Nonetheless, the student gets his opportunity to test his mettle on his trek home when a panther tracks him and his horse. Fortunately for the student, he had prepared for the emergency by packing the sedative Valerian, which supposedly “possesses great attraction for the cat tribe, who smell it at a great distance, and resort to it eagerly, devouring its fragrant fibres with great apparent relish” (96). The sedative

ends up saving the student, for after a failed attempt to distract the panther by sacrificing Chaos, the student pours the poison down the panther's throat at the moment of the panther's lunge. In another story, found in Warren Wildwood's *Thrilling Adventures Among the Early Settlers* (1866), a male hunter and his male dog Sport face off against a "half-grown panther" and an "old she-panther." After the hunter shoots and kills the cub, he and Sport face off against the mother panther and the physical skirmish that ensues results in the panther's and Sport's death (340), which leaves the human hunter as the last combatant standing.

Beginning with Filson's 1784 Daniel Boone narrative, the panther-like Boone, along with his counterpart, the wildcat-like Davy Crockett, dominated the landscape of literature of the frontier and American westward expansion. Out of their narratives emerged their fictional counterpart Edgar Huntly, who proves his masculinity by dominating the frontier and the panthers that inhabit it. This trend of male characters dominating women and panthers alike would continue past the middle of the century—in William Gilmore Simms's *The Cub of the Panther*, as well as in the abovementioned *Thrilling Adventures*, for instance. On the other hand, in adventure stories that feature female protagonists, such as the fictional and semiautobiographical Indian captivity narratives, white women establish their social value with and against panthers of the wilderness. In *Life of Mary Jemison* (1823) and a narrative found in *Girl Captives of the Cheyenne* (2004), panthers appear in tales of so-called Indian captivity. Jemison, who found herself captured by Seneca, with whom she chose to stay after the tribe adopted her, uses the panther to mark her level of acculturation into the tribe. Before her capture,

she describes the terrifying shrieks of the panther she hears on her Pennsylvania farm. Later, she reveals a change of attitude, noting that her adopted Seneca brother makes the panther, now an *animalized animal*, shrink at the sight of the former's strength (Seaver 36; 58). In *Girl Captives of the Cheyenne*, a woman who has just escaped from her captives encounters what she believes to be a panther. Instead of running or engaging, she remains still and God's providence delivers her from harm (Meredith 100), thereby establishing her privileged position among "savage" people and animals. Moreover, *Girl Captives of the Cheyenne* makes symbolic connections between animals and Indigenous-Americans, a common tact that effectively animalizes the latter in captivity narratives and other Anglo-American writings (Gaul 37). Paired with male-dominated adventure stories, these gendered narratives reveal that the act of taking on big cat power by taking on the animal's characteristics is a biopolitical act reserved for male characters of the early nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, as the century progressed, authors began to develop female characters who take on the same big cats that made their male predecessors powerful. Calamity Jane, the wildcat of the Wild West, gave way to characters such as Irene Marlowe in Bierce's "The Eyes of the Panther" and the human tigress in Addis's "A Human Tigress." Although Irene's mostly hollow victory largely tempers Bierce's anti-patriarchal statement, Addis's statement, informed by the transnational women's movement in America and Mexico, proves much stronger since the tigress survives the altercation that claims one of her arms. She may have abandoned her hunting grounds for the time being, but her body count stands and male characters witness and come to

fear her power.

A Human Tigress

“Mexico is a queer country.” So begins the 1893 short story “A Human Tigress” by Yda Hillis Addis, who spent her formative years in Mexico, engaged frequently in border crossing, and published original fiction, Mexican legends, and journalism in periodicals on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.²³ Born in Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, shortly after the unceremonious departure of her slaveholding family from Lawrence in 1857, Addis relocated with her family during the Civil War to Mexico, where they hoped to distance themselves from the turbulent political and economic climates in the U.S. While in Mexico, Addis accompanied her father, photographer Alfred Shea Addis, on his travels through the country, became proficient in Spanish, and learned several Mexican folktales and legends. When the Addis family returned to the United States and settled in Los Angeles in 1872, Yda became a school teacher and shortly thereafter launched her writing career with her first publication of note in *The Argonaut*, a San Francisco bi-weekly periodical founded in 1877 by Frank M. Pixley and edited by Ambrose Bierce, among others. From 1880 to 1893, Addis wrote dozens of pieces for *The Argonaut*, many of which drew on her childhood experience in Ciudad Chihuahua, as well as on her time spent living and working in Mexico City from 1886 to 1890.²⁴ Of those pieces, “A Human Tigress” most emphatically delivers the critique of patriarchy that appears with frequency in Addis’s work.²⁵ In the tale, the queerness of Mexico refers to the country’s occurrences of “Awfully strange things”—in this case a string of gruesome attacks carried out by a “human tigress,” a mysterious nude woman

with clawlike fingers who seduces then disembowels her lustful male victims.²⁶ For her use of sexual manipulation and violence (two qualities largely associated with masculinity), Addis's chimerical tigress invites investigation into the interplay among animality, sexuality, and gendered modes of domination in American literary traditions.

With its portrayal of a strong female character who seeks justice for herself and for other women who have fallen victim to the machinations of lecherous or otherwise imperious men, "A Human Tigress" falls squarely within the late-nineteenth-century cultural context that produced numerous transnational meditations on women's sexual rights. During this period, anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre provided one of the boldest voices in the U.S. against male sexual authority, writing in "Sex Slavery" that "Adultery and Rape stalk freely and at ease" in American culture (345). Across the southern border, the criminalization of *rapto*, defined in the 1874 Mexican Penal Code as having occurred "when someone abducted a woman against her will by the use of physical or moral violence, deception, or seduction in order to have sexual relations or to get married," shows a corresponding concern for sexual violence against Mexican women. As I argue here, Addis's tale makes a strong contribution to women's efforts to bring attention to this transnational issue. Writing during the Mexican Porfiriato period, which coincided with the practice of *rapto*, Addis set her tale in Mexico and revised Mexican big cat folklore to create a femme fatale character who plays the role of *raptor* (abductor/seducer) rather than *raptada* (abducted/seduced).²⁷ This feline-driven inversion of gender roles functions as Addis's point of entry into the transnational debate over male sexual license since it ironizes the American literary tradition characterized by

masculinist panther-killing episodes and narratives of panther-like men who “hunt” women.

Some of the male characters in “A Human Tigress” hold the *renegron*, a fabled black jaguar of near-supernatural size, strength, and aggressiveness, responsible for the attacks plaguing the Mexican countryside, but none foresee that the true culprit, as the story’s title suggests, takes the feminine and anthropomorphic form of the Mexican jaguar.²⁸ Addis’s choice of protagonist marks the tale’s decisive break from the set of masculinist texts within the tradition of American panther narratives discussed above. To different degrees and with varying agendas, male characters in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* (1799), James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers* (1823), and William Gilmore Simms’s *The Cub of the Panther* (1869) establish the male gender as the subject position *par excellence* by asserting their supremacy over women, panthers, and even nature itself. In the cases of frontier figures Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, both of whom prove their mastery of the American wilderness by killing panthers, their pseudo-embodiment of the big cat fuels their acts of “hunting” women and establishes their violence-tinged sexual authority. Since Mexican culture reflects the practice of associating gods and powerful, influential people with jaguars, it stands to reason that Addis would rely on *renegron* folklore, and not on American panther mythos, to intervene in this tradition of masculinist big cat texts, which she does by creating a landscape where strong, lustful men fall victim to an even stronger jaguar-woman.

To turn to the tale itself: “A Human Tigress” takes place in the Huasteca region of Mexico, through which Jack Dexter, the tale’s American narrator, travels with his

personal servant, Mexican Juan de Dios Nava. The two men come across a regiment of Mexican rural guards tasked with defending a perilous stretch of road on which scores of travelers—solitary men, exclusively—have fallen victim to an unidentified assailant. Jack, who unconsciously escaped harm by traveling over the road with his servant, embeds himself in the regiment, and, after listening to the guards' conjecture about the identity of their foe, witnesses firsthand the quick, bloody work of the human tigress when the patrolmen discover one of their own, a man named Filemon, mutilated along the roadside. A search of the surrounding area leads to a confrontation between the tigress and Enrique Candado, the lieutenant of the patrol. Enrique seeks a sexual encounter with the fully nude and sexually inviting tigress, who conceals her clawlike hands behind her back, but he instead suffers the same grisly death the tigress meted out to Filemon and the many men before him. During the struggle, however, Enrique manages to slice off part of the tigress's left arm, which effectively thwart future attacks. Fearful of how the tigress provides a template for challenging patriarchal attitudes, Jack collects her severed arm and takes measures to ensure that the "women folks can not see it" (H, 5).

From the story's opening words, which identify Mexico as a "queer," i.e., non-normative country, present-day readers are made to contend with Addis's complex but often negative cultural assumptions about Mexico. Disparaging Mexico and its inhabitants became standard fare in mid-nineteenth-century documents that argued in favor of the annexation of Texas, and the practice long outlasted the achievement of U.S. southwestern expansion. Addis's fiction largely participates in this practice, for her

depictions of Mexico accentuate its abnormality, its lawlessness, and its inferior nonwhite population. Moreover, in accordance with the system of racial stratification that prevailed in California following its annexation into the U.S., Addis often portrayed nonwhite Mexicans as generally inferior to both Anglo Americans and European-descended Mexicans; her fiction does, however, marginally privileged the dark-complexioned mestizos over the indigenous Mexican population. In “A Human Tigress,” the American narrator Jack Dexter asserts his Anglo-American superiority by designating his servant a member of the “lower classes,” by describing his disgust for the “brown,” presumably mestizo Filemon and by ridiculing Enrique Candado for butchering “the queen’s English into very funny slices of idioms.” Even Enrique speaks of the inferiority of the indigenous peoples when he admits that the Mexican government chose to ignore the tigress’s killings since the “beast killed only Indians, and *rancheros*, and travelers of little category.” Jack exhibits a similar disdain for Mexico’s indigenous populace when he describes the inhabitants of the Colima jungles as “ignorant and superstitious, like all the country people in *tierra caliente*.” Since Addis repeats a similar sentiment in “Mexican Fauna,” an article of hers that appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* two months after the publication of “A Human Tigress,” the distance between Jack’s racial attitudes and her own diminishes.²⁹

Consistent, moreover, with the negative stereotypes about the sexual promiscuity and general disreputableness of lower-class Mexicans that circulated in California during her residency there, Addis portrays the more prominent patrolmen in “A Human Tigress” as driven by sensual pleasure and largely dismissive of women. Enrique, whom

Jack describes as “always getting into scrapes about some woman,” finds himself exiled in La Huasteca on account of a failed love affair with a nameless woman—a “little girl,” a “pink,” a “rosebud”—whom Enrique’s superior, General Rocas likewise courted. Filemon, who risks the dangerous pass to enjoy the pleasures of a dance, and the Poblano, who lost his commission after “one mad night in Puebla” when he “spent [his] future for a word from a woman,” round out the androcentric patrol. As for the patrolmen’s American counterpart, Jack often calls to his mind the words of his “women-folks,” from whom he gleans some wisdom, but his failure to name them, along with his reluctance to aid the *madre* upon first arriving at the guards’ camp, exemplifies his contemptuous attitude toward women. Addis’s unflattering portrayal of these men shows the extent to which she believes their chauvinist attitudes permeate both Mexican and American culture.

To develop the character that faces off against the patrolmen, who later in the story shift from chauvinists to sexual predators, Addis revises the *renegron*’s known attributes, transforming it into a bona fide femme fatale. Notwithstanding the evidence to the contrary, rumors abound that a *renegron* roams La Huasteca in search of victims. A *renegron*, Enrique explains, “is a black jaguar, but huge and savage—oh! fierce beyond any conception of such as know only the jaguars common and current” (H, 4). A rare account of the elusive, semi-mythical animal appears in Felix Leopold Oswald’s 1880 travelogue *Summerland Sketches, or Rambles in the Backwoods of Mexico and Central America*:

The backwoodsmen of Southern Colima [Mexico] believe in the existence of an

animal which, according to their accounts, must be a large, black-haired feline, of extraordinary strength and ferocity and of strictly nocturnal habits. The *renergón*—blackamoor (*carraguar*, or night-tiger, the Indians call him)—has broken into adobe cabins and torn their inmates into pieces before a puma could kill a cow; and neither a bear nor a jaguar would follow a fisherman and capsize his boat in the middle of the stream, which feat is ascribed to a *renergón* of the lower Balsas. (77-78)

Jack's statement that "There was a *renergón* raising the deuce of a row down on the lower Balsas, when I was in Southern Colima" (H, 4), along with his knowledge of the *renergón*'s alternate names—"carraguar" and "night-tiger"—suggest Addis's familiarity with related *renergón* folktales, if not with Oswald's account itself.

According to one well-known big cat myth of Mexico, that of the *onza*, the alleged progeny of a male jaguar and a female lioness, young women who venture out alone into the dark run the risk of being sexually assaulted by the hybrid creature and subsequently birthing a powerful and dangerous were-jaguar. Addis possibly had this offspring in mind—her tigress, after all, can be read as a powerful and dangerous *onza* daughter who avenges her human mother's rape by staging violent challenges to male sexual dominance—but, in "A Human Tigress" and elsewhere, Addis consistently uses the term *renergón*, which appears solely in English-language texts.³⁰

Foremost among Addis's revisions to *renergón* folklore, she converts the animal into a discriminate killer, which serves to highlight the patrolmen's failures to recognize the tigress's anti-male agenda. We learn from Oswald's retelling of the encounter

between the *renegron* and a cattle-herder named Juan Rivéra that the animal kills indiscriminately. Rivéra, a noted *renegron* fighter and panther hunter, left home one day with his son Miguel to find a missing milch-cow he suspected had fallen prey to a puma. When the two men found their cow's mangled carcass, they waited in ambush for the perpetrator but got more than they bargained for when a *renegron* arrived on the scene to finish its meal. In the ensuing melee, Rivéra lost his life gruesomely, and Miguel suffered a gashed shoulder but escaped to report the incident (Oswald 78-81). Whereas the *renegron* in Oswald's account kills men, women, and animals alike, the *renegrona* in "A Human Tigress" victimizes men only. Enrique, at odds with Jack, adamantly insists on the culpability of the *renegron* and makes his case by saying, "It's a *renegron*! Did you ever hear of a jaguar that attacks . . . nothing but *gente*—humans? And brave! it always chooses men, *por Dios!* never has assailed a woman" (H, 4). Those familiar with *renegron* folklore would find Enrique's justification curious since, as Jack shrewdly concludes, the attacker's modus operandi differs wildly from that of the *renegron*. A third opinion on the identity of the assailant comes from the Poblano, who, rejecting both the jaguar and *renegron* hypotheses, argues, "this Horror . . . is no beast of the field or forest, neither is it a human slayer. It is a Creature of Hell." For all their competing theories, the men share an obliviousness concerning the identity of the assailant, even though its pattern of killing discloses a great deal about its motives.

Another departure from *renegron* folklore, that of using the Spanish grammatical marker (a) to change *renegron* to *renegrona*, feminizes the animal. With the exception of his single use of "*renegrona*" at the story's opening, Jack uses the term *renegron*

throughout, though he refutes the *renegron* theory and even doubts the animal's existence. He remains firmly of the opinion that a common jaguar carries out the attacks, for reports of the attacker "did not answer the description of the night-tiger." Only after his experience in Mexico does Jack acknowledge the existence of what he calls a *renegrona* (H, 4). Next to nothing, however, in Oswald's portrait of the *renegron* hints at the potential for it to take the feminine form, even though *renegron* folklore contains anthropomorphic aspects. "I was told," writes Oswald, "that only a year ago the appearance of a carraguar in the Indian wigwams on the Rio Piñas created a perfect were-wolf panic" (Oswald 78). This mention of lycanthropy indicates that some believe the *renegron*, like the part wolf/part human werewolf, represents one half (the nighttime half) of a part jaguar/part human creature. But, unlike the *renegron*, which allegedly hunts at night and resides "in the *selvas bravas*' (wild woods, primeval forests) 'of the river jungles'" (H, 4), Addis's explicitly female tigress kills in broad daylight and along a well-traveled road. Moreover, the tigress's permanent jaguar "claws," clearly not the product of a nighttime metamorphosis, eliminate the possibility that she takes the form of a were-jaguar. The tigress therefore stands as an altogether different creation, a female version of the *renegron* unencumbered by its limiting animal attributes, or even its part-time human form.

Addis somewhat retains the anthropomorphic aspect of *renegron* folklore, but she arms her jaguar-woman with a weapon absent from the *renegron*'s arsenal: potent sexuality. The tigress lures men to their deaths by appearing before them "naked as Eve in Eden" (H, 5), a strategy that reveals much about Addis's appropriation of the femme

fatale theme. The term *femme fatale* appeared in French literature as early as 1854 and soon after became synonymous with the expression *filles d'Ève* in French visual representations. The former term has “come to be known as an archetypal woman whose evil characteristics cause her to either unconsciously bring destruction or consciously seek vengeance,” and the latter refers to the figurative daughters of the biblical Eve, arguably the first *femme fatale* (Menon 3-4). French occupation of nineteenth-century Mexico resulted in considerable cultural exchange, so it comes as little surprise that Addis modifies French representations of the *femme fatale* figure.³¹ One such representation from which to draw comparisons is Jean Floux’s 1891 poem “Les Filles d’Ève,” which warns its readers of women who appear dainty and radiant during the day but transform into dangerous, claw-handed harlots at night. One can compare Floux’s rendering of the destructive dual nature of women to another model of femininity that vilifies sexual women: the centuries-old virgin/puta (whore) dichotomy that played an integral role in the social fabric of Mexico during Addis’s lifetime (and still does, to a degree). The dichotomy rests in part on the division between La Virgen de Guadalupe, an exemplar of chaste femininity, and Coatlicue, a remnant from early Mesoamerica who represents promiscuous, socially stigmatized women.³² Countering these archetypes of femininity, the tigress unapologetically uses her sexuality to terrorize men.

Part of the tigress’s strategy of seduction depends on conforming, at least at first, to what the patrolmen presumably consider traditionally beautiful feminine features, such as the small, white hands and long, resplendent hair attributed to the daytime women in Floux’s “Les Filles d’Ève.” Jack uses the phrase “something white” to

describe the tigress, adding more details when he gets a closer look: “She was very fair—her skin looked pinky, like a baby’s.” Moreover, Jack’s description of the tigress’s lengthy and luminous hair, which “hung nearly to her knees” and appeared “a light auburn, glistening beautifully,” further echoes Floux’s poem. By appearing “conventionally” beautiful, along with performing the simple deception of concealing her clawed hands behind her back, the tigress puts her victims at ease and encourages a sexual encounter. Jack’s thoughts when he observes the meeting between the tigress and Enrique best demonstrate the effect of the tigress’s charm. He initially takes the tigress for a possible victim of gang rape and says, “No *renegron* at all—no wild animal—two-footed tigers these are—the brutes have stripped her!” But when he observes the tigress’s ostensibly coquettish behavior, he proceeds to express his sexual interest in her and lament, “Why couldn’t it have been me to meet her, instead of that ass, Enrique?” (H, 5). The speed with which Jack moves from concern for the woman to lusting after her proves the effectiveness of the tigress’s strategy, as it simultaneously emphasizes Jack’s willingness to take advantage of her presumed sexual availability. It also shows that Addis does not spare Jack, the story’s proxy for American men, criticism for his lasciviousness.

Similar to the nighttime women in Floux’s poem, the tigress poses as sexually available in order to exploit her victims’ strong sexual appetites. The patrolman Filemon, for instance, wishes to spend his night off from duty socializing at a dance and expresses his readiness to take the risk of walking the requisite nine miles alone. Enrique marvels at the old man’s fervency, declaring, “This Filemon is fuller of caper and courting now

than any of the youngsters” (H, 4). Filemon eventually succumbs to his passions, and when the patrolmen stumble upon his maimed body the next day, they inspect the crime scene, finding no sign of a struggle, only “old Filemon’s *zarape*, and his belt, with the revolver and cartridges, which looked as if he had taken it off and laid it carefully on the blanket” (H, 5). Though this evidence of a sexual encounter corroborates Filemon’s dying words, which implicate a woman in his demise, the patrolmen fail to appreciate the scene’s significance. When faced with the tigress, Enrique displays a similar level of ignorance regarding her intentions. Instead of exercising caution, he springs, tiger-like, “to her side with his arms outstretched.” Before long Jack hears a blood-curdling scream that he presumes is a “guide to [the woman’s] feelings” but instead comes from Enrique, whom the tigress mortally wounds in an altercation. Jack’s response to Enrique’s death, that “The lieutenant’s love of women had thrilled him once too often,” places the brunt of the blame for the deadly encounter on Enrique’s unchecked libido rather than on the tigress who took advantage of it.

The final step in the tigress’s strategy involves using her clawlike fingers, again reminiscent of Floux’s nighttime women, to carry out her killings in a manner that corresponds to sexual violation. Jack describes Filemon’s mangled body as a “sort of whitey-brown husk, with two yards of entrails dragging from it” (H, 4), and the latter uses some of his last breaths to empathize with the collateral casualty of a bullfight: the bullring horse that a bull, enraged and unable to distinguish between the horse and its rider, gores to death with its phallic horns. To Dr. San Juan, a surgeon passing through the region, Filemon’s wounds appear the effect of weapons that “must have been as

sharp as razors, and thrust in like a set of claws and pulled out curving, so as to scoop the viscera” (H, 5). Additionally, Jack observes the way in which “Enrique’s torsal cavity was, as the Spanish word it, ‘emptied,’” and the Poblano tells the story of Poncho Hirigoyen, the “lusty six-footer, with a carbine, a knife, and two revolvers,” whom the tigress turned “inside out” (H, 4). The tigress’s method of killing brings to mind the passage in “Sex Slavery” in which de Cleyre draws an analogy between sexual acts and vicious crimes: “a young mother lacerated by unskilful surgery in the birth of her babe, but recovering from a subsequent successful operation, had been stabbed, remorselessly, cruelly, brutally stabbed, not with a knife, but with the procreative organ of her husband, stabbed to the doors of death, and yet there was no redress!” (348). If sexual acts are violent acts of penetration, the tigress, who thrusts her claws mercilessly into the flesh of her victims, occupies the role of the tale’s most sexually dominant character. Therefore, unlike Floux, whose poem advises men to guard themselves against sexual femme fatales, or the adherents of the virgin/puta (whore) dichotomy who stigmatize sexual women, Addis creates a figure whose threatening sexual character emerges not from a feminine dual nature but from her need to respond to the sexual threats of men.

Despite the display of power by Addis’s tigress, she cannot sustain her resistance to male sexual authority, and a pact of silence between the story’s male characters all but guarantees the erasure of her legacy. As Jack says of Dr. San Juan, his one confidant, “When I did tell him [about the assailant’s identity], he agreed with me that the proper thing was to keep a close mouth, as we both have done until now” (H, 5). (That Jack breaks his silence means little since, by addressing an unknown “sir” while narrating, he

in all likelihood has a like-minded male audience in mind.) With respect to the Poblano, who witnesses the human tigress fleeing the scene of her meeting with Enrique and takes her for an ordinary woman, he likewise asks Jack to keep silent about the tigress's identity. Jack goes further than the Poblano asks of him, however, not only keeping silent about what he witnessed, but also knowingly hiding proof of the tigress's existence: "The thing I picked up by Enrique's body, close beside his bloody sabre, is a hand and a part of an arm, lopped off halfway between the wrist and the elbow . . . Dr. San Juan and I put the thing into *aguardiente*, and I have it yet in alcohol, in a glass jar, sealed, and soldered into a tin jacket, so the women folks can not see it." Jack means to hide any proof of the human tigress, the model for formidable and independent female sexuality (from women, especially), and his last words bring the story's feminist aspects into their sharpest focus.

Along with critiquing and challenging male sexual license in Mexico and the U.S., "A Human Tigress" raises questions about the subset of American big cat narratives that portray panthers "sexually" assaulting women. Harriet Prescott Spofford's "Circumstance" (1860) falls into this category despite its attention to progressive gender concerns. The story centers on an unnamed woman who is forcefully swept up into a tree by a panther when she walks home alone through the Maine woods. The beast keeps the woman captive throughout the tale and subjects her to an attack suggestive of sexual violence. Remembering the folk saying that music charms wild animals, the woman begins to sing, which holds the panther at bay long enough for her husband to arrive at the scene, infant in one arm, hunting rifle in the other, and dispatch

the animal just when the woman reaches her most helpless state—when her voice fails. Though critics read the woman’s defense of her body and soul as her means to spiritual and artistic awakening, they also acknowledge that her reliance on male authority figures, whether on her husband who saves her, or on God whom she sings to, tempers her liberation.³³ William Gilmore Simms’s *The Cub of the Panther* (1869) further establishes a hunter-prey relationship founded on masculine predators and feminine prey. In one episode, Rose Carter flees from home to escape her despotic husband, Edward Fairleigh, and finds herself stalked by a panther over a snowy plain at the same time she “suffered from the pains of labor.” Simms’s footnote to this episode explains that, according to mountain folk tradition, panthers possess a “special appetite” for “a woman in the situation of Rose Carter” (165). The panther’s sexualized appetite for Rose’s blood goes unsatisfied, however, and, once out of danger, Rose gives birth to Fairleigh’s child, a baby boy who inexplicably bears a birthmark on his forehead that resembles a panther cub. The birthmark insinuates a “mutual attraction between Rose and the beast” (Steinhagen 210) since, again according to folk tradition, pregnant women can “mark” their unborn children if they fail to fulfill their precise cravings “in right time” (Simms 174). That Rose dies in childbirth illustrates how the novel frames her sexual desire as abnormal and deserving of punishment. Addis’s sexualized big cat, on the other hand, captivates her male victims and punishes male, and not female, sexual passion.

A contrasting group of texts, those that feature female big cats, call attention to how, because of their severity, the retributive acts of Addis’s tigress overshadow those

of her predecessors. In Edward L. Wheeler's late-nineteenth-century *Deadwood Dick* series, Calamity Jane, a central character in many of the series' plots, has a backstory that implies sexual ruin and a reputation as both a tomboy and a wildcat, two traits that aid her in her quest for retribution.³⁴ As Michelle Anne Abate observes, one of the meanings assigned to the prefix "tom" in "tomboy" is that of "male sexual predators (tom cats)" (xiv). The association is more than appropriate in light of the Calamity Jane-Arkansas Alf Kennedy plotline, in which Jane, notorious for her masculine garb and behavior, inverts the predator/prey dynamic in the couples' relationship: she takes up residence in the mining town of Whoop-Up in order to hunt down Arkansas Alf, whose "defiling touch" robbed her of her "maiden name, but *never* of her honor" (Wheeler, *Calamity Jane* 174, original emphasis). In Ambrose Bierce's "The Eyes of the Panther" (1891), the werepanther Irene Marlowe likewise takes a stand against an overbearing male figure. Irene repeatedly denies Jenner Brading's incessant and forceful advances, citing her mental instability, which stems from the traumatic night of her conception, as the main impediment to their marital union. On that night, Irene's mother awoke to find glowing panther eyes at her cabin window and, out of fright, smothered the infant (Irene's sibling) she held to her breast. The panther's appearance in the window, a "rather blatant symbol of sexual penetration," results in Irene's mother becoming "pregnant with a bastard child, Irene" (Gutenberg 158). Irene's nighttime appearance at Jenner's cabin window in panther form therefore suggests her intent to either cause him physical or psychological harm comparable to that enacted upon her mother by the wild panther. However, similar to how Calamity Jane's victory over Arkansas Alf remains

largely pyrrhic (she shoots him through the chest, but he survives), Jenner cheats Irene out of her vengeance when he awakes to what he rightly perceives as the eyes of a panther at his window and fires his pistol into Irene, who returns to human form in death. Addis, who published alongside Bierce in *The Argonaut*, reinterprets his motifs of mystic felinity and gender politics, investing her own femme fatale with the means to make good on her murderous designs, if only temporarily, as she does by amassing a death toll anywhere from fifty to upwards of two hundred and fifty victims before her attacks come to an end.

Combating Mexican men whom Addis characterizes in one tale as universally “destitute of principle, at least in so far as concerned the honor of women,” the tigress stands among a number of female avengers in Addis’s oeuvre who seek reprisal against licentious men.³⁵ In the gothic tale “The Priest’s Bridge: A Legend of Mexico” (1888), Domingo Sarraza, who feigns piety while lusting after women, becomes captivated by Beatriz de Millan and schemes to remove the main obstacle to his sexual conquest of the young woman, her caretaker and protector, the priest Juan de Nava. Years after Sarraza lured the priest to a bridge in town and stabbed him to death, a veiled Beatriz, who shunned the society of men after the murder, entices Sarraza by insinuation of a sexual tryst to follow her to the same bridge, where Juan de Nava’s skeleton animates and strangles Sarraza to death. Furthermore, in the anti-Catholic “The Picture of the Priest” (1891), two nuns act in concert to avenge multiple cases of sexual assault. Immediately after convent priest Joaquin Gonzaga rapes Gertrudes Solis, she stabs him to death viciously with a tile-scraper that she obtained from a fellow nun, Anastasia, whose own

daughter was murdered decades earlier when she fatally wounded the convent's confessor during an attempted rape. Anastasia, with the help of a male accomplice who lusts after Gertrudes himself, disposes of Joaquin Gonzaga's body. She then poisons her accomplice to tie up any loose ends and ensure Gertrudes' safety.

As statements of female empowerment written by a woman writer against the backdrop of a troubled marriage and allegations of insanity, "A Human Tigress" enriches studies of literary feminist forerunners such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who wrote her anti-patriarchal classic "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) following a strained marriage and bouts of depression that led some to question her mental stability. (Similar to Gilman's experience with the infamous "rest cure," Addis was prescribed rest by her physician after she performed a "great deal of severe literary labor" in early 1890.)³⁶ In both "A Human Tigress" and Gilman's best known work American men impede social progress and female protagonists, at a high cost to their physical and mental wellbeing, win pyrrhic victories over domineering men. Pairing Addis with Gilman also furthers our understanding of the phenomenon, typified by Gilman, of women writers who, as Susan S. Lanser observes, "inscribed racism, nationalism, and classism into [their] proposals for social change" (Lanser 429). Whereas Gilman's anxieties over the "Yellow Peril" influenced her choice of color for the foul, terrifying wallpaper—"yellow" was a slang term for Chinese immigrants (Lanser 427)—Addis turns the black *renegron* into a white woman avenger and positions her white male narrator as racially superior to lower-class Mexicans. Since Gilman penned "The Yellow Wallpaper" while living in California, the two writers can be said to have shared the Anglo-American "psychic

geography,” or culture-based collection of principles (Lanser 425), that fostered the prejudices against nonwhites reflected in their fiction.

Nevertheless, one could argue that Addis saw herself as an advocate for Mexicans and Mexican culture. During the Los Angeles Chrysanthemum Fair in the fall of 1889, Addis was among the women who organized and operated the booth designated for Mexican culture, one of the many booths “illustrative of the several peoples of the earth.” A portion of the displayed collection of “curios and works of art” consisted of “rare and valuable articles” Addis collected during her sojourns in Mexico. Addis once more acted as a liaison of sorts between American and Mexican culture in “Mexican Lusted Pottery,” her highly touted essay for *Harper’s Magazine* in which she describes her discovery of the impressive pottery-glazing technique of the indigenous Mexicans of San Felipe, Guanajuato. Most noticeably, in an editorial for the *Los Angeles Herald*, Addis describes at length how several cities in Mexico possess the same trappings of cultural progress found in the bustling metropolises in the U.S. She ends her piece with the following satirical plea: “I think that the magnitude and system of these institutions . . . will dispel some erroneous ideas, and that good Angeleños will agree with me that such achievements are fairly good for ‘benighted Mexico.’” When it comes to Mexican gender politics, Addis often showed her commitment in her fiction to challenging what she calls in one story the “threefold subjection” of a lover, a woman, and a Mexican.³⁷ In “A Human Tigress,” the strongest example of such commitment, Addis refashions the *renegron* into a feminized and sexualized killer of men who defends the sexual rights of Mexican women regardless of their somatic and class differences. This show of violent

resistance and gender solidarity ultimately constitutes Addis's most powerful feminist statement in her imagined scenario where a woman's human/nonhuman status as a big cat does not mark her as inferior to men but rather fuels her power over them.

Early-nineteenth-century authors, especially those of frontier literature, defined the *fully humanized human* mostly in white, masculine terms by creating socially-damaging associations between women, nonwhites, and animals. Ironically, for their white male characters, inhabiting or displaying the characteristics of big cats triggers the "savage" aspect of their nature that helps to establish their dominance over others. As the century progressed, however, authors began to craft female characters who likewise exhibit big cat characteristics in the interest of asserting social power. Whether embracing wildcat characteristics in order to operate successfully in a male-dominated Wild West, transforming into a panther in an attempt to escape the pressure of marital engagement, or seducing then disemboweling sexually threatening men, Calamity Jane, Irene Marlowe, and Yda Addis's human tigress appropriate the big cat-fueled biopower of the "manthers" that preceded them. Nonetheless, Calamity Jane shoots but does not kill the disreputable Arkansas Alf, Irene Marlowe loses her life at the hands of Jenner Brading, and the human tigress loses one of her arms in her altercation with Enrique Candado. As these mostly hollow victories illustrate, catlike female characters achieve a modicum of social power when compared to that of their male counterparts.

The acts of adopting big cat characteristics by both male and female characters in the nineteenth-century provide examples of how embracing animal associations strengthens rather than diminishes social power. Since these acts have consequences for

social marginalization, they participate in what Agamben calls the “anthropological machine,” the mechanism by which humans use nonhumans for biopolitical means. As Agamben writes, “On the one hand, we have the anthropological machine of the moderns. As we have seen, it functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human.” He goes on: “The machine of earlier times works in an exactly symmetrical way. If, in the machine of the moderns, the outside is produced through the exclusion of an inside and the inhuman produced by animalizing the human, here the inside is obtained through the inclusion of an outside, and the non-man is produced by the humanization of an animal” (*The Open* 37). Agamben chooses the figures of the animalized human—Haeckel’s “ape-man,” for instance—and the humanized animal, or “man-ape,” to prove his concept. But whereas the ape-man or man-ape finds himself low on a social hierarchy for his association with nonhumans, the “manthers” and lady wildcats of this chapter use their proximity to big cats to climb or stay atop social hierarchies. With this they mimic the American Indian practice of deploying the panther in service of waging intracultural contests for power and parallel the act by Frederick Douglass, who, as I outline in chapter four of this study, affirms his social value by embracing associations between enslaved peoples and the noble lion.

CHAPTER IV

MAN MADE BRUTE: BIG CATS, SPECIESISM, AND SLAVERY

The practice of animalizing African Americans reaches far back in history, yet this nefarious tradition took on new significance at the turn of the twentieth century with Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), *The Clansman* (1905) and *The Traitor* (1907), three novels that constitute the author's so-called Trilogy of Reconstruction. Prior to Dixon's trilogy, which portrays African-American men as "beasts" with insatiable sexual appetites for white women, the dehumanization of African Americans rested largely on analogy: proslavery advocates and anti-black racists drew parallels between African Americans and domestic animals fit for purchase, sale, and reproduction in service of economic gain. Neither dehumanization tactic completely stripped African Americans of their humanity in the eyes of the American public at large, so each, to varying degrees, served to create in their respective sociopolitical frameworks what Giorgio Agamben terms "bare life," a living being excluded from the prevailing political order on account of its position between the full humanity that would grant it social power and the full animality that would wholly preclude such power. Agamben rightly finds the Nazi concentration camps, in which detainees, "wholly reduced to bare life," experienced the "most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized" (*Homo Sacer* 171), but another biopolitical site, American plantation slavery, serves as the focus of this chapter. Held captive and subjected to a "*state of injury*, in a phantomlike world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity" (Mbembe 21, original emphasis) enslaved peoples in America experienced the full force of racism,

dehumanization, and biopolitical power.

Even though dehumanization tactics function as the engine that makes biopower run, critics who explicitly apply biopolitical theory to the issue of slavery favor more general theorizing about a slave's condition, as opposed to examining the intersections of biopolitics and animality. Moreover, scholars of American slavery who examine dehumanization tactics rarely employ the parlance of biopolitical theory. Andreas Oberprantacher, for one, allows for the possibility that "plantation societies" paved the way for the "disastrous integration of sovereign power and biopower" that found its fullest articulation in the Nazi death camps (177). Achille Mbembe makes this same associative leap but more fully fleshes the effects of biopower on slaves, arguing that, though kept alive for their masters' economic gain, enslaved peoples experience a "triple loss: loss of a 'home,' loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status" (21). With the Middle Passage and the slave's social condition in mind, Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that the "enslaved body was the 'primitive' form of biopower in the sense of Marx's concept of the primitive accumulation that preceded the formation of capital" (296). Neither of these critics, however, explore how biopolitical negotiation and dehumanization tactics went hand in hand in creating the social conditions that, as David Brion Davis argues, "severed ties of human identity and empathy and made slavery possible" (*Problem of Slavery* 9). In her study of slave narratives collected by the Federal Writers' Project, Mia Bay focuses on dehumanization tactics, arguing that slaves found "animal husbandry to be the single most useful metaphor for understanding the intricacies of the slave-master relationship" (129), but she misses the opportunity to

consider how the same slaves who understood their enslavement in terms of their supposed animality understood their humanity in light of their encounters with actual animals.

As I discuss below, the instances where bare life meets natural life present moments of crisis that undermine the dehumanizing tactics at the heart of the slave system. In the antebellum period, and later in the Reconstruction era, the prevailing political order employed dehumanization tactics in order to justify the enslavement of African Americans. Although a large body of criticism exists on the topic of how slaves who published their own narratives described the harmful psychological effects of slaveholder dehumanization tactics, critics have written relatively little about how slaves use their own narratives to claim their humanity by differentiating themselves from nonhumans. Slave narrators in lesser-known antebellum slave narratives, as well as those in several slave narratives produced by the Federal Writers' Project in the late 1930s, adopt the strategy of excluding nonhumans from their subject formation processes in order to make claims for their full humanity. Their narratives, I argue, show how slaves, the supposed embodiments of bare life, interact with the natural life they encounter in ways that call attention to their humanity, that is, their essential difference from nonhumans. Engaging in their own form of biopolitical negotiation, these slave narrators move beyond the recognition of how society at large likens them to lowly animals and declare their humanity by telling of their escape from, or defeat of, the nonhumans—panthers, in this case—they face on their respective plantations. The nineteenth century also saw the rise of famed antislavery orator and author Frederick Douglass, who

participated in discourses of dehumanization by employing lion metaphors designed to grant biblical authority to the social causes of abolition and racial equality for African Americans. Rather than shying away from comparing enslaved peoples to animals, Douglass associates the rebel slave with the many noble and divinely favored lions of the Bible. Conversely, Douglass disparages proslavery forces by equating them with the lions in the Bible that represent wickedness. Though by different means, the slave narrators who describe their panther encounters, and Douglass, who uses lion metaphors to valorize slave rebellion and the antislavery fight at large, demonstrate how enslaved peoples utilize big cat scenes and figurative language to claim social power largely denied to them.

Panthers on the Plantation

With the rise in abolitionist activity and fervor in the 1830s and 1840s came a new, tightened focus for antebellum slave narrators. As Philip Gould observes, “The central abolitionist project for exposing the evils of the Southern plantation (and the false paternalistic myths supporting it) became the absolute priority of the antebellum slave narrative” (19). Rather than relying mostly, as their predecessors did, on the rhetoric of religious moralism and universal humanity to denounce slavery, antebellum slave narrators incorporated into their narratives the disturbing details of their daily lives in an effort to shock their readers out of complacency (Gould 14-17). In antislavery nonfiction and fiction alike, this new strategy involved highlighting the dehumanizing effects of slavery. In the 1836 antislavery novel *The Slave: or Memoirs of Archy Moore* (1836), the eponymous protagonist Archy Moore relates that one of his masters, Major

Thornton, abides by the dictum that “A merciful man . . . was merciful to his beast” and therefore cannot “bear the idea of treating his servants worse than his horses” (105). Archy admits to major Thornton’s relative magnanimity but emphasizes its limitations: “Had I been a horse or an ox, there would be good ground for this idea; but unfortunately, I was a man; and the animal appetites are by no means, the only motive of human action, nor the sole source of human happiness or misery” (114). In his 1846 speech “American Slavery,” Frederick Douglass echoes Archy’s sentiments, framing the issue in blunt terms: “The condition of a slave is simply that of the brute beast” (7).³⁸ Douglass elaborates on this statement in a now famous passage from his first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845): “I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!” (58). Sojourner Truth’s *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850), which asserts that the American slave culture considers slaves “to be little more or little *less* than a beast” (10, original emphasis), and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), which compares the treatment of a runaway slave to that of a “wild beast” (36), further substantiate the concerted effort antebellum slave narrators and white antislavery authors undertook to expose how the supposed animality of African-descended peoples perpetuated the American slave system.

Launched largely in response to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s wildly popular *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), a number of response novels set out to undermine the circulating

argument that slavery animalized slaves.³⁹ The idea of a paternalistic slave culture, in which slaveholders are benevolent parent figures who bear the responsibility of caring for their child-like slaves, operates as the dominant metaphor for Southern slavery in these novels. In order to advance the myth of paternalism, however, these novels had to perform a balancing act that consisted of convincing readers that, on the one hand, enslaved people deserve white society's assistance on account of their shared humanity, and, on the other, that they embody a proximity to animality. To resolve this seeming paradox, these texts make the case that white society's civilizing influence suppresses the slaves' animal nature. In Mrs. V. G. Cowdin's *Ellen; or, The Fanatic's Daughter* (1860), northerner Horace Layton journeys to the South with his belief that the institution of slavery animalizes its captives. But the text makes it clear that Layton does not base his opinion of slavery on experiential knowledge but rather on his "having been taught to believe the slave denied all human rights—as inexpressibly degraded, and classed with the brute creation" (Cowdin 6). As part of a character arc common to the plantation literature genre, Layton comes to see the error of his ways when he realizes that "slavery in the Southern States was a system of judicious control over a race of human beings who, as yet, were incapable of self-government, or of thriving as a community upon the strength of their own intellect, unaided by superior natures and intelligence" (Cowdin 10). Layton may recognize the humanity of Southern slaves, but other texts in the plantation literature canon recognize a slave's humanity conditionally, that is, on whether or not he or she accepts the civilizing influence of slave owners. In Mary Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* (1852), Aunt Phillis harbors Jim, a runaway slave,

for a night in her cabin, not wanting to turn “a beast out” in the storm that raged that night (116), and, in Caroline Hentz’s *The Planter’s Northern Bride* (1854), Hentz portrays rebellious slaves Jerry and Vulcan as giving in to their animal natures after disobeying their masters (190; 261). Significantly, in these scenarios the institution of slavery acts as a humanizing, not dehumanizing, force.

To challenge these discourses of slaves’ inherent animality, slave narrators dehumanized slave masters in kind, as Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner Truth do in their narratives.⁴⁰ Slave narrators also resisted notions of their inhumanity by offering animal narratives that prove their resilience, courage, and, ultimately, their humanity. Narratives of this type prove exceedingly rare, for first-hand accounts of African Americans’ experiences on the frontier, where animal encounters were more likely, have largely been lost to history. Case in point, for the African Americans that inhabited Pennsylvania from the time of its founding as a colony to its urban transformation, their interaction with the Pennsylvania wilderness remains obscure. As Gary Nash observes, “Not a single document remains to inform us how Philadelphia’s slaves and free blacks might have viewed their world as the colonial era drew to a close” (*Forging Freedom* 36). This absence applies equally to earlier African Americans, though some of their wilderness experiences can be gleaned from early exploration narratives. In Peter Stephen Du Ponceau’s *A Discourse on the Early History of Pennsylvania* (1821), Du Ponceau imagines an untamed Pennsylvania from the point of view of early sailors traveling down the Delaware River: “They view with astonishment the novel scenery which strikes their sight; immense forests on each side, half despoiled of their red and

yellow leaves, with which the ground is profusely strewn. No noise is heard around them, save that of the deer rustling through the trees, as she flies from the Indian who pursues her with his bow and arrow. Now and then a strange yell strikes the ear from a distance, which the echoes of the woods reverberate, and forms a strong contrast to the awful stillness of the scene” (21). On the other hand, Sharon V. Salinger counters Du Ponceau’s idyllic view of untamed Pennsylvania. As she writes, “When the first ships brought passengers from England to Pennsylvania in December 1681, what greeted the arrivals did not inspire optimism.” “Caves scattered along the Delaware River,” she continues, “had to suffice as the first shelters” (18). Although these two accounts differ on the basis of whether the sight of the untamed Pennsylvania wilderness inspired awe or dread, they serve the similar purpose of establishing in semi-mythic terms the starting point from which Pennsylvania became “civilized.”

Moreover, both accounts stress the unbroken nature of the Pennsylvania wilderness, yet they differ in their description of who, exactly, bore the responsibility of clearing the inhospitable region. Du Ponceau, for instance, writes of William Penn, whose many achievements were “due to the immediate operation of his powerful mind.” Du Ponceau describes one of those achievements, the founding of Philadelphia, in a way that discounts the amount of human labor required to raise the city. Du Ponceau writes that a future historian of Pennsylvania will show “a noble city founded, and its walls rapidly rising as it were by *enchantment*” (28, emphasis added). But, as Nash’s work on African Americans in Pennsylvania makes clear, unfree black labor, and not enchantment, cultivated the land. Nash writes about the arrival of the *Isabella*, a ship

from Bristol, England, that docked in Philadelphia in 1684 carrying 150 African slaves whom the Quakers eagerly contracted and set to “work clearing trees and brush and erecting crude houses in the budding village” (*Forging Freedom* 8). In addition, the practice of using slave labor to clear the land existed two years earlier, as evidenced by a statement made by James Claypoole, whose agricultural pursuits required unfree labor. “Advise me in the next,” writes Claypoole to a friend, “when I might have two Negroes for that they might be fit for cutting down trees, building, plowing, or any sort of labor that is required in the first planting of a country” (qtd. in Salinger 22). Part of the work of clearing the land, we can presume, involved encounters with animals. In the anonymously authored *Eccentric Biography; or, Memoirs of Remarkable Female Characters, Ancient and Modern* (1803), the author(s) profile a Philadelphia-born slave known only as Alice. Alice, who lived in Philadelphia until ten years old, “remembered the ground on which Philadelphia stands, when it was a wilderness, and when the Indians (its chief inhabitants) hunted wild game in the woods, while the panther, the wolf, and the beasts of the forest, were prowling about the wigwams and cabins in which they lived” (1). Unfortunately, narratives of these presumed encounters remain unwritten or undiscovered.

The shifting social, economic, and political scene that resulted in the majority of Pennsylvania slaves living in urban areas partly explains the deficiency in narratives in which slaves encounter wild animals. Once slaves finished the “heavy pioneer work of clearing the forests,” the demand for unfree black labor decreased (Wright 18). Moreover, as urban Philadelphia gained prominence, the concentration of slaves in

Pennsylvania resided mostly in urban areas. Several factors contributed to this distribution of unfree black labor. Namely, the wealth of urban areas relative to rural ones, made it easier for city residents to afford slaves (Nash “Slaves and Slave Owners” 248). With this shift came changing roles for enslaved Philadelphians. When the demand for agricultural workers decreased, the demand for urban workers, whether clerks, carpenters, etc., increased (Salinger 3). Prior to this cultural shift, however, the burden of clearing the Pennsylvania wilderness fell on unfree labor performed by African Americans. And, even though only one account from an early African American, that of Alice, refers to the panthers that cohabited the Pennsylvania wilderness, the demand for black unfree labor to clear the wilderness points toward many unrecorded encounters between Pennsylvanian African Americans and the animals of the Pennsylvania wilderness.

Nonetheless, later narratives, such as those of slaves Peter Wheeler and William J. Anderson, detail how the presence of panthers on or near their plantations added to their hardships. In *Chains and Freedom: or, the Life and Adventures of Peter Wheeler, a Colored Man Yet Living* (1839), Peter Wheeler describes his surroundings as a “dreadful wild country” where “all kinds of wild varmints—wolves, and panthers, and bears, was ’mazin plenty, and rattlesnakes mighty thick” (Lester 59). To further emphasize the dangers posed by wild animals on the plantation, Wheeler offers a retelling of the time he observed an axe-wielding man pass through the neighborhood on his way to a nearby swamp and later found the man lying dead surrounded by two “big wild cats” that the man managed to kill with his axe during a fatal encounter (Lester 28-29). Whereas

Wheeler's narrative highlights the general perils of plantation life, William J. Anderson, in *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson, Twenty-four Years a Slave* (1857), uses a wildcat encounter to show the courage of runaway slaves. Anderson cites panthers as one of the dangers that make it "almost impossible for slaves to escape from that part of the South, to the Northern States" (26), yet he proceeds to tell the story of Phill Sharp, a successful runaway. During his trek through a swamp shortly after running away from his master, Sharp encounters a "large panther, on the opposite bank, awaiting his arrival" and, before he has time to act, sees a "large alligator, with his mouth wide open" join the pursuit. Figuring that he would fare better on land, Sharp swims across the swamp, and as he nears the shore, the panther lunges at him but lands on the alligator instead. According to Anderson, the two animals, "had an awful fight," but Sharp, focusing on his break for freedom, did not "wait to see which came off best" (27). In both of these scenarios, wildcat encounters illustrate the added dangers of plantation life. In the case of the Phill Sharp episode, Anderson shows how slaves coped with these dangers with an amount of courage not expected from bare life beings supposedly content, as are domesticated animals, with their lot in life.

In the early part of the twentieth century, former slaves interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) likewise highlight the perilous conditions under which they lived by mentioning the presence of panthers on their plantations. Since the conditions under which the Federal Writers' Project collected these testimonies produced a number of constraints that bring into question the veracity and critical usefulness of the narratives, a brief history of the FWP's collection and publication

process is in order. Originally conceived as a division of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), whose primary responsibility lay in preparing a comprehensive guide of America, the FWP eventually expanded its scope to include the collection of “folklore, life-histories and materials on Negro life” (Yetman, “Background” 544). The WPA’s efforts to record ex-slave testimonies produced over 2,300 narratives, some of which were heavily influenced by prominent American Folklorist John A. Lomax, who acted for a time as the project’s folklore editor. In an effort to “get the Negro interested in talking about the days of slavery” in an honest and authentic way, Lomax designed an interview script he included in a memo he sent to field writers on April 22, 1937. The memo, titled “Supplementary Instructions #9-E to the American Guide Manual,” includes twenty questions, fifteen of which deal with life as a slave, three that address emancipation and Reconstruction, and two general questions that could refer to either the ante- or postbellum periods.

Since antebellum slave narrators shared the goal of detailing the brutal day-to-day conditions under which they lived, their narratives bear striking resemblances to one another. In fact, scholars of antebellum slave narratives commonly describe the genre as one characterized by “overwhelming *sameness*” (Olney 148, original emphasis; Bland 16). James Olney, in his contribution to the classic *The Slave’s Narrative* (1991), even goes as far as to identify a twelve-item “Master Plan for Slave Narratives,” a list of generic conventions employed by most antebellum slave narrators (153). He also positions Frederick Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative* as the genre’s “fullest, most exact representative” (154). It should come as no surprise, then, that the structure and content

of antebellum slave narratives—Douglass’s, in particular—parallel Lomax’s FWP field questionnaire. Lomax’s question of “Where and when were you born?” evokes what amounts to perhaps the most well-known convention of the antebellum slave narrative: that of the narrator beginning with the phrase “I was born” and continuing by “specifying a place but not a date of birth” (Olney 153). Structural similarities between antebellum slave narratives and Lomax’s questionnaire continue with the latter’s second question: “Give the names of your father and mother” (Lomax). Other questionnaire items include questions about slave activity on holidays such as Christmas and New Year’s Day, and slave diet, dress, and religion. Although variance exists from one narrative to the next, the narratives collected by the FWP largely conform to the generic conventions of antebellum slave narratives.

Absent from Lomax’s interview script, however, is the explicit purpose of denouncing slavery adopted by Douglass and other antebellum slave narrators. “It should be remembered,” the memo makes clear, “that the Federal Writers’ Project is not interested in taking sides on any question. The worker should not censor any material collected, regardless of its nature” (Lomax). Despite the stated attempt at neutrality, which translates into an attempt at coaxing out the unfiltered truth from respondents, critics have identified several well-known constraints on the resulting narratives. Among others, the length of time passed between the respondents’ experience in slavery and their interviews, the reliability of the respondents’ memory given their advanced age, and the race (overwhelmingly white) of the interviewers, contributed in their own ways to distort the narratives. Nonetheless, several scholars agree that the narratives remain

worthy of study for the insights they provide into the shaping and misshaping of ex-slave testimonies (Yetman “Ex-Slave” 187-189; Hartman 10-12). As it relates to this project, I read the testimonies as narrative performances rather than strict histories. In that capacity, their storytelling qualities work in favor of discovering how interviewees engaged in revisionist history, that is, how they positioned themselves as the heroes in their own animal narratives, narratives that ultimately serve as vehicles for their claims of humanity.

Whether or not interviewees asked question 13 of Lomax’s questionnaire, which in part asks if former slaves remembered any “Stories about animals,” interviewees offered stories of their encounters with panthers, the majority of which reveal the imbalance of the power between white authority figures and the slaves under their control. Molly Finley of Arkansas, for instance, paints a scene in which her father’s generation cleared out land on which “panther[s], bears, and wild cats” roamed while armed overseers supervised the work and looked out for “varmints” (294). This power dynamic, which clearly favors slaveholders, surfaces once more in the story of Cresa Mack, a former slave in Arkansas who recalls the time she mistook a treed panther for a dog and witnessed her overseer shoot it out of a tree (26). Moreover, Louis Love of Texas recalls a similar moment in which his master hunted down and killed a panther that had killed a calf (30-31). Though these narratives seemingly position slaves as helpless and in need of the protection of their overseers and masters, the narratives of two Texas ex-slaves, Tom Mills and Wayman Williams, show that slaves in some regions of the country defended themselves with violence against panther attacks. Tom

Mills recalls how, when herding cattle along the Rio Grande river, he awoke one day to the sight of a “big old female panther” staring at him. As Mills tells it, he remained calm, reached for his Winchester, and shot the panther between the eyes (104). Though not faced with a panther himself, Wayman Williams, also of Texas, recalls how panthers often made frequent attacks in his area and offers his interviewer the story of the time a panther threatened his grandfather, who crossed a river on horseback. With the help of two hunting dogs that held the panther at bay, Williams’s grandfather managed to reach his house, arm himself, and shoot the ferocious panther (W. Williams 183). Even though proslavery advocates and anti-black racists reduced slaves to bare life status and did not trust them with the means to protect themselves from wild animals on their plantations, the narratives of Tom Mills and Wayman Williams show that some slaves had the very human agency and wherewithal to kill panthers.⁴¹

Aside from addressing power imbalances and the wildlife perils associated with plantation life, slave narratives that contain scenes of panther encounters challenge some of the justifications of slavery related to the dehumanization of African Americans. Although, as Bay points out, “even the most rabidly polygenist white Southerners were never literally convinced that their black bondspeople were animals” (134), slavery apologists confused the issue at times when trying to convince the public at large that enslaved peoples lacked the mental capacity necessary to achieve a higher level of civilization. In William Harper’s “Memoir on Slavery” (1838), he makes the case that the institution of slavery humanizes rather than brutalizes its captors since it operates under a paternal system of mutual affection. Part of Harper’s overarching argument rests

on his recognition of slaves' essential difference from animals: "Is it not natural that a man should be attached to that which is *his own*, and which has contributed to his convenience, his enjoyment, or his vanity? This is felt even towards animals, and inanimate objects. How much more towards a being of superior intelligence and usefulness, who can appreciate our feelings towards him, and return them?" (99, original emphasis). But on the point of slaves' mental capacity and potential for social advancement, Harper equates them to irrational, unfeeling animals, saying, "Is it not better that the character and intellect of the individual should be suited to the station which he is to occupy? Would you do a benefit to the horse or the ox, by giving him a cultivated understanding or fine feelings?" (111-112). Harper's contradictory statements, which position slaves as human enough to reciprocate affection yet not human enough to rise up through the ranks of civilization, epitomize Agamben's definition of bare life beings, that is, people subjected to social oppression on account of their supposed proximity to animality.

This notion that enslaved peoples possessed intellects only slightly superior to those of nonhumans comes into question in narratives of former slaves who claim their humanity by recounting how they outsmarted the panthers they encountered on their plantations. Former slave Frederick Shelton of Arkansas, for one, tells of the time a fellow slave traveled through the woods at night and came face-to-face with a panther. Presumably unarmed, the man proceeded to hold his breath and play dead while the panther covered him with leaves. According to Shelton, the panther "went about one hundred yards into de woods to call his friends to de feast" (146). During the panther's

absence, the man climbed a tree after filling the hole the panther dug with a log. When the panthers returned to find the man missing, they attacked the original panther out of frustration. John Sneed of Texas recalls a similar scene in which a panther attacked him during a cattle drive. While asleep under a tree, Sneed awoke to find a panther dragging him into the thicket. Like Shelton, Sneed played dead to escape an initial attack. Taking Shelton for dead, the panther walked off, gave a yell, and returned to dig a shallow hole in the dirt. While the panther worked, Sneed calmly reached for his “six-gun” (50) and said “Thank you, old man,” before shooting the panther between the eyes. When the panther’s mate and cub came running in response to the panther’s call, Sneed dispatched them as well. Later in his narrative, Sneed implies that his courage, and intellect, more importantly, exceeds that of a white man whom Sneed rescues from a panther attack. When Sneed sees a panther dragging the man off into the wilderness, he uses his gun to kill the panther and then has to run down the white man who ran off after being “scared stiff when dat dead cat fall on him” (51). Not only did the white man act more cowardly than Sneed when in the same situation, the man also lacked Sneed’s cunning, which effectively makes him Sneed’s intellectual inferior.

Though not explicitly tied to the dehumanization of slaves, another justification for slavery based on anti-black racism, that of the biblical “Curse of Ham,” comes under scrutiny by slave narrators who used panther narratives to demonstrate the favor they find with God. As David Brion Davis observes, the “Curse of Ham,” a misnomer for the curse of slavery Noah placed on the descendants of his son Ham came to justify southern slavery as the “increasing enslavement of blacks . . . transformed biblical interpretation”

(Davis, *Inhuman* 67). In *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy; Late a Slave in the United States of America* (1843), an animal encounter serves to demonstrate how slaves challenge the notion that God had forsaken them. Grandy's narrative includes a description of the animals, panthers included, that surrounded his humble swamp cabin. According to Grandy, "One night I was awoke by some large animal smelling my face, and snuffing strongly; I felt its cold muzzle. I suddenly thrust out my arms, and shouted with all my might; it was frightened and made off. I do not know whether it was a bear or a panther, but it seemed as tall as a large calf. I slept of course no more that night. I put my trust in the Lord, and continued on the spot; I was never attacked again" (39). That Grandy portrays his silent prayer as answered speaks to how he views himself as a child of God, as someone made in God's image, and not as the beast of burden with whom dominant society associates him.

The theme of finding God's favor in the face of a big cat attack likewise appears in an earlier text, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball* (1837). At one point, Ball recounts a big cat encounter told to him by a slave he meets while in South Carolina. As the unnamed man from Africa relates, he had previously lived in a state of servitude as a prisoner of war, and, while traveling through the desert with his captors, one of the party's camels broke loose and the man's captors charged him with retrieving it. Although the man soon found himself faced with a set of hungry lions who force him to remain high in a tree for several harrowing days, when the opportunity presents itself, the man comes down from the tree and drinks at the watering hole despite the danger of the lingering lions. As the man relates, "I walked out

upon the desert, and prayed to be delivered from the perils that environed me” (181). Within moments, the man finds the one camel the lions did not kill and escapes the treacherous area. Ball’s later recounting of his own encounter with a panther, which a hunting party that included himself, his master, and other men eventually kills (355-357), echoes these themes but emphasizes the shared humanity of slave and master.

Similarly, slave narrators in FWP narratives describe panther encounters that demonstrate their communion with God. In the case of freedwoman Cordelia Jackson of South Carolina, a panther attack prompts her belief in God. As she says, “One night, Aug. 30th, our house started rocking. We thought a panther was a-rocking it, kaise my old man had see’d one. He run out wid a gun and went to de wood pile; den he hollered to me and said, ‘Delia, come out here, de whole world is shaking’” (Jackson 6-7). Her and her husband’s presumption about the presence of the panther proves correct, as they find a panther climbing into their cabin for rations before Jackson’s husband grabs his gun and shoots the animal. As in Moses Grandy’s narratives, Jackson frames her near-death experience in terms of spiritual awareness, exclaiming, “God sho showed his power dat night. Ever since dat I been fixed with God” (Jackson 7). In the narratives of Charity Morris of Arkansas and Kiziah Love of Oklahoma, the two women, as Charles Ball and Moses Grandy did before them, find favor with God when faced with animal attacks. The night Morris ran away from her plantation, she took up refuge in an abandoned structure and had to endure an entire night of an unidentified animal scratching at a wall. Though Morris cannot identify the animal, her statement that she took up in the shelter because she “wuz skeered uv bears an panthers” shows the

psychological duress she experienced on account of panthers and other wild animals. To counteract her fear, she prays through the night: “Dat thing scratched all night an ah prayed all night” (Morris 149). God answers her prayers, and the animal does her no harm. In Kiziah Love’s case, her prayers when faced with a panther save both herself and her husband, Isom. When Love hears a panther outside her cabin, she uses a table to block the opening of the fireplace and barricade herself and her child inside the cabin. She too takes to prayer, asking specifically that her husband stay away for the entire night, which he does (196-197). On the whole, these narratives demonstrate divine favor for slaves, who, according to proslavery ideology, long ago lost favor with God.

Since the practice in American society of dehumanizing African Americans did by no means end with the formal dissolution of slavery, responses to the practice in the long nineteenth century span from well before the antislavery movement in America took hold to well into the first half of the twentieth century. In 1806 the Irish poet Thomas Moore published *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems*, comprised mostly of poems written during Moore’s voyage to America. His disillusion with America, which espoused “perfect liberty” (Moore 180) yet held countless men, women, and children in bondage comes through clearly in “Epistle VI” when he writes “Alike the bondage and the license suit / The brute made ruler and the man made brute!” (Moore 181). As the decades passed and the antislavery movement gained momentum, slave narrators and antislavery white novelists alike corroborated Moore’s recognition that the institution of American slavery operated on the principle that enslaved peoples amounted to little more than animals. Their voices did not go unopposed, however, for antislavery texts,

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), especially, sparked a flurry of so-called Anti-Tom texts that deemphasized the day-to-day horrors of slavery and reinforced the view that African Americans amounted to as much as cattle and other domestic animals. Defenders of the humanity of African Americans would again face this clash of ideologies when the work of Thomas Dixon brought the dehumanization of African Americans back into the national spotlight. Some of the most telling responses to this form of dehumanization appear in the Federal Writers' Projects slave narratives in which former slaves describe how they either outsmarted or killed panthers they encountered, two tactics that demonstrate their own brand of biopower, however limited.

The narratives in which slave narrators differentiate themselves from the big cats they encounter, whether through describing how they escaped harm through cunning, prayer, or violent action, speak directly to what David Brion Davis terms "the problem of slavery," the "impossibility, seen throughout history, of converting humans into totally compliant, submissive chattel property" (*Problem of Slavery* 13). As slavery apologists argued that enslaved peoples lacked the mental capacity to achieve refined civilization and therefore deserved servitude, slave narrators told stories of how they escaped panther attacks through skill, intellect, and faith. Collectively, these narratives present a strategy of resistance as of yet little discussed. Better-known examples of how slave narrators resisted their dehumanization include the numerous instances where they recognized that slavery as an institution, and not an innate quality within themselves, reduced them to the status of chattel and therefore positioned them in an indeterminate zone between the fully human and the fully animal. Beyond simply demonstrating their

capacity to recognize that slavery brutalized them, the slave narrators I discuss above told stories of how they differ fundamentally and in superior ways to the plantation animals they encountered.

Frederick Douglass: When the Lion Wrote Theology

In their own cultural moment, former slaves interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project differentiated themselves from the big cats they encountered. On the whole, their narratives serve to emphasize their humanity in a system that routinely dehumanizes them. In contrast, among his many strategies in his fight for abolition and racial equality, Frederick Douglass embraced *likeness* between enslaved peoples and big cats, adopting the biblical lion as a symbol of antislavery might and proslavery wickedness. In the debate over slavery that raged in antebellum America, political combatants on both sides of the ideological divide drew on the Christian Bible to justify their respective positions. Whereas proslavery advocates widely circulated Bible-based arguments in favor of the continued enslavement of African-descended people, abolitionists turned to Bible-based ethical principles to fortify their moral suasion campaigns. As is well documented, Douglass engages with the Bible on this and several other points: he compares proponents of slavery to the evil influence represented by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and he often chastises those who profess to be Christians yet refuse to free fellow human beings from bondage. Considerably less attention, however, has been paid to how Douglass intervenes in the slavery debate through his use of lion metaphors. On more than one occasion in his writings and oratory, Douglass compares the North to a mighty lion that should show more fierceness and less restraint in its dealings with the rebellious

South. Positive associations between lions and antislavery forces likewise appear in Douglass's novella, *The Heroic Slave* (1852), in which he valorizes the rebel slave Madison Washington through favorable comparisons to a mighty and noble lion. Conversely, Douglass equates the slave-owning Auld family in particular and proslavery forces in general with malicious, destructive lions. As I argue in this chapter, when read against the Bible, which constructs a dualism between divine or divinely-favored lions—Jesus Christ is the “lion of the Judah tribe”—and wicked ones—Satan prowls like a “roaring lion”—it becomes apparent that Douglass appropriates the Bible's use of lion metaphors in order to signal to his Christian audiences and readers that the noble lion, embodied by abolitionists and rebel slaves, must slay the destructive lion of slavery before America can repent for its original sin of participating in and advancing the Atlantic slave trade.

I will argue shortly that biblical lion metaphors provide the primary methodology by which to evaluate Douglass's own lion metaphors, but I will take a moment here to note how his lion-based figurative language intervenes in transatlantic dialogues about African lions and the value of blackness. One text that establishes negative associations between Africans and lions is Mungo Park's 1799 travel narrative *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*. Detailing his journey to the central portion of the Niger River, Park describes the massacre of a group of lion hunters by a lion; in other scenes, the mere presence of a lion in the distance causes Park and others much consternation. Park's fear of the lion's ferocity and menace then gets transferred onto Sambo Sego, the African prince who, hearing a rumor that Park had come into “plenty of gold” (87), requests that

Park relinquish part of his new-found fortune. Park complies, saying, “though it was very mortifying to me to comply with the demands of injustice, and so arbitrary an exaction, yet, thinking it was highly dangerous to make a foolish resistance, and irritate the lion when within the reach of his paw, I prepared to submit” (88). In the broader context of Park’s work, this African prince is one of several dangerous “lions” the explorer encounters in his travels.

Negative associations between blackness and lions, such as those in Park’s text, or even in the work of John Locke, who bolsters his *tabula rasa* theory by observing that a newborn child does not innately fear objects of dread such as the “Blackmoor” or the “Lion” (172), would make their way into the debate on slavery. In one debate that played out in the pages of the London *Examiner*, a contributor sympathetic to the plight of African-descended peoples argues against assumptions of their “inferior animal character to the White man” and proposes that they became forced into servitude on account of their superior physical strength, which allows them to labor in harsh conditions. In response, the rebutting editor states that the correspondent’s argument fails to “overthrow their present inferiority with regard to the general rank in the scale of beings, for the lion is stronger than the noblest of human beings, and yet nobody will contend for his intellect” (“Negro Faculties” 566). Stated otherwise, African-descended people might share superior physical strength with lions but they likewise share an inferior intellect. In another context, slavery apologist Achille Murat justifies slavery by citing the “general laws of nature” that grant both the slaveholder and the slave the right to prove their might against one another. He frames this contest in terms of a hunter and

lion:

A man meets a lion: he has incontestably the right to appropriate to himself the lion's skin, but the lion has a right equally incontestable over the flesh of the man. But, as the one defends his skin, and the other his flesh, it happens that the spontaneity objective of each of them becomes an obstacle to the other which he has a right to destroy. Here, then, are two unquestionable rights placed before us: there does not, nor cannot, exist between them any arbiter but the great general laws of nature. (Murat 83-84)

Here the lion stands in for the slave who, despite having superior strength, loses out to the superior-minded hunter, who stands in for the slaveholder. According to Murat, the laws of nature dictate the outcome of a contest between powerful forces, and, in this particular contest, the strong, yet feeble-minded, slave has no recourse against the relatively weak yet intelligent slaveholder.

These texts contrast with the work of writers who associate African-descended peoples with lions in ways that highlight the former's noble characteristics. In his 1773 poem "The Dying Negro," British author and abolitionist Thomas Day writes that Africa, the land where the lion roars to "curb the savage monarch in the chase" is among the places where "Heav'n planted man's majestic race" (9). In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Slave's Dream" (1842), the speaker tells of a dying slave who lies face down in a rice field. At the point of death, the slave's mind wanders to his African homeland, where the slave was a king. He imagines himself riding over the plains of Africa and encountering the animals that represent his native land. He sees a flock of

flamingos and hears the “hyena scream” and the roar of the lion. Comforted by the presence of these animals, which signal his presence in his own land, the slave no longer feels the “driver’s whip,” and he dies a noble death (Longfellow 24-25). In each of these cases, to be from Africa, the land of lions, is not a source of shame but rather a source of pride.

Douglass engages with this debate on the relationship between African-descended people and lions in both his work and his personal life, as he was lionized by the American public in ways that only thinly-veiled the dominant racist discourses of the time. In the context of Lionism, the “quintessential mode of nineteenth-century celebrity” (Salmon 60), Douglass’s personal acquaintances and professional biographers, evoking the noble status of the lion in the animal kingdom, referred to him as a lion.⁴² Later in his life, when Douglass moved to the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C., his celebrity, along with the public’s fascination with his mane-like hair—which in itself carries with it problematic racial undertones—earned him the nickname “The Lion of Anacostia.” Douglass’s physicality also attracted racialized comparisons to lions. Helene von Racowitza, friend to Douglass’s longtime friend and possible lover Otilie Assing, wrote in her memoir that she and Assing “found [Douglass] a strikingly attractive, tall, glorious type of man, built like a lion, in whom race mixing . . . has created the most fortunate position” (qtd. in Diedrich 378). Nathaniel Rogers, who commented on two antislavery addresses Douglass delivered in Concord, New Hampshire, on February 11, 1844, came away with a similar impression of the influence of race on Douglass’s physicality. He compares Douglass’s commanding stage presence

to the “stalk[ing] to and fro” of the “Numidian Lion” (Rogers 26), which refers to lions shipped to gladiatorial contests from “Numidia,” the Roman provincial name for what is now Tunisia and parts of Algeria in North Africa (Hairston 104-105).⁴³ And, even though Wendell Phillips’s prefatory letter to Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative* compares Douglass to the lion in Aesop’s “The Man and the Lion” who writes the history of the predator/prey, or oppressor/oppressed, relationship from its own perspective, the irony, of course, is that Phillips’s letter provides the authenticating “white envelope” for Douglass’s “black message.”⁴⁴

Lionized by the American public for his rousing oratory and his skillful prose, Douglass used his national platform to deploy lion metaphors that convey the idea that slavery was an affront to God, not divinely-sanctioned. Douglass demonstrates throughout his work that he was simultaneously aware of how Christian theology impeded *and* advanced his primary social causes. John Ernest frames this ambivalence in terms of crisis (68), which most critics agree plays out largely in Douglass’s autobiographies.⁴⁵ Jared Hickman argues that Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) dramatizes the dilemma between the liberating doctrines of Christianity and the slaves’ seemingly never-ending wait for emancipation (361-362). Also with Douglass’s autobiographies in mind, Richard Yarborough observes that Douglass’s writings “reflect his personal struggle to come to terms with religious faith, the requisites of which may have seemed dangerously close to the obedience demanded by the abusive paternal figure of the white slave master” (290). For Sharon Carson and Zachary McLeod Hutchins, the struggle described by Yarborough appears in Douglass’s autobiographical

writings as challenges to Christianity and even Christ himself. Carson argues that Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* affirms an "authentic," i.e., largely non-existent, form of Judeo-Christianity (20), and Hutchins contends that Douglass, in the same text, rejects Christ outright (300). However, a broader view of Douglass's writing, a view that includes his later autobiographies along with his speeches, reveals that Douglass closely follows the Bible's example of differentiating between lions that act on the behalf of divine justice and lions that represent the wickedness of false and non-believers.⁴⁶ By doing so, Douglass presents his professedly Christian audience and readers with a Bible-based argument that abolition equates to the fulfillment of divine justice against the human sin and error that crystallized into the American slave system.

To challenge the religious hypocrisy that, according to Douglass, at best hindered abolition and at worst wholly sanctioned the institution of slavery, he often took aim at slaveholders masquerading as devout Christians. In an 1855 lecture titled "The Anti-Slavery Movement," Douglass relies on lion metaphors and the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 to establish slaveholders' religious failings. After offering his "sober" view of the history and future of antislavery movements, Douglass takes aim at slaveholders, the de facto anti-abolitionists, and leans on the so-called Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 to establish their hypocrisy, their championing of human rights only as applied to themselves. By doing so, Douglass positions anti-abolitionists as obstructions in the way of the divine justice of abolition. Again evoking Matthew 7, Douglass says, "He [the slaveholder] knows very well, whatsoever he would have done unto himself, but is quite in doubt as to having the same things done unto others. It is just here that lions spring up

in the path of duty, and the battle once fought in heaven is refought on the earth” (“Anti-Slavery” 328). If duty here is abolition, then the battle Douglass refers to is the somewhat apocryphal battle between Lucifer, the “roaring lion” of Peter 5:8, and God, whom Lucifer wished to usurp.⁴⁷ Douglass, then, looks forward to when the wicked lions, here associated with slaveholders, are vanquished by a higher power. The metaphor also evokes Isaiah 35, which instructs God’s people to rejoice in the fact that their hardships will end and a pathway, called “The way of holiness,” will open up to them. The author goes on to say, “No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk *there*: and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads” (*Authorized King James Version*, Isa. 35.9-10). Through these allusions, Douglass positions antislavery forces, as opposed to their opponents, as the beneficiaries—if only eventually—of divine favor.

In his antebellum autobiographical writings, Douglass makes further use of lion metaphors to castigate religious hypocrites. In his 1845 *Narrative*, Douglass associates himself with the biblical Daniel and, conversely, associates slaveholders with anti-Christian wickedness. Douglass’s statement to a friend that after escaping slavery he “felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions” (*Narrative* 89) draws quite obviously on the book of Daniel, in which King Darius the Mede feels compelled to punish Daniel for his worship of God, a higher power who undermines the king’s authority. As the story goes, Darius punishes Daniel by sealing him inside a den of lions, but God, who favors the faithful Daniel, sends an angel to seal the mouths of the lions.

Significantly, Douglass's "den of hungry lions" relates directly to his personal experience—and not only to slavery in the abstract—for the lion-like qualities of members of the slaveholding Auld family, along with those of the infamous slave-breaker Edward Covey, serve to illustrate their wickedness. When Douglass's master, Captain Anthony Auld, passes away, Douglass endures a month of speculation about whether he will serve Captain Anthony's son, Andrew, or the Captain's daughter, Lucretia. Familiar with Andrew Auld's cruelty, Douglass rejoices when he comes under Lucretia's service. As Douglass says of this transaction, "It was a glad day to me. I had escaped a worse than lion's jaws" (*Narrative* 47). When Douglass leaves the service of Lucretia to serve Thomas Auld in 1832, he learns of Thomas's cruelty, later writing that "He might have passed for a lion, but for his ears" (*Narrative* 51). Douglass also likens Edward Covey, to whom Thomas Auld sends Douglass for "breaking," to a wicked big cat—a tiger, this time. As Douglass says of one beating at the hands of Covey "he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after" (*Narrative* 56). These are, therefore, the "lions" and "tiger" that Douglass escaped, and, if we further apply the story of Daniel, those of the Auld family's ilk will be the downfall of the slave system, for King Darius, astonished at Daniel's miraculous escape from his fate, revokes his own authority and feeds his advisors, the representatives of a corrupt and petty political order, to the lions.

A decade later, in his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Douglass moves away from vilifying the Aulds through comparisons to vicious

big cats but continues to use lion metaphors to condemn the American slave system. He continues to associate his plight with that of Daniel in the lion's den (*My Bondage* 350), but he refrains from equating Thomas Auld, Andrew Auld, and Edward Covey to fierce, unmerciful big cats. Douglass does, however, add a passage in *My Bondage* that disparages (presumably) proslavery forces by equating them with big cats and bears, two species vilified in the bible. Writing of the time he found himself imprisoned for his role in a plot to runaway with fellow slaves from Thomas Auld's plantation, Douglass describes the presumably proslavery "fiends" who plied him with questions as he sat in his cell: "To talk to thoseimps about justice and mercy, would have been absurd as to reason with bears and tigers. Lead and steel are the only arguments that they understand" (*My Bondage* 324). Relying on the threat of violence to oppress those under their rule associates these "bears and tigers" with the "wicked ruler" of Proverbs 28:15, who rules over the "poor people" as a "roaring lion, and a ranging bear."⁴⁸ Through this association, Douglass, although afoul of slave law, positions himself as the party wronged by a violent and corrupt system of rule. Douglass also adds to *My Bondage* a slave song whose "double meaning" associates lions with the perils of slavery. The song, which on the surface speaks of the slaves' anticipation for the Christian afterlife, belies the hidden meaning through which the enslaved express their desire for freedom. At the nexus of those two meanings is the lyric, "I thought I heard them say, / There were lions in the way, I don't expect to stay / Much longer here" (*My Bondage* 608), which could either be referencing Daniel's den of lions, "The way of holiness" of Isaiah 35, or any number of the Psalms that associate lions with evil that obstructs the path to paradise.

In contrast, Douglass valorizes slave rebellion by comparing rebel slave Madison Washington to a noble lion. In “West India Emancipation” (1857), Douglass compares slavery to a “den of lions, a nest of scorpions, or an army of rattlesnakes” (359). Douglass had previously used similar lion imagery, in “Farewell Speech to the British People,” for instance, yet in “West India” he endorses the *violent* insurrection of Joseph Cinqué and Madison Washington, both of whom led violent slave rebellions. As Douglass says of the two men, “Joseph Cinque on the deck of the *Amistad*, did that which should make his name dear to us. He bore nature’s burning protest against slavery. Madison Washington who *struck down* his oppressor on the deck of the *Creole*, is more worthy to be remembered than the colored man who shot Pitcairn at Bunker Hill” (367, emphasis added). Douglass’s endorsement of the violence these men used to resist slavery comes through most clearly in his use of a line from Byron’s *Childe Harold*: “Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow” (“West India” 366). Douglass’s avoidance in “Farewell Speech” of emphasizing Madison Washington’s acts of violence in favor of describing Madison as merely he who “broke his fetters on the deck of the *Creole*” (71) signals the evolution in his moral thought.

Shortly after Douglass introduces the character of Madison Washington in *The Heroic Slave* (1852), Douglass, citing Madison’s lion-like physicality, positions the rebel slave as an instrument of God’s vengeance. “Madison,” writes Douglass, “was of manly form. Tall, symmetrical, round, and strong. In his movements he seemed to combine, with the strength of the lion, a lion’s elasticity . . . His whole appearance betokened Herculean strength; yet there was nothing savage or forbidding in his aspect” (*Heroic*

222). In light of the book of Revelation, in which Jesus Christ, described as the “Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David” (5:5), possesses the power to bring about the Rapture—the ultimate judgment upon a sinful world—Madison’s lion-like qualities resonate with the messianic tradition. However, his use of physical violence to enact his escape from slavery marks his departure from the passivity preached in *The Sermon on the Mount* and elsewhere.⁴⁹ It does, however enable his violent rebellion aboard the *Creole*. As related by the character Tom Grant in Douglass’s novella, the lion-like Washington possesses superhuman strength: “‘You murderous villain,’ said I, to the imp at the helm, and rushed upon him to deal him a blow, when he pushed me back with his strong, black arm, as though I had been a boy of twelve” (*Heroic* 245). The blow Madison strikes against slavery therefore positions him not as the messiah himself but as a lion-like instrument of divine will.

Since Douglass commends Washington for striking a blow against the slave system, again referred to as a “den of lions” (“West India” 359), it is more accurate to say that Washington is a divinely-favored lion-like lion slayer. The Bible is again instructive here, as lions serve a similar dual purpose. Not only do they execute God’s will, their defeat at the hands of divinely-favored figures shows the might of those imbued with the Spirit of the Lord. To the inhabitants of Moab, who incur God’s wrath on account of their unfaithfulness, God sends a lion among them to aid in their destruction (Isa. 15:9). Likewise, when the inhabitants of Israel provoke God’s anger by not fearing him, he “sent lions among them, which slew *some* of them” (2 Kings 17:25, original emphasis). Significantly, the act leads to repentance, for the king of Assyria,

who settled parts of Israel with inhabitants from nearby regions, commands a priest from Samaria to teach the law of God in Bethel after learning of how God used a lion to punish his people (2 Kings 17:26-28). Moreover, God sends a lion to kill a man who disobeys the “voice of the LORD,” as spoken by the son of a prophet (1 Kings 20:35-36). In a reminiscent scene, God commands a prophet from Judah to travel to Bethel to spread God’s word and explicitly tells the prophet not to take bread or drink in any house in Bethel. The prophet of Judah therefore refuses King Jeroboam’s invitation to his home, but when a false prophet of Bethel later deceives the prophet of Judah into doing that which God forbid, God sends a lion to kill the prophet of Judah. To further demonstrate his power, God has the lion stand guard over the prophet’s carcass and donkey without attacking either (1 Kings 13:20-28). If death by lion commonly serves as punishment for those that deny God’s authority or break his laws, Madison Washington’s lion-like qualities further establish his position not as the messiah himself but rather as an instrument through which God strikes a blow against a morally corrupt slave system.

Although Madison Washington does not rise to the status of messiah, his victory over slave traders, the “den of lions,” aligns him with divinely-favored biblical figures who display their might by vanquishing lions. Along with Benaiah, one of King David’s “mighty men” whose fighting legacy includes the slaying of a lion in a pit (1 Chronicles 11:22), better-known figures Samson and David himself likewise prove their might, and, more importantly, their divine favor by killing lions. Before becoming King of Israel, David gained renown when he faced Goliath, the Philistine warrior. When David offers

to fight Goliath when all others refuse, he pleads his case to his father Jesse by reminding him that, in David's capacity as shepherd, he fought and defeated fierce animals: "And David said unto [King] Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered *it* out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God" (1 Sam. 17:34-36, original emphasis). David makes it clear, however, that his confidence comes from God's favor and not from any earthly power (1 Sam. 17:37). As is well-known, David does, with the aid of God, vanquish Goliath as he did the lion previously.

Judges 14 presents us with a similar story in which the spirit of God assists a lion-killer to vanquish his enemies. In the chapter, Samson, during travels to Timnah to court one of its women, comes face-to-face with a young lion that "roared against him." With the aid of the "Spirit of the Lord," which "came mightily upon him," Samson kills the lion with his bare hands. When he returned after a time for his new wife, Samson discovers that the lion carcass has filled with bees that have produced honey. Samson then puts forth the following riddle to the men of Timnah: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." When the men fail to solve the riddle, they ply Samson's wife until she reveals the answer. This provokes Samson's ire, and he, again imbued with the "Spirit of the Lord," kills thirty men of Timnah (Jud. 19). In these examples—those of David and Samson, especially—the act of vanquishing a lion

functions as a prerequisite for defeating one's enemy. Applied to Douglass's work, Madison Washington's lion-like qualities make him the instrument through which God strikes a blow against a slave system unsanctioned in his eyes, and his personal defeat of slave traders—the den of lions—is the prerequisite for abolishing the slave system altogether.

In “The War and How to End it” (1862), which Douglass delivered as the nation was in the throes of the Civil War, he follows his own example in *The Heroic Slave* of equating antislavery forces with a noble lion. More specifically, Douglass leads his audience to the realization that the North should act upon its heaven-ordained duty of ending the war by any means necessary. Douglass begins his lion analogy by positioning the North as a lion roused out of its lair by the bombardment of Fort Sumter. Although Douglass says that this lion “shook his thundering mane in wrath,” he acknowledges that the Northern lion was slow to wake and ultimately underestimated the zeal of the Confederacy. As a result, the North took the wrong tact, opting to “put down the rebellion by a show of force rather than by an exercise of force” and to show its teeth but not use them (“The War” 488). Unlike the dual nature of God put forth in Proverbs 19:12, which states that “The king's wrath *is* as the roaring of a lion; but his favour *is* as dew upon the grass,” the North, in Douglass's estimation, failed to match its anger with effective action. Douglass implies, then, that the newly-roused Northern lion should act in accordance with the vengeful lion-like God of the book of Jeremiah. Among the book's succession of prophecies about the destruction of God's enemies, three of such prophecies equate God with a vengeful lion. Regarding the destruction of the nation of

Edom, which benefited from the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah says that God “shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong [Edom]” (Jer. 49:19) and thoroughly vanquish the nation. God doles out the same punishment for the nation of Babylon, which incurs God’s wrath for destroying the nation of Israel (Jer. 50:44). Moreover, in the passage most similar to Douglass’s use of the Northern lion metaphor, the Bible compares God to an angry lion that leaves his lair to vanquish the nation of Judah, which provokes God’s anger through its disobedience (Jer. 25:38). As Douglass suggests in “The War and How to End It,” the North, although not yet at this point, should consider this type of vengeance against the disobedient Confederacy.⁵⁰

Following the close of the Civil War, Douglass’s political priorities naturally shifted, and his literary and oratorical output decreased, causing one critic to call him “an aging lion unable to find either the cause or the words to reanimate his roar” (Oakes 279). Nonetheless, Douglass returned to form at times in this period by employing lion metaphors when addressing the past and present challenges of American race relations. In “The United States Cannot Remain Half-Slave and Half-Free” (1883), a speech Douglass delivered on the twenty-first anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, he again uses a lion metaphor to admonish hypocritical Christian slaveholders. Referring specifically to the Christian practice of baptism, which, if one takes a literal approach to the Bible, would secure the freedom of anyone who requests it, Douglass explains that slaveholders routinely denied slaves baptism for that very reason. Again evoking the wicked lions of the Bible, Douglass calls this practice by professed Christians the “fact” that “stood like a roaring lion ready to tear and devour

any Negro who sought the ordinance of baptism” (“The United States” 664). In another of his speeches, “The Nation’s Problem” (1889), Douglass, shifting his focus from the past to the present, addresses the issue of African-American race pride, which Douglass sees as an obstacle to racial equality. More specifically, Douglass claims that race-based solidarity, as opposed to that built on individual or collective achievements, stands as the “the lion in the way of our progress [toward racial harmony]” (“Nation’s Problem” 730).⁵¹

The spirit of reconciliation that appears in “The Nation’s Problem” informs Douglass’s other uses of lion metaphors late in his life. In his final autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, 1892), Douglass, as in the earlier *My Bondage*, identifies with the biblical Daniel, removes mention of the Aulds’ negative lion-like qualities, and retains the “double meaning” slave song that positions slavery as the primary obstacle to paradise on earth. Douglass does, however, add a number of lion references to *Life and Times*. For one, Douglass draws on the book of Isaiah to demonstrate that the remedying of restrictions on African-American rights in the Reconstruction era constitutes a step toward paradisiacal racial harmony. Douglass makes the case that, although the passing of African-American voting rights was not without problems—bitterness and resistance from the “old master-class” and unspecified “evil” performed by African Americans—to not pass African-American suffrage would do more damage to white-black race relations. As he says, “Until it shall be safe to leave the lamb in the hold of the lion, the laborer in the power of the capitalist, the poor in the hands of the rich, it will not be safe to leave a newly emancipated people completely in

the power of their former masters” (*Life* 818). This imagined state of racial harmony resonates with the promised paradise for God’s people in Isaiah 11:6, in which “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together.” In this scenario, a state of racial harmony can only be achieved when the destructiveness of the lion—here read as the old master-class—is rendered harmless. Douglass puts this another way in his 1878 speech “There Was a Right Side in the Late War,” in which he states that “Men are not changed from lambs into tigers instantaneously, nor from tigers into lambs instantaneously” (487). Here the tigers, read slaveholders, need to be made lambs, as lambs, read former slaves, need to be made into tigers in order for the country to achieve racial harmony.

Even though Douglass remained mostly consistent in his use of lion metaphors throughout his career, some of his references to lions reveal his crisis of faith. In *Life and Times*, Douglass celebrates that “Martial law has taken the place of ecclesiastical law” (993) since, in the day of the former, “The holy men who ruled at that day could be lions as well as lambs” (992), that is, both peaceful and destructive. Since Douglass associates these holy men with those in his own time who profess to “love the Lord” but “hate the negro” (*Life* 993), his critique falls squarely on lion-like religious hypocrites. Moreover, Douglass embeds a critique of God’s treatment of slaves in his description of the time he escaped from Covey’s farm to seek reprieve from his master Thomas Auld. Disappointed with Auld’s hard-heartedness, Douglass writes, “I had jumped from a sinking ship into the sea; I had fled from the tiger to something worse” (*My Bondage* 274). Douglass’s statement resonates with Amos 5:18-19, which castigates the wicked

who nonetheless look for solace from God. As the biblical author writes, “Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end *is* it for you? the day of the Lord *is* darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.” Applied to Douglass’s experience, one can read Thomas Auld as an unresponsive God figure and Douglass as the misguided sinner. Read another way, Thomas Auld stands in for the “bear” that Douglass ran to after escaping Covey, the “tiger.” This implies that Douglass thinks he has lost divine favor in a system that he criticizes for its lack of empathy and lack of general fairness. Lastly, the scene in *The Heroic Slave* in which Madison Washington uses his lion-like physicality to escape the fire that destroys his hideout in the woods equates the fire with God’s judgment *and* slavery. (*Heroic* 228). Madison, then, relies on his own actions to escape God’s judgment, which in effect usurps God’s authority. In these instances, Douglass represents God as either an unreasonable tyrant or a figure easily supplanted by heroic human action.

Nonetheless, Douglass rarely deviated from his use of lion metaphors to condemn the proslavery cause and laud the antislavery one. In the antebellum period, Douglass equated the Aulds, Covey, and slaveholders in general with big cats that, in the Bible, represent wickedness. On the other hand, in the same period he associated Madison Washington, the North, and the antislavery cause in general with the powerful lion-like God of the Old Testament and the similarly powerful lion-like Son of God in the New Testament. Even when his focus shifted from antislavery work to challenging anti-black racism in the wake of the Civil War, Douglass likened obstacles to racial

harmony in the U.S. to wicked lions. Douglass's contemporaries also used lion metaphors to illustrate the social power of African Americans and to disparage those who harbor anti-black sentiments,⁵² yet Douglass uniquely combined the tactic with liberation theology to condemn the proslavery cause and, conversely, to grant biblical authority to the abolitionist and anti-racist causes.

As I have outlined in this chapter, responses to the dehumanization of African Americans in the nineteenth century took two distinct forms in relation to big cats. Whereas authors and oral storytellers use big cats to claim one's humanity through demonstrations of *difference*, Frederick Douglass and others use the animal to claim one's divine favor through demonstrations of *likeness*. Faced with a system that routinely dehumanized them, plantation slaves who told of their encounters with panthers took pains to differentiate themselves from the animal. Whether describing how they outsmarted the panthers, how they defended themselves against panthers with violence, or how they prayed to a receptive God to deliver them from panther attacks, these slaves showcase their very human qualities, that is, a superior intellect, the ability to operate weapons, and a soul recognized by their divine creator. Likewise faced with claims of slaves' animality, Frederick Douglass took another course of action. Among his many strategies in his fight for abolition, he adopted the lion as a symbol of the slave's cause and, as in the Bible, pitted that noble lion against the wicked ones that without exception experience defeat for fighting on the wrong side of God's divine will.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The Black Panther Party and the Human/Nonhuman Border

In chapter 4, I outlined two distinct strategies enslaved peoples in nineteenth-century America used to claim social power in the face of overwhelming economic and sociopolitical oppression. Routinely denied personal freedom and equal rights under the law on account of their supposed animality, formerly enslaved people interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s, along with those who published antebellum accounts of their escapes from slavery, highlight their humanity by emphasizing their superiority to nonhumans. Faced with panthers on or near their plantations, these authors and oral storytellers relate how the hallmarks of their humanity, such as superior intelligence and God-given souls, secured their escapes from imminent death. In contrast, Frederick Douglass, the most influential antislavery orator and writer of the nineteenth century, offers a counter discourse to such escape narratives by embracing associations between nonhumans and enslaved peoples. Well aware that dehumanization tactics fueled the institution of slavery, Douglass drew on biblical allusions to equate proslavery forces with biblical figures of wickedness—Satan, most notably—and, conversely, associates antislavery forces in the North and the hero of his antislavery novella *The Heroic Slave* with noble and divinely favored lions such as Jesus Christ, the “lion” of the tribe of Judah. This chapter, then, aims to delineate the extent to which these engagements with biopolitical negotiation function as antecedents to the Black Panther Party's (BPP) use of panther iconography and figurative language. More

precisely, this chapter shows how the BPP extends the long-standing American tradition of big cat literature by adopting the American panther as its symbol of social and political revolution. The symbol allowed the BPP to draw parallels between the American panther—its self-defense instinct, its persecution, and its fierce nature—and the social plights of the domestic and international communities for which the BPP advocated. However, as I demonstrate below, the symbol of the American panther became a political liability for the BPP as the party made overtures to more mainstream political circles. The party subsequently moved away from big cat figurative language, only to find that with a decrease in panther-related rhetoric came a decline in the party’s political relevancy.

Recent critiques of early BPP scholarship fall roughly into three categories. There are those critics who find fault with studies that rely too heavily on the “great-black-men” model of BPP history, that is, the model that privileges the writings and experiences of the party’s “central triumvirate” of Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver. This model suggests that, contrary to what history bears out, “many ordinary members and fellow travelers were incidental to the party’s history” (Street 352-353). Other critics demonstrate the shortsightedness of studies that over-emphasize the party’s cultural image (the beret’s, the black leather, the weapons) or violent rhetoric and overlook the legacy of the party’s many community programs, such as their free breakfast for children programs and their free community health clinics (Kirby 26). In response to these types of myopic studies, David J. Garrow argues that scholars should take into consideration the fact that, from the party’s inception to its ultimate demise, the

BPP and its philosophy and approach to black self-determination and liberation “evolved through a succession of extremely fundamental changes” (651). From this perspective, one must consider the party’s violent actions, imagery, and rhetoric only partially representative of its overarching political program. After all, although the Oakland-based organization began as a call for self-defense tactics within communities that bore the brunt of police brutality, it later expanded its scope to include domestic and international directives aimed at reducing inequalities in economics, health care, and education.⁵³

This evolution in political strategy comes through most clearly in the pages of the party’s official organ, the *Black Panther Black Community News Service* (later *Intercommunal News Service*).⁵⁴ From its first issue in 1967 to its final one in 1980, the *Black Panther* voiced the perspectives of the party’s central leadership, along with the points of view of countless nationwide party members and contributors. It provides an intimate portrayal of the Panthers, one that demonstrates their fluid and at times contradictory political stances. Thus the *Black Panther* has proven a rich resource for scholars interested in the deployment and evolution of the BPP’s political strategies. Rodger Streitmatter surveys the initial four years of the paper’s publication and outlines its contribution to dissident press history by tracing how the ever-changing political fortunes of the Panthers shaped their justifications of self-defense, as well as informed their responses to the economic oppression and police brutality they viewed as plagues upon the collective black community. Christian A. Davenport likewise offers a multi-themed study of the *Black Panther*, in which he examines every available issue from 1969-1973 to show the frequency with which the party discusses issues related to its Ten

Point Platform. In more focused studies, Cristina Mislán examines the role of international politics in the *Black Panther* from 1967-1970 and argues that, contrary to conventional scholarship, the Panthers globalized their anti-imperialist rhetoric early on in the party's existence (212); Matthew W. Hughey takes on the issue of black masculinity as represented in the paper from 1967-80 and contends that the party, far from taking a one-dimensional stance on the issue, worked within and against dominant cultural notions of black masculinity (30); and Linda Lumsden examines the other side of the gender divide and traces how the *Black Panther* moved away from sexist stereotypes after its initial two years of publication (901).

While these studies offer valuable insights into how the pages of the *Black Panther* reflect the political evolution of the BPP, they pay insignificant attention to how the party's rhetoric coincides with the political usefulness of the American panther's symbolic value. As I argue here, by associating themselves with the symbol of a black panther, the BPP drew on several preconceived notions about the animal, notions that advanced the party's political agenda. Because the American panther experienced severe persecution since the colonial period, during which "Acts to Destroy" promoted the overhunting of panthers by offering settlers a monetary reward in exchange for panther hides, Panther rhetoric and imagery evoke that lengthy legacy of persecution. Convinced that the "White mother country"⁵⁵ sought to execute genocide on its black citizens, the rhetoric and imagery of black "genocide" and "extermination" formed the basis of the party's emphatic calls for the collective black community to ensure its own survival through forceful action. This persecution-based rhetoric also allowed the party to justify

the violent means of self-defense it promoted, especially in its early years. From the party's perspective, armed resistance constituted the desperate measures needed to match the desperate times. Additionally, the black panther symbol evoked the self-defense component of the BPP's persona, as party founders Bobby Seale and Huey Newton both acknowledged that the panther's supposed use of violence as a means of last resort appealed to them. Lastly, the black panther symbol served to signal political strength, especially when the Panthers contrasted themselves with their political opponents, whom the Panthers refer to as pigs, dogs, and other lowly animals.

Unlike previous studies on the BPP and the *Black Panther* that have examined how political realities forced the party to tone down its inflammatory rhetoric over the course of its existence, this chapter shows that the party became less politically influential the further their rhetoric and actions moved away from what the American panther represented to the party in its early stages. According to party member Randy Williams, the Panthers' political viability rested largely on their ability to execute the BPP Ten Point Platform: "Political power is the ability of the people to carry out the Ten Point Program of the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party deals with bringing real political power to Black people" ("'Tis the Season" 7). The BPP platform therefore offers a useful gauge by which to trace the evolution of the Panthers' political thought. In fact, as the political realities of the Panthers fluctuated, so did the party platform published in the *Black Panther*. Among other notable changes, the platform turned its attention to international rather than solely domestic affairs. The globalization of the BPP's political agenda bears out, for instance, in the May 4, 1968, revision of the

platform, which calls for United Nations intervention in oppressed black communities, as well as in the March 29, 1972, platform, which demanded an “immediate end to all [global] wars of aggression.” The BPP platform also moved away from general charges of racism toward critiques of individual oppressors. In the BPP’s original Ten Point Platform, published on May 15, 1967, the party framed white Americans as its main antagonist. Point 3 states, “We want an end to the robbery by the White man of our Black community.” Likewise, the “What We Believe” addendum to point 4 takes aim at the “White American business men” who refuse to grant full employment opportunities to the black community. The platform’s fourth point makes a similar critique of “White landlords” who fail to provide the black community with adequate and decent housing. On July 5, 1969, a notable change to the party’s platform signaled the more wholesale changes of the platform it promoted from March 29, 1972, to the party’s formal dissolution: in the third platform point referenced above, the word “CAPITALIST” replaces the words “White man.” This new attack on capitalism, which removes race from the equation, typifies the rhetorical moves the BPP would implement as it overhauled its platform on March 29, 1972. In this final version of the platform, prejudiced and oppressive businessmen and landlords remain targets, but the race of the individual oppressor plays little, if any, role in the matter.

As the party’s political agenda evolved, so did its stance toward the extent to which it would embrace the symbolic value of the American panther. For instance, the Panthers’ use of rhetoric concerning black genocide and extermination decreases over time, as does their use of the slogan Panther Power, which evokes the noble and

powerful characteristics of the American panther. With some exceptions, the use of the rhetoric of armed resistance and self-defense decreases as well. Dehumanizing terms for the BPP's political opponents, such as "dog" and "pig," especially, remain relevant to the rhetoric of the *Black Panther* for much longer, yet the use of those terms likewise decreases over the course of the party's existence. As I argue below, this overall decrease in the rhetoric attached to the symbolic value of the American panther coincides with the party's increasing loss of political clout. The Panthers became less influential among rank-and-file, lower class party members as they toned down violent rhetoric in order to appease the political donor classes that could aid them in enacting real political change (Bloom and Martin 390-394). As a result of this political reality, the Panthers transformed from an anti-imperialist, militant group to a more pacifist, community-focused one, and, in turn, the rhetorical force associated with panther comparisons became less and less a political asset for them.

Similar to Frederick Douglass's sophisticated system of lion metaphors, which affirmed African-American social power through comparisons between enslaved peoples and the noble lion, BPP imagery and figurative language simultaneously draws on the rhetorical force of American panther comparisons and laments how American society at large devalues African-American life to an extent on par with its low appraisal of animal life. Shirley Dixon takes up the issue of devalued African-American life in the poem "Black Spirit," which appears in the October 19, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*. As Dixon writes, the collective "We" of African Americans dies, "Not as well as the lowest Animal" (5). Likewise, in response to the April 6, 1968, shooting death of the BPP's first

recruit, eighteen-year-old Robert James Hutton (aka Lil' Bobby) at the hands of the Oakland Police Department, Malcolm X's widow Betty Shabazz offers the following poignant remembrance of the slain youth: "Shot down like a *common animal* he died a warrior for black liberation." Shabazz counters this dehumanizing treatment of African Americans by making pleas for the recognition of their full humanity, as she does in her eulogy of Hutton: "The question is not will it be non-violence versus violence but whether a *human being* can practice his god given right of self-defense."⁵⁶ Not unexpectedly but somewhat paradoxically, the BPP and its affiliates countered the dehumanization tactics American society leveled against them through claims of humanity that they delivered side-by-side with their self-identification with the American panther.

More often than not, however, the BPP used big cat iconography and figurative language to reject the idea that Panthers deserved comparisons to common animals. From the position of relative power afforded to them through their identification with the fierce and powerful American panther, the BPP would dehumanize its political opponents and use the *Black Panther* as a means of rewriting history from the bottom up. In a statement that echoes Wendell Phillips's assertion that Frederick Douglass, through his 1845 *Narrative*, rewrote history from the perspective of the persecuted lion, BPP Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver contends that the dominant factions of American society had largely denied African Americans the right to document their history for themselves: "You've had history written by pigs, to edify pigs and to brutalize our [black Americans'] minds. We say that we have to close the book on

history today, close the book on everything, everything up to today” (*Post-Prison* 144). Much in the same way Douglass reversed the victim/victimizer roles in his own cultural moment, Cleaver here dehumanizes the BPP’s political opponents to set up a contrast with the lowly pig and the strong, aggressive panther with which Cleaver and his party identified. Thusly engaged in biopolitical negotiation, the BPP proves that, when accompanied by an animal scheme that favors a culture’s chosen animal representative, animal iconography and figurative language effectively promote political action and radical thought.

Origins

As Frederick Douglass did before them, BPP co-founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale recognized the usefulness of big cat comparisons to advancing their political agenda. As Bobby Seale relates, he became aware of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), a black political organization formed in Lowndes County, Alabama, under the auspices of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1966, which went by the name “Black Panther Party” and adopted a black panther logo in response to the use of white rooster logo by a white supremacist group. In a speech delivered by Stokely Carmichael, Honorary Prime Minister of the BPP and chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1966-1967, Carmichael rehearses his version of the origins of the LCFO’s use of a black panther as its emblem: “We chose for the emblem a black panther, a beautiful black animal which symbolizes the strength and dignity of black people, an animal that never strikes back until he’s backed so far into the wall, he’s got nothing to

do but spring out. Yeah. And when he springs he does not stop” (“Speech”). Bobby Seale, who came across the black panther and white rooster images in a LCFO pamphlet, found the pairing striking, saying to co-founder Huey P. Newton, “A white rooster ain’t got a chance here, ’ you know?” Impressed with the image of a powerful black panther, Newton then researched the animal’s nature and discovered that its aggression largely results from a self-defense instinct. In Seale’s words, Newton drew a parallel between the self-defense tactics of a threatened panther and the violent response needed from the black community to achieve total political liberation: “The black panther is an animal that when it is pressured it moves back until it is cornered, then it comes out fighting for life or death. We felt we had been pushed back long enough and that it was time for Negroes to come out and take over” (qtd. in Bloom and Martin 42). Both Carmichael and Newton emphasize the panther’s self-defense instinct and both would go on to cite that instinct as the justification for the more violent, aggressive facets of their political activism.

Now a formal political organization, the Oakland-based BPP founded by Newton and Seale entered a political arena with a multitude of black activist organizations that, albeit with differing philosophies and tactics, fought for the welfare of African-descended peoples, both domestically and internationally. Not only did the Panthers set themselves apart from most of their political contemporaries by promoting armed revolution, they also distinguished themselves through their choice of party emblem. The long-established NAACP employed a logo depicting two balanced scales that represent the organization’s fight for racial equality. The Congress for Racial Equality (C.O.R.E)

used a logo composed exclusively of text, and some of the more prominent black power organizations that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s used logos that featured depictions of human beings. In the case of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), its logo depicted the clasped handshake between a white hand and a black hand; Maulana Karenga's US (US Organization, Organization US, or United Slaves) used a logo that depicts an African male encased in a symbolic triangle; and the logo of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) shows the image of the organization's first president, Martin Luther King, Jr. In contrast to these organizations, most of which the Panthers denigrate at one time or another in the pages of the *Black Panther*, the BPP adopted a nonhuman as its icon of black revolution.⁵⁷ With that symbol they soon surpassed in notoriety the original Black Panther Party, from which they adopted the black panther logo, and in turn inspired other organizations to incorporate a nonhuman into their name and/or logo. Most notably, the BPP inspired mimic organizations such as the Gray Panthers, who fought for the rights of the elderly, the anti-racist white collective known as the White Panther Party, and the White Tigers, a group of New York City police officers united in their opposition to the Black Panther Party (Y. Williams 184-187). The BPP's influence demonstrates the extent to which other political organizations realized the political power generated by the image of a fierce, relentless animal.

The Hunter and the Hunted

Many of the calls to arms the Panthers voiced in print and oratory went hand in hand with their repeated claims of how the prevailing political order routinely took steps

to ensure the mass extinction of black Americans by way of “hunting” them, so to speak. Several visual images found in the *Black Panther*, for instance, depict white Americans actively hunting black Americans, Panthers among them. In the May 4th, 1968, issue, a photo titled “In White America” depicts a white family (husband, wife, and two small boys) armed with assault rifles and wearing artillery belts. The photo appears above the following caption: “WHITE CITIZENS ARE ARMING THEMSELVES all over the country and organizing their communities not for self-defense, but for the outright slaughter of innocent black citizens” (2). Whereas this photo reveals the complicity of the ordinary white family in the mass extinction of black citizens, another photo, one in which a depiction of Uncle Sam leads a “Panther Hunt” through the “Ghetto,” implicates the highest levels of the United States government in the systematic targeting of Black Panther Party leadership.⁵⁸ The latter photo speaks directly to the suspected and now confirmed tactics of disruption, some of which had deadly consequences, used by intelligence agencies such as the F.B.I. against the Panthers.⁵⁹

To complement the warnings against black genocide conveyed in the abovementioned photograph and illustration, the BPP delivered numerous written and oral statements on how the “White Mother Country” set out to exterminate black residents within its borders. These warnings ranged from accusations of targeted beatings and killings to claims of mass genocide on par with the worst cases of such atrocities in human history. In “Roundtable Interview with Earl Anthony,” BPP Communications Secretary Kathleen Cleaver uses hunting metaphors to lament how African-descended people, who once reigned as “kings” and “had kingdoms,” found

themselves hunted like animals. In another moment in “Roundtable,” party leaders insist that the highest levels of the U.S. government are preparing to “perpetrate the final and the ultimate form of genocide upon black people.” Furthermore, responding to the February 29, 1968, release of the “Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders” (aka the Kerner Report), the BPP express their deep skepticism toward the report’s findings, classifying it as yet another tool of black genocide. According to the Panthers, the report, which lay blame for the rash of urban rioting from 1965-1967 on white racist attitudes, fell short of offering substantial changes to the institutions responsible for perpetuating such attitudes: “Black People, Beware of this document! We cannot believe that this inhuman, unbelievably savage government has finally seen the light and is going to change. No! These racist Pigs are setting the stage for the total extermination of black people” (“Dig on This” 20). The use of similar rhetoric appears in articles from the *Black Panther* on domestic and international issues, as the party sought United Nations intervention against the “war of genocide” against black Americans and warned about the black genocide enacted by unchecked police brutality.⁶⁰ Even when the Panthers’ concerns turn to the quality of education received by African Americans, they use hunting metaphors to associate their plight with the persecution of the American panther. In “10 Point Platform and Program of the Afro-Asian-Latin-Student-Alliance,” students demand to receive an education that helps them “survive” in a world where educational practices are designed for their “absolute destruction.”

Beyond using hunting metaphors to communicate their concerns over the oppression of the collective black community, BPP members from all party ranks make

more forceful accusations against American society by comparing the suffering of black Americans to those persecuted during the Jewish Holocaust.⁶¹ Huey Newton, for instance, lists “concentration camps” among the tools of oppression America’s “racist dog power structure” plans to use against black Americans (“Police Slaughter Black People” 10). Following the October 28, 1967, shootout between Newton and Oakland P.D. officers that left officer John Frey dead, officer Herbert Heanes wounded, and Newton injured then incarcerated, BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard called for black Americans to fight for Huey’s release in order to, specifically, keep the BPP leader out of the gas chamber and, generally, to resist an impending black genocide. Further evoking the Jewish Holocaust, Hilliard writes, “The furnaces are here, it is only necessary to see the glow” (3). Hilliard’s words echo earlier statements by the *Black Panther* contributor John H. Wilson, who writes, “when I look at the soul of the white man, there is reflected a horror greater than that practiced on the Jews by the Germans — it is coming!” (1). Hilliard’s allusions to the Jewish Holocaust also prefigure the words of an uncredited author in the April 6, 1969, issue of the *Black Panther* who uses a comparison between housing projects in America to Nazi concentration camps, as well as a comparison of government programs and public institutions in America to S.S.-run programs in Nazi Germany (“The Anatomy of Extermination” 18), to urge black Americans toward their last resort in the face of extreme persecution: armed revolt.

These claims of black genocide provided the BPP with the justification needed to defend the violent brand of self-defense the party saw as a viable and even necessary component of its political strategy. In the inaugural issue of the *Black Panther*, which

the Panthers published in response to the death of twenty-two-year-old Denzil Dowell at the hands of an officer of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department, the BPP advocates for the forming of "self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist police oppression and brutality" ("Let Us Organize to Defend Ourselves" 2, original emphasis). Over the next few issues of the *Black Panther*, the emphasis on self-defense would remain, but the BPP would adapt its calls for armed self-defense to match its rhetoric of black genocide. In the aptly titled running editorial "In Defense of Self Defense," Huey Newton set out to provide the rationale for taking up arms in defense of black communities. As he writes in the July 20th, 1967, issue of the *Black Panther*, the "black masses are handling the resistance incorrectly," for they refuse to take up the gun to resist the American power structures that are plotting to "totally annihilate the black community" (3). The party's most forceful calls for armed resistance therefore came in response to their frequent, violent, and deadly encounters with law enforcement officers across the country. Armed resistance, they argued, was the only means of survival in the face of this form of persecution. Thus three of the major tenets of the early BPP—its claims of persecution, its calls for self-defense, and its advocacy of armed political resistance—relate directly to the history and characteristics of the American panther. By extension, the symbolic value of the black panther logo in this period proved invaluable to the Panthers who saw parallels between the themselves and the mighty animal.

Panther Power

Along with identifying with the persecution of the American panther, even after

the party dropped “Self Defense” from its name prior to the publication of the March 16, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*, the BPP employed a detailed and consistent animal scheme that positions those who work toward BPP goals as superior to those, regardless of race, who work against them. Drawing on the rhetorical force generated by the fierce pose of the black panther image used as the BPP’s icon of black revolution, party members, both men and women, identified themselves with the strong, aggressive panther. The slogan “Panther Power,” which the BPP used frequently throughout the first three years of publication of the *Black Panther*, best represents this practice. As explained by Newton, “Panther Power” refers to the collective execution of the BPP’s Ten Point Platform: “Black Power is really people’s power. The Black Panther Program, Panther Power as we call it, will implement this people’s power” (“Huey Newton Talks to the Movement”). According to one contributor of the *Black Panther*, the slogan “Panther Power” also comes with connotations of aggression and violence. The writer recounts a standoff between the Oakland highway patrol and Eldridge Cleaver, the first editor of the *Black Panther* and the BPP’s Minister of Information. According to the writer’s account of the incident, one of the patrolmen who pulled over Cleaver’s car but came up empty in a subsequent search of the vehicle issued the following warning to Cleaver: “If we ever catch you with a gun, you better use it!” In response, “Brother Eldridge gave a low PANTHER laugh. Suddenly the evidence was plain on their faces and in their eyes, that if Brother Eldridge had even moved so much as a muscle the pigs would have fainted of fear. Eldridge Cleaver’s message was clear—PANTHER POWER” (“Latest News Flash” 10). Thus aggression became central to exercising

“Panther Power” in service of the BPP agenda.

To wield “Panther Power” one must claim membership in the BPP, so party members by and large describe the transformation from common activist to Panther as one that involves completing a political education regimen. This process of political transformation appears in two early poems in the *Black Panther*. In “Dig It Baby,” contributor Chico Grant writes, “So wakeup Black People / Stop playing the fool, / Whitey is out to get you / And he don’t play by the rules.” According to the poem’s speaker, once the black community collectively achieves this level of political consciousness, then it will become “one hell of a Big BLACK CAT. (BLACK PANTHER)” (“Dig It Baby” 9). A similar trajectory from ordinary citizen to powerful political Panther appears in “Ode to Bobby Hutton,” a poem that memorializes Hutton. The poem, which opens with the line “Bobby Hutton was a man,” chronicles how Hutton struggled to cope with America’s racist tendencies until he found political mentors in Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver. Under that mentorship, Hutton regained his “desire to be free” and “became a Panther” (F. Jones 17), both in the sense that he joined the party and in the sense that he developed political consciousness. Some Panthers, however, argued that political education, while integral to the process of becoming a Panther, was insufficient without accepting the role of violence in political revolution. Panther Kituba X, for instance, castigates a male acquaintance for his reluctance to use the gun as a tool of liberation:

Melvin . . . Why don't you get out of that culture revolutionary ass bag, and pick up your mother fucking GUN!!! All you brothers do is talk, talk, talk . . . Be a

true Black revolutionary and pick up your gun, don't be scared, and stop all that jive intellectual bullshit . . . I am a Black woman who has already picked up the gun, NOW BROTHER MELVIN, I'M WAITING FOR YOU.

(“A Sister Pulls” 3)

Signed “A Concerned Pantherette,” the letter shows that, regardless of gender, BPP members saw an aggressive, militant stance against oppression as a condition for achieving true Panther status.

Notable exceptions to the notion that one earns Panther status by way of political education include the idea that Panthers, i.e., BPP members, can bear children born with Panther status. This exception appears in “A Message to the Ghetto,” by Kitambaa Cha Chuma, the Area Captain for the BPP’s Long Beach, California, chapter:

You, like myself, was born a Panther, though it took all of my 26 years on the planet to realize it. Now that I know the nature of self, I shall live the life of a Panther, fight the fight of a Panther, and die the death of a Panther! . . . The fight of a Panther is to preserve and free the masses. The death of a Panther is to die for the masses and the birth of Panther is to be born Black!” (2)

Since the Oakland-based BPP chapter places a strong emphasis on political education as the main method of becoming a Panther, it most likely would disagree with Chuma on the point of achieving Panther status from birth, but it would, as evidenced by Eldridge Cleaver’s assertion that potential BPP members are “young black cats” who will grow into strong, adult panthers (“Huey’s Standard”), agree that each black American possesses the potential, with the assistance of the BPP’s political education program, to

become a Panther.

In contrast, the BPP uses the term “paper” panthers/tigers to denigrate those who oppose bona fide Panthers. In 1946 Mao Tse-Tung, Chairman of the Communist Party in China and revolutionary hero to the BPP, labeled opponents to social liberation and reform, on account of their flimsy and easily destroyed nature, “paper tigers.”⁶² Taking inspiration from Mao, the term “paper tiger,” and its modified synonym “paper panther,” would enter the BPP lexicon. The BPP uses the phrase “paper tigers,” for instance, in a September 28, 1968, the *Black Panther* article to launch a call to action against “paper tigers,” i.e., “ministers, politicians, [and] Toms” that have “sold out the Black worker” (Freed 3). The BPP even uses Mao Tse-Tung’s “paper tigers” quotation verbatim to introduce an early 1969 article in the *Black Panther* that announces the expulsion of BPP members accused of acting as “RENEGADES, COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARIES, AND TRAITORS [sic]” (“Vallejo Chapter Expels Reactionaries” 16). Since the BPP’s process of political indoctrination required readings from Mao Tse-Tung, it stands to reason that the term “paper panthers,” coined by BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard (Bloom and Martin 94), serves a similar purpose as the term “paper tiger.” Evidence of this appears in a 1967 illustration by BPP Minister of Culture Emory Douglass titled “Paper Panthers,” which depicts a paper panther (made of a newspaper) torn apart by flying bullets. The tagline reads, “TO ALL PANTHERS WHO DON’T BELIEVE IN ARMED SELF DEFENSE.”⁶³ This implies that “fake” Panthers, those that believe in liberation rhetoric but do not condone armed resistance, will face destruction at the hands of the violence they are not prepared to counter. The BPP launches a similar

rhetorical attack against “fake” panthers in the September 14, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*. The article “Warning to So-Called ‘Paper Panthers’” condemns “Black brothers” who are “vamping” on “hippies” instead of fighting actual counterrevolutionaries (11). Read in light of Emory Douglass’s “Paper Panthers” illustration, this warning to “paper panthers” demonstrates that the BPP set out to create a distinction between “real” Panthers, i.e., those who are willing to participate in armed revolt, and the “fake,” or paper, Panthers who fail to embrace armed resistance.

The Political Menagerie

To maintain the powerful and threatening political persona the BPP generated through its association with the American panther, the party dehumanized their political opponents through comparisons to pigs, dogs, and other lowly animals. The party applied this tactic to the general “power structure” it opposed, as well as to more specific political opponents. On more than one occasion the BPP compares the “white racist power structure” to a monstrous octopus whose tentacles represent the network of politicians conspiring to oppress black Americans. Eldridge Cleaver makes this point when discussing Huey Newton’s spirit of revolution: “for four hundred years black people have been wanting to do exactly what Huey Newton did, that is, to stand up in front of the most deadly tentacle of the white racist power structure, and to defy that deadly tentacle, and to tell that tentacle that he will not accept the aggression and the brutality” (*Post-Prison* 41). Cleaver adds more specificity to this analogy elsewhere, claiming that San Francisco mayor Joseph Alioto is “plugged into one gigantic system, one octopus spanning the continent from one end to the other, reaching its tentacles all

around the world, in everybody's pocket and around everybody's neck." As Cleaver claims, Lyndon Baines Johnson, a favorite target of the BPP, stands at the head of this "beast" (*Post-Prison* 129). The BPP likewise denigrated their African American political opponents with animal comparisons. For instance, in a play on the centuries-old practice of comparing African Americans to apes (orangutans, in this case), the BPP label members of Maulana Karenga's US organization, "The Karengatangs" ("Fascist Pigs Murder" 11). The BPP launched a similar attack against black leaders "endorsed" by the power structure when they equated their rhetoric to the mindless mimicry of parrots.⁶⁴

With much more frequency, however, the BPP uses the term "dog" to dehumanize their political opponents. As with the BPP's use of other dehumanizing terms, their use of the term "dog" applies to general and more specific targets of their ire and frustration. In a general sense, the "white racist power structure" described above becomes the "white racist *dog* power structure" (Anthony 2, emphasis added). In a more specific sense, the BPP criticize the "white dogs" of Merritt College who refused to hire a qualified black candidate to the position of Dean of Student personnel in 1967 ("Merritt College Refuses" 2). In yet another example of how the party used dehumanization tactics indiscriminately, they label Lester McKinney, the head of the Washington, D.C., SNCC office, a "reactionary dog" for his opposition to Stokely Carmichael. The vitriol aimed at McKinney elevates with the following threat: "Brother Lester has ordered the shooting of Black men and for this his nuts will be cut out. Whenever a Black man denies his ancestral past and resorts to western pigs, or their lacking [sic] for protection then that brother needs to be 'offed.' His nuts need to be

removed” (“Stokely Puts Down” 10). This implies that Lester, a “dog,” requires neutering, which will end his ability to reproduce and give life to more “dogs.” The BPP also used the term “dog” frequently to disparage law enforcement agencies and officers. This specific criticism appears in the wake of the mass arrest of BPP members following the Panthers’ May 2, 1967, march on the Sacramento State Capitol building. One of the party members arrested for his part in the march, for instance, labels an officer a “racist dog” and a “beast” (“Statement on Black Unity” 4). In a later article, in which the BPP cite the death toll from the black community as a result of police brutality, the party refers to cops as “nothing but . . . human dog[s]” (“Editorial” 4). Much like how Bobby Seale recognized the political value in pitting a black panther logo against a white rooster logo, the BPP adopted the persona of the powerful American panther and assigned their political opponents the persona of the more feeble dog.

By far the BPP used the term “pig” most frequently to dehumanize their political opponents. The most notable definition of the term “pig” appeared often in the earliest issues of the *Black Panther*. In a brief section titled “What is a Pig?,” the BPP define a pig as, “A low natured beast that has no regard for law, justice, or the rights of the people; a creature that bites the hand that feeds it; a foul depraved traducer, usually found masquerading as the victim of an unprovoked attack” (14). BPP co-founder Bobby Seale offers a similar definition in a February 1970 interview in *The Guardian*: “When we use the term ‘pig’ for example, we are referring to people who systematically violate peoples’ constitutional rights—whether they be monopoly capitalists or police” (Foner 82). Accordingly, since opposition to the rights of black Americans fuels the derogatory

term “pig,” the term applies to a multitude of BPP opponents. During the student strikes of 1968-1969 at San Francisco State University, the BPP lambasted university president S.I. Hiakawa by labeling him a “pig lacky” [sic] (“Third World Ousts Pigs” 15). The party also used a similar tactic to criticize a number of politicians and government officials. In an October 26, 1976, article in the *Black Panther*, members of the Sacramento BPP even goes as far as to take on the 1968 United States presidential candidates, regardless of political affiliation. They label 1968 the “year of the pig” and associate Republican candidate Richard Nixon, Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey, and American Independent Party candidate George Wallace with members of the swine family. The BPP label Hubert, mockingly called the “lesser of three evils,” “THE PIG,” Nixon, a “well known racist in his own right,” “THE HOG,” and “Nazi” Wallace, “THE BOAR.” According to the BPP, all three candidates “have the audacity to snort and oink about ‘law and order,’” (“The Pig, The Hog, and the Boar” 6), yet they routinely violate the rights of the BPP.

The BPP, however, applied the term “pig” most often to police forces across America. Simplifying the matter a bit, *Newsweek* magazine offered the following observation about the BPP: “They put the word ‘pig’—meaning policeman—into the radical vocabulary” (“Guns and Butter” 40). Despite its limited analysis, the *Newsweek* article does point toward the most prevalent use of the term “pig.” *Black Panther* contributor Zeke Boyd offers the following view on what makes a police officer a pig: “This pig (a policeman is a pig when he fails to treat other human beings with respect) places value on VIOLENCE against other human beings” (10). Illustrations in the *Black*

Panther also create associations between pigs and law enforcement officers. In the paper's second issue, an image of a pig appears alongside the tagline "Support Your Local Police." This Emory Douglas illustration precedes many similar illustrations, such as one that depicts a pig lamenting the association of his species with police officers, that portray law enforcement officials as on par with or lesser than the lowly pig.⁶⁵ The association would go on to become a powerful symbol for challenging what the BPP saw as a brutal and unjust police power in the United States and would even spark international activism, as evidence by the act by a "group of radicals" who protested U.S. police violence in front of the American Embassy in London in 1968: they presented the Embassy a severed pig's head on a tray. Acknowledging that the Embassy would not accept the offer, the BPP writes, "Perhaps they did not recognize him [the pig cop] without his nightstick and gun" ("Pigs Refuse to Accept" 3). As was the case with their use of the term "dog," the BPP used the term "pig" to project strength and gain political clout.

Whereas leadership in the Oakland-based BPP largely advocated for a race-neutral use of the term "pig," some Panthers used the term to denote the white race specifically. The opening lines to the poem "Revolutionary Tribute," which appeared in the December 7, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*, state, "Pig we studied your beat / We know your name (Anglo Saxon)" (12). The BPP did, however, apply the term "pig" across racial lines. In a reprinted Third World Press article, black members of the San Francisco police force, known as the "Officers of Justice," are criticized for launching a disingenuous campaign for racial equality within their own department. The article

shows the skepticism of the black community, which sees the organizing of the black San Francisco police officers, who are ostensibly fighting against institutional racism in the workplace, as a selfish ploy to secure higher salaries and more promotions. To highlight the critique of such police officers, the article labels them “black pig members of the racist San Francisco pig force,” and the “black S.F. Pigs” (“Black S.F. Pigs Fake Unity” 6). The BPP also apply the term “pig” to members of the black community who advance the oppression of black Americans on several sociopolitical fronts.⁶⁶ The BPP, for instance, critique a health care system that the party view as neglectful at best and overtly hostile at worst to the black community. The party warned its readers to remain vigilant against a health care system that encourages the reduction of the black population (via birth control) and does little to treat the cases of tetanus that resulted from drug abuse among African Americans.⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, the BPP labeled those who perpetrate these acts “pigs.” The same goes for those with the power to control the housing markets and the criminal justice system, two institutions that the BPP likewise charge with attempted genocide.⁶⁸ The BPP therefore stressed the importance of survival and self-defense against “pigs,” regardless of race, that perpetrated these specific crimes and opposed their political agenda in general.

The actions of BPP allies and enemies alike reveal the influence of the party’s use of dehumanization tactics. Toward the close of the 1968 TWL Hemispheric Conference to Defeat American Imperialism, Vietnamese diplomat M. Hoang Minh Giam turned to BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard in a moment of solidarity and said, “You are Black Panthers, We are Yellow Panthers!” (qtd. in Bloom and Martin 310). As

it concerns BPP enemies, they too engaged with dehumanization tactics in an attempt to counter BPP practice and ideology. The so-called “White Tigers,” a faction of New York City police officers known as the Law Enforcement Group, or LEG, engaged in this process. The group, whose name plays not only on the white/black racial divide but also on the rhetorical force of comparing themselves to a fierce big cat, became notorious for its involvement in an assault on Panthers and white sympathizers in the Brooklyn Criminal Courthouse on September 4, 1968. The assailants, who allegedly wore buttons declaring their support for segregationist presidential candidate George Wallace, shouted “White Power,” “We’re the white tigers,” “White tigers eat Black Panthers,” and “Win with Wallace.”⁶⁹ In a case in which a BPP enemy dehumanized herself or himself, a “Mrs. Pig” telephoned Kathleen Cleaver more than once to issue a threat against the BPP Communications Secretary. Mrs. Pig offered the following specific threat: “If the blood begins to flow in Richmond, the second pint of blood is going to be yours and that I pledge you as a personal promise!” Likely the same person called once more to announce that she had placed a \$5,000 bounty on Cleaver’s heart (“Blood and Money” 14). As demonstrated by Mrs. Pig’s threats, the raced-based balance of power favors the presumably white Mrs. Pig to the point where she is willing to dehumanize herself, threaten violence against others, and expect impunity.

End of an Era

The BPP’s use of the rhetoric of genocide, self-defense, and survival, along with its use of dehumanization tactics, reached its pinnacle in 1970, the year in which American panther figurative language and iconography appeared in the pages of the

Black Panther with the most frequency. Beyond 1970, however, the symbolic value of American panther would become less and less a political asset for the BPP. Not long after the *Black Panther* changed its tagline from “Black Community News Service” to “Intercommunal News Service” in early 1971, the use of the term “genocide” within its pages dropped off sharply (some notable exceptions include articles on the dangers of sickle cell anemia and the inadequate health care at Vacaville Prison in Vacaville, CA).⁷⁰ Moreover, by the time the BPP published the March 16, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*, the party had dropped the moniker “self-defense” from its official title. Huey Newton explains the change thusly:

We ran into the problem of people misinterpreting us as a political party. They use the words for self defense to define us as a group that is para military [sic], or body guards, or something of this nature. But we found that it was very difficult, even though in our program we described or defined ourselves as a political party, people seemed to misinterpret the definition of what self defense was all about . . . But, to make it clear to every one we changed the name to the Black Panther Party, to make it clear what our political stand was about.⁷¹

Naturally, this caused a drop off in the number of times the term “self defense” appeared in the pages of the *Black Panther*; however, the issue of self-defense would resurface in the traditional sense of the party’s use of it, as well as in the case of Inez Garcia, who killed her rapist in self-defense.⁷² A similar drop off occurred with the term “dog,” which appeared with much less frequency past early 1971. The use of the term “pig,” on the other hand, appeared with much more frequency past 1971 than the term “dog,” but

use of the former term did drop off shortly after the BPP overhauled its Ten Point Platform on March 29, 1972. By the time the BPP published its final issue in September of 1980, it could gain little to no political currency from symbolic associations with the American panther. The BPP had abandoned the rhetoric of genocide and extermination; the slogan “Panther Power” was a distant memory; and the BPP make no mention of oppressive “dogs” and “pigs.”⁷³ Nonetheless, in its heyday, the BPP engaged themselves in biopolitical negotiation through the use of big cat iconography and figurative language. By identifying with the American panther, the BPP extended the American big cat literary tradition and built for themselves an enduring political legacy.

Big Cats and Biopolitics

This study has explored how a culture’s relationship to nonhumans, as represented in its literature and oral traditions, informs its subject formation processes and social structuring practices. Tracing the presence and function of big cats (panthers, especially) in multicultural American literature, this study reveals how that particular species group functions as a point of entry for disparate American cultures into Foucauldian biopolitical negotiation, that is, acts of forming one’s own or forcing on others socially-constructed subjectivities in the name of social hierarchization. In American-Indian big cat narratives, the kinship model of human/nonhuman interaction leads tribal members to look to humanized panther figures mostly as deities and models for tribal law and customs. This somewhat insular practice contrasts with the masculinist tradition of Anglo-American panther narratives, in which panther-like men dominate panthers, women, and animalized nonwhite peoples. Directly opposed to this tradition, a

number of female characters in Anglo-American texts welcome the associations with big cats that endow them with social power. Likewise finding themselves excluded from the prevailing American political order, dehumanized African-Americans, on the one hand, call attention to enslaved people's core humanity and, on the other hand, use the rhetorical force of big cat comparisons to affirm their social power. Lastly, as this chapter has shown, by choosing the American panther as its icon of black revolution and staking claim to the animal's established cultural personal, the Black Panther Party, especially in its early period, asserted social power over their dehumanized political opponents.

Born out of a recognizable tradition of nineteenth-century Anglo-American animal narratives that assert white male dominance, both over big cats and over dehumanized women and ethnic minorities, this study argues that big cat narratives enable social warfare on the level of ideology. Although the early nineteenth-century frontier narratives that establish white masculinity as the subject position par excellence provide a useful starting point for tracing the cultural work of big cat narratives, they offer a mere fraction of nineteenth-century big cat scenes. They also provide limited insights into the biopolitical techniques of women and nonwhites, especially those animalized by the prevailing political order. This study therefore establishes and broadens scholarship on big cat narratives by performing a comparative reading between the Anglo-American big cat tradition and the oral and written traditions of American Indians and African Americans, two cultural groups who produced their own rich big cat traditions. By comparing big cat narratives from different U.S. cultures, my study, which

departs from the trend of applying biopolitical theory to population control in the strictly genetic sense, shows that authors can manipulate the human/nonhuman border via narrative into a potent biopolitical tool. Exploring texts that bear this out furthers our understanding of how American cultures position themselves relative to nonhumans, how those relationships inform subject formation processes, and how those processes contribute to the overall framework of nineteenth-century American society.

Notes

¹ Milanich and Charles Hudson note how Garcilaso's text, which relies heavily on secondhand information and contains numerous errors in sequence and details of events, does not meet the criteria of an accurate historical record (6-7); for a more detailed discussion of the text's second-hand nature, see Lankford, "Legends" 175-190.

² In using "animal(s)" and "nonhuman(s)" in place of the more accurate "nonhuman animal(s)," I follow the work of Jennifer Mason, who considers the frequent use of "nonhuman animal" stylistically awkward and distracting for the reader (175).

³ Mason focuses her attention on the work of Susan Warner, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Charles Chesnutt, and Boggs's study examines the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, and Frederick Douglass. In response to Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan's arguments in favor of critics moving away from analyses of wild animals, as those animals hold masculine privilege over feminized domestic animals ("Introduction" 6), I follow Adam's own assertion that male animals hunted by men are symbolically female (*The Pornography of Meat* 84). Masculine scenes of wild-animal hunting therefore continue to open up avenues of inquiry related to gendered power dynamics.

⁴ For another example of Spaniards feeding Indigenous guides to the former's dogs, see Garcilaso 515.

⁵ The Spanish also reserve the status of *humanized animal* for their own dogs, for Garcilaso describes how they are willing to eat native dogs but not their own (259; 339).

⁶ The scientific name for the American panther, alternately known according to region as a “mountain lion,” a “puma,” a “cougar,” and a “catamount.” See Parker 20.

⁷ The term “Cacique” refers in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean to a native chief. Sivils identifies the tribe as the Uzachile (Yustaga) Timucua (“Indian Captivity” 86).

⁸ With his use of the term “lion,” Garcilaso follows the lead of the aforementioned early explorers of the Americas who, showing their European biases, used the term “lion” when speaking of *Felis Concolor*.

⁹ In “‘The Base, Cursed Thing’: Panther Attacks and Ecotones in Antebellum American Fiction,” Sivils examines the panther scenes in Brown, Cooper, and Spofford through the lens of ecocriticism and argues that in each scene the panther represents a “growing American anxiety about the human relationship with, and impact upon, the natural environment” (20).

¹⁰ See Christophersen 143-144, Newman 68, and Grabo 66 for readings of Edgar’s act as a regression into savagery. For a reading that emphasizes the temporary nature of that savagery, see Gardner 444.

¹¹ See note 3 above.

¹² Hallowell researched the Ojibwa tribe and concluded that their worldview included “beings of an additional class to the one they use for themselves (*anishinabek*, connoting Indians or ‘human beings’).” He goes on to say, “The category includes animate beings to whom the Ojibwa attribute essentially the same characteristics as themselves and whom I shall call ‘other than human’ persons” (63-64).

¹³ Daniel earned the name “Black Panther” when born to parents forced into slavery by a tribe of Delaware Indians led by Chief Leopard (Wraxall 40). Following the death of his parents, Daniel managed to escape the tribe and find employment on a transport vessel, where he would meet the Taylors. Impressed with how the Taylors “treated [him] as a man, as [their] equal” (Wraxall 65), Daniel leaves his employment to serve the Taylor family.

¹⁴ Although Brown is in the minority among Pennsylvanians by calling the panther a cougar, he demonstrates his familiarity with the various names used to describe the same animal, at different times using panther, cougar, catamount, and tiger. For a list of the panther’s alternate names, see Shoemaker, *Extinct* 16-17.

¹⁵ For a discussion of Brown’s familiarity with Buffon, see Hinds 328. In the seventh volume of his highly influential *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-1788), Buffon sought to clarify for his readers the difference between the various American animals that previous taxonomists had erroneously identified as tigers. He describes the “panther,” which he notes is common in Asia and Africa, and identifies the Jaguara of South America, the Cougar, the Jaguarate, and the Cat-pard, or mountain cat, all different species that resemble the panther. See Buffon, 2; 7-9.

¹⁶ Christophersen argues that “Edgar becomes identified with this brute self when he kills the panther and ingests its blood and fibers” (144); Newman argues that “[Edgar’s] subsequent feasting on the panther’s raw flesh emphasizes his elemental condition” (68); Grabo argues that “In outsavaging the panther, Edgar has become the panther, a mechanism for mayhem and a threat to society (66); and Robert S. Levine

argues that Edgar's act of ingesting the panther raw emphasizes the "extent to which Edgar has gone 'savage'" (*Dislocating* 50).

¹⁷ Critics have also noted how the American Indians' supposed lack of intelligible language marks them as an inferior race. See Grabo 69.

¹⁸ For a discussion about the misrepresentation of the Pennsylvania panther, see Shoemaker, *Extinct* 11.

¹⁹ See Converse 36-39 for Iroquoian origin stories about the panther being christened the "West Wind" and page 51 for a story about a panther-like figure who acts as "one of the emissaries Death sends to the earth to gather souls."

²⁰ The Great Serpent possesses the ability to cause illness in humans. See Lankford, "Great Serpent" 119.

²¹ For alternate versions of the same scene, see Hawks 14-15 and Tripplett 69. For mentions of how this panther encounter begins Boone's career as a famed hunter, see W. Cody 22 and Johnston 40.

²² See Krause for a more detailed analysis of Edgar's ambivalence toward the Delaware tribe.

²³ Addis also published her only full-length book, *A Memorial and Biographical History of the Counties of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura, California*, in 1891.

²⁴ For biographical information on Addis, which is relatively scarce, see Mighels, 205-206, 224-226; *An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, California* 366-367; Palmquist and Kailbourn 68-69, 547; and Ecker. Also see note 24 below.

²⁵ Anti-patriarchal themes resonated with Addis with good reason. A failed engagement to ex-California Governor John G. Downey, as well as a purported affair with Theodore Gestefeld, the editor of Mexico City's English-language newspaper *The Two Republics*, embroiled her in public scandal. She also endured a failed marriage to renowned California lawyer Charles A. Storke, whom she separated from, and later divorced, on the grounds of his alleged general abusiveness and "sexual perversion." Addis subsequently faced a litany of legal troubles, the most serious of which was a charge of attempted murder. The plea of insanity entered by Addis's legal counsel in that case, which echoed Charles Storke's own allegations of her impaired mental state, led to her being committed for life to an insane asylum, from which she is said to have escaped and disappeared. See "A Tragic Romance;" Starr 289-290; "Yda Addis-Storke;" Rasmussen; and Baym 302.

²⁶ Addis, "A Human Tigress." Hereafter cited in the text as H.

²⁷ See Sloan 60.

²⁸ "Jaguar" translates to "*el tigre*" in Central and South America.

²⁹ See Almaguer and Addis's "Mexican Fauna."

³⁰ See Brown and López 129-130; Addis, "Mexican Fauna"; and Addis, "An American Husband." The term *renegron* also appears in H. L. Williams's "The Strong Man of the 'Little Orrin': The Menagerie-Man's Story," in which an American human smuggling ring fronting as a traveling circus attracts patrons in Mexico by displaying a "renegron" that is in fact a normal jaguar dyed black.

³¹ See LaGreca 29.

³² See Anzaldúa 49-53.

³³ See Bendixen, "Introduction" xxvi-xxix and Gaul 40.

³⁴ See Wheeler *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road; or, The Black Rider of the Black Hills* and *Deadwood Dick, A Road Agent!* 12.

³⁵ See page 4 of Addis's "A Woman's Wile." Even when departing from stereotypical depictions of Mexican women as ignorant and libidinous, Addis qualifies the extraordinary deeds of her strong female characters by making them what I call "exceptional women," that is, women she describes as able to succeed in their designs in spite of, not because of, their race and class.

³⁶ See "Naughty Tommy."

³⁷ See Addis "Chrysanthemums," "Local Melange," "Mexican Lusted Pottery," "Yda Addis' Letter," and "The Vengeance of Paloma."

³⁸ Hildreth expanded *The Slave: or Memoirs of Archy Moore* in 1852 and retitled it *The White Slave; or, Memoirs of a Fugitive*. In an added passage, Archy meditates on the condition of the slave in a manner that in turn echoes Douglass quite obviously: "It [the word slave] speaks of man deprived of all that makes him amiable or makes him noble; stripped of his soul, and sunk into a beast" (158).

³⁹ In Stowe's novel the dehumanization of slaves is shown to be a routine practice as well as a topic of debate. The vicious slaveholder Simon Legree often hurls the epithet "beast" at his slaves, whether calling Lucy a "lazy beast" for her lack of productivity, or calling Tom a "black beast" for his insolence (364-365). In a general sense, Legree's tactics make their way into the debate between Augustine St. Clare and

his brother Alfred. As Augustine warns his brother, who wholeheartedly believes in his constitutional right to own and oppress African Americans, “educated they [the slaves] will be, and we have only to say how. Our system is educating them in barbarism and brutality. We are breaking all humanizing ties, and making them brute beasts; and, if they get the upper hand, such we shall find them” (276).

⁴⁰ Jacobs compares her owner Dr. Flint to an animal closely watching its prey (63), and Truth questions the humanity of the slaveholding Hasbrouck when she refers to him as a “brute of a man” (61).

⁴¹ The Texas “Black Codes,” which extended antebellum restrictions on African-American rights into the Reconstruction era, dictated that African-Americans were not allowed to carry firearms on any enclosed premises or plantation without the owner’s consent. See Crouch 28-29. Williams’s panther narrative is therefore more suspect than that of Mills. Considering Mills’s duties as cattle herder, he may have been allowed to carry a firearm for personal protection on the Texas plains. On the other hand, Williams’s grandfather, whose panther encounter presumably occurred in the antebellum period, would have had less reason to lawfully carry a firearm.

⁴² See Holland 154 and McFeely 136; 235-236. Douglass also used the term for others. See Douglass, “Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison” 35.

⁴³ As Hairston observes, Rogers’s reference to the “Numidian Lion” carries with it allusions to both heroism of the classical age and the Bible’s messianic tradition. As he explains, Numidia was synonymous with personal and military conquest, as evidenced in the victory in that area of Jugurtha over the Romans, as well as in the winning of

Cleopatra Selene's hand by King Juba II in the same region (Hairston 104-105).

Hairston also observes that "the lion had an obscure religious significance to the story of the Messiah" (105), which most likely refers to Jesus's status as the "lion" of the Judah tribe. Moreover, Hairston notes how the association of Douglass with the "Numidian Lion" has several undertones of masculinity (102). The same, I argue, can be said of Douglass's own lion metaphors, which favor (as in the Bible) the masculine subject position. One notable exception is Douglass's "Woman and the Ballot" (1870), in which he likens granting women the right to vote to unchaining a chained lion (97).

⁴⁴ Phillips writes, "YOU remember the old fable of 'The Man and the Lion,' where the lion complained that he should not be so misrepresented 'when the lions wrote history.' I am glad the time has come when the lions write history'" (Douglass, *Narrative* 11). Phillips's statement inspired the title of the 1994 PBS Douglass documentary *When the Lion Wrote History*.

⁴⁵ For other readings of Douglass's engagement with the Bible, see Zeitz and Rudoff.

⁴⁶ Since slaveholders had long used Bible passages to justify the institution of slavery, Douglass at times offers robust challenges to Christian orthodoxy. He counters, for instance, the common proslavery argument that the "Curse of Ham" granted biblical authority to the enslavement of African Americans by reminding his audience that miscegenation resulting from sexual relations between masters and their slaves produced slaves with white ancestry. By the Bible's own logic, those slaves would not be subject

to the “Curse of Ham,” and their social condition should not, therefore, be considered divinely sanctioned. See Carson 20-21.

⁴⁷ Douglass would return to this verse in his 1890 address “The Negro Problem,” in which he states “A lie ceases to be very dangerous when it parts with its ability to deceive. The devil is less dangerous as a roaring lion than when transformed as an angel of light” (438).

⁴⁸ Douglass would again equate oppressive slaveholders with tigers later in his life with his speech “Haiti and the Haitian People” (1893), in which he disparages the professedly religious slave masters in Haiti who “With religion on their lips, the tiger in their hearts and the slave whip in their hands . . . lashed these innocent natives to toil, death and extinction” (522).

⁴⁹ Matthew 5:38-40 reads “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also.”

⁵⁰ This same line of thinking applies to Douglass’s “Speech of Frederick Douglass on the War” (1862), another wartime speech that makes use of a lion metaphor. As Douglass argues, slave culture has contaminated the American spirit, which now possesses the “cunning of the serpent, without any of the harmlessness of the dove, or the boldness of the lion” (“Speech” 94). In both the speeches, whether implied or explicitly stated, Douglass argues that America can only achieve peace (symbolized by the dove of Genesis 8) through the bold actions of a lion-like vengeful God.

⁵¹ Douglass claim directly opposes James McCune Smith's belief that black pride is the "lion" the forges "the pathway of . . . progress." See Stauffer 182.

⁵² In *Blake: or, the Huts of America* (1859, 1862), Douglass's contemporary Martin Delany highlights the ingenuity of runaway slaves who imitate a panther's screech to ward off those in pursuit of them (79). Moreover, in *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color* (1879), Delany cites the lion-like sphinx as proof of the high intellectual capacity of early Egyptians, here read as Africans (69-70). Most relevant to this discussion, Delany, on his so-called "Western Tour for the *North Star*," during which he toured free states to generate subscriptions for the *North Star*, employed the biblical story of Daniel and the lions den in order to associate the antislavery cause with God's favor. As he says of the proslavery-leaning Wilmington, Delaware, where he was to travel with Douglass and Charles Lenox Remond, "Thus you perceive we intend to 'beard the lion in his den'" (qtd. in Levine, *Delany* 120).

⁵³ Huey Newton saw both the party's rhetoric and its community activism as integral to its ultimate success. As he says in the May 4, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*, "The Vanguard Party [the BPP] must provide leadership for the people. It must teach the correct strategic methods of prolonged resistance through *literature* and *activities*" ("In Defense" 6, emphasis added).

⁵⁴ The subtitle of the *Black Panther* changed from "Black Community News Service" to "Intercommunal News Service" in between the publication of the January 30, 1971, and the February 6, 1971, issue.

⁵⁵ The BPP uses this blanket term to denote a fascist, racist, and imperialistic America.

⁵⁶ A telegram from Shabazz regarding the death of Lil' Bobby Hutton is reprinted on page 17 of the May 4, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*. Emphasis added to quotation.

⁵⁷ The BPP often criticized Civil Rights organizations they perceived to be acting against the interest of African Americans. For instance, the July 20, 1967, issue of the *Black Panther* contains a full, illustrated page titled the "bootlickers gallery" (19). Among the "bootlickers" are Roy Wilkins, the NAACP Executive Director from 1967-1977, Martin Luther King, Jr., the first president of the SCLC, and Floyd McKissick, who led CORE from 1966-1968. BPP members and members of Karenga's US were openly antagonistic toward one another, which eventually led to the infamous shooting deaths at the hands of US members of Panthers Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter and John Huggins on the campus of UCLA on January 17, 1969.

⁵⁸ See the image "Panther Hunt" on page 9 of the June 21st, 1969, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the infamous F.B.I COINTELPRO program, see Bloom and Martin 200-203.

⁶⁰ See articles "Panthers Move Internationally: FREE HUEY AT THE U.N." and "Racism, Fascism, and Political Murder" in the September 14, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁶¹ In a June 13, 1967, news release from the BPP-affiliated Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the organization uses similar rhetoric in response to

the violent assault with firearms of a SNCC meeting by white residents of Prattville, Alabama: “We recognize and accept yesterday’s action by racist white America as a declaration of war. We feel that this is a part of America’s gestapo tactics to destroy SNCC and to commit genocide against black people.” See page 9 of the July 3, 1967, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁶² See “U.S. Imperialism is a Paper Tiger” in *Selected Works of Mao-Tse-Tung*.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_52.htm

⁶³ See page 5 of the July 20, 1967, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁶⁴ See page 3 of “In Defense of Selfdefense [sic]” in the July 3, 1967, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁶⁵ See page 1 of the May 15, 1967, issue of the *Black Panther* and page 12 of the October 19, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁶⁶ See “Speech by the Minister of Education” in the March 9, 1969, issue of the *Black Panther* and “Kathleen Cleaver: (From New York Radio Address)” in the January 4, 1969, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁶⁷ See “Purged from the N.C.C.F. Detroit” in the May 19, 1970, issue of the *Black Panther* and “Tetanus” in the January 24, 1970, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁶⁸ See “Open Letter from San Quentin the Underground Prerss [sic] Speaks About Genocide in the Prisons of Calif” and “Letters from Prison” in the July 11, 1970, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁶⁹ See “White Tigers Vs. Black Panthers; Score: Trouble” in the September 19, 1968, issue of *The Coshocton Tribune* and “Press Conference of N.Y. Panthers” in the October 5, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁷⁰ See “Genocide: The Systematic Killing or Extermination of a Whole People” in the April 10, 1971, issue of the *Black Panther* and “Vacaville-America’s Headquarters for Medical Genocide” in the June 26, 1971, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁷¹ See page 4 of “In Defense of Self Defense” in the October 5, 1968, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁷² See “Inez Garcia Murder Trial: Rape Victim Asserts Woman’s Right to Self-Defense” in the October 5, 1974, issue of the *Black Panther* and “In Defense of Self-Defense” in the October 12, 1974, issue of the *Black Panther*.

⁷³ For Huey Newton’s explanation as to why the BPP refrained from using the slogan “Panther Power” after 1970, see Foner 144.

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