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The Strange Life And Stranger Afterlife Of King Dick including His Adventures in Haiti and Hollywood With Observations On The Construction Of Race, Class, Nationality, Gender, Slang Etymology And Religion

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The Strange Life And Stranger Afterlife Of King Dick

including

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with Observations on

The Construction of Race, Class, Nationality, Gender, Slang Etymology and Religion

as a preliminary exploration of

Pop Fiction, Pulped History and the Celluloid Politics of

Cultural Neo-imperialism

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for degree of
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**THE STRANGE LIFE AND STRANGER AFTERLIFE
OF
KING DICK!!**

including

His Adventures in Haiti and Hollywood

from

Kenneth Roberts' Lydia Bailey

WITH SUNDRY OBSERVATIONS ON

*The Construction of Race, Class, Nationality, Gender, Slang
Etymology and Religion*

as a preliminary exploration of

**Pop Fiction, Pulped History and the Celluloid Politics of
Cultural Neo-imperialism**

Dedication

To my family, and all others who actively assert the primacy of life as she is lived above study of dusty documentation, and above those who spend their lives today on justification of yesterday's prejudices. Above all, to King Dick, whoever and wherever you may be. I could never go a round with you, Dick, but it's been fun going around with you.

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Abstract

Richard “King Dick” or “Big Dick” Crafus, Cephas, or Seaver(s) first attracted attention by his size, strength and the authority he exercised as leader of U.S. African American Prisoners of War in Britain during the War of 1812. After the War he was celebrated as a boxing pioneer, ceremonial King of the black community and almost certainly auxiliary law officer. Very little has been known about his life, and much of that obscured by his black working-class status; his true standing within his own community remains mysterious. Yet paradoxically he’s been made much of, in academic writing and fiction alike right up to the present day. Although his life resisted the reduction of himself and his people to irrelevance and invisibility, I argue that his most prominent role has been as a palimpsest, a used canvas or marked screen onto which scholars and fiction-writers alike, as intellectual workers, have projected their images of the place of Blacks, blackness and racialized Others in the Americas and the Americanized world, including Haiti and Arabia. This thesis attempts to reconstruct his life and interpret his myriad reconstructions, to illuminate both dominant white and less-accessible minority discourses. The particular characteristics inscribed into Big Dick’s figure have helped define class and caste structures, public morality and the use of public space, and the working of the U.S. capitalist and cultural imperium in the marketplace of discourses.

Introduction

He was born in 1771, 1791, or somewhere in between. He was six foot three and quarter inches, six foot five, or seven feet tall. He weighed more than 300 pounds. He was born in Salem Massachusetts, Vienna, Chile, Saint-Domingue (Haiti) or the Sudan. He was descended from black royalty, had been enslaved—or not. He was a seaman, a powerful prison trustee, a boxing teacher, a gambler, a dancing master, a laborer, a Boston police auxiliary, a morals-vigilante leader, Boston's "King of the darkies" and a wealthy Haitian planter-general. He became a Prisoner of War during the War of 1812 from U. S. privateer *Requin*, or frigate *U.S.S. Chesapeake* after her famous defeat by *HMS Shannon*, or maybe he was a Prisoner of Conscience from the British Royal Navy, unwilling to fight his fellow countrymen. His death was reported in newspapers from Maine to Baltimore; his life and work are attested by half-a-dozen memoirs, a dozen items and letters in news-journals, and a handful of registers, Directories and Admiralty Records. His name was Richard Seaver, Seavers, Cephus, Cephas, Crafus or Craftus, and he was known as King Dick and Big Dick.

His life exists in at least two separate chronological dimensions: the past time of his own mysterious biography, and the continuing time of history and culture, which belongs to novelists and scholars. He is an essential character in at least five novels and a play, and may have inspired others. He is the subject of numerous scholarly articles, dissertations, theses and monographs. It is time to look at his whole mythic career, nonfictional and fictional, in historical context.

He lived his known life in the north Atlantic world, yet achieved his greatest popularity in connection with the Afro-Caribbean and Mediterranean regions. In Kenneth Roberts' best-selling novel *Lydia Bailey* (1947), King Dick "materialize[s] as suddenly and magically as though he'd popped from the ground like the slave of the lamp.... something elemental and irresistible."¹ He is a Haitian revolutionary artilleryman, a wealthy *General de Place*, a trusted confidant of both Toussaint Louverture and the fictional U.S. American narrator, Albion Hamlin, and an expert trader in fine gems and rum. He is Hamlin's guide to Haiti and "Voodoo"—and a Muslim Marabout (wandering holy man). He's a perfect servant, guide and rescuer, and a preternatural capitalist who "knows how to make money" as well as, according to discarded drafts, an able paralegal. In the now difficult-to-obtain 1952 Technicolor movie of *Lydia Bailey* he undergoes further transformation: rather than a pre-jet-set global traveler and opportunist, he becomes a patriotic Haitian-born mulatto *gen de couleur* (person of color) and patriarchal Southern-style planter.² He is literally patriarchal—he has eight wives and uncounted children.

In each of his guises, times, and incarnations, King Dick represented a special case of Blackness for Whites, an expression shaped and reshaped by society, of what an exceptional Other might be and do. He lived in a time when racial attitudes and beliefs were in transition; and documentary evidence about his life must be assessed in that light. Nevertheless, he probably achieved as much as any Black U.S. American could, and far more than most working persons. After death he grew, sometimes backwards in time, to a stature no citizen could hope to achieve in life. His actual words are nowhere recorded

¹ *Lydia Bailey* (Garden City NY: Doubleday and Company, 1947) was one of the top ten-selling novels of the year, and as Roberts's last major work, helped him win a special Pulitzer Prize for his body of work; the quote is from p.80.

² The movie is now only available as a DVD from Spain under the title "*Revolta en Haiti* (Lydia Bailey)."

except in fiction. His story tells us about the naturalization and persistence of racism and hierarchy, of United States exceptionalism, and about the construction, reconstruction and marketing of class, capitalism, and the American cultural imperium. His figure has been contested as an agent of black power or repression, morality and capital, Americanization and alien othering. He's provided a vehicle for U.S. American cultural and economic domination, and empowerment for Black Pan Americanism, or at least an attempted economic alliance of Haiti and Hollywood and civil rights advocates in the United States.³ In his lifetime, he used his exceptional strength and perhaps humor to resist the marginalization and erasure of himself and his fellow African Americans. After his death, he continued to represent their presence, although he could no longer strike blows against their slanderers. He became a palimpsest, a used canvas to be repainted, a story to be retold to each teller's new purpose. While he lived, Whites monopolized the power of representation in the United States. Since his death, he has defied their power to reduce him to silence and irrelevance.

³ Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 5-15 and 131-144

Book I. The Past as Prologue

Chapter the First: The Life and Times of Big Dick

King Dick at Dartmoor

He first came to the world's documented notice at Dartmoor Prisoner of War Depot in Devon, England. He was logged into the bleak, remote, damp stone cold prison by British officials on October 9, 1814, as a captured U.S. privateersman, licensed to prey upon Britain's merchant ships under a Letter of Marque and Reprisal issued by the U.S. government during the War of 1812. According to historian Ira Dye, his vessel, *Requin*, was taken near the French port of Bordeaux in March 1814. The army of General Lord Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington, was the captor.⁴ His captors recorded his name as Richard Crafus, 23 years old, born in Vienna, Maryland, a privateer port on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. We can be fairly sure he was a working class seaman because captured officers were paroled to live in villages around Dartmoor.⁵

A later source states that he was serving in the British Royal Navy when the War broke out, and "would not fight against his country, gave himself up as an American

⁴ Captain Ira Dye U.S.N. (Ret.) researched British Admiralty POW records in the 1980s and 1990s; he corresponded about Big Dick with Jeffrey Bolster in 1988 and 1990, according to an email from Bolster to this writer dated 3/23/2012. Britain was in the final months of its war with France's Napoleon Bonaparte, which explains why—although there was no formal treaty of alliance—a U.S. privateer could be caught in a French port. *Requin* brought Big Dick's first (anonymous and indirect) entanglement with the State, as it led to a squabble, memorialized by a letter from the Duke to the British Ambassador, and continuing in the British House of Commons at least through 1823, about prize-money/ compensation. Duke of Wellington, Ed., *Supplementary Despatches and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur, Duke of Wellington*, (London: John Murray, 1872), vol.14, 605-6, Wellington to Sir Charles Stuart, 6 December 1815; and *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, (London: Hansards, 1824), House of Commons 02 July 1823 vol 9 cc1405-12.

⁵ Robin F. A. Fabel mentions a sole "mulatto from New York" Dartmoor prisoner who might plausibly, as a prizemaster, be described as an officer and perhaps a gentleman. Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor: Black and White Prisoners in the War of 1812," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9, no. 2, (Summer 1989).

citizen, and was made a prisoner of war.”⁶ If he so claimed, Dick could have been casting himself as representative of—and fitting his biography to—the historical moment. A major cause of the War of 1812 was the Royal Navy’s insistence on “pressing” (drafting) for their desperate fight against Napoleon, sailors who had (real or forged) citizenship papers for the upstart United States.⁷ Yet a third story of his capture appears in an unpublished 1881 memoir about *Old Boston and its Once Familiar Faces*: Dick was taken prisoner on June 1, 1813 in the terrible battle off Boston when the dying Captain James Lawrence vainly exhorted the crew of U.S.S. *Chesapeake* not to “give up the ship!” to HMS *Shannon*.⁸

His Dartmoor intake papers describe the six foot three and one-quarter inch giant as of “stout build, round face, black complexion, black wool hair, black eyes.” Whatever his actual height, he towered over his five foot six inch average contemporaries, and enhanced his stature by wearing a bearskin hat. He soon rose to lead more than one thousand African American sailor-prisoners of Wing Number Four (actually a separate building) of the gaunt prison complex. Dartmoor became the subject of a considerable U.S. prisoner-of-war literature, when repatriation delays kept thousands incarcerated there for up to half a year after the treaty of peace had been signed and led to a notorious “massacre” of prisoners.

⁶ *Boston Patriot*, February 1831, reprinted in *New York Spectator* 2/22/1831, and William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*, 2/26/31.

⁷ W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*, (Cambridge Mass & London England: Harvard University Press, 1997), 114. More than two hundred U.S. Americans opted to go to prison rather than serve in the Royal Navy after the War was declared, about a third of them Black. In this they were over-represented: African Americans made up slightly more than half that proportion of the U.S. maritime workforce.

⁸ George Hugh Crichton, *Old Boston and Its Once Familiar Faces*, manuscript, 1881, Boston Athenaeum, “Big Dick” chapter, 1.

Three memoirs by white U.S.-American prisoner-of-wars are our most extended sources, although several additional accounts confirm or add details. The first was edited by Harvard physician Richard Waterhouse, and published in 1816:

These blacks have a ruler among them whom they call *king DICK*. He is by far the largest, and I suspect the strongest man in the prison. ... When he goes the rounds, he puts on a large bear-skin cap; and carries in his hand a huge club. If any of his men are dirty, drunken, or grossly negligent, he threatens them with a beating; and if they are saucy, they are sure to receive one.⁹

Another memoir, by a self-described “Green Hand younker” named Josiah Cobb, confirms this remarkable picture:

This prison is almost entirely under the control of yonder Ethiopian giant, of six feet seven inches in height, with a frame well proportioned, and has strength far greater than both height and proportions together. ...When a culprit is brought before him for trial, 'Big Dick,' the familiar name he answers to, makes short work of it—never has been guilty of delaying or putting off 'till next term; and he is equally prompt with the punishment as with the trial, being both judge and executioner, and not unfrequently sole accuser.¹⁰

A third memoir, edited by no less than Nathaniel Hawthorne, echoes and extends Cobb’s authoritarian theme:

A tall, powerful black man, known among the prisoners as “Big Dick” or “King Dick,” ... ruled the poor blacks with as arbitrary an authority as any other despot could. He was nearly seven feet tall and proportionally large, was of a muscular and athletic make, of a commanding aspect, shrewd of mind, and an expert boxer. These qualities rendered him very formidable to the poor beings with whom he was surrounded, and contributed to his gaining a sway over them, and very much to its continuance.¹¹

⁹ Waterhouse, Richard, *A Journal, Of A Young Man Of Massachusetts...* (Boston: Rowe and Harper, 1816) (2nd edition), 174-177. Bolster, *Black Jacks* 263-4 n12, states that “Ira Dye’s remarkable detective work shows that Waterhouse’s informant was probably Henry Torey, a twenty-one year old seaman from Massachusetts.” In contrast, military historian Justin Jones has drawn attention to an article by one Henry Viets asserting that this account was adapted from the journal of “a rather obscure ship’s surgeon named Amos G. Babcock”; Jones, “The Prison on the Moor,” history thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2011, 5, 81ff, 145-6.

¹⁰ Cobb, Josiah, *A Green Hand’s First Cruise, Roughed Out from The Log-Book of Memory, of Twenty-Five Years Standing: Together with a Residence of Five Months in Dartmoor. By a Younker*, (Boston: Otis, Broaders, and Company, 1841), 43-5.

¹¹ (Benjamin Frederick Brown), Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1926). 181-186. Brown was not identified as author until considerably after first publication.

The original author was eventually identified as one Benjamin Frederick Brown.¹² Dick's British captors apparently found him less worthy of remark than did his compatriots, although Cobb claims he was "allowed greater indulgence than any other within the walls. He frequently obtains permission to pass through the gates, remains outside for hours, roaming about the fields... and returns at his will."¹³

African American prisoners at Dartmoor had been segregated into wing #4 for eight months, since February 1814, when Dick arrived.¹⁴ They were separated into the most isolated building in response to complaints by Whites alleging misconduct and thievery. Brown/ Hawthorne asserted, however, that "these blacks were, to say the least, as orderly and correct in their deportment, and as moral as their more intelligent white neighbors.... we could reproach the blacks with nothing that they could not retort on us with interest."¹⁵ Their numbers increased until they took over the Wing late in the year, after French POWs were released.

The prison's self-contained, open barracks-style "wings" allowed King Dick to amass and exert extraordinary authority. Nearly two decades before Dartmoor was built, Jeremy Bentham had published his proposal for a "panopticon" prison with universal surveillance and control of cells by centrally-situated warders.¹⁶ But the Depot's long narrow buildings offered no such commanding vistas. They were divided only by stanchions, from which the inmates hung their hammocks; there were no cells, no bars

¹² sometimes spelled with a terminal "e"

¹³ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 44

¹⁴ Charles Andrews, *The Prisoners' Memoirs, Or, Dartmoor Prison*,... (NY: 1815), 69-70

¹⁵ Justin Jones, "The Prison On The Moor: A Study Of The American Prisoner-Of-War Experience Within Dartmoor Prison 1813-1815" (master's thesis, University Of Texas At Arlington, 2011), 67; Brown/ Hawthorne, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 182

¹⁶ see Michel Foucault, Alan Sheridan trans., *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (NY: Random House, 1977), 195-230, for the "panopticon" as prison and regime of governmental control and oversight.

except on the unglazed outside windows. The prisoners were fairly free to mingle with each other and with natives who came there. Walls and fences surrounded the prison and divided the “wing” buildings into several separate yards; Number Four stood alone in the central yard. Control was exerted from the perimeter walls by the British with frequent musters and occasional inspections.

The world of a British prison was a space where Dick could assert himself and develop his leadership persona and power, isolated from the tensions of the United States’s partially-enslaved society. The guards were more interested in preventing riots and other disorders than in enforcing racial hierarchy. Although Dick’s charges in Number Four were among the prisoners who attempted to escape by tunneling under the walls, the British must have been glad to exploit the strength of arm that made him “a great favourite with the authorities of the Depot.”¹⁷

Dick’s leadership role has attracted an extraordinary level of attention from U.S. scholars since. As Dartmoor’s structure was analogous to Twentieth Century military prison-camps, it seemed to offer useful lessons. In 2000 Robert C. Doyle lectured the U.S. Air Force Academy about “American POW Narratives,” describing how King Dick “defied rank [and] used ... cunning and natural leadership abilities in combination with basic survival techniques to direct the activities of [his] peers against their captors.” Military historian Justin Jones’s 2011 thesis concentrates on conditions in Dartmoor and discusses “Crafus’s” effectiveness in maintaining discipline. Both note Dick’s blackness, but only in passing. This in itself is a remarkable demonstration of just how important “color-blindness” has become to the U.S. military today. Neither remarks that the U.S.

¹⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners' Memoirs*, 116ff; Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 44.

army would only begin to include black units—with white officers—a half-century after the War; nor that integration of the armed forces would take almost another century.¹⁸

Prisoner self-discipline and governance are givens for military historians. But military discipline was always modified on shipboard; and if Dick was as he there and then represented himself—a privateersman working on shares, rather than a serviceman on a government issued salary—then absolute command and subordination would not have come automatically to him. As a sailor, he would have experienced both relative freedom to travel, and the neo-feudal regime of shipboard discipline, as well as the gibes and kicks of white shipmates. Unfortunately Dick’s prior sea-service, if he was a privateersman as seems likely, is not documented. It’s possible he was an enslaved sailor before capture, but given how easily he assumed his kingship, it seems more likely he had experienced some freedom.

Academic historians Reginald Horsman (1975), James and Lois Horton (1977 and 1979), Robin F. A. Fabel (1973 and 1989) and Paul Gilje (2004) variously devote paragraphs or pages to Dick which centralize his blackness. For them, writing from the perspective of post-“short Civil Rights Movement” academia, King Dick serves as a signpost in chronicling the late birth, gradual development and (in C. Vann Woodward’s memorable phrase) “strange career of Jim Crow.” His power and relative freedom are a useful counterexample to the image of a monolithically racist-oppressive social order in the Atlantic World. These scholars share the belief that de-naturalizing segregation and racism serves the greater U.S. polity more than strengthening military cohesion by ignoring racism and silencing racial difference. The social context in which James and

¹⁸ Robert C. Doyle, “Making Experience Count: American POW Narratives from the Colonial Wars to Vietnam,” The Forty-Third Harmon Memorial Lecture In Military History, (Colorado: United States Air Force Academy, 2000), 9; Jones, *Prison on the Moor*, 79-80

Lois Horton consider “Richard ‘Big Dick’ Seaver” in two 1970s monographs —“Culture, Community Struggle, and Protest,” to paraphrase the titles, reflects this. Similarly, Paul Gilje’s *Liberty on the Waterfront* explores the Black community ashore, but like the rest of these scholars, tells only of Big Dick’s brief time at Dartmoor.

That Blacks should be led by a black man might seem logical, but for his contemporaries, the issue was not simple. Jeffrey Bolster offers perhaps the most insightful analysis in *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (1997). He links Dick’s kingship to colonial New England traditions of Negro Election Day, Pinkster, and similar celebrations throughout the 18th and early 19th century maritime Americas. Many free or enslaved black communities chose a ceremonial and juridical ruler; to White observers, these rituals generally appeared to be semi-comic celebrations of misrule. At Dartmoor, however, real authority was at stake; under the pressure of imprisonment, limited autonomy and equality for Blacks was possible and real, not merely a short-term carnivalesque or seeming parody of white governance. The result was that Dick “threatened white sailors in a way that black shipmates or mob leaders did not” through his “independent leadership of a self-regulating black collective”, and “white commentators found it impossible to imagine that African Americans, left to themselves, could create a viable social organization founded on some principle other than raw power or toadying to whites.”

An important theme of the Dartmoor memoirs was how (exceptionally) able “free-born Americans” were at self-government even when incarcerated. In this context Dick’s role in keeping order among disdained Blacks is all the more remarkable. “Confronted by a vibrant black culture that contradicted what they had been taught about

racial inferiority, Bolster argues, “most white sailors denied blacks’ distinctive accomplishments. Blacks, meanwhile, capitalized on white sailors’ uneasy fear of black political organization and ... collectively leveraged prison Number Four to prominence.”¹⁹ King Dick may have exploited this fear for his own benefit: as the Brown memoir put it,

one great means of his continuing in power was, I think, the countenance he derived from the white prisoners. They very early perceived the advantage to their own quiet which grew out of Dick’s authority; for, in all cases of conflict between whites and blacks, he invariably took the part of the former.”²⁰

Cobb generally agreed: “it is thought anarchy would reign where now is despotism, only for the sway this man of might holds over his sable brethren...” although he complained that Dick was harder on Whites than his own kind: “Most tightly does he draw the cords of despotism around his good subjects, giving them an extra twist, when his white aliens come under his handling, as often they do, either for real or fancied crimes.”²¹

The common denominator is that the white memoirists all condemned Dick’s kingship as a throwback to feudal rule through brute force, in contrast to the elected committees governing each U.S. White wing. “No.4, or the negro-prison, was an exception to the democratical form of government; this was under a regal, or rather despotic form,” wrote Brown/ Hawthorne. But Bolster argues that Dick’s governance served Blacks well, both by enforcing internal unity, and masking their motions from Whites’ gaze. He asserts that black prisoners actually preferred “a modified form of one-man rule” rather than adopting the white committee system or simply acquiescing to Dick’s rule of the fist. Far from “usurping” governance, King Dick’s power was

¹⁹ Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 102-128; quotes are 103, 108, and 112. Bolster notes that many seamen of the day used more than one name.

²⁰ Brown/Hawthorne, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 181

²¹ Cobb, *Green Hand’s First Cruise*, 44

deliberately “vest[ed]” in him by black prisoners less enamored of complicated U.S. “democratic” forms—which they could only have experienced as an hypocritical farce—than they were used to African-style monarchy.

Dick’s Atlantic World Adventure

Bolster’s excellent analysis of white attitudes raises the question of how White sources’ treatment of Blacks responded to conditions at the time of publication, but he does not explore their image of Dick in that light. While all the memoirists show considerable bias, each writer and editor had his own agenda in portraying Dick. The earliest of the Dartmoor accounts, published by Dr. Waterhouse in 1816, is the most favorable: “This black Hercules commands respect, and his subjects tremble in his presence. He goes the rounds every day, and visits every birth [*sic*] to see if they are all kept clean.... this *king RICHARD* the IVth, is a man of good understanding; and he exercises it to a good purpose.”²² The writer’s opinion of Blacks in general was not good; his purpose was moral instruction for Whites, as shown by the title, *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts... Interspersed With Observations, Anecdotes And Remarks, Tending To Illustrate The Moral And Political Characters Of Three Nations*.

The other two accounts were published twenty-five or thirty years later.

Hawthorne, as editor of Brown’s memoir, had a budding literary reputation to nurture by 1845, manifested by the irony and literary allusions therein:

For a scepter, [Dick] carried a powerful club in his hand... and many of his subjects had a feeling sense of his royal grace and condescension, in the love-pats with which he honored them. He dubbed his knights by a blow upon the head, instead of the shoulder, and instead of rising up after the blow was inflicted, they

²² “Negroes are generally reputed to be thieves. Their faculties are commonly found to be inadequate to the comprehension of the moral system; and as to the Christian system, their notions of it, generally speaking, are a burlesque on every thing serious,” Waterhouse, *Journal Of A Young Man*, 174.

were very apt to fall down; but this probably arose from the defective education of the monarch.... for, I believe, he could not read at all.

Like other monarchs, Dick had his parasites and flatterers; and though as he engrossed nearly all the function of the state in his own proper person, he had few or no offices or honors or emolument to bestow upon them; yet, I dare say, they reaped, in some way or other, substantial fruits of his royal bounty.²³

Prisoner Cobb's account, published until 1841, is full of even less graceful sneers at

Dick's "despotism" and "usurp[ing]... arbitrary authority:"

He will often, while going the rounds of his dominions, catch a chap at a trick he does not like, when without the ceremony of a trial, the culprit is lambasted upon the spot, and on goes Big Dick, to spy somebody at something, whereby he can have a chance of displaying, not only his prowess, but also his authority, with an occasional exercise of his fists, merely to keep his hand in, without the semblance of crime to sanction the flogging. Hard is it, for such as are weak, to fall under his displeasure, for they have no redress, and must submit to his will and his harshness.

Why such disdain?

While the lives of black sailors were never easy, they became more difficult as the 19th Century progressed. After the successful slave-revolution in Haiti (1791-1803), the specter of black violence grew on the U.S. Whites' and especially slaveholders' minds.²⁴

A series of Negro Seamen Acts, the first passed in South Carolina in 1821, brought Blacks who sailed into Southern ports into penal custody and under the threat of re-enslavement, especially in the wake of Denmark Vesey's Haiti-inspired conspiracy of 1822. Denigration and oppression of Blacks grew more savage and pervasive as debates over abolition heated up. Even in New England racist rhetoric swelled, partly in reaction to Boston resident David Walker's blistering anti-slavery *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens*

²³ Even this source, however, calls Dick "shrewd of mind." Brown/Hawthorne, *Green Hand's First Cruise* 181-6.

²⁴ See, for example, DuBois, Laurent, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Geggus, David, ed. *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, (University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Matthewson, Tim, *A ProSlavery Foreign Policy*, (Westport CT & London: Praeger Publishers, 2003), *passim*.

of the World (1829) and the 1831 appearance of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper *The Liberator*. As Bolster puts it, "the antebellum black seafarer [was] more likely each year after 1830 to be harassed by his white shipmates, thwarted by northern crimps, or incarcerated by southern officials, [and] lost what little maneuvering room he had."²⁵ Although the memoirs were all ostensibly written at the time of imprisonment, the memoirists' tone evidently shifted as distance from actual events allowed increasingly racist attitudes to seep into their accounts at the time of publication. While Messrs Cobb and Brown could not reduce King Dick to passivity, his reign could be painted as a parody of governance, his rule as the result of black imitation and subservience.²⁶

"King Dick keeps a boxing-school," says Dr. Waterhouse, "where the white men are sometimes admitted."²⁷ Indeed, "His pupils were mostly white men," claims Hawthorne, "for Dick did not care to teach any of his own subjects an art which might prove dangerous to his own power." But the currents of moral authority and power at Dartmoor were far more complicated than simple White/Black or strength/ weakness binaries, modified by subordination to British imprisonment. The privateersmen who made up the majority of the prison population had a bad reputation as chartered pirates, especially among British professional warriors.²⁸ For business-oriented U. S.-Americans, however, privateering was an honorable substitute for the tiny Navy. The United States' naval weakness in 1812, and its entrepreneurial ideology, compelled it to elevate

²⁵ Bolster's subject and subtitle is '*African American Seamen [throughout] the Age of Sail*,' so these comments, while applicable to how King Dick was portrayed, do not specifically refer to him. *Black Jacks*, 229.

²⁶ Brown/Hawthorne, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 181; but compare Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, on "his handling [of] white aliens" quoted on page 11 above.

²⁷ Waterhouse, *Journal Of A Young Man*, 177

²⁸ Incidentally, U.S. Navy personnel's behavior at Dartmoor did not differ greatly from their free enterprise brothers: several navy sailors at Dartmoor taken in *USS Argus* were punished by prisoners' committees as traitors and rogues, to the extent of being branded on the cheeks with the letters 'U.S.' & 'T.'

privateering to a kind of amateur patriotic auxiliary fleet to counterbalance the world-straddling British Royal Navy. This private-enterprise role in foreign policy would grow, over time, to a major component of U.S commercial neo-imperialism. Appropriately, even if Dick himself did not come off a privateer, he exercised a commercial power in Dartmoor which was in keeping with emerging U.S.-American ways.

The prisoners bought and sold food, handicrafts and other diversions and commodities in a market on the prison grounds. The market attracted British participants, and was funded by U.S. government stipends to the prisoners. Closing the market to one or all wings, which could lead to considerable hardship including hunger and boredom, was one form of punishment exercised by the guards. The Blacks of #4 were notable market participants, and Number 4's courtyard may have been its center, which gave them considerable leverage. According to Nathaniel Hawthorne, "...the monarch levied contributions on the shop-keepers, who, in turn, were obliged to collect it of their customersDick understood another kingly art too, very well, for he was a monopolist, and engrossed the sale of beer within his prison...." True to form, Waterhouse attributes Dick's economic power to his "good understanding" and the respect he'd earned; Cobb to brute strength; and Brown/Hawthorne to primitive Blacks' feudal instincts, in contrast to modern "American" democratic capitalism.

Dick's Dartmoor domain was an important center of commerce and culture, even if his methods of governance and his "nervous arm and massy club" may not have recognized much separation between "culture" as the arts of diversion and as the praxis of governance. Some Whites even preferred its superior order and amusements: "The officers, to escape maltreatment, went into No. 4, where they were civilly received by the

blacks,” according to Brown/ Hawthorne and others. “It soon became a prison of refuge, to many who were uneasy in their positions in the other prisons.”²⁹ Dick’s inter-racial role as provider of refuge to white prisoners has been much discussed by scholars; and his administrative activities went far beyond mere policing.

A person, entering the cock-loft of No. 4, would be highly amused ... if his sense of smelling be not too refined, [by] this strange assemblage of antics. Here he may see boxing, fencing, dancing, raffling, and other modes of gambling; ... drawing with chalk and charcoal; and tricks of slight-of-hand; ...he may be regaled with the sound of clarionets, flutes, violins, flageolets [recorder flutes], fifes, tambarines, together with the whooping and singing of the negroes....³⁰

This list is remarkable for its inclusion of refined arts (fencing, dancing, drawing), despite the disdainful comments about “antics,” the smell and “whooping ...of the negroes.” How directly Dick participated in most of these is not known, although he must have had a major role in regulating them. Other prisoners’ diaries add even more sophisticated activities to the Wing’s cultural productions:

[Nov] 23d Yesterday evening Mr. Fellows and I went over to the No 4 prison among the blacks to see a play performed ... such another crowding you never saw for my part I got along side of a great he Negro about seven feet high when he sat down ‘twas with difficulty I could see over his head. ... After the play we had a grand dance...³¹

Shakespeare was also performed; one highly imaginative source goes so far as to claim that King Dick’s stature and dignity allowed him to play *Othello*.³²

Prisoners could draw on centuries of tradition in dressing as women in the plays.

Although local women participated in the market, the Dartmoor Depot was, of course, a

²⁹ Brown/Hawthorne, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 182.

³⁰ Waterhouse, *Journal Of A Young Man*, 177

³¹ *The Diary Of Benjamin F. Palmer Privateersman*, (New Haven: Acorn Club, 1914), 108-9, entry for November 23rd [1814]. Palmer also writes “the prisoners of the other prisons wishing the Market open, being destitute of Coffee and other Necessaries came in a mob headed by Big Dick A 7 foot Negro, and by force of arms carried the offenders [who had taken some boards out of No.6 prison] and carried them before [British commandant captain] Shortland...” in his page 138 entry for “Jany 22nd [1815].”

³² “Hazel, Harry” (Justin Jones), *Fourpe Tap*, (Boston: Jones Publishing, 1847) 85. Bolster discusses Black seamen’s religious practices and traditions of performance for and parody of Whites, *Black Jacks* 121-124.

unisexual society to all intents and purposes. Within this homosocial setting, sexual activity must have occurred from time to time; and when it did, Whites did their best to tar the Blacks with it. Among the French POWs held at Dartmoor until Napoleon's (first) overthrow were a group known as "Les Romains." These "Romans" were considered "depraved" enough to have sold their clothes and to go around naked except for a blanket and a blade. They were banished to Wing Number 4, where their activities could contaminate only Blacks, as were three French 'bugger[s]' "turned in to No. 4 among the Negroes."³³ Hawthorne and his informant imply that Dick himself was tainted by such activities, in that "He kept two white lads continually about his person, whom he took care to select for their comely looks, and to keep them handsomely clad. We denominated them his secretaries..."³⁴

Prisoner Cobb cast a disapproving and moralistic eye on some of these commercial activities: "...In this prison, gambling is carried to a greater degree than in any of the others. The inmates here have nothing to restrain them, except the ready fist of their king, Big Dick, from indulging in all the vicious principles and habits man possesses. ..." ³⁵ Some assert that Dick collected the sovereign's share of gambling proceeds, too. Many U.S. Americans were expressing disapproval of the excesses of market capitalism by the 1840s, when the Cobb and Brown/Hawthorne accounts were published; perhaps we can see traces of this, projected onto Dick and his Black subjects, in them.³⁶

³³ Palmer, *Diary*, 176. Another source confirms that "3 Frenchmen flogged for burglary [*sic*: an error in transposing the writer's longhand to type, perhaps?]." *The Journal of Nathaniel Pierce of Newburyport, Kept at Dartmoor Prison, 1814-1815. Essex Institute Historical Collections* 73 (January 1937), 39

³⁴ Brown/Hawthorne, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 186; Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 148 similarly implies sexual impropriety.

³⁵ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 45.

³⁶ Waterhouse, *Journal Of A Young Man*, blames Jews, not Blacks, for market excesses.

Strip away the prejudice, and what does all this tell us about Richard “Big Dick” Crafus, the man? Evidently he was much concerned with appearing strong, exacting respect, and keeping order. The only exception to such unbending rectitude, aside from the gambling, is Brown/Hawthorne’s allegation that

He sometimes punished gross instances of drunkenness very severely; [but] the inebriating draught must... have been drawn from the royal fountain.... It was said that his royal majesty was sometimes in the habit of indulging his own bibulous appetite to a crapulous degree—but then he held a monarch’s privilege...

and that is qualified as hearsay. Was he a martinet, a narrow tyrant—or only concerned to make sure Whites saw him that way?³⁷

Part of the answer may lie in his broader role. We see, in Dartmoor number 4’s society, the intersection of at least four cultures and subcultures: U.S. White American (itself a hodge-podge), “African-American,” British, and the maritime fo’c’sle, the homosocial environment where common sailors slung their hammocks.³⁸ All these are divided by a common language, as has been said; plus there was the influence of their quasi-military employment, and the French POWs whose occupation of Wing Number Four overlapped with that of the Blacks. Dick embodied at least three of the cultures. He didn’t just bridge them; with his strength and authority to impose order, he effectively negotiated their coexistence in common space. As the master organizer/ broker of this potential cultural chaos, he reincarnated the transcultural role of the Atlantic Creoles of Africa and Colonial North America who were his predecessors, whatever his own early

³⁷ Fabel, “Self Help” 182-3, martinet; Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 108-113, concerned to be seen as....

³⁸ Fabel points out that only 14 of Dick’s “subjects” in the prison were African-born, among the 73 from “Foreign parts” and the rest came from almost every state, including about 15% born in the Deep South. “Self Help”, 168. Fo’c’sle culture included music, dancing, sewing and handicrafts.

biography.³⁹ To suggest that he exercised such cultural power consciously may be too much; but the overall picture, and his later history, do not suggest a humorless dictator.

One night several [of “his subjects”] attacked [Dick] while asleep in his hammock; he sprang up and seized the smallest of them by his feet, and thumped another with him. The poor negro who had thus been made a beetle of, was carried next day to the hospital, sadly bruised, and provokingly laughed at.

says Waterhouse.⁴⁰ The laughter can only have taken place if it was approved by Dick himself.

Fisticuffs and taxes were not Dick’s only means of maintaining order. The sources agree that in addition to teaching and practicing pugilism, Crufus maintained a close alliance with the cultural apparatus of morality and persuasion. The prison was served by both visiting ministers and a resident black Baptist one:

It is curious to observe the natural alliance between *king* Dick and this *priest*. Dick honors and protects him, while the priest inculcates respect and obedience to this *Richard the 4th*. Here we see the *union of church and state* in miniature. Who told this negro, that to maintain this influence, he must rally round the huge club of the strongest and most powerful man in this black gang of sinners? And who told king Dick that his nervous arm and massy club, were insufficient without the aid of the preacher of terror? Neither of them had read, or heard of Machiavel.⁴¹

“As to the Christian system, the [preacher] has no more idea of it than he has of the New Jerusalem” stated Waterhouse, and Brown/Hawthorne condemned him as “an ugly, thick-lipped, ignorant black man” guilty of “ranting... roaring, such a torrent of broken

³⁹ For Atlantic Creoles, see Thomas C. Holt, *Children of Fire: A History of African Americans* (NY: Hill and Wang, 2010) 42-52, and Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone* (Cambridge MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998) 17-63.

⁴⁰ 174; Brown/Hawthorne confirms the coup plot: “There was much secret murmuring and dissatisfaction among the subjects of King Richard, and one or two conspiracies to dethrone him; but he, by means of his spies, had knowledge of the treason. Thereupon he went to the neighbors, and told them of their purposes, and further said, that he would give them fair play. They must come out, one at a time, and try a match of boxing with him; and if either of them could conquer him, he would give up his power to the conqueror; but if no one could, and he ever heard of their rebelling against him again, he would flog them within an inch of their lives. The result was, that he flogged them all, and never heard of any more conspiracies.” *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 182-3; other sources similar.

⁴¹ Waterhouse, *Journal Of A Young Man*, 174-5 and 177-8; for similar accounts of Dick and the preacher see also Brown/Hawthorne, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 192-3, and Cobb, *Green Hand’s First Cruise*, 257.

gibberish running into blasphemy... uttered [with] grimaces and contortions.”⁴² Others confirm the preacher’s alliance with Dick, but admit that he attracted white listeners, if only as “a novelty.” Whatever opinion Whites held of Black religious styles and practices, Dick’s partnership with the priest helped him maintain hegemony over Number 4, and, indeed, extend his influence beyond its walls as white prisoners came to participate in the services and the Wing’s other attractions.

The treaty ending the War of 1812 was signed in December 1814, but it took months to arrange the prisoners’ repatriation. Dick was still at Dartmoor when frustrations boiled over, leading to the killing of seven prisoners and the wounding of dozens more by British guards. According to prisoner Joseph Valpey, “the Blacks were near the gates of their Yard Gamboling and not Mistrusting any harm when a dreadful fire from the top of the wall killed several [actually two] and wounded many [four].”⁴³ “Richard Cephas” signed “his mark” and deposed “on oath” that “he saw the body of John Haywood, a black man; that John Haywood was in prison No. 4, with this informant” and heard the shots from “the privy” where he spent most of the time between “about half past five in the evening” and some minutes after six.” The deposition, which was communicated to the House of Representatives on January 31st 1816 by President James Madison, does not explicitly connect this Mr. Cephas with “King Dick,” nor ascribe any special authority to the witness. Whether this was our Dick, or whether he missed the massacre, having perhaps “obtain[ed] permission to pass through the gates...

⁴² Waterhouse, *Journal Of A Young Man*, 173; Brown/Hawthorne, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 193. One particularly interesting entry in *The Journal of Nathaniel Pierce* notes a falling-out between “the king of #4” and the preacher Black Simon, when Dick banishes the latter from his pulpit calling him “a Hypocrite ... [who] would steal his messmates bread and Cheat other people.” 46, dated April 23 1815. The Dartmoor memoirs contain considerable comment on black religious practices, not further quoted here as not directly related to Dick.

⁴³ *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, (Detroit: Michigan Society of Colonial Wars, 1922), 27.

and return at his will,” the record of the event and investigation that followed would seem to indicate that extraordinary discretion went with his extraordinary strength and authority. The April 6th 1815 massacre’s notoriety ensured that Dartmoor, and therefore Dick, would be remembered.⁴⁵

Richard “King Dick” Crafus was discharged as a prisoner on June 15, 1815. Many black prisoners refused repatriation on ships bound for southern ports for fear of being enslaved there; perhaps Dick was one of them.⁴⁶

Big Dick in Boston

King Dick moved to Boston sometime after the War, assumed to have arrived with other freed prisoners. In 1816, New England newspapers brought him a kind of fame by publishing an excerpt from Waterhouse’s account about “King Dick & Simon the Priest in Dartmoor Prison.”⁴⁷ He’s listed in 1825, ’26 and ’27 volumes of the *Boston Directory*, in the back with the other “People of Color,” as “Richard Seaver~~s~~, labourer” [*sic, emphasis added*], living on Southac Street; another source says he lived in “a crowded tenement” on Botolph Street.⁴⁸ *Niles Weekly Register* for June 11th 1825 describes him as “weight 306 pounds; circumference around chest 4 feet 2 inches; aged 38 years.” Brown’s *Memoir of A Yankee Privateer*—the one edited by Nathaniel Hawthorne—states “After the peace, Dick was well known, in Boston and vicinity, as a teacher of pugilistics.”⁴⁹ Having proved his strength’s value, Dick evidently resisted

⁴⁵ For further information on the massacre, see the primary source memoirs, Horsman “The Paradox of Dartmoor Prison,” Fabel, “Self-Help in Dartmoor” and Jones, “Prison On The Moor” inter alia.

⁴⁶ Cobb, *Green Hand’s First Cruise*, 254-5.

⁴⁷ “King Dick & Simon the Priest in Dartmoor Prison” *The Yankee*, (Boston) 4/26/16 vol V. no.18, 1 for example.

⁴⁸ Crichton, *Old Boston*, “Big Dick (King of Darkies)” chapter, 1.

⁴⁹ Hawthorne does not specify when, however, 187.

reduction to obscurity by becoming a public gladiator. Having no major wars to fight, he instead made himself important to the rise of sport in the United States.⁵⁰

Dick's career as a boxer and teacher of boxing is the subject of numerous short newspaper pieces, mostly after 1825. The earliest, an 1821 piece in the *New England Galaxy and Literary Advertiser*, promotes "Sable Richard" as

the magnum stag amongst the bucks of the ring;—he is no mongrel, no half bred sneezer;—he is true blue; game to the finger's end; sound wind and limb; grand cock of the walk;—up to a cross-buttock, rib roasting, and fighting strait."⁵¹

A letter to the same paper one month later condemns the writer for calling him only "Big Dick" when he is "a king" according to the Waterhouse memoir which he quotes. The letter-writer suggests that "when the act of city incorporation goes into effect" Whites are to benefit from "an intelligent Mayor, chosen by the people; and why cannot we... elect a permanent 'King' of the Negroes?... we shall then be sure of an efficient town government...." Other newspaper items invoke his name and prowess in connection with an 1822 joke about tooth-pulling and an 1825 description of a trial witness on the stand. The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* reported in 1838 reported that "an exhibitor in Boston has... a pair of pantaloons said to have been worn by Big Dick, the famous American pugilist." Clearly, he made himself a legend in his own time and place.⁵²

Dick's Presence is also attested by William Cooper Nell, in his 1855 "*The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*." He states "When a boy, living in West Boston, I was familiar with the person of "Big Dick," and have heard the following

⁵⁰ Moore, Louis, "Fit for Citizenship: Black Sparring Masters, Gymnasium Owners, and the White Body, 1825-1886" *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 96, No. 4 (Fall 2011). This writer is grateful to Professor Moore for primary sources on Dick's boxing career.

⁵¹ "Spare Ribs," December 21 1821; 4, 219; "Juba," January 25 1822; 5, 224. American Periodicals Series Online pp.251 & 2 respectively

⁵² *Weekly Visitor and Ladies' Museum* Jul 27, 1822; 5, 13, American Periodicals; *Weekly Commercial Advertiser* 8 April 1825 pg. 208; Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, May 12 1828.

account of him (which is taken from the *Boston Patriot*) confirmed.⁵³ It is not wholly out of place in this collection....” The “account” is another excerpt from Waterhouse. Former police chief Edward Savage noted in *Boston by daylight and gaslight* (1866),

1829 July 4. Celebrated with little spirit.... In the evening, a man tride to whip Big Dick, and got the worst of it. Big Dick (Richard Cephas) was a big darkey and the bully of the Hill. He was a dancing-master by profession, and a peace-maker by practice. He is remembered by some old men as standing head and shoulders above his fellows, weight 300 pounds, with short open blouse, red jacket, little round-top hat, and was feared by all.⁵⁴

Whatever Savage meant by a 300-pound “dancing-master,” it seems that Dick was continuing the “peace-making” methods he’d practiced at Dartmoor, especially in neighborhoods then known as “Nigger Hill” (the north slope of Beacon Hill) and the “Black Sea” waterfront.⁵⁵ Around Christmas 1828 the *Patriot* briefly reported that “Richard Cephas, otherwise known as “Big Dick” and... “King Dick” was committed to jail... for violently assaulting one John Spencer and robbing him of some money” in an “affair” involving “the gaming table and ardent spirits.”⁵⁶

The most extensive non-fiction treatment of King Dick in Boston is an unpublished 1881 manuscript titled *Old Boston and its Once Familiar Faces* by George Hugh Crichton. A four-page 500-word chapter devoted to “Big Dick (King of the Darkies)” states that “Richard Cephas was a well known character on and about Nigger Hill about 1826-1835,” asserts that he was captured in the *U.S.S. Chesapeake* in 1813,

⁵³ p.27. His title-page continues, “with Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons, To Which is Added a Brief Survey of the Condition and Prospects of Colored Americans. The account “taken from the *Boston Patriot*” is an excerpt from the Waterhouse memoir quoted above. William Cooper Nell (Boston: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855), was an African American abolitionist and journalist; his dates are 1816-1874.

⁵⁴ Edward Hartwell Savage, *Police records and recollections, or, Boston by daylight and gaslight: for two hundred and forty years.* (Boston: J.P. Dale, 1873).

⁵⁵ JoAnne Lloyd, “Beneath the “City on the Hill:” The Lower Orders, Boston, 1700-1850,” Ph.D. diss., Boston College 2007, 12, 263, 269-274; 31, 148, 164-5; see also Wikipedia contributors. “North Street, Boston.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.* 7 Sep. 2012. Web. 14 Jan. 2013

⁵⁶ The report was reprinted in the *Haverhill Gazette*, December 27, 1828.

and tells of his role in Dartmoor. It states that his Boston boxing-school was not very successful, as “he knocked all his scholars out and they never came back to finish the course.” Crichton makes two valuable contributions to King Dick studies. The first expands on Savage’s mention of his “peace-maker” role:

A position upon the Special police force was offered him, which he accepted and filled with distinction. His hands were full and muscles kept in full play, with fighting, quelling riots and settling disputes. He did the work of ten men of the Constabulary force being a man of magnificent physique all of seven feet in height weighing 310 lbs.

A more recent scholar has concluded that Boston’s then-tiny police department probably used King Dick as an auxiliary, almost certainly not in an official position.⁵⁷ Crichton’s manuscript continues “Dick was a generous magnanimous man, always advocating the cause of right preventing the strong from trampling upon the weak.”⁵⁸

Second, Crichton also says Cephas

would act as Master of Ceremonies at the Nigger ‘Lecture’ (or as they called it Nigger Bobolition). On that day bright and early Dick would appear in full dress, a short red vest over which was spread a goodly-sized collar, his white shirt being fully displayed between pants and vest. His round wooley head surmounted with an old style police cap, swinging an Emmence [*sic*] cane. He placed himself at the head of an awkward squad of colored Brethren of all sizes and costumes. Giving the order to follow him, he would march them onto the Common in and across the Frog-pond, up the hill down around the Old Elm amid the shouts and laughter of the assembled crowd who came to witness Dick’s parade. After a patriotic speech Dick would dismiss them.

Negro Election Day was something of a saturnalia, overturning social norms, and which permitted a degree of black self-governance and judgment among slaves.⁵⁹ According to historian JoAnne Lloyd, Crichton conflated and to a degree traduced two traditions in

⁵⁷ Lloyd, ‘Beneath the “City on the Hill”’, 355. This writer is grateful to Dr. Lloyd for providing the key to “Big Dick’s” post-Dartmoor biography, by identifying him with the name “Richard Seavers.”

⁵⁸ Crichton, *Old Boston*, “Big Dick (King of the Darkies)” chapter, p.3

⁵⁹ Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002), 54-81. See also David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, (London and NY, Verso, 1991), 100-104

identifying “Big Dick’s parade” with both it and “Abolition Day” parades commemorating the United States’ 1808 ban on the slave trade.⁶⁰ But if Dick did indeed function as cop or “bully,” he represented a kind of revival of the colonial Pinkster celebration’s kingly rule. His demi-judicial strong-arm reign among working Blacks extended an informal but very real authority beyond the few days of the ceremony.

These parades and celebrations articulated Blacks’ right to public space. They were variously inflected by class-issues: the free black bourgeoisie of the 19th Century was determined to demonstrate their respectability, even as racist “broadside”-leaflets and journals denigrated all black public celebrations. Lloyd argues that Dick’s parade, however “fun” or harmless, represented an emergent class of free black workers. “Indisputably,” Lloyd states, “it was Richard “Big Dick” Seavers who had the ear and the heart of Boston’s black working class.”⁶¹ She speculates that the parade’s ‘fun-loving’ leader’s death may have cleared the way for nervous white Massachusetts politicians to change inauguration celebrations—for unofficial Negro offices as well as White electoral ones—from summery July 14 to discouraging January.⁶²

That is all the factual documentation tells us about his life. The death notice of “Mr. Richard Seavers, well known by the name of Big Dick”, appeared in February 1831 in the *New York Spectator*, *Niles Weekly Register*, and the second issue of William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*, among others. The cause was given “as a rapid consumption from a severe cold induced by exposure”, age 52 years. The obituary which followed days later said little, unfortunately, about his life in Boston beyond his boxing and that his personality was noteworthy. Crichton tells us that he was ‘full of fun’—which seems

⁶⁰ Lloyd, “Beneath the “City on the Hill”, 313-361

⁶¹ Lloyd, “Beneath the “City on the Hill”, 309

⁶² Lloyd, “Beneath the “City on the Hill”, 347-8

likely, given what happened next. For King Dick lived on, his image appropriated by a Boston journalist named Justin Jones.

Chapter the Second: Richard Reconstructed

During the Reign of Good King Dick

In 1845, the Boston story paper *The Star Spangled Banner*'s editor Justin Jones began running a serial named *Big Dick, the King of the Negroes or, Virtue and Vice Contrasted. A Romance of High and Low Life in Boston*. The author was listed as Harry Hazel, Jones's pen-name. Hazel/ Jones republished it as a 100-page "novellette"—his spelling—in 1846, because "the extreme popularity of the work among all classes of readers... fully justifies us in republishing it entire." *Big Dick* and its sequel constitute Dick's most extended biography. Each book contains a different, rather conventional lithograph of Dick; the two do not resemble each other. Hazel/ Jones gives Dick's name as Richard Seaver, states he was taken in the *Chesapeake-Shannon* battle, and refers to his time at Dartmoor where "he gained so great an ascendancy over his fellow prisoners, of his own complexion, that he was dubbed by general consent, 'King of the Negroes.'

At the close of the war he was liberated and came to Boston, where he remained until his death.... He once kept a Boxing School, but having been employed as a Police officer and finding it more lucrative, he gave up his school, for duties more acceptable to the government of the town. ... his new occupation kept him busily at work, and he probably fought more battles, settled more disputes, quelled more riots, and arrested more rogues than any ten of his coadjutors."⁶³

We will postpone further analysis of the "factual" record until we've considered this so-called "fictional" one.

The narrative opens in 1816, on a "bitter, cold, and cheerless night," when,

⁶³"Harry Hazel," *Big Dick, the King of the Negroes*, (Boston: Jones Publishing, 1846), Author's Preface.

notwithstanding the dreadful inclemency... there was one abroad who... had the power and the courage to breast the violence of the pitiless elements.... a gigantic looking man... capable of meeting almost any obstacle. The man of huge proportions suddenly halted, lifted [a] basket out of a snow-drift, and... found, to his consternation, that...—the basket contained a treasure!... an infant!”

The baby, we eventually learn, is the newborn daughter of a white lady and her husband, a midshipman in *U.S.S. Constitution*. The marriage has been kept secret at the cost of the mother’s disgrace, for fear it would blight the young officer’s career-prospects, and the baby has been exposed by its vicious uncle and wicked rich grandfather. The owner of the nearest “mansion”, a “rich and miserly Frenchman, of sixty” refuses refuge to the foundling. The yet-unnamed giant (race not given) takes it to Boston’s lowest basement dive, “The Mermaid’s Retreat” where he has an “arrangement” with the owners. The Retreat is “a vile haunt ...for ... the fallen” on the disreputable side of Beacon Hill. It’s a place of

...universal happiness—[where] the blessings of Liberty were enjoyed... freedom of thought—freedom of expression—freedom of the press... and the utmost freedom of action—it mattered not how antic, how boisterous, how revolting—every indulgence was tolerated....

The giant stops a brawl by breaking down the door, and is finally formally introduced as: “BIG DICK, THE KING OF THE NEGROES! The Champion of Tri-mount! The Magnanimous, the gigantic, the unconquered hero of a thousand well-fought combats!” and one of “those who were bound to watch over the morals and quietude of the town while its inhabitants slept.”⁶⁴

Big Dick sends the brawlers out into the dark and stormy night, banishes the Retreat’s musicians Black Pete and Tambo Lum to the coal cellar, and gets the owners to adopt the infant foundling. Then he interrogates “two sprigs of aristocracy” who are

⁶⁴“Harry Hazel,” *Big Dick* 12-16.

“seeking a night’s diversion” at the Retreat, and forces them to admit to pimping the virginal young daughter of a white friend of his to a local madam. Pages later Dick rescues the girl, un-violated, from “old marm Packingham’ ... and her corps of shameless, depraved daughters of iniquity!” and returns her to the bosom of her grieving family headed by an impoverished but honest watchman.

Eight years later, Dick reunites the foundling, since grown to girlhood, with her disgraced upper-class mother. He thwarts the said mother’s arranged marriage to a lispng swindler posing as a French Count, and reunites her with her husband, just returned from nine years at sea. Then Dick reconciles her with her debauched and dying brother, and witnesses the suicide of her villainous father.

The ludicrous plot is less significant than the settings and characters. “The Mermaid’s Retreat” is both subterranean space for the expression and fulfillment of social appetites “of the *lowest* order... to the newly-landed mariner, any port in a storm[where] no questions were asked;” and part of the public sphere where Dick is “sworn to maintain order... quell the riot and preserve peace.” “Having some discretion invested in him as an officer of the police,” Dick uses the place as “a sort of ‘rat-trap,’ or rather rogue-trap.” The owners are cockney bawds; the patrons, Irish brawlers,

sailors and scavengers, boot-blacks and beggars, chimney-sweeps and street-sweeps, bullies and burglars, gamblers and highwaymen, cut-purses and cut-throats, ... rag-pickers, shop-lifters, apple-women, floor-scrubbers [and] a score or more of the remnants of once exceedingly fine and blooming damsels!”

The Retreat contains the dregs and disorders and social diversions of the lower classes.

The Mermaid’s patrons are mostly harmless as long as they swindle only each other and, unsuccessfully, Dick himself.

Vice is embodied in greedy plutocrats and invasive foreigners; Virtue in Dick's Presence. Some Boston businessmen are virtuous, as are the generally absent officers of Boston's own hero-warship *U.S.S. Constitution*. Danger comes from immigrants, poseurs and other transgressors who threaten to rupture the boundaries between respectable society and the chaos and corruption of the Black Sea neighborhood. Villains—Irish low-lives, cockney criminals or miserly phlegmatic French gentlemen—are marked with ludicrous comic dialects. While the Retreat attracts some of those “who had fallen from a higher estate... [members of] another grade of society,” Dick's fellow Blacks are contained in their place, even banished to the basement Retreat's lowest coal-cellar, by the additional mark of skin-color. The Retreat's talented musicians neither enhance nor threaten the higher classes and culture, since “Genius never meets its reward under a sable skin,” except for those already-corrupted few who seek them out.⁶⁵ Blacks, in short, constitute a separate society shared with déclassé Whites.

Dick and the Moral Law

Hazel/ Jones couples “Virtue” to humor in Big Dick's persona of both “Herculean” hero and comic foil. His only enemies are the already vicious people he inherits in his role policing the evil rich and the immoral poor. Falsely charged with assault, Dick intimidates constables sent to arrest him, making them wait while he dawdles over his chowder. He even tucks their chief, Boston's finest “thief-taker,” under his arm and carries him physically cross-town to the court-room:

Big Dick marched into the Court Room with majestic dignity, and placing Old Reed on the clerk's desk thus addressed the magistrate:
“Your Honor will perceive that I have made due return of your constable, and have also presented myself before your Honor to answer any charge that may have been preferred against me.”

⁶⁵ “Harry Hazel,” *Big Dick* 13

The Judge tried to preserve his gravity; but the scene was too ludicrous. He burst into a hearty laugh; the lawyers too were convulsed, and the spectators shouted boisterously with mirth.

Dick is acquitted. His sense of “fun” is raised to more-than-human height in this incident: his titular virtue and humor leaven the excesses of the over-solemn law. Even the bailiffs accept humiliation at his huge hands. Author Hazel/ Jones asserts that “there are now living in this city several who remember most of the circumstances narrated throughout this chapter,” and claims that “the old records of the magistrate’s court, if in existence” will confirm the story.⁶⁶

Big Dick’s most provocative episode has him lead a mob of “mechanics, sailors and truckmen” in the historical July 1826 “Riot on Negro Hill.” In this little-documented event, a self-deputized petty-bourgeois posse pulled down buildings in Boston’s misleadingly-named interracial red-light gambling-and-whoring districts. Hazel/Jones has Dick exhort rioters with a stirring oration to “a duty which every man owes to the morals and welfare of the city... a good cause... of virtue [versus] evils.” Because “Justice is too weak” and slow, “a riotous assembly” is needed to make room for “hundreds of tenements [to be] occupied by the industrious and the virtuous of our young city.”⁶⁷

Based on *Big Dick*, scholar Joanne Lloyd argues that this was not a race riot, but one of several Boston “vice” or “morals” riots wherein citizens asserted the virtue of their newly-industrializing city against its more permissive past. But “vice” and “race” riots may have been less separable than Lloyd claims. Whites faced with industrial discipline

⁶⁶ “Harry Hazel,” *Big Dick* 43-49.

⁶⁷ “By general consent, you have made me the leader of this expedition. It is not an honor that I coveted, but believing it a duty which every man owes to the morals and welfare of the city, I accept with pleasure. We are engaged in a good cause—the cause of virtue, and though the laws may call this assemblage a riotous one, we are bent on the destruction... of a vice which is equally unlawful...”: etc., etc. “Harry Hazel,” *Big Dick* 58-61.

created a “pornography of their former lives,” argues David Roediger, paraphrasing Jules Rawick. They often attacked Blacks in a combination of envy and shame, conflating Blacks’ supposed freedom for pleasure with their own more autonomous, less regimented pre-industrial selves.⁶⁸

In participating in the Nigger Hill mob, Dick faces a version of the city’s predicament writ small: whether to hold to one’s maritime roots and continue to serve the shore-going sailor-patrons of the dives, or pursue a new, more urban industry-oriented future. Leading the “riot” would place Big Dick in an ambiguous and complex position: should he fulfill his semi-official policing role and serve the moral spirit of the law rather than its letter, by attacking centers of vice? Or should he stay true to his own history as a patron and bouncer for the Retreat and other such dives? Hazel/ Jones’s black Dick resolves dilemma by leading the mob away from his friends, towards other malefactors. He portrays Dick as remorseful afterward, but only because he believes he’s accidentally killed an assailant, not out of conflicted allegiances.⁷⁰ While his involvement seems plausible, even likely, his leadership role is almost as hard to credit as his oratory.

The fact that Dick is able to flout the letter of the law while serving its spirit cannot but throw the discourse of law and order into question. Dick’s exceptional stature allows him to serve a higher social law which preserves his freedom and his friends’ liberty, and serves the market-laws of supply and demand for vice-type services. This moral human law even transcends the property rights of the drinking-and-whoring dens’ owners. Dick does not challenge the validity of man’s legal code; indeed, his court case confirms its fairness by demonstrating that even a Black man can overcome false

⁶⁸ Lloyd, ‘Beneath the “City on the Hill”’, 380-390; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness* 95-6, 100-110, paraphrasing Rawick’s *From Sundown to Sunup*.

⁷⁰“Harry Hazel,” *Big Dick* 61-2.

accusers. Dick's involvement with the extreme antics of the Mermaid's Retreat's patrons allow the author to parody Constitutional "Libert[ies]... of thought... freedom of speech... of expression... of the press... [and] freedom of action." The satire points up the absurdity of the United States' claims to exceptional Virtue. Hazel/Jones demonstrates the hypocrisy of the "equal[ity]" to which "all men are created" while making Dick himself exceptional.

"Elder and even middle-aged inhabitants of our metropolis," claims the "novellettist" again, will confirm "this well-accredited tale... together with many incidents connected with that memorable affair, which are now given to the public for the first time."⁷¹ Are these disclaimers a mere literary device? True or not, Dick's shifting alliances between the vice and the virtuous sides of the law smack of a real human being, resisting impoverishment and obscurity after the glory of his Dartmoor reign. That he might be more inclined to make the most of his powers rather than hold to an absolute moral code is understandable; and being a decade from his sea-time, he'd be free to commit to bourgeois morality. Big Dick monitors the boundaries of democracy and disorder, keeping the extreme "liberties" of the Mermaid's Retreat and its lowlife customers in their place, apart from Boston's socially higher, if sometimes morally inferior, citizens. Dick's familiarity with the rules and practices of *la vie de la lowlife* position him to police the limits of the lower depths, and protect some of its denizens from violent exploitation.⁷²

Big Dick penetrates upper-class rooms, too. The story ends with Dick "an honored guest" at the high-society wedding of the white girl he had rescued. "Our

⁷¹ "Harry Hazel," *Big Dick* 57.

⁷² For "*la vie de la lowlife*," see (or rather hear), Russell, Anna "Anna Russell's Guide to Concert Audiences", Columbia, 33rpm, 1953.

southern friends may marvel” at his social acceptability, remarks the author, “but let them remember that our hero was a Chilian by birth; that he had as good an education as the great mass of mankind; and that he was as hospitable, as magnanimous, as brave, and as ‘chivalrous’ as the most gallant son of the South could desire.” Thus Jones challenges slavery with a tongue-in-cheek mildness which avoids the “excesses” of Yankee abolitionism. “And were it not that he had been born with a skin as dark as an Ethiop’s, even [Southerners] would have accounted him a hero of the age....”⁷³

Big Dick was followed by “Harry Hazel’s New Romance. *FOURPE TAP: or, the Middy of the Macedonian. In which is contained the concluding incidents in the eventful career of BIG DICK, KING OF THE NEGROES*”. Dick is reduced to *Deus ex Machina*. His star turn is partly taken over by a mute black bantam-weight Black youth, the eponymous Mr. Tap. As small and lively a boxer as Dick is large and impregnable (“poignards” shatter against Dick’s chest), Tap is rescued from a distant pirate isle by a U.S. naval midshipman (the sub-eponymous “middy”) along with the girl, now amnesiac, whom Dick saved in the prequel. Both are then brought to Boston. The plot is even more preposterous than *Big Dick*, with some of the domestic adventure displaced overseas, from a tale of urban corruption into an escapist-patriotic fantasy.

The domestic parts of the two “novellettes” are quite similar, as police farce, moral mellerdrama and parlor romance. Even the two (white) male love-interests are similar: both stories feature shore-bound men of skill and mental labor (physician in *Big Dick*, artist in *Fourpe Tap*) and officers of the U.S. Navy. The latter represent the highest state of white manhood, combining heroism, service and discipline with protection of legitimate commerce, much as Dick does. They serve in the most famous of Boston-

⁷³ “Harry Hazel,” *Big Dick* 99.

based frigates.⁷⁴ The Navy is a force apart from the urban mainstream, like Blacks, yet elevated in contrast to “Negroes” who are both suppressed and laughable. The poor-but-honest-, or rich-but-personally-uncorrupted heroines embody true love, loyalty and domesticity. After they’re rescued by Dick and/or the Navy from pimps’ and pirates’ threatened violation, they return to matrimony, home and hearth. Again the story ends in marriage, although this time Dick is not invited.

Dick first appears four chapters into *Fourpe Tap* as the powerful-yet-puckish spirit of the Fourth of July celebration on Boston Common. He still polices his black compatriots, patrols the wild side of society and keeps swindlers in check; thwarts the plots of foreign-born criminals; provides refuge to the unjustly accused talented young artist, and facilitates young love. He keeps Blacks within bounds in the Common celebration; he is not seen leading any parade, either patriotic or for the more troubling “Bobolition.” He’s trusted by the honest burghers of Boston, and respected by all. The main additions to his story are accounts of birth, early biography, death and resurrection.

Dick explains that he is the son of a beautiful enslaved “Caffir” princess and a young Peruvian officer of “herculean size and strength,” orphaned on “the night that ushered me into the world... by a dreadful earthquake [which] destroyed a great portion of ... the Peruvian city of Quito.”⁷⁵ After education and various adventures, he makes it to New York as a stevedore, and enlists in time to be captured in *Chesapeake* and sent to Dartmoor. “Your career has certainly been a very singular as well as an interesting

⁷⁴The historical *H.M.S. Macedonian* had been taken prize by *Constitution*’s sister-frigate *U.S.S. United States* during the War of 1812; her name recalled Alexander the Great, King of the known world. We can only speculate that she was chosen by Hazel/ Jones for the title of his second *Big Dick* for the alliteration, and because she was the most important naval prize taken in the War.

⁷⁵ Not yet then independent of the colony of Chile. A notorious earthquake occurred there in 1797.

one,” says Dick’s interlocutor in *Fourpe Tap*, ““and I dare say your name and fortunes will serve as a theme for some romancer of a future generation.””⁷⁶

The Man’s Fate

Our hero declines and dies shortly after accidentally killing his friend Tap. Dick flings him headfirst against a tree-stump while breaking up an unfair boxing match between Tap and “a negro sailor of double his weight”. Instead of “Herculean” hero, King Dick is reduced to a minor character, not even a member of the wedding, used by Hazel/ Jones to sell the novel. He tragically earns his mark of Cain, as biblical advocates of slavery interpreted skin-color, by killing his brother instead of standing as a counter-example to Black subordination. Dick’s friends, fearing for his remains, bury the body infused with “a chemical compound which would not only destroy the body in twenty-four hours but would have a like effect upon the coffin, plate and all!” at “low water at a place designated in Boston Harbor.”

... But the credulous negroes had been outwitted—deceived! ...on the very night that they went down to see if the chemical agent had destroyed the body, it was stretched out on a dissecting table in Mason Street, prepared for the knife of the dissector!

Luckily [*sic*] it was for the physician that his treachery was not discovered by those who had so outrageously imposed upon. Instead of prescribing for the destruction of the body he had prescribed for its preservation, and in twelve hours after it had been deposited he had caused it to be removed!

If any of our readers doubt this last event of our story, we would inform them that by visiting the medical college of this city they can ... [view] the skeleton of the negro giant, which is there deposited.⁷⁷

In all these diminishments, we may see the writer anticipating Dick’s fate in the Twentieth Century by retreating from a relatively pro-Black stance. Incidentally, Crichton’s “non-fictional” *Old Boston and its Once Familiar Faces* manuscript tells a

⁷⁶ “Harry Hazel,” *Fourpe Tap* 84-6.

⁷⁷ “Harry Hazel,” *Fourpe Tap* 100.

slightly different story: “Dick before his death sold his body to the Medical College, where the skeleton hangs to this day.”⁷⁸

Big Dick is a champion and hero of Hazel/Jones’s romances in every sense except the sexual: he is a bachelor, honorable and trusted with the most vulnerable, richest and whitest young beauties of the city. He’s the rescuer of babies and virgins, the chaste enabler of love and marriage among respectable white Bostonians. Dick confirms their purity by his own. He himself lives without wife or lover, and without any expressed interest whatsoever in having either them or the “fallen damsels” of Boston.

In the middle of the city’s corruption, Dick lives a monastic life. He abides in a ramshackle hovel with “dingy brick walls... cracked chimneys, broken panes of glass, vacuums filled with cast-off garments, old hats, etc.,” despite the respect and patronage he’s earned from Boston’s finest, best and brightest. He also owns a “rickety... uninhabited tenement.”⁷⁹ Despite author Hazel/ Jones’s glorification, Dick is firmly stuck in his place like other Blacks, separate from Boston’s white society. He’s alone and apart, sacrificed to humanity and resurrected, a secular saint with a Rabelaisian sense of humor.

Hazel/Jones’s Dick is the embodiment of Virtue—civic and sexual, commercial and criminal loyalty among thieves—or at least low businessmen. His speech and grammar are impeccable, his voice “stentorian,” his loyalty unimpeachable, his strength as the strength of ten. Despite his poverty, “Seaver’s” modesty and sense of “fun” are an example for all. The author holds him up as evidence of Blacks’ worthiness, while

⁷⁸ A curator of Harvard’s Anatomical Museum today states, “the case of Richard Seavers is not unfamiliar to us and the Warren Museum has had this question before. We have not found any documentation to date that suggests that Richard Seavers was part of the Warren... We are currently engaged in a full osteological survey of our skeletal collection and it is possible that something on Seavers may be found. However, we are at the end of this process, so this would be unlikely at this juncture.” Email correspondence between with Dominic Hall, July 31 - August 20, 2012. See also Savage, *Boston by Gaslight*, 69 “[Dick] long since ‘shuffled off this mortal coil,’ but his stately figure may still be seen not a mile from his former residence.”

⁷⁹ “Harry Hazel,” *Big Dick* 68; *Fourpe Tap* 75.

keeping him firmly in his place policing the disreputable side of Beacon Hill, holding back the “Black Sea.” His rogues’ gallery is full of Irish, cockneys, and Frenchmen; apprentices, madams, and miserly, dishonest, greedy, socially- and economically- advantaged persons who’ve betrayed their privileges to prey on others. Big Dick shines through the melodramatic plotting and overheated prose as the moving principle of a morality play and a pirate adventure both. Hazel/Jones has appropriated Dick’s identity to refashion him as perfect public servant. He is apolitical, not participating in governance or voting. He is hardly seen ruling over his fellow “Negroes”, despite the title, except in one comic scene in each novelette—at the Mermaid’s Retreat in the first, on the Common in the second. Still, his impressive physical presence and his violent occupation embodied a potential challenge to the masculinity of Boston’s Whites. This may explain his sexual and political neutering in Hazel/Jones’s portrait of King Dick.

Any Black King would, by definition, be exceptional within his own community; but Hazel/Jones is not interested in that. Dick does, however, protect Blacks and Boston’s productive strata, which is constructed as white, from each other by keeping them in their largely separate respective spheres. Ultimately, and despite the writer’s intentions, Hazel/Jones’ King Dick becomes the exception who proves the reign of White Supremacy. While boxing aficionados recalled him in mid-to-late 19th Century news-journal items, for the most part, the century forgot him.

Dick in “Reality,” Fiction, and Academia

Reading Richard’s Reality

Why should we care about King Dick’s extraordinary and often improbable story? What does this remarkable saga tell us? If true, why is he so obscure, and if it’s embellished, why does he matter? Our evidence runs along a continuum from history fictionalized by its tellers—as has been said, the official versions are fiction, too—to “historical fiction.”⁸⁰ After the War of 1812, Dick’s prominence, as a black man whose boxing school and exhibitions could not easily be confined to the back of the Directory, was a problem for Boston society. News-journalists select for their market, and historians write for the victors, so nonfiction involves a certain focusing and silencing, while fiction struggles to construct roles and answers. Still, we must be careful not to fit the limited evidence to the historian’s wish fulfillment. So first we will consider how much can be established as “factual;” second, we will review attempts to construct meaning from his life in fiction and in scholarship. The features of Big Dick that emerge from both Hazel/ Jones’ “novellettes” and memoirs like Crichton’s must be judged by their plausibility as well as their provenance.

Hazel/ Jones’ truth claims may just be a story-teller’s gimmick, the inverse of modern “disclaimers” and corresponding to the trope of being ‘based on’ real events. But current historical theory teaches us to examine all texts equally: so-called fact and fiction are both “discourses,” historically-situated products and records of human biases and beliefs. According to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, ruling classes attain leadership, or hegemony, by manipulating the cultural values of society. And cultural

⁸⁰One who has said so is historian Glenda Gilmore, in Lipke, Alan, *Democracy’s Denial: Revolutions in Wilmington* (Public Radio International: Listening Between the Lines, Inc., 2004 and www.PRX.com).

ascendancy is achieved, asserts French theorist Michel Foucault, through naturalized discourses which historicize and popularize narratives about values and “good” and “common” sense.⁸¹ Scholar-historians and fiction-writers alike serve their audiences’ perceived needs, however different their market-sectors.

One problem is that the “factual” Crichton repeats almost verbatim language found in Hazel/ Jones’s preface to the fictional *Big Dick* “novelette:” “he was, in truth, a magnanimous and generous man, always to be found advocating for the cause of the right and preventing the strong from trampling upon the weak.”⁸² Crichton also echoes Hazel/ Jones in recounting Dick’s Chilean origin and capture in *U.S.S. Chesapeake*, although using different names. So how should we assess these sources? Once we allow for paucity of records, especially about Blacks, the confirmed “facts” about Dick’s life in Boston do not definitively contradict most of the fictions, nor vice-versa. Crichton gives *Big Dick*’s Boston dates as “about 1826-1835;” the former is approximately when “Seavers’s” name first appears in the city directory; but the latter is four years *after* his obituary—understandable when you consider that Crichton was writing fifty years later. Crichton also claims Dick “was one of the prominent leaders at the burning of the Charlestown convent”—an historical event which took place in 1834! Crichton may have been confused by the fact that another “Harry Hazel” “novellette” about the destruction of the Ursuline (Roman Catholic) Convent was published the year before *Big Dick*.⁸³ Hazel/Jones and Crichton also shared the far-fetched story of Dick’s “Chilian” origins,

⁸¹ Antonio Gramsci; Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Noell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (International Publishers, New York, 1971), 7-10, 192-218. Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 3-39, 71-87, 126-140, 178-211; Clare O’Farrell, www.Michel-foucault.com/concepts, web, consulted 3/22/13 1:35PM; Johanna Oksala, *How to Read Foucault*, (NY: W.W. Norton & Co. 2007), 45-54.

⁸² “Harry Hazel”, *Big Dick*, Author’s Preface; compare page 24/footnote 56 above.

⁸³ This writer has skimmed the novelette, in which Dick does not alas appear.

which would have made him not merely an Atlantic Creole but a citizen of Global Oceania. Not even the “novelletist” Jones gives Dick Spanish fluency or an accent.

As publisher/ author of a story-paper, Jones would certainly have felt entitled to embellish stories he’d heard, but Crichton believed he was reminiscing about “history.” The most plausible reconstruction is that both Crichton and the Maine-born Justin Jones heard the traditions of Dick’s life in Boston, but they could hardly be in a position to confirm them. Jones was fifteen years old at Dick’s reported death, Crichton was five.⁸⁴ So was Crichton familiar with the Hazel works and confused some of the details? Did they know each other? Did they share sources? Can we hear, faintly, Big Dick telling different stories to different audiences at different times? All these seem likely.

Take Dick’s capture, for example. Statistically, given the small size of the U.S. Navy he was most likely to have served in a privateer. That he was a prisoner-of-conscience from the Royal Navy first appears in his obituaries; if true, it presumably would have appeared in the Dartmoor intake records. Service in *Chesapeake*, which first appears in Hazel/Jones, would have associated him with a famous, tragic and heroic moment in Boston’s and the Navy’s history. This would have enhanced his stature to some, especially in the 1830s as the fleet grew in size and status and its professionalism replaced the entrepreneurial romance of privateering amateurs. But it was a lie: *Chesapeake*’s crew never reached Dartmoor.⁸⁵

Still, the differing stories made it harder to trace him to a possibly enslaved past, and linked him to whichever societal myth might most impress a listener. In the absence

⁸⁴ and William Nell, who “was familiar with the person of “Big Dick,”...when a boy” had just turned 14. For Jones’s biographical details, see J. Randolph Cox, *The Dime Novel Companion: a Source Book*, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 147-8.

⁸⁵ email correspondence with Matthew Brenckle, Research Historian, USS Constitution Museum, 3/25/13.

of easily-accessible documentation, only one source seems to have been available and credible: the Man himself. One is forced to conclude that Dick was well-informed about news-events and popular historical narratives, and well-practiced in the sailor's pastime of yarn-telling, and that he contributed significantly to his own legend.

Or take his names. A Richard *Cephas* might have given his name as "Crafus" to the British clerk who recorded his Dartmoor intake, to obscure his origins or an enslaved past. Or he might have been misheard by the Devonshire clerk. And when deposed about the Massacre, he might have volunteered his real name out of a sense of patriotic duty. Or he might forgotten his *nom de guerre*, especially if he was in the habit of "indulging" in beer "to a crapulous degree"—a habit neither unusual nor particularly discreditable to a seaman of that time (nor any other time, perhaps). After arriving in the Boston area, he might have adopted "Seaver" to recall Waterhouse's King of Dartmoor, while avoiding too closely traceable an association with a possibly-enslaved past.⁸⁶

We know of Dick's existence mostly because at Dartmoor, he was undeniable: if not for his leadership there, Dick might have been lost in the trivia of antiquarianism. In Boston, he still embodied a challenge to the prevailing social and power-structure simply by being a physically-strong free working-class Black of some authority, but he could no longer to be isolated in a separate "wing." Dick played a major role in creating "a market for boxing instruction in the Boston area," with his "boxing resort" and "scientific system," according to boxing historian Louis Moore.⁸⁸ Leaving his fans aside, many

⁸⁶The confusion about his name began in Boston, unless the "Crafus" of the Dartmoor intake records is the same man who marked his X on the massacre affidavit as "Cephas." The memoirists who were his fellow prisoners apparently knew him only as "(Big or King) Dick."

⁸⁸Louis Moore, "Fit for Citizenship: Black Sparring Masters, Gymnasium Owners, and the White Body, 1825-1886" *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 96, No. 4 (Fall 2011), 451-3. This writer is indebted to Professor Moore for primary sources and leads on Dick's boxing career.

Whites would gladly have ignored or forgotten his existence; and because he was Black, they could. He apparently had neither family nor literacy to contest any posthumous portrayal if libelous (pace Hazel/ Jones, Crichton and Savage).

King Dick has come down to us almost entirely as a construction of the white gaze. In his own time, Blacks were mostly illiterate if in his class, distanced and disdainful if of a higher social order.⁸⁹ Although Hazel/ Jones asserts “that he was superior to most of his race in intellect and education,” and able to read and write, no non-fiction source agrees.⁹⁰ There are no known records of his “thousand combats,” no ledgers of the boxing and dancing lessons he taught. A very few Black writers resisted his reduction to a tool of Whites, much as he himself resisted reduction to obscurity after Dartmoor. Black abolitionist William C. Nell quotes Waterhouse, the earliest, most pedantic and political of the Dartmoor memoirs, for most of his information about Dick. The selection implies Dick’s sense of humor and policing role without directly affirming them; in his own voice Nell asserts only that Dick was born in “Salem or vicinity,” entered the Royal Navy at age 16 and was a prisoner of conscience. Nell’s portrait of a man of principle and leadership accords with the book’s sub-titular agenda of elevating “the Condition and Prospects of Colored Americans.” The only other known Nineteenth Century account by a Black is an 1894 essay titled “The White Problem” by Richard T. Greener, “the first Black Harvard College Graduate.” Greener takes the famous white literary critic and writer William Dean Howells to task for “looking up the streets of ‘Nigger Hill,’ and see[ing] only a few straggling Negroes.... And yet there are many

⁸⁹ see Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest*, and Lloyd, ‘Beneath the “City on the Hill”’ for Black middle-class attitudes.

⁹⁰ It seems most likely that Dick himself was illiterate, as Brown/Hawthorne surmised (above); after all, Waterhouse explicitly noted the Black priest Simon’s ability to read (on page 179). And besides, *if Dick could read, he would have written, n’est-ce pas?*

stories...” including “Big Dick, the boxer.”⁹¹ Both accounts are notable for their discretion, as fits the authors’ doubly-disdained status as Black and writing about a working-class subject. Black scholars such as James Horton have begun to reflect on Dick’s role, but the records have been so scattered, so inaccessible until the recent advent of the internet, as to limit their investigation.

Nonetheless we can discern elements of a powerful agent, as well as a powerful physique, in Big Dick’s history. He embodies a transitional moment in the process of defining U.S. identity and nationality and the place of race within them. The War of 1812 was a critical time for national unity. New England’s economic trade-related war aims differed from the rest of the States’s territorial ambitions. After U.S. invasions of Canada were defeated, the ruinous blockade made New England’s secession a real possibility. One way the “war party” tried to preserve the union was by advocating “Free Trade and Sailor’s Rights” as the national goal. The slogan declared a kind of nationalism that was at once limited in its territorial aims, and expansive in extending U.S. economic ideals onto the borderless oceans. It also reflected the rising Nineteenth century ideal of Free Labor.⁹² But as a black sailor, considered inferior by many of his white peers, Dick fit neither the national nor the class category well.

Richard and Representation

In order to further understand his role, we must now assess the evidence of “fictional” as well as “historical” sources. Tall tales of Dick’s prowess circulated among

⁹¹ Greener was born in 1844 and so never met Big Dick. He graduated from Harvard in 1870. The essay appears in Werner Sollors, Caldwell Titcomb and Thomas A. Underwood, eds., *Blacks at Harvard: a documentary history of African-American experience at Harvard and Radcliffe*, (New York: NYU Press 1993), 46 and 54; Greener endnotes his reference “Richard Seavers (c.1794-1830), who stood 6 feet 5 inches.”

⁹² David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*, (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 9-58.

boxing fans and were published by white journalists, but no folktale, fiction or verse about him known to have originated among Blacks has survived. Could this indicate that he was perceived in his own community as being on the side of legal oppression, in service to The Man, rather than a hero of resistance like Stagolee or Robert Charles?⁹³

Dick himself was a living paradox. At Dartmoor, Whites Othered him as a not-quite-U.S. American, banished to the black Wing he made his own; in Boston, novelist Hazel/ Jones elevated him to an exceptional citizen who stood as an example of law, order, and Virtue regardless of his origin and voting status. Some Dartmoor memoirists constructed U.S. identity by excluding Blacks and Dick himself, as an “undemocratic” “usurper” and “despot,” more like their British captors and unreliable Napoleonic allies than themselves. In fiction, Hazel/ Jones constructed true Americanism by holding Dick up to our admiration as an immigrant whose voluntary allegiance and contribution to our polity make him one our (sort of) best. The story of his “Chilian” origin erases African genesis and America’s sin. Thus, the “real” Dick helped define the United States by exclusion, by differing from White models, while the fictional one presented an alternate, more inclusive but still edited Americanism.

Similarly, Dick incarnated cultural ambiguities. At Dartmoor, as we have seen, Dick’s alliance with raw noisy black religion, with its Dionysian “ranting ... roaring, blasphem[ous] ... torrent of broken gibberish” attracted comment, and some White attendees.⁹⁴ In Hazel/ Jones’s proto-Unitarian Boston, religion was almost invisible, seen only in the weddings that end both *Big Dick* novellettes, and in the literary conceit of Dick’s own Christ-like suffering and resurrection. It’d be easy to make too much of this

⁹³ Would that I turn out to be wrong! See Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, (Oxford and NY: Oxford University Press, 1978) especially 407-440.

⁹⁴ Brown/Hawthorn, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 194

fictional device, but we should note that at this time human History was widely held to operate within what Stephen G. Hall calls a “providential” framework, showing the workings of divine guidance through Great Men and peoples.⁹⁵ Again, in the white historical record Dick represented the rowdy extreme of acceptable religion; in fiction, he participated in a less stringent, more apollonian practice.

Dick’s real-life role as cultural broker in Dartmoor is discussed above. In Boston fiction, he’s the protector of liberty and artistic genius in the Mermaid’s Retreat and on Boston Common; in both fiction and fact, he’s the cop and King of the Negroes, acknowledged by authorities as The Boxer and the bully. It’s tempting to choose to see the historical Dick as clown-prince satirizing as well as upholding the rules of law, as in the fictional courtroom episode described in *Big Dick, King of the Negroes*, but we *just don’t know*. So from here forward we join other scholars in their imaginative endeavor of assessing all the nineteenth-Century evidence of Dick’s life and times.

Historians have tried to extract as much as possible from the sources. They’ve read Dartmoor memoirs against the grain to get at his meaning. In contrast, Lloyd’s dissertation about working-class Boston tries to read history into Hazel/ Jones’s “fictions.” Dick’s shadow hangs over Patrick Rael’s 2002 *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* as the there-unnamed King of Boston’s Blacks. As the relevant chapter of Jeffrey Bolster’s *Black Jacks* is titled, he is the prime exemplar of “The Boundaries of Race in Maritime Culture.”

⁹⁵ Hall, Stephen G., *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth Century America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1-86; Novick, Peter, *That Noble Dream, The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.61-85.

Literary scholars seem to find him irresistible, too. In both fiction and non-fiction, Dick marks an interim stage in the development of identity/ consciousnesses of Race, nationality, and Class. Professor of English Jonathan Elmer goes so far as to argue that King Dick inspired the “black pagod” of the beginning of *Billy Budd, Foretopman*. Elmer argues, in *On Lingering and Being Last: Race and Sovereignty in the New World* (2008) that, as *Billy Budd* was Herman Melville’s unfinished last work, King Dick thereby represents Melville’s last word on individuality and autonomy in this racialized world.⁹⁶

Hazel’s Big Dick fictions belong to a genre of mid-nineteenth century anti-immigrant, anti-catholic “city novels,” according to Timothy Wade Helwig. In these, “native-born workers [are] feeling threatened by the labor competition immigrants posed” as has so often been the case in U.S. history. As adversary to these interlopers, Dick is a full-blooded American champion (even if born in *South America*).⁹⁷ This is important at a time when, Helwig argues, class was defined in the United States “as a primarily political rather than an economic identity.” In contrast to European socialism, U.S. Americans often described class in terms of antagonism between productive and non-productive groups. The villains are “part of a coalition of idle non-producers and their political allies.... Immigrants often appear as the willing henchmen and impressionable dupes of the villains.”⁹⁸ These non-producers threaten to reduce citizen-craftsmen to dependent

⁹⁶Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Foretopman*, (NY: Pathfinder, 1965), 1st paragraph after the Preface. Jonathan Elmer, “Was Billy Black?” *On Lingering And Being Last: Race And Sovereignty In The New World* (NY: Fordham University Press, 2008) 108-117, references Hawthorne, Bolster and Horsman, but never Dick’s real or fictional appearance in Boston.

⁹⁷ Timothy Wade Helwig describes Dick as “an escaped slave from Chile who fought in the Revolutionary War and was held prisoner by the British for several years.” *Race, nativism, and the making of class in antebellum city-mysteries*. Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2006. Helwig was not familiar with his Dartmoor or Boston “real-life” documentation when he wrote the dissertation, according to a telephone conversation with this writer, 11/4/12.

⁹⁸ Helwig 3, 9-13. He bases his argument largely on cultural historians Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, and David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, among others.

wage-slaves. In contrast, Dick's companions at the Mermaid's Retreat are productive in their dirty-but-untouchable work, even satirically admirable for their extreme "liberties."

Big Dick's race connects him to Helwig's central thesis: that the emergent socialist and abolitionist presses of the 1840s sought to build alliances among their constituents through shared tropes, arguments and story-lines, about productive laboring people threatened by exploitative banker-investor-industrialists in the north and slave-owners in the south.⁹⁹ "Wage slavery" constituted real degradation for white men in a time when industrialization was threatening the independence of craftsmen and yeomen. As a productive enforcer of social-moral codes, Hazel/ Jones's Dick is designed to appeal to city mystery-fans and abolitionist-readers alike. But Dick does not articulate an abolitionist agenda in any known record, fictive or factual. Hazel/Jones constructs him as silent on race and slavery issues: if he stands for autonomy and independence, it is by example only. He lives the life of "self-reliance, self-motivation, integrity and thrift esteemed by most Northerners as fundamental components of the free-market system," according to Susan O'Donovan.¹⁰¹

In the novels we see Dick interacting with Whites "of the better class" and the déclassé denizens of the Retreat, but the Black middle class is invisible. His own poverty underlines his working-class status, closer in his work to the field-laborer than to the elite house servant of standard U.S. American typologies.¹⁰² In popular/pulp "city novels," however, class is portrayed as almost a moral construct, a sentimental, ethical, and even

⁹⁹ Helwig finds common ground between David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness*, and Eric Foner's "Workers and Slavery," in Paul Buhle and Alan Dawley, eds., *Working for Democracy*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 23

¹⁰¹ Susan O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 166

¹⁰² Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial & Antebellum South*, (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 186-243.

aesthetic lifestyle, rather than economic category. Helwig argues this moral interpretation grows out of distaste for the increasing power of impersonal markets and harsh bosses over honest laborers, as a pre-Marxist construction which sees class as largely something one *has*, rather than belongs to. “Lower class” implies the “moral depravity... indolence, intemperance and immorality” which persists in current tropes of an underclass, and which some have tried to inscribe into Blacks especially.¹⁰³ ‘The better classes’ of Whites and Blacks alike defined “or co-fabricat[ed],” in Patrick Rael’s phrase, their identity by contrast to the immorality of the lower ones.¹⁰⁴ Dick fits into the class of best people whose virtue contradicts rising racism. By policing the boundaries between the amoral, pleasure-loving patrons of the Mermaid’s Retreat and the Common Fourth of July celebration, Dick preserves the respectability of the better classes, black and white, even if the latter did not acknowledge the former’s existence.

In sum, Big Dick reflects a desire to find solutions to issues of race, class, and gender (in his role as savior of putatively fallen women and protector of virginal daughters), with an “American” one of virtue on a scale of human/individual behavior, rather than in impersonal *systems* of law, social hierarchy and economic imperative. He is so constructed by both Hazel/ Jones’s fiction and in the selective treatment of the White historical record. The lacunae which have encouraged so many to inscribe qualities and roles into him, allow him to be turned both ways as a figure of discourse—to serve the status quo, or to challenge it and force its reconsideration. Dick contradicts many givens about Blackness: he’s *exceptional* and inspires our interest as powerful, a leader; and at the same time he’s *representative* of the racial/social limits which he challenged at

¹⁰³ Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 43-91

¹⁰⁴ Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest*, 3-6

Dartmoor, glided past in Hazel/Jones's fiction, and/or accommodated in what we know of his "real-life" boxing and bullying careers in Boston.

Dick's Lifetime Summed Up

Dick suffered white prejudice, even if no Whites acknowledged it. In Hazel/Jones, his isolation and poverty are explained as saintly self-denial, thus masking the white privilege of his chroniclers. His death at about 52 years testified to his suffering.¹⁰⁵ The anger he apparently swallowed, as well as the strain of carrying around his 300-pound weight, and his probable poverty, must have contributed to his death from "as a rapid consumption from a severe cold induced by exposure"—probably pneumonia.

He served the polity and he serves writers by standing in for, but not standing *up* for, his race: he's not what the early Twentieth Century called "a race-man." His story demonstrates that even before the rise of "scientific racism," *race* was real as seen, felt and experienced by suffering persons, especially when conflated with class.¹⁰⁶ As such, King Dick's story can be seen as a rebuke to that academic excess which reifies race as a theoretical construct, and to the cultural/ political discourse of "colorblindness" that tries to wish the reality of racialized experience away. It reminds us, again, that the thing that's "constructed" *around* skin color is not "race" itself, but the edifice of qualities—behavior, education, deportment, aesthetics, "culture"—that people have historically associated with it.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ One paper gives his age as "52," but that could be a typographical error. "Died," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, 02/15/1831, vol II, 62, 1.

¹⁰⁶ see Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People*, (NY: W.W. Norton, 2010), 151- 200, for scientific racism. For race as a construct, see the last twenty years of historiography and social sciences writing.

¹⁰⁷ For colorblindness, see Mark Elliot, *Color Blind Justice: Albion Tourgee and the Quest for Racial Equality, From the Civil War to Plessy v. Ferguson*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 5; Zeus Leonardo, "The War on Schools: N[o] C[hild] L[eft] B[ehind], Nation Creation and the Educational Construction of Whiteness," *Race Ethnicity and Education* vol.10 No. 3, p. 265, quoting I. Lopez, "Colorblind to the reality of race in America," *The Chronicle Review*, 53(11), (2006) B6.

What else do we know of the man himself? The preponderance of evidence and plausibility is that he was probably a free, U.S.-born sailor. He became a boxer in Boston. He was some sort of “Peace Maker” or “bully” who liked to wear a red vest. He probably had a gift for social interaction, although possibly a man of few words. He was almost certainly a self-possessed person who perhaps grew to a humorous teller—or perhaps actor-out—of tales in Boston, perhaps paradoxically using humor as a “weapon of the weak.”¹⁰⁸ His domestic and sex-life were not thought worthy of remark, whether because uneventful or not respectable. Crichton describes him as ceremonial parade-leader, and several news items affirm that he “was a sort of king among the colored people” and connected with “Bobolition Day;” and there’s the suggestion that he continued to work in refined high culture/ deportment as a ‘dancing master.’¹⁰⁹

Discounting the known fictions, it is only when we consider Dick’s boxing career that his personality begins to come into focus. As a Black in a white-dominated society, in the afterglow of his power at Dartmoor, he could have had plenty of anger and frustration to express. His fighting-role would have given him a socially-acceptable means to externalize frustrations, especially if it is true, as Crichton claimed, that he “he knocked all his scholars out and they never came back to finish the course.” The boxing-ring would have been a comparatively safe space to release aggression. Crichton’s claim that he was “a generous magnanimous man, always preventing the strong from trampling upon the weak” suggests that he felt insults against his people, whether of his class or his color, deeply. The difficulty of his position is perhaps implied by Savage’s description of

¹⁰⁸ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels, Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, (NY: Free Press, 1996), 8; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (NY: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁹ *Boston Investigator*, 2/22/1888 response to “a correspondent,” 6; and an “Answer to Queries” squib in the *Boston Evening Transcript* 1/19/1897.

him as “the bully of the hill.” He would have needed considerable tact, humor, presence of mind, charm and discretion to get away with fighting Whites, even in the ring.

But just as we have no documentation of Dick’s life before Dartmoor, so there is a five year lacuna in direct “factual” documentation of his life between Dartmoor and Boston. We might speak of a five-year gap, if his early life were not *all* gap. *We don’t* know where he was from 1815 to 1820-ish, nor where or when he was born. This working-class King’s reign was short: eight months or less at Dartmoor, perhaps fewer than five years in Boston. Yet he was remembered among some Boston Blacks (Nell and Greener), cops (Savage), and many sportsmen. He’s a jigsaw puzzle with too many pieces missing, a portrait with too many blank spots. He is remembered for his deeds; his words are forgotten. There is no record of anything he said; his single most detailed expression is his use of a would-be coup d’état-plotter at Dartmoor as a club—an anecdote so memorable that Hazel/Jones adapted it to his account of the “Nigger Hill Riot.” At the risk of selective over-interpretation, his inspiring oratory in the novel rings false compared to his anxiety he shows while waiting for a favorable witness in court. Hazel/Jones may have exaggerated his verbal powers, although contemporary observers noted Blacks’ predilection for oratory and big words, which scholars have since traced to African cultures.¹¹⁰ So maybe he was a good talker. Combine Hazel/Jones’s high rhetoric with Crichton’s reported “patriotic speech”-ifying, and what stands out is the “novelletist’s” refusal to denigrate Dick with the coon dialect which minstrelsy and newspapers were then beginning to inscribe into racist stereotypes—and which the former does indeed inflict on his lesser black characters.

¹¹⁰ Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History through Songs Sermons and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005) 81-96 contains an excellent summary of eyewitness testimony and scholarly interpretation.

In addition to his “bullying” use of brute strength, there are other implications of venality: “crapulous indulgence” in beer at Dartmoor, and “ardent spirits” with his arrest for assault and robbery reported in the 1828 Haverhill Gazette. And what of his two “comely white secretaries” “he kept... continually about his person” at Dartmoor? Were they his advisors on how to exploit white bias? Bolster argues that Dick’s dictatorial ways were a façade behind which he and his fellow blacks lived their real lives.¹¹¹ Much of Big Dick’s personality remains hidden. Was his psyche divided against itself along racial lines, as W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon would suggest?¹¹² Certainly the writers who’ve reconstructed him to date depicted no such alienation. If Crichton and Hazel/ Jones are to be believed, he was so self-possessed as to be unaffected by the White gaze: he did as he wanted, apparently, as if he recognized no society-imposed limits. New sources may yet emerge, but his nature seems accessible only through reimagining, in other words, fiction, third-person “memoir”, and, more politely, informed academic analysis and conjecture. Indeed, it is the writer’s ability to inscribe a simple integrity into him that has kept him alive. Hazel/ Jones constructed him as an uncomplicated embodiment of Virtue. Professor Elmer suggests that Herman Melville constructed him as a Symbol of autonomy and authority. We will see more of these constructions in the second half of this thesis.

If Dick was 23 when he was admitted to Dartmoor, it follows that he was about 40-41 years of age—not 52, as reported, when he died, although his life could certainly

¹¹¹ Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 111-2.

¹¹² W.E.B. DuBois, “Of Our Spiritual; Strivings,” *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (NY: Grove Press, 1967), *passim*.

age a man prematurely.¹¹³ It's even possible there were two King Dicks, Crafus of Dartmoor and Seaver of Boston. A man of such stature would surely attracted attention, tending towards legend, within the black working class or at least maritime sub-class/ community, as well as among Whites. A later Richard Seaver *might* plausibly have secretly received "Big Dick's" crown from Richard Crafus, whether as a gift or appropriation, the later posing as owner of/ exploiting the earlier one's known history. That would account for some of the contradictions in the record. "Signifying," wearing the mask and lying to white people, is a well-known defense among Blacks. The theory of "another Dick" is pure conjecture; if true, it would evidence a major level of sophistication in Blacks' antebellum signifying on Whites.¹¹⁴ So we will let it go unless and until new evidence emerges.

The literary King Dick of the 19th Century might, at first glance, appear to be a walking, unstoppable contradiction, bursting bounds and embodying the potential for non-raced leadership: so Hazel/ Jones wanted to see him. But on deeper consideration, he is a liminal figure in the most active, fulfilled, positive sense: he incarnated, or *was*, the limit. He did not stand against the boundaries of Blackness; rather, he patrolled them to the extent, in Savage and Hazel/ Jones, of *being* those bounds, the living end. In fiction, instead of simply staying—or being forced to stay—in his place, he made a place for himself wherever he was. In penetrating beyond normed limits, he defined them for

¹¹³ The lower figure approximates "Miscellaneous Scraps" in *Niles National Register* which gives his age as of 6/11/1825 as "38 years."

¹¹⁴ Then there is the problem of the two "Justin Joneses." In addition to the 19th-century "novelist" (1814-1889) who used the pen-name "Harry Hazel", there is the scholar who presented his *Prison on the Moore* History thesis at the University of Texas at Arlington in May 2011. According to a March 30, 2012 phone interview with this writer, he is no relation to the 19th Century Bostonian Justin Jones and utterly unaware of his *Big Dick* and *Fourpe Tap* novelettes. Which suggests that King Dick's true nature may be that of a wrinkle in the space-time continuum, rather than a mere human being or a Pirandellian character in search of an author.

others. He could police the black and underclass communities where no white cop could go, and, according to Hazel/ Jones, go to white places no Black could. Because of his stature, no-one challenged him; and because he seemingly went each place with humor and the “dancing master’s” grace (at least as Whites recorded it), no line appeared behind him where he walked. He was “a human doing,” an organism, a giant point in motion, not a line. White writers saw him as going further than others of his class and race; he defines limits by his presence, rather than knocking up against them.

At his full mythic seven-foot three-hundred pound presence he was a natural, but temporally-limited, center of attention. Because (and probably only because) he was Black, there are no statues, no plaques, and because illiterate, no graffiti saying “Big Dick was here.” Or maybe every unspeakable mental graffiti that says “Big Dick” *is* his invisible, repressed monument: the name that haunts our sexual fears and fantasies still. The connotations of the title “*Big Dick, King of the Negroes*” echo to this day: when this writer asked the librarian for the microfilm reel of the novelette, she looked at the title and said “I don’t think I can say this.” “Dick” as slang for penis dates to the mid/late 19th century. As slang for police officer or detective, it surfaced a little later. A few decades from the “Big Dick’s” death might be a reasonable time for verbal practices to be documented; but by definition the connection cannot be traced. The boundaries disappeared behind Big Dick as he went, leaving no shadow, except that which white writers recorded and that which is on all our minds when we think of those words.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Eric Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang & Unconventional Language*, (NY: The Macmillan Co., 1967), 218 gives the earliest date as ca.1860; others give 1888-91. Dick for “detective” or “police officer” dates to the latter period; it’s use for “fool” dates to the sixteenth century, but it’s doubtful that anyone used it that way twice within Dick’s hearing.

And so there his story rested for another fifty years or so, after Crichton had his say. A few more Dartmoor memoirs were found and obscurely published during the early twentieth century, and some minor items appeared in late-nineteenth century newspapers. But they added only indirectly confirmatory details to Big Dick's tale. So Dick's importance so far, his most significant historical function, has been as a palimpsest. His was the image of a powerful black man—non-threatening because of his sense of humor, his self-containment, his choice to confine his aggression to the boxing ring, and his evident unwillingness to challenge his people's assigned place. He was a partially-marked screen onto which Whites (so far) have been able to project their needs, beliefs and desires.

Book II. The Palimpsest: King Dick in the *Lydia Bailey*

Complex

Chapter Three: Richard Meets Roberts

Roberts's Family Reminiscence

In 1931, the nationally-influential journalist Kenneth Roberts published his second historical novel, *The Lively Lady*, based on his great-grandfather's War of 1812 experiences. Midway through the novel, Captain Daniel Nason and crew arrive at Dartmoor after their privateer has been taken, and are told to ask for "King Dick." They are rescued from "mean... unsavory" French prisoners by "a gigantic Negro:"

He wore a bearskin hat, so that he seemed eight feet tall; and in his right hand he carried a long club, like the handle of a boarding pike, but thicker and gnarled. His face was a soft, sooty black, like the black on the bottom of a kettle, and his head seemed too small for his enormous body, rather like a melon balanced on an up-ended gun. Yet his mouth and eyes made up in size for the smallness of his head; for his mouth stretched all the way across his face, as though slashed with a knife; while his eyes, possibly because of their whiteness against the sooty black of his skin, had the appearance of china doorknobs set on swivels....

"Heah!" the huge Negro said in a plaintive, light voice, poking the Frenchman with his stick and rolling his eyes over us, "Wha's goin' on heah? Who stirred up all 'is whuppus?"

After one of Nason's men flatters Dick by jokingly condemning slavers and slavery, he drives French off, and

This black bulk.... gave way to immoderate mirth, opening his mouth until it seemed like a yawning cavern in his face....He turned and waved his club over us benevolently. "Come on, you white folks," he said. "Scuse mah delay, but we

been havin' trouble wif ouah society in this place, so we gettin' picky an choosy!"¹¹⁶

This King Dick gives Nason and his men refuge in Number 4, feeds them with the prison's best, and helps their escape attempts by having them taught to pose as Frenchmen. Dick offers to teach Nason "how to hit, 'nen you can be king in anudder prison" but Nason only wants to escape to the Englishwoman he loves. "Whuffoh you want to be like all 'ose white Americans? Alus pussuckin' roun' bout gittin' out? Whyn't you hol' yo' tongue and be a good white boy?" Dick tries to tempt Nason by offering to "show you plenty ways to mek money," but Nason is not interested. Given the emphasis on democracy in the memoirs Roberts consulted (he does not even mention the elected committees that ran the other wings), the narrator's refusal of a governmental role is revealing of the author's philosophy.¹¹⁷ Later we learn that Dick is reluctant to leave Dartmoor and power, and see him outside the prison observing Nason's escape attempt. At last sight, Dick facilitates Nason's reunion with his lover.

Portraying a powerful black man favorably gave Roberts's work a certain novelty at a time when U.S. American society was thoroughly segregated. He puts Dick in charge of Number Four months before his actual arrival at the prison—an understandable error, but one which indicates that his research was less thorough than he claimed.¹¹⁸ Roberts's main intervention in *The Lively Lady* was to add an Amos n' Andy patois, distorted proportions and stereotyped mannerisms to the Dartmoor accounts, which did not

¹¹⁶ Kenneth Roberts, *The Lively Lady*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1931), 216-7 (hereinafter *LL*)

¹¹⁷ *LL* 231.

¹¹⁸ Roberts visited Dartmoor, and developed a reputation for strong research, but he failed to anticipate Dye's investigation into the Prison's intake papers.

describe his speech or looks.¹¹⁹ By inscribing a stereotyped vision of Blackness into Dick, Roberts reifies images of Blacks popular with white U.S. Americans who had limited personal contact with them. He reappropriates Dick's image to confirm Blacks' subordination: although King Dick rules within his own sphere and ventures out into the British countryside, his only possible attempt to penetrate into the wider whiter space of the prison is through the thwarted alliance with Nason.

Roberts also makes Dick expert in Obeah-type folk-medicine, and grants Dick power to discriminate among Whites. He does not consider what segregation meant to Dick and other Blacks at Dartmoor. Although King Dick enjoys the trappings of royalty, there's no hint of the deeper agenda posited by Bolster, to protect black colleagues from white gaze. Dick describes his own elevation as a pure recognition of his power; his favoring of narrator Nason a matter of mere liking: King Dick for Captain "Dick" Nason.

Roberts was developing a reputation as an historical revisionary, but he does not explore alternatives to then-standard Dunning-school histories or popular minstrel-influenced images of "Negroes." King Dick is an antiquarian curiosity in *The Lively Lady*, an exceptional Black with power, rather than a look into the cultural conditions, experiential realities, or societal role and potentials of African American life. The only hint of Blacks' particular forms of adjustment comes in Dick's improvising a song-verse to communicate covertly with Nason during his escape attempt: "'Ere's somebody lookin' foh folks Ah knows/...Git inside quick...!"¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Roberts recommends Josiah Cobb's *Green Hand's First Cruise*, the most racist of the Dartmoor memoirs, as source for King Dick. The Palmer, Waterhouse, Valpey and Brown/Hawthorne memoirs are also named in *The Lively Lady's* one-page essay on "Authorities."

¹²¹ LL 261

In his next role, Dick would return to center stage as one of the most important characters in Roberts's widest-selling novel. *Lydia Bailey* was his last major fictional work, and his most ambitious in its international, multi-societal setting.¹²² By making King Dick the narrator's and readers' guide to not only Blackness but to Haitian, North African and Islamic culture, Roberts does more than simply place him within the United States's prevailing racial/ social/ economic order: he extends and reinforces it, by a complex triple movement. First, as the narrator's friend and guide to exotic, primitive, racialized foreign peoples and societies, he establishes his own worthiness and importance. Second, he distances those people and their problems from U.S. "America," and naturalizes the problems as racial characteristics of the alien Other. Finally, and perhaps most uniquely, as a strong, loyal, supposedly independent Black friend, he affirms the author/ narrator and reader's self-images as free-thinking, unprejudiced citizens, thereby erasing White privilege and reinforcing white perceptions, while covertly confirming that Blacks are deviants within the U.S. polity.

Roberts's Raced Revisionism

Kenneth Roberts lived in Kennebunk, Maine; his political and literary philosophy remained deeply local even as his influence as a popular writer expanded nationwide. Born in 1885, he graduated from Cornell in 1908 and began a twenty-year career as reporter and magazine correspondent. He covered the Russian Revolution in Siberia for the U.S. Army's Intelligence Section. After completing his Service, he received "a roving commission," in his own words, to report and comment on immigration for the *Saturday Evening Post*, the United States's most widely read weekly magazine with a circulation of over two million. He corresponded from Europe on the "threat" of inferior national

¹²²His only later historical novel, *Boone Island*, is generally regarded as a minor work.

“races”, and testified before early 1920s Congressional hearings which led to restrictive legislation. He later collected and re-published his pieces as *Why Europe Leaves Home*, endorsed Mussolini’s Fascisti in *Black Magic* (1924), and privately stated the Ku Klux Klan “stood for the same principles that most respectable people believed in.”¹²³ The importance of Roberts’s anti-immigrant writings is noted by such leading historian-scholars as David Roediger, James R. Barrett, and Nell Irvin Painter.¹²⁴ His conservative bias is less obvious in his “fiction,” until one contrasts his emphasis on “great man” leadership with his disdain for the political process as represented by the corrupt incompetents of Congress and politicians in general.

After publishing numerous adaptations and collections of his articles and columns, Roberts left the *Post* to write historical fiction, with the support and editorial mentorship of his friend and neighbor, the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Booth Tarkington. Roberts himself both coveted and disdained the Pulitzer; shortly before his death in 1957, the Committee awarded him a Special Citation for “historical novels which have long contributed to the creation of greater interest in our early American history.”¹²⁵

Roberts’s revisionist novels about Benedict Arnold, loyalists, frontiersman Robert Rodgers and other historical figures made him renowned for strongly-opinionated, meticulously-detailed action-writing.¹²⁶ One critic celebrated Roberts’ ability to “actually

¹²³ Jack Bales, *Kenneth Roberts: The Man and His Works*. (Metuchen, N.J. and London, Scarecrow Printers, 1989) 17-20; and *Kenneth Roberts*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 12-26

¹²⁴ James R. Barrett and David Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (Spring 1997), 12; Painter, *History of White People*, 302-4.

¹²⁵ Bales, *Kenneth Roberts* (1993), 64, 118

¹²⁶ *Northwest Passage*, about Rodgers, is perhaps his best-known single work (1937); his Benedict Arnold novels are *Arundel* (1930) and *Rabble in Arms* (1933); *Oliver Wiswell* is his primary work about American Loyalists, although their perspectives also appear in *Rabble in Arms* and *Lydia Bailey*.

make historical facts do the plot-work of fiction.”¹²⁷ He built his reputation for research by consulting archives in the United States, personally exploring the scenes of his narratives, making exhaustive use of secondary sources, and editing new editions and/or translations of previously-obscure primary sources. Scholars now remember him largely as a regional writer focusing on Maine’s inhabitants in the late colonial/Revolutionary period circa 1740-1815.¹²⁸ His tales work as cynical counter-narratives to tropes and grade-school texts about overly-virtuous historical Americans. They brought him considerable cultural power: Painter notes that as late as 2005, Roberts’s novels were still recommended on National Public Radio.

As a stylist Roberts’s greatest strength was portraying sweat and suffering through the simple direct language of first-person narrators. He vividly evokes physical sensations, action, hardship and individual effort; the sights, smells and tastes of his sprawling epics are closely observed and colorfully presented. His taciturn native-Maine narrators and comic-relief side-kicks offer an appealing mix of Down-East reticence and local dialect, as they struggle, often heroically, against forces of nature, official stupidity and hostile armies. Reviewers applauded his ‘thrilling... crowded... intricate... dramatic intensity... realism... breathless action and shrewd plot sense,’ but frequently note his reliance on two-dimensional characters. One of the most acute yet charitable assessments is that of Graham Greene: “very vigorous, readable, curiously old fashioned in colouring... written by an author of wide, rather than deep, imagination.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Hallett, Richard, “Lydia Bailey has Just a Tinge of Maine Flavor” *Portland Sunday Telegram*, 9 February 1947, D 2

¹²⁸ Dissertations and theses on his work up to the 1990s concerned his pre-*Lydia Bailey* novels; leading English-language Haitian literature scholars J. Michael Dash and Mary Renda do not mention Roberts, although *Lydia* is arguably the 20th Century’s best-selling U.S. American book set in Haiti.

¹²⁹ Quotes from reviews excerpted in Jack Bales, *Roberts: the Man*, 77-118, including Graham Green, “Fiction.” *Spectator* [London], 151 (15 Dec ’33), 910.

When, exactly, King Dick infiltrated the project that would dominate Kenneth Roberts's World War Two-time efforts is not clear. We do know that Roberts did not originally intend to visit Haiti or deal with Blacks in what became *Lydia Bailey*. The first germ of the novel infected Roberts when he "wondered how a French army had got into trouble" in Haiti and ended up imprisoned in Dartmoor.¹³⁰ But then he started writing about the Barbary Wars of 1803-6, and the failure of the joint-U.S. Marine/ Arab mercenary expedition to the shores of Tripoli. The Haitian Revolution entered the story as a facet of the career of his villain, Tobias Lear, the historical former personal secretary to George Washington. Lear had been U.S. consular official in St. Domingue (as French colonial Haiti was named) before he became the Mediterranean expedition's diplomatic nemesis. Roberts cast Lear as *Lydia Bailey*'s villain because he negotiated a dishonorable treaty with Tripoli's usurping ruler when the combined U.S. Marine-Arab effort to replace him was on the verge of success.¹³¹

Roberts extended the story back into Haiti to draw a wider picture; the Haiti story grew over the six years it took Roberts to write *Lydia Bailey*, until it occupied about 200 pages—roughly the second- and third-fifths—of the book.¹³² So a guide was needed, and *The Lively Lady*'s King Dick probably came to hand as a sidekick character of established strength, authority, and inscribed comic appeal. Roberts's accidental literary journey to Haiti echoes the United States's historical and political disregard for that

¹³⁰ Roberts, Kenneth. "On the Evolution of *Lydia Bailey*," *Wings, The Magazine of the Literary Guild*, (NY: Literary Guild of America), vol. 21, (January 1947), 4-7

¹³¹ Roberts' diary states "To work on the Derna [Libya] story..." 3 November 1941 entry, referring to the Mediterranean/ Barbary Pirates subject of the second half of *Lydia Bailey* [apparently at least his second start: Roberts, *I Wanted to Write*, (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1947), 346]. Kenneth Roberts Archive, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College, consulted by this writer 8/15-18/11 and 8/6-8/12.

¹³² *Lydia Bailey*, 71-273

country.¹³⁴ His massive list of sources consisted almost exclusively of white observers' works, with just a few Caribbean- (not Haitian) and U.S.-African American perspectives.

When *Lydia Bailey* begins, the slaves of the French colony of Saint Domingue (or San Domingo, as Roberts calls it) have been in revolt for a decade. The hero/narrator, a Maine-farmer/ lawyer named Albion Hamlin, falls in love with the portrait of the eponymous young Philadelphia woman, reportedly deceased while working as governess/tutor for a French plantation-owner in Saint Domingue, then governed by the Black general Toussaint L'Ouverture. Hamlin goes there partly in hopes of meeting her.

Roberts Reinvents Richard

King Dick's Guide to Haiti and Barbary

Hamlin lands in Cap Français (now Cap Haitien) and breakfasts in an *Hotel* crowded with gluttonous, boastful, gaudy, bombastic "simian" "Negro" generals overdressed in greasy finery. He sees "a hulk of a man ...in a simple suit of wrinkled white linen" perform a tooth extraction with his bare hands before resuming his seat next to "a short, gray-haired, partly bald and wholly worried-looking" man whom we later learn is the great Toussaint L'Ouverture, black Governor-General of St. Domingue.¹³⁵

Hamlin then sits in an outdoor café-table, ignored by a "languid light-colored mulatto waiter" of more-than-French arrogance, surrounded by "Negroes of every

¹³⁴ There is no known evidence that Roberts ever visited Haiti; in fact his diary for March 13, 1943 reads: "Found Sister had made a 3-week trip through Haiti some years ago, so I pried into it as hard as I could." The next day's diary entry continues "...chewed the rag with Sister till nearly 2 a.m., mostly about the jagged mountains of Haiti. She says they aint jagged. Columbus, William Beck, John Vandercook & the Encyc. Britannica say they are." His sources for *Lydia Bailey*, while extensive, were a broad but biased range of mostly white, almost exclusively non-Haitian primary, secondary, scholarly and popular sources which he did not assess methodically.

¹³⁵ *Lydia Bailey*, 78-9.

gradation of color” “with flattened noses and enormous banana-shaped lips... pale-brown elegants with aquiline features,... and buxom black prostitutes, in waists and dresses slit to show their enormous breasts and thighs; and—most noticeable of all—innumerable slender coffee-creamy-colored mulatto women... all freely and openly making advances to ... sailors scattered through the crowd.”¹³⁶ Hamlin sees the waiter suddenly rob a small boy. Before Hamlin can intervene, “a veritable giant of a black man... the same enormous tooth-extractor [from the *Hotel*]... materialized as suddenly and magically as though he’d popped from the ground like the slave of the lamp.... [like] something elemental and irresistible.” He presses Hamlin back into his chair, “wipes” the waiter with his fist, and introduces himself as General King Dick.¹³⁷ Hamlin restores to him the package which the waiter had tried to steal from Dick’s small boy, a fortune in pearls, and Dick attaches himself to Hamlin for the rest of the story.¹³⁸

This King Dick explains he is a *general de place*, in charge of a plantation abandoned by its French owner. He was born a Sudanese prince, kidnapped into slavery from an Arab trading-caravan and taken to Timbuktu, then given to a captain in the Royal Navy “because he was big enough and strong enough to work a pivot gun by himself.”¹³⁹ He has learned all about trading wine and gems, North African trade-routes, “the odd habits of Arab Marabouts... and African witch-doctors.” He speaks several languages in fractured comic dialects. Freed in then-Spanish New Orleans, he’s been a secret agent for the governor, and former secretary to the non-fictional U.S. general and Spanish spy James Wilkinson. After Wilkinson caught him wearing one of his gaudy uniforms, Dick

¹³⁶ 73-5.

¹³⁷ “General Tiresias Algernon Saint Christopher King Dick,” in a discarded typescript page hand-labeled “At End.” Kenneth Roberts papers

¹³⁸ 75-81

¹³⁹ in early drafts, King Dick is from Dahomey: Roberts papers, ML-25(5):2

escaped to Haiti and was made “a real general” because he “could read and write... [knew] how to behave like a general even though he knew nothing of... military science... and, third, he explained to Toussaint some ideas he had of teaching other strong Negroes how to operate artillery, even when reluctant to do so.”¹⁴⁰ Those ideas evidently had to do with his ability to “wipe” anyone right across the room with a caress of his fist.

Dick takes Hamlin to his plantation for hospitality and a “Voodoo” ceremony, where the “Hungan” will tap into Haiti’s drum-network to “see into next week” and learn Lydia’s whereabouts. They travel to her plantation, then return to Cap Français when she turns out to be too devoted to her pupils to leave. A French Army lands to reassert control from the Metropole. The recently-revolted colony dissolves in war, chaos, and scorched earth, a bloody cycle of atrocities, caused, the narrator claims, by lust and greed for power, but clearly heightened by the presence of primitive, ridiculous, hate-filled, mysterious and superstitious Blacks.

After Hamlin advises the Haitian generals to resist the French landing, a grateful Toussaint charges Dick with ensuring Hamlin’s and Lydia’s safety. Dick and Hamlin rescue her just as her plantation is destroyed by murderous marauding Maroons (runaway ex-slaves). Then, obedient to Toussaint’s orders, they join the army of the brutal “toad-like” General Jean Jacques Dessalines. After witnessing massacres and atrocities, Dick helps restore the decrepit fortress of Crete-a-Pierrot for a crucial battle. Dick connives in the lovers’ escape from Dessalines, and bribes their way past the French blockade. First, however, he solemnizes their wedding, although “marriages not officiated at, not... in Haiti, not much. They just happen, like breakfast or opening botto rum.”¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ 87-90.

¹⁴² 271, 267

Dick, Albion and Lydia sail for France to return her student-charges to their homeland. But Dick's presence offends their ship's bigoted master, who betrays the couple to the Barbary pirates. The Hamlins are captured and enslaved in Tripoli, Hamlin as a gardener, Lydia as tutor to the usurping "Bashaw's" nephews. After a year of hard labor and belated bombardments by the U.S. Navy, Hamlin sees a huge Marabout (Muslim holy man) "engaged in the customary... pastime of howling indistinguishable nothings at the top of his lungs." It's King Dick.¹⁴³

Dick frees Hamlin and takes him to join the expedition to restore the rightful Bashaw, with its U.S. general, army of Arab mercenaries and accompanying detachment of eight Marines. Dick then rescues Lydia, but Hamlin is unable to prevent Tobias Lear sabotaging the army's efforts with a craven negotiated peace. King Dick defeats the Bashaw's cavalry; we last see him excusing the United States's abandonment of its Arab allies "in his best Arabic. 'The war is over. Bismallah! All is for the best.... It is Allah's will.'" He reassures the Arabs that "I have decided that I shall be your leader" and leads them into the desert.¹⁴⁴ We also learn that L'Ouverture has died in a French prison, LeClerc's army has been destroyed by yellow fever and Dessalines has declared himself emperor of the newly renamed independent "Haiti."¹⁴⁵

Roberts wrote "King Dick was 100% real in *Lively Lady*, purely fictional in *Lydia*."¹⁴⁶ He casts Hamlin as his first person narrator, encouraging us to read him as mouthpiece for the author's own opinions. Dick was lauded by popular reviewers as by

¹⁴³ 348

¹⁴⁴ 485-7

¹⁴⁵ 373

¹⁴⁶ Noted on a list of "Characters in LYDIA BAILEY" forwarded by Roberts's editor at Doubleday, October 2, 1946, to Roberts, apparently created for inclusion in the book, but used instead for movie-rights negotiations.

far the most vivid character, and ignored by some of Roberts's most prestigious academic critics. In transplanting him to the Haiti of 1802, Roberts made Dick at least a dozen years older than the Dartmoor intake records. He takes Hawthorne's claim that "in all cases of conflict between whites and blacks, [Dick] invariably took the part of the former" to the extreme. Even though he's a master of cultural and economic capital in Haiti and Arabia, Dick knows how to behave. As narrator Hamlin says, "like every Negro I had ever known... [he] was always smilingly silent in the presence of white men except when being questioned...."¹⁴⁷ In his diary for December 8, 1942, Roberts wrote "...Started re-doing King Dick's manner of speech, which is too niggerish."¹⁴⁸

Dick is always self-contained, greeting white prejudice with a discrete, bemused contempt of which only Hamlin and the reader are aware. He is no revolutionary. He has elements, in dignity and outsize buffoonery, of Brutus Jones, the hero of Eugene O'Neill's expressionistic stage and screen hit *The Emperor Jones*, which Roberts almost certainly knew. Brutus Jones was vaguely inspired by the historical Haitian King Christophe, but in *Lydia Bailey* King Dick has none of Jones's vaingloriousness.¹⁴⁹ Nor is he an articulate Marcus Garvey, an angry Jack Johnson, nor any of the other archetypal Blacks then familiar to U.S. white readers: he seems original. He is ever ready to use his strength and "cocomacaque" club to "wipe" malefactors, always good humored and even-tempered, never proud or assertive, out-of-control or out-of-place. He literally never

¹⁴⁷ 275, 87-90

¹⁴⁸ Rauner special collections library, Roberts archive.

¹⁴⁹ Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism 1915- 40*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 196-211

rocks the boat, choosing in a discarded episode to live on shipboard rather than discomfit Hamlin's less-tolerant family, friends and clients.¹⁵⁰

King Dick joins up with Hamlin because of his honesty, and because "he preferred white Englishmen and white Americans to people of his own color.... he trusted them more, and the good ones gave him a feeling of mental satisfaction he couldn't get from those with darker skins."¹⁵¹ As Hamlin's guide and protector, Dick mediates between the narrator/ author and the strange and potentially threatening cultures and peoples they encounter. His knowledge and skills extend beyond the novel's varied settings and societies. He knows enough of Haitian "Voodoo," North African Islam, Bedouin society and hierarchy, military and maritime culture, gunnery and government, rum, jewels and trading, to manipulate any situation to his and Hamlin's advantage. King Dick learned the tricks of desert traders during his royal youth; he's sold "sherry to rich Surinam planters." On his plantation, "Very good profits I realize last year. Two hundred sixteen thousand dollars.... That not bad, my my no!" He combines an African aristocrat's tolerant sense of superiority with a shrewd Yankee trader's practicality; he is a modernist-individualist capitalist, an entrepreneurial genius who "knows how to make money."¹⁵²

Capitalism, Class and King Richard, Revolution and Race

Colonial St. Domingue had been a major trading-partner for "Continental" North American merchants. New England-native U.S. President John Adams (1797-1801) favored a prosperous, peaceful Haiti free from French colonial domination. Adams

¹⁵⁰ typescript, section hand-labeled ML-25(8?):17, "Chapter 41" pp.458-464a, Roberts Archive (not used)

¹⁵¹ 90

¹⁵² In North Africa, he arranges for his friends' caravans to supply the mercenary army when it reaches Tripoli, "because during a war somebody always has more money than he knows what to do with." 84-88, 104-5; 378.

supported Toussaint L'Ouverture's regime because Toussaint restored the colony's prosperity after the first devastating years of the Revolution.¹⁵³ As Dick explains, "Toussaint, he say everybody on this island gonna be free and equal.... Reason why? Share profits. All working, all free, all equal, all good, long as Toussaint make behave."¹⁵⁴ Their small share of profits assures that in Dick's/ Toussaint's Haiti, everyone will be equal and free to stay in their place, or rise through their commercial merits. Much as individual good will has replaced prejudice between white Hamlin and Lydia and black Dick, business enterprise, as the expression of individual will made fair and just by the hidden hand of the market, is solving Haiti's problems. It is the United States's mission and glory, and Dick's privilege, to exercise and spread that exceptional gospel.

But in 1801, the year before Hamlin arrives in Haiti, Adams's successor, southerner-slave-holder Thomas Jefferson had proposed "to confine this disease [of Revolution] to its island.... As long as we don't allow the blacks to possess a ship we can allow them to exist and even maintain very lucrative commercial contacts with them."¹⁵⁵ Dick is perfectly positioned to "maintain such contacts" and be an agent of the neo-imperial capitalist system which will eventually make the United States a great anti-colonial world power. He plans to finance Hamlin's travels around Haiti by buying gold braid from him at \$3 a foot and selling it to other Haitians at \$5. When the French

¹⁵³ Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 223-230; Tim Matthewson, *A ProSlavery Foreign Policy*, (Westport CT & London: Praeger Publishers, 2003) 50-119; Rayford W. Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776--1891*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1941) 83-121.

¹⁵⁴ 95

¹⁵⁵ By 1821 the US was supplying 45% of Haiti's imports, and bought 25% exports: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 52-55. Jefferson is a significant presence in discarded drafts of *Lydia*, although this commercial policy is never mentioned.

invasion and scorched earth warfare wreck the economic prospects, Dick leaves with Hamlin and Lydia. Even while escaping, Dick plans “to exchange his remaining pearls for a cargo of rum that would later repay all our expenses.”¹⁵⁶

Dick knows he’s socially vulnerable when disguised in rags; as “we look now, nobody will believe anything we say. We need gold lace, silk shirts, high boots, rings, and big hats so that we may look respectable again.... [Otherwise] I should be called nigger, and be stolen from.”¹⁵⁷ But his hidden supply of pearls and his royal heritage can transcend social barriers. In his virtuous commitment to freedom, equality, opportunity, Albion and Lydia, he is a moral person who has class, in Helwig’s 19th-Century/conservative sense.¹⁵⁸ As in Hazel/ Jones, true class expresses character, not hierarchy, and Dick is a classy guy who honors and exceeds his debt to Hamlin, dissolving socio-economic boundaries. Dick’s presence allows Roberts to eliminate economic stratification and transcend the ideology of class.

Shortly after they meet, King Dick tells Hamlin, “You and me, we think like Americans, but nigras think like nigras. They believe everything. They not *anything* they not believe.”¹⁵⁹ In thus denying that he is “like a nigra,” Dick substitutes the “national” bias and “cultural” prejudice of “thinking like,” for race. Hamlin and the reader, however, remain aware of Dick’s blackness. In thinking “like an American” Dick becomes equivalent to, while remaining different from, one of us.¹⁶⁰ He’s able to operate on both

¹⁵⁶ 273

¹⁵⁷ 260

¹⁵⁸ see Chapter I of this essay 45-47.

¹⁵⁹ 103.

¹⁶⁰ Amy Kaplan calls “the representation of race... a major tool in dispossession” of native revolutionary leadership. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 117-118

sides of Hamlin/Roberts's color-line, by virtue of his skin-color on the one side, by his position as cultural broker on the other.

He accomplishes much more than that, however. Being "like an American," Dick associates himself with the U.S. Revolutionary War, then barely twenty years past, and disassociates from the ongoing Revolution in what will soon be an independent Haiti. The U.S. "revolution" was a war of economic and national independence, freeing thirteen colonies from the political and mercantile sway of the British mother-country/ Metropole. The Haitian Revolution (1791-1803) and the overlapping revolution in France (1789-1799) were much more: they threatened to overturn Europe's social hierarchy with the French declaration of The Rights of Man. Haiti, in taking those Rights as a de-racialized absolute, threatened racial hierarchy everywhere and the economic basis of white civilization.¹⁶¹ In 1802-5, the time of *Lydia Bailey*, Haiti's Revolution was the most radical of the continuing age of revolutions.¹⁶²

In *Lydia*, Napoleon has just smothered the French Revolution, and is trying to snuff out the Haitian one, too, with his army. As an "American," Dick embodies the United States' bourgeois "Common Sensical' revolution's" promise of economic opportunity and political independence.¹⁶³ But narrator Hamlin, author Roberts and

¹⁶¹ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (New York, The Dial Press, 1989) 47-50, reverses the direction of the revolutionary impulse by arguing that France's bourgeoisie owed its own revolutionary freedom to think and act politically to the riches produced by Caribbean colonies. Incidentally, James was one of Roberts's prime sources; how Roberts managed to reconcile his perspective with more racist sources is one of the major questions at the heart of this writer's forthcoming study *Pop Fiction, Pulped History and the Celluloid Politics of Neo-imperialism: The Construction of Race, Class, Gender, Culture (Religion?) and Nationality in the Haiti of Kenneth Roberts' Lydia Bailey (and Elsewhere)*

¹⁶² see, inter alia, Thomas Bender, "A Season of Revolutions: The United States, France and Haiti"; David Brion Davis and Peter J. Hinks, "Atlantic Revolutions and the Age of Abolitionism"; Robin Blackburn, "The Achievement of Haitian Revolution"; Jeremy D. Popkin, "Liberty in Black, White and Color: A TransAtlantic Debate" in Thomas Bender, Laurent DuBois and Richard Rabinowitz. *Revolution! The Atlantic World Reborn*, (NY: New York Historical Society, 2011).

¹⁶³ Thomas Payne, , *Common Sense*, *passim*

character King Dick say nothing about rights or revolution. They conspire to silence the true principles of Haiti's war, as Haiti itself has long been silenced in U.S.- and world history.¹⁶⁴ In the world according to *Lydia Bailey*, the Old World's colonial sickness of race- and class-conflict will be ended by a proper application of opportunity, rationality and character.

In Roberts's hands, Dick's silence echoes into the writer's twentieth century. We have seen how Dick's role evolves to fit the agenda of each of the authors who construct him. When we first met him, in 1814-5, he was Dartmoor's enforcer of racial separation and order. At about the time that Hazel/ Jones was transforming him into Boston's guardian of public morality (1844-5), the egalitarian principles of France's revolution were being expanded to the spectre of worldwide class reconstruction and economic leveling, by Karl Marx et al. That spectre was still haunting the Western world when Roberts reconstructed him in the mid-20th Century. King Dick's silence erases the twin threats of social and economic leveling, of racial and Red revolution, by claiming the privileged position of the United States's newly-proposed world economic order. Looking back from Roberts's 1940s to King Dick's fictionalized 1800s, Dick reduces Revolution to mere nationalist resistance to tyrannical exploitation without representation.

The time between *Lydia Bailey*'s action and its composition straddle the brief period, around 1890-1905, when many historians hold that the United States acted as a classic imperial power.¹⁶⁵ Instead, U.S. America developed a commercial strategy which

¹⁶⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 70-107 and *passim*.

¹⁶⁵ Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001) 9-47 & 200-246; Couvares et al *Interpretations of American History. vol. 2 From Reconstruction* (Boston, NY: Bedford St. Martin's, 2009), 97-107, Alfred W. McCoy, Francisco A. Scarano, and Courtney Johnson, "On the Tropic

would eventually evolve into post/ neo-imperial economic dominance. The novel takes place when the ideology of the United States's exceptional revolutionary mission was first being developed and tested, and King Dick embodies that mission. Amy Kaplan has demonstrated that U.S. imperial consciousness "fights on a double front," legitimizing struggles for independence from European colonial dominance, while de-legitimizing revolutionary movement by non-white non-U.S. Americans because "... 'they', unlike 'us', [are] incapable of the self-government to which revolution aspires."¹⁶⁶ Haiti's Revolution is delegitimized by atrocities which Dick and Hamlin witness, and by Haiti's extreme divisions, according to King Dick:

"These black people, they almost too much for me. ... big Negroes hate little Negroes, little Negroes hate big Negroes, poor mulattoes hate rich mulattoes for being rich, and hate other poor mulattoes for being poor, rich Negroes hate rich Negroes, Negroes don't hate mulatto women, Negro women rather sleep with white men than with Negroes, good Negroes hate bad Negroes, bad Negroes hate good Negroes, big Negroes hit little Negroes... little Negroes let big Negroes hit 'em and cheat 'em, but won't let mulattoes or Blancs touch em...."¹⁶⁷

Such intra-racial divisiveness rendered Haiti's people incompetent, and in need of tutelage by people who "think like Americans." Dick is, for Hamlin and Roberts, a member of the monolithic colored caste, but they recognize his individual value and so should everyone else.¹⁶⁸ Teacher Lydia and Lawyer Hamlin, true unprejudiced social revolutionaries, are such tutors, and King Dick could be their sponsor in Haiti. King Dick is a fantasy of a perfect Black partner who affirms and empowers Hamlin's egalitarian posture, and masks the social capital which privilege his and Roberts's position.

of Cancer: Transitions and Transformations of the U.S. Imperial State," 3-33, and Thomas McCormick, "From Old Empire to New: The Changing Dynamics and Tactics of American Empire," 63-79, in McCoy and Scarano, *Colonial Crucible: Empire and the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2009).

¹⁶⁶ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 117

¹⁶⁷ 215.

¹⁶⁸ Roberts does not distinguish between color and caste.

Sex with Big Dick

The trope of Black loyalty and subordination originated in defenses of slavery; its unremarked appearance here demonstrates the widespread hegemony of racist propaganda during the twentieth century. Roberts/Hamlin opposes slavery “with all my heart” but cannot conceive of an autonomous civilized black man, even as he endows King Dick with magical abilities.¹⁶⁹ While he provides a biography that could explain those powers, the resulting figure represents a kind of natural—or rather supernatural—endowment inscribed into a Black man, as so many Whites inscribed “natural rhythm” and “jungle sensuality” into Blacks.

Roberts makes King Dick discretely highly sexed, but masks it with Victorian reticence, like Lydia who “never liked public lovemaking... whether in life or in books.”¹⁷⁰ King Dick has “wifeses” wherever he goes, including at least one in his youth in Timbuktu, eight in Haiti including two “extra, in case of visitors” like Hamlin, and three upon his return to North Africa. He gets “sick of ‘em” easily, divorcing his Haitian wives by presenting each with fifteen feet of gold braid so they can “hide in the hills till safe to come out and marry a colonel, maybe... even a general.”¹⁷¹ Despite his many wives, Dick has no acknowledged children. His plantation is “crawling with ...popeyed little boys [but] ‘These not mine. They my wifeses,’” as he tells Hamlin.¹⁷² As a plot-device, this barrenness leaves him free to trot the globe with Hamlin and Lydia and serve their needs. In addition, his lack of emotional attachment to women and children accords with the claims of anti-abolitionists and Scientific Racists, that Africans are deficient in

¹⁶⁹ 196.

¹⁷⁰ 474

¹⁷¹ 101, 470, 169

¹⁷² 97

family-feeling, romantic love and the civilizing foundation of the nuclear family.¹⁷³ His exotic, even enviable, yet barren sexuality is figured in his huge, distorted proportions and misshapen head. In the early 20th Century, Haiti was represented in U.S.-American discourses as a tropical font of exotic sexuality, according to Mary Renda.¹⁷⁴ Big Dick reduces Haitian sex to a distanced joke, no threat to true-lover Hamlin.

Dick's presence allows narrator Hamlin/ writer Roberts to demonstrate liberality by proclaiming his willingness *to let him marry his sister*.¹⁷⁵ The fact that Roberts doesn't give Hamlin a sister saves the writer from dealing with a serious psycho-socio-sexual conflict. As Hamlin explains to a bigoted questioner, Dick's "got too many brains to want to do such a thing" as marry white. He is utterly loyal to Hamlin and his Love, both in the sense of respecting the phenomenon of their *being* in love, and in the person of Lydia. Dick never trespasses beyond pure platonic friendship and respect with Lydia, or any other white woman. His most intimate moment with her is to 'squat down' to listen to her read to her young French tutee-charges.

King Dick's voluntary subordination to Hamlin enacts U.S. American fantasies of Blacks' role in society. Many of Roberts's sources for Haitian "local color" were participants in the U.S. Occupation of Haiti of 1915-1934. Renda argues that the occupation was empowered and justified by discourses of paternalism, popular accounts which recruited U.S. Americans to take responsibility by disciplining and teaching Haitians and other "little brown brothers." U.S. men, according to Amy Kaplan's

¹⁷³ Painter, *White People, passim*, for a history of Scientific racism. For particularly relevant examples of the argument for Africans' affectional deficiency and lack of family connection, see T. Lathrop Stoddard, *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), and St. John, Sir Spenser, *Hayti or The Black Republic*, (Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, London 1971, originally published 1884)—both used by Roberts for *Lydia Bailey*.

¹⁷⁴ Renda, *Taking Haiti*, pp.10-27, 223-260 and *passim*

¹⁷⁵ 276-8

extension of the argument, saw themselves in danger of losing their masculinity through over-civilization. They sought to reclaim their manliness by defeating the colonial forces of decadent Europe and overcoming the natural forces of the savage, sensuous, colonized world. Then, paradoxically, they could elevate the savages by educating and civilizing them, especially through the subordinated agency of women teachers and unsexed missionaries.¹⁷⁶ Although Roberts avoids engaging explicitly with issues of masculinity and effeminacy, he portrays Hamlin as dragged unwillingly from his Maine farm to Washington DC, Haiti and North Africa. Roberts's sources on Haiti, and the structure of *Lydia Bailey*, reflect this paternalistic structure.¹⁷⁷ Hamlin and honorary "American" Dick climb mountains, brave holocausts, trek through "breast high... black mud and green slime," defy Dessalines and fight the French, thereby proving their worthiness to reach and save Lydia. Lydia is a teacher of knowledge and Western values, although strangely her mission is to the French colonizers and Arabs: the Haitians, in their divisiveness and primitive caste status, are not ready for her.¹⁷⁸

King Dick, although appearing to be autonomous, associates with Hamlin and Lydia as would a perfect servant who unconditionally fulfills their needs. He is a 1947 conservative's wish-fulfillment perfectly-caste assistant who knows his place, makes no demands, comes when needed, never needs summoning, and answers before being asked. Despite his elevated rank and riches he is the author's and narrator's friend, without independent will and action. He has surrendered his manly autonomy to the Hamlins,

¹⁷⁶ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 26-50; see also Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 5-155.

¹⁷⁷ Notably Seabrook (see below), John H. Craig and Faustin Wirkus, both participants in the U.S. invasion and U.S.-dominated regime that prevailed until at least 1944, when Haitian finances were belatedly released from U.S. "supervision." See also Hans Schmidt, *The U.S. Occupation of Haiti 1915-34*, (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971)

¹⁷⁸ 430

although he's not conscious of it; at least one reviewer affirmed this by labeling Dick Hamlin's "Man Friday."¹⁷⁹ He "takes a fancy" to Hamlin, not Lydia, although its implications are unexplored even when they're reunited after years of captivity:

...He came sliding over [the wall] like a big black cat, caught me by the shoulders, and landed lightly on his feet before me. At the sight and the feel and the familiar sweaty smell of this true and faithful friend, my throat contracted so that I was hard put to it to breathe, and we just stood there like two fools, silently patting each other's shoulders.

I took him by the arm and led him to my little hut...¹⁸⁰

King Dick is a fantasy figure of extraordinary appeal to U.S. American readers.

Hamlin and Lydia form the more-highly-civilized, yet intellectually-grounded couple who can take up the White Man's burden and raise the savages of the world. King Dick is the local agent who could enable their mission to Haiti, but makes it clear that the mission's historical failure is due to the Haitians' shortcomings, not the U.S. Americans. He has the potential to be Haiti's own Black capitalist patriarch, but in his voluntary barrenness, disclaims that role to serve the Hamlins.¹⁸¹

Big Dick's Bestseller

Lydia Bailey was a huge hit, one of the top-10 selling U.S. novels of 1947.¹⁸² It was widely reviewed: the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography's* critic wrote that "Roberts has time and again proved himself an accurate historian" and that he'd "done a magnificent job of description in [the] vividly accurate [Haiti] scenes."¹⁸³ Henry Steele Commager called it "a capital tale, packed with action and adventure and

¹⁷⁹ Appel, David, "Kenneth Roberts Dusts off More History," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1/5/47 Books 1,9

¹⁸⁰ 122-3; 349.

¹⁸¹ As Hamlin puts it, he "isn't ambitious, for one thing; and like you and me, he's intolerant of the shortcomings of his own people." Just *what* he's not ambitious for is not explained. 277.

¹⁸² Roberts, *I Wanted to Write*, p.357 fn8; it was also selected by the Literary Guild, and as a gift book by Book of the Month Club.

¹⁸³ Kirkland, Frederic R., *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (Apr., 1947), 165-166

with history.”¹⁸⁴ Many reviews singled out King Dick, hailing him as Roberts’ most unforgettable creation. Long Island University English Professor Robert C. Whitford commented “it is to be hoped that in [Roberts’s next] book King Dick will be a central figure. In this one he “steals the show.”¹⁸⁵

King Dick’s presence made the novel work. He holds the sprawling narrative together more effectively than the villain Lear’s occasional appearances. He’s the most prominent of the “new & interesting characters” that Roberts’s friend and mentor Booth Tarkington attributed to *Lydia Bailey*.¹⁸⁶ In some ways, he is a variation of Roberts’s standard comic sidekick character. This figure is usually socially inferior and militarily subordinate to the narrator, marked by his quaint speech and folk-wisdom. Roberts’s Dick giggles and says things like “My, my! Oh my goo’ness me my! ... You been very malice;” but he’s also exceptionally potent in every way except sexually. He not only ransoms Hamlin from Haiti and rescues him from Barbarous slavery, but saves him from a French prison and Yellow Fever in discarded drafts.¹⁸⁷

Why is Roberts’s Dick so effective as a character? He appears to embody liberal racial openness, when in fact he delivers reactionary discourses and fits a profoundly conservative agenda. Dick combines the stereotypes of the brilliant black clown-performer with those of the potent magical “slave of the lamp” and the Herculean hero in what seems like a fresh but familiar configuration. When *Lydia Bailey* was published in

¹⁸⁴ “A Breathless Vista of Forgotten History,” *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, 1/5/47 1-2.

¹⁸⁵ Reviewer Margot Jackson refers to “that famous big black, King Dick”; If Ms. Jackson was referring to Dick’s “fame” outside of *The Lively Lady*, she was the only one who showed any awareness of it. “Magnificent ‘Lydia Bailey’ Example of Roberts; Skill,” *Beacon Journal* of Akron Ohio, 1/5/47. Whitford review, “Destined to be ‘Year’s Best’ Historical Novel” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 1/5/47; numerous others in Roberts’s letter books, which do not give the page numbers.

¹⁸⁶ Roberts diaries, 10/19/44

¹⁸⁷ quotes 81, 83; imprisonment and yellow fever: typescript hand-marked ML-25(4):17 pp.446-457, chapter number crossed out by hand, Roberts Archive, Dartmouth College

1947, many of Roberts's readers would have been personally unfamiliar with real 'Negroes'.¹⁸⁸ Their ideas of blackness, like Roberts's ideas of Haiti would have been largely formed second hand, by popular images from decades of minstrel shows to films like *Gone with the Wind*. One of Roberts's sources was William Seabrook's *The Magic Island*, a 1929 travelogue by a U.S. journalist and occultist. His Haiti book has been described as a "lurid" work by a "negrophile... exponent of the virtues of Haiti's black soul:"

the Haitian people... are habitually a little comic, a little childish, a little ludicrous, they are easily vulnerable to a certain sort of caricature,... then suddenly from time to time something that is essential in the color and texture of their souls—essential perhaps too in the color and texture of their skins—something more than atavistic savagery, but which may trace none the less to their ancestral Africa... some quality surges to the surface...¹⁸⁹

The fact that King Dick is likeable yet powerful both confirms and transcends this description. He carries much of Seabrook's 'little' bit of comedy and childlikeness, but he is also wise and authoritative enough to keep these "people's ...atavis[m]" in check. As a foreign, semi-'Americanized' Black, Dick stands in for both Haitians and U.S. "Negroes." As in his 19th Century portrayals, King Dick marks the boundary between Black and White; at the same time, his mediation distances Haiti's savages from the narrator and reader.

Dick's magical first trick as genie is to create himself as Hamlin's "best friend who is Black," in accordance with the popular cliché, "some of my best friends are black." By so doing, he transforms race relations for the narrator and the reader with a

¹⁸⁸ Including this writer when I first read it in ca.1963, ca. age 10.

¹⁸⁹ J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the U.S.: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, (London: MacMillan Press Limited, 1988, rev.1997) p.25; William Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 277. Although Roberts' copy of Seabrook does not contain marginal comments or underlining, his 2/3/1942 diary notes "Read in Seabrook's book on Haitian voodoo."

sylllogism: Dick has extraordinary qualities and powers, and is not simply depicted as inferior, dependent, a product of racist bias. He is a strong Black man, independently wealthy, wise about human nature, so he must be more than a white fear-fantasy or projection. As the narrator's and readers' friend, he proves that we are not bigoted racists. Dick seems to demonstrate that Roberts and the readers are beyond prejudice, progressive and discerning enough to befriend a powerful black man. And as an 'outside', 'unbiased' observer of Haiti and raced peoples, he confirms the validity of received stereotypes, while refusing the language of bigotry. This is the kind of contrarian thinking that sells Roberts's books.

Roberts affirms and sanitizes stereotypes by putting them in King Dick's mouth. It is he—not the narrator—who confirms the bad qualities of Blacks *en mass*. Roberts veils his race-ism by distinguishing black individuals from the masses. Virtually the only fleshed-out black characters, however, aside from Dick himself, are the historical Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Dick provides the introduction to both. Other Haitians are largely-undifferentiated laborers, intoxicated "Voodoo" celebrants or faceless brutish soldiers and buffoons. They disappear into a landscape "throbbing" with drums and pregnant with the menace of dangerous unseen Maroons. They are Jim Crow stereotypes led by exceptional geniuses. King Dick and Toussaint, as "positive" Blacks, allow Hamlin/ Roberts to present himself as an unprejudiced judge of character. As in Roland Barthes' "Operation Margarine," they are the exceptions that disprove the racist rule.¹⁹⁰ Dick's character lets Roberts site himself, in Gramscian

¹⁹⁰ Roland Barthes, "Operation Margarine." *Mythologies*. (New York: Noonday Press, Farrar 1972), 40-42

hegemonic terms, as a non-bigoted, even somewhat-advanced participant in racial discourses, without challenging then-popular received racial notions.¹⁹¹

Dick's special power is that we all want to be his "friend," to benefit from the full supernatural power of his strength, humor, wealth, cultural knowledge, thought, insight, skills, discrimination, respect and loyalty. We want him to be our "slave of the lamp." He is the White fantasy of black servility and dedication, who, granted all his potential of intellectual genius (instinctual understanding?), physical power, moral and legal autonomy, potency, lays it all at our feet. He surrenders his power, especially sexual and physical, to serve *us*. He is the perfect servant we want to be in our relation to a Christian god. So he transcends friendship and slavery: he elevates the narrator to godhead by his perfect service, and exalts the reader, in fantasy, to one worthy of his service.

King Dick's Religious MonoCulturalisms

If for Hazel/ Jones and Lloyd, King Dick's presence at the "Nigger Hill riot" turned apparent racial Difference into moral/ class Difference, for Kenneth Roberts he turns racism into cultural difference. He starts by nullifying cultural/ religious difference. At Dartmoor, Dick was associated, most explicitly by Waterhouse, with the black Baptist priest.¹⁹² For U.S. American readers, the great mystery and totem of Haitian Difference was Vodou. In the aftermath of the Intervention, memoirs, news reports and even some films had constructed it as the epitome of primitive exoticism and danger.¹⁹³

The first mention of Vodou in *Lydia Bailey* is Dick's reaction to the sight of Hamlin's supply of gold braid: "'My, my!' he whispered. 'That better than Voodoo.'" He

¹⁹¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 191-218

¹⁹² see Chapter 1 page 19 and footnote 41 of this paper.

¹⁹³ Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 39, 125-130 and *passim*; Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 118-176.

introduces Hamlin to “Voodoo” by arranging a ceremony to locate Lydia. “Tomorrow we go to my house and I show you things.... I see with drums.” At his own plantation, Dick instructs his “English-speaking wife”:

“Things too slow around here. Tonight we dance—big dance—big big dance. We got to see into next week.... get me every Gangan, Hungan, Mambu, Bocor anywhere around, and let em have all the goats, roosters, and rum they need. Tell em to start dancing quick. Along about midnight, we be out; see how they get along; find out what we want to know.”¹⁹⁴

King Dick explains that the “Gangan” (priest) will learn the desired information by drum networks; then mystify it with tricks such as divination by sacrifice.¹⁹⁵ Roberts’s Dick has turned “voodoo” into a *device*, rather than a belief-system, whose mysteries can be exploited by a rational American. What it and gold braid are good for is manipulating people. Like everything else, its utility can be bought by those who practice free enterprise.

Vodou is both subject to rational explanation, as a logical conduit for special knowledge, and psychologically useful to motivate the credulous. Dick tames and distances “Voodoo” at the same time he grants its racialized cultural potency:

“Voodoo makes you do what you might not do unless you believe in Voodoo.... If a nigra hear he die next Tuesday, three o’clock afternoon, he do it. If sick nigra hear he not sick, first thing you know, he not sick. Now then, suppose nigra wish to go to Cap François [*sic*]. Right away he pay call on Hungan and ask him what day look best. Hungan kill white rooster for Papa God; then he and nigra eat what Papa God leave, drink rum, dance all night, and Hungan tell him Papa God say go Cap François Monday. If somebody don’t tell nigra Monday be good, nigra afraid go any day. See?”

Dick also explains how “I pick up hot coals in fingers. When I do that, black people afraid of me.... Nothing hard when you know how. You get four-five things from

¹⁹⁴ 84, 93, 96

¹⁹⁵ 93

chemist--quicksilver, hamitalis, camphire, storax--... wash it on hands and you can pick up coals.”¹⁹⁶

King Dick is a realist and skeptic, ready to ascribe logical reasons to “Voodoo’s” observed effects. He is apparently immune to Vodou’s most notable characteristic: possession of the devotee by the Gods or *loas*: King Dick is effectively an advertiser, not a practitioner, of Vodou’s exotic powers. He enables Roberts’s use of it as local color, and allows him to equate it with other religions: as Hamlin narrates it, “What were all these things but a burlesque of greater Gangans in lands that posed as civilized?.... Christianity contains all the sillinesses and pretenses of Voodoo.”¹⁹⁷ Yet it retains a mystery which the rationalist does well to respect: Dick relies on “wanga” charms made by Gangans, as well his personal favorites: his six-shooter and the oxtail in which he hides his pearls. In short, Roberts has adopted a literary strategy for having it both ways: by using King Dick as an “American[ized]” guide to a semi-explicable yet alien Other culture, he reproduces, reasserts, and rationalizes U.S.-white prejudices about Blacks as a race. But he disguises these prejudices as a freethinker’s reinterpretation of ruling hegemonic ideas, by contextualizing them in the friendship between black Dick and the color-blind white Hamlins.

King Dick narrowly missed being the vehicle for a full-scale confrontation with Islam, too. As we have seen, Dick’s knowledge of Islam enables him to pose as a Marabout in North Africa. Roberts’s mentor Booth Tarkington proposed an encounter between King Dick and “an Arab... full-blooded ... Negro ‘sorcerer’” named Sidi Ogo.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ 103-105

¹⁹⁷ 106, 313

¹⁹⁸ Rauner Roberts Collection, Box 5 Folder 6: a handwritten eight-page note on Ritz-Carlton notepaper, complete with freehand cartoon doodle of Sidi Ogo, dated November 16 1943.

“He’s reputed to be 8 ft by 8, uses his teeth and ample axes... very devout Mahometan, prejudiced against Christians, favorite food eats entrails and goat-bones in coos-coos, can leap 24 ft horizontally and over a camel vertically. Very great eater.....” Tarkington wrote. “Well, King Dick hears a good deal about Sidi Ogo and gets a yen to meet up with him and see who’s who.” Fortunately for literature—unfortunately perhaps for cultural historians—Roberts did not take up this suggested Clash of Civilizations between Dick the Americanized Sudanese prince and the “Mahometan Negro sorcerer.” Like “Voodoo”, Islam is used as a plot device, not explored as cultural power. Instead, Roberts sends Dick off into the desert, riding back to his recreated North African kingdom at the head of the mercenary army deserted by the pusillanimous U.S. government. But Dick himself has no personal reason to begrudge U.S. policy, in fact no politics except his own power of the fist, so we can count on him to protect us from the wrath unleashed by our government’s betrayal of its Arab allies.

Richard Historicizes Roberts

As Roberts was struggling to finish *Lydia Bailey*, Civil Rights advocates were struggling for a place on the United States’s national agenda. King Dick plays a critical role in demonstrating that the “race problem” was not a major one, because the readers’ and narrator’s individual judgment of character is good and sufficient to prove the issue is elsewhere/Othered. Dick is above and beyond struggling because he’s so potent in his own sphere. Dick never agitates for better treatment. Dick is always tactfully and tacitly ready to assume whatever place will best serve the moment and his company. King Dick erases prejudice from the reader’s awareness, and projects it onto Others—bigots and

foreigners, especially Haitians. King Dick is probably Kenneth Roberts's last fictional word on the subject of race.¹⁹⁹

King Dick is more than a novelty: he's accepted and acceptable, a Great Enabler whose super-natural powers allow Roberts to write past plot-traps without comment. *Lydia Bailey* is in no way a magical-realist fiction, but King Dick is a kind of proto-realist-magician. He's a white "American" in black skin, a genie who makes Hamlin's deepest personal dreams come true. He enables Roberts's evasion equations: revolution equals independence; individual virtue and common-sense judgment trump race; capitalism dissolves difference; Mysteries can be manipulated through respect and knowledge. He's a confidence man, literally portrayed as adept at pea-and-shell games, but the ones who get conned are the readers, not the narrator-Hamlin.²⁰⁰

How original is Roberts's version of King Dick? Unfortunately the *Lydia Bailey* papers do not tell how and when Roberts decided to reconstruct him. Roberts never mentions Nell, Savage, or any other post-Dartmoor source. Discarded drafts have King Dick open "a boxing academy" in Portland Maine, but that could be a mere gloss on his reported activities in Dartmoor, or a recollection of Hawthorne's brief reference to his post-war activities.²⁰¹ Roberts visited the Boston Athenaeum, but there's no record of his having seen the Crichton manuscript. It's conceivable—barely—that young Roberts had been exposed to fellow Maine-iac Justin Jones/ Harry Hazel's *Big Dick* pulp novels. He

¹⁹⁹Roberts begins *Lydia Bailey* with a diatribe against consistency, with narrator Albion Hamlin raging about "...dangerous men who consistently thought all people with black skins are inferior to those with white skins; intolerant men who consistently believed that all people with white skins should be forced to accept all people with black skins as equals...."¹⁹⁹ Foreword, 1. If we accept that Hamlin speaks for the author, Roberts is claiming to be a discerning, open-minded thinker on matters racial. This appears to be his only comment on U.S. Civil Rights, especially if it was written in 1947, during the last frantic weeks of preparing the manuscript for the press.

²⁰⁰ 85, 87-8

²⁰¹typescript, hand-labeled ML-25(5):2 pp.153-4, Rauner Roberts Archives.

might even have read them, and “forgotten” them as sources, as Crichton evidently forgot his debt to them, but given their ephemerality it seems unlikely. As a self-regarded important writer, Roberts certainly would have felt entitled to reconstruct the palimpsest Dick to his own “100% fictional” purpose. Most likely he knew nothing specific of “Seaver’s” later life. Roberts reconstructed King Dick, in *The Lively Lady*, to confirm his age’s ruling images and stereotypes of Blackness; and took that reconstruction, in *Lydia Bailey*, as license to create a magical fantasy “slave of the lamp” who confirms post-Enlightenment racist imagery and U.S. racial, economic and social exceptionalism.

When King Dick leaves Roberts’s readers in the North African desert, it is nine unexplained years short of his appearance in documented history and Roberts’s earlier novel, at Dartmoor. Dick has passed across the Hamlins’ and the readers’ lives like a comet and gone on to the glory of his own world. But when we meet him again at Roberts’s version of Dartmoor, he is much diminished, infantilized, more inclined to cling to power, although he’s retained his sense of humor. But trying to find consistency in Roberts’s two portraits of King Dick is certainly pushing fiction too far.

Lydia Bailey brought Roberts to the apex of his popularity. In January 1947, with World War II just won and the Cold War beginning to roil domestic politics, U.S. Americans were ready for escape into historical fiction. Roberts’s new work after a six-year silence was eagerly awaited and heavily promoted. Roberts brought King Dick to a nationwide audience who had never met him before. Hazel/ Jones’s “pulp” reprint of his serial story was an event only for the author/printer, as cheap and typo-ridden as possible, but Doubleday’s release of its star-author’s long-awaited effort was the occasion for a

huge marketing campaign. Even U.S. African Americans and a chapter of the Urban League wrote to Roberts to acclaim *Lydia Bailey*, and ask to broadcast excerpts.

Roberts's reputation and the publisher's marketing efforts led Twentieth Century Fox to pay the highest price to that date for a novel's movie-rights.²⁰² But as the publisher's attorney wrote to Roberts: "if you use any fictional characters in a subsequent book which have appeared in LYDIA BAILEY, it will be impossible to sell that book to anyone except Twentieth.... [I]f [King Dick] is a real character and has been referred to in histories and so forth, we have no more worries about him.... he was a real person and Twentieth will have no hold on him." A follow-up letter explains that "Twentieth Century would reserve the right to sue ... [any] motion picture company [making a movie of *The Lively Lady*] and not you."²⁰³ Once again King Dick posed a problem for conventional cultural and legal practices, of the kind now called "intellectual property."

One of the dissenters from the chorus of praise for *Lydia Bailey* was Walter F. White, Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. White had already recognized the public relations potential of a major Hollywood movie about Haiti. But the book did "irreparable harm" to Haiti's image, wrote White, at a time when he and his white future wife Poppy Cannon were trying to promote tourism to that nation.²⁰⁴ Haiti would need a pointed public relations campaign to counter these "distortions," he wrote.²⁰⁵ The making of that movie would bring another remaking of

²⁰² Roberts's letter books at Dartmouth, and the Library of Congress Ken McCormick Collection of the Records of Doubleday and Company, contain copies of correspondence between Roberts, publisher Doubleday and the movie studios.

²⁰³ Lee Barker to KR, September 26 and October 11, 1946, Roberts's letter books.

²⁰⁴ Walter Francis White and Poppy Cannon Papers, Yale Beinecke Rare Book Library, and NAACP papers, 9/20/47. On January 12 of that year—just days after the book was released—White had already expressed interest in a version of the film made and premiered in Haiti. Walter White to Haitian president Dumarsais Estimé, Box A295, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁰⁵ Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier*, 131-33 and p.230 n1.

King Dick's image, character and societal role, and the Whites' efforts may have contributed, surprisingly, to that transformation.

Chapter Four: Roberts's Richard Remade

Introducing "King Dick" to Hollywood

King Dick, as the most prominent black character in the story, would have to carry the burden if NAACP Secretary Walter White's effort to improve on Roberts's treatment of Haiti and African Americans in general was to succeed. *Lydia Bailey's* portrayals of other, 'non-fictional' black characters—Toussaint, Christophe, Dessalines—had to remain within the bounds of accepted historical thought. Unless 20th Century Fox turned the project into something more documentary-oriented, Dick's "100% fictional" role as guide would be the main nexus of mediation between story and viewer, the site of creator and consumer's gaze. Mr. White's earlier wartime efforts to influence Hollywood studios treatment of African-Americans had not been very successful, however.²⁰⁶ It is not now known how much influence he had on the project, although his recent and very controversial marriage to Public Relations professional Poppy Cannon might have significantly increased their effectiveness.²⁰⁷

Mr. and Mrs. White urged that the film be shot in Haiti as a tourist ad and revenue source for that impoverished country.²⁰⁸ But it was not to be. Production was delayed by

²⁰⁶ See Dyja, Thomas, *Walter White: The Dilemma of Black Identity in America*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 159-161 and Janken, Kenneth Robert, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP*, (NY: New Press, 2003), 266-7.

²⁰⁷ White wrote to Haitian President Paul Magloire on February 18, 1952, that "Mrs. White and I had the great privilege recently of seeing a preview of 'Lydia Bailey.' It is a magnificent film and one that will do immense good in telling the people of the world a truer story of Haiti's gallant past...." White and Cannon Papers, Group 3, boxes 35, 44

²⁰⁸ The White to Magloire letter continues: "As Mrs. White and I looked at the picture we remembered with pride and pleasure some work we did... in Haiti in 1949 on the picture and, later, with Mr. Darryl Zanuck..." See also "Memorandum From: Walter White To: Ambassador Joseph V. Charles Re: Public

time and circumstance until the project diminished from proposed epic extravaganza to studio-lot B Technicolor adventure.²⁰⁹ In April 1951, a part-time curator at the San Diego Historical Society wrote Kenneth Roberts that “I had a wild call from 20th Century Fox about LYDIA BAILEY. They were looking for a technical [script] advisor.... the producer has undertaken to shoot the whole picture in the Hollywood area.”

The consultant’s script critique demonstrates that Dick would again be reconstructed to fit external preconceptions. He writes about shot 283 that “KING DICK could very well give [the line] ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ in good French, because he is a fairly well educated “British nigger.”²¹⁰ Describing an educated Black as a “British nigger,” rather than a French-educated Haitian, reflects Anglo-Saxon prejudices about education and civilization in general, and signals that movie Dick would bear little resemblance to Roberts’s version. This time, instead of a pawn in Roberts’s pop historical revisionism lesson, Dick would serve as a celluloid agent of the Hollywood dream-factory’s post-colonial empire of cultural consumption.

The corporate project of movie production reopened the struggle over King Dick’s representation. No longer captive of Roberts’s sole construction, Dick’s image was now subject to the requirements, desires and whims of screenwriters, marketers, casting directors, actors, et cetera, as well as—possibly—self-appointed representatives

Relations Campaign for Haiti” September 20, 1947, Walter and Poppy Cannon White papers, 1 & 6, etc., Yale Beinecke Rare Book Archives. An undated newspaper squib/clipping in Roberts’s letter books on 20th Century-Fox President Darryl F. “Zanuck’s Foreign Schedule” describes “the company’s plans for making films out of the United States.... on the agenda.... are “Lydia Bailey,” to be made in Haiti....” Roberts Archives, Rauner Library, Dartmouth College.

²⁰⁹ The White to Magloire letter continues, “Our one regret is that our strong recommendation that the picture be filmed in Haiti could not be accomplished. We are informed that certain demands regarding a tax of \$100 a day and other requests for payments which the makers of the film deemed unnecessary and excessive were responsible for making the film in Hollywood instead of Haiti....”

²¹⁰ Ben F. Dixon to KR, 2 April 1951, in KR’s letter book, Rauner Library. Needless to say, Roberts was furious with 20th Century Fox’s refusal to use him or his nominees as advisors.

of potential customers like Mr. and Mrs. White. Trying to recreate Roberts's genius-clown-magician would be picking one's way through a movie-making minefield, and risk offending millions of viewers. Roberts called the screenwriters "two tenth-raters," "bush-leaguers, far better fitted to be night-soil men than to dabble in the arts," but they were in fact noteworthy Cold War liberals who we will discuss later. But there's no indication they were much interested in Haitian culture or King Dick's real antecedents.²¹¹

Further, as a product of the Hollywood studio system, the questions would have to be asked, who could play King Dick? One of the few Black actors who approached the stature, talent and star-power to play the role was Paul Robeson. He was known to late 1940s/early 1950s Hollywood by his performances as Othello and especially Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor [Brutus] Jones*, among others. But he'd announced that he'd no longer act in the movies' racially demeaning roles. If he could be tempted, turning the character over to him would have overshadowed any likely white romantic leads and turned the project on its head. Furthermore, Robeson was an all-but-avowed Communist, a blacklisted subversive who'd been to Moscow, had his passport revoked, and denounced the United States by presenting the anti-lynching petition "We Charge Genocide" to the United Nations.²¹² Casting directors turned instead to six foot five inch operatic-handsome William Marshall, whose best role so far had been De Lawd in a Broadway revival of *The Green Pastures*, a comedic retelling of Old Testament episodes as seen by white writers through the eyes of a black child.²¹³

²¹¹ KR letters to fans Gardner Campbell, 6/27/52, and Mrs. Leslie Paepke, 9/8/52, letter book, Rauner Library. You know the one about the blonde starlet who was so dumb she slept with the writer?

²¹² Martin Duberman. *Paul Robeson*. (New York: New Press, 1988). 259-261 and *passim*.

²¹³ "William Marshall Attains Goal on Advice of Parents," *20th Century-Fox Exhibitor Campaign Book* (PR materials for *Lydia Bailey*), 5, courtesy of David F. Miller@Fox.com; Marc Connelly, *The Green Pastures*, (NY: Faffar & Rinehart, 1929), based on Bradford, Roark, *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun*. (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1928).

King Dick in Haiti

The entire *Lydia Bailey* film is set in Haiti, eliminating the Mediterranean story.²¹⁴ Its opening announces An Event: several shots of “Voodoo” drummers are followed by a close-up of a bejeweled hand opening a large tome titled “20th Century-Fox presents *Lydia Bailey* by Kenneth Roberts.” The pages show highly decorated credits, and a title card portentously purporting to summarize Haiti’s historical situation. About minute into the movie, we see a large white-suited café-au-lait-colored gentleman listening to the drums announcing the arrival of a ship bearing a young U.S. American lawyer from Baltimore (Hamlin). Shortly after Hamlin’s landing, the same gentleman is seen conspiring with a sailor off his ship. When movie-Hamlin’s small black porter-boy is knifed by two white Frenchmen trying to steal his valise, the handsome man comes to his aid. Hamlin hands the wounded boy to him and asks for a doctor. He replies in perfect English: “What color doctor? A black one who’ll rub him with goat-vomit? Or a white one who’ll bleed him even more?” He carries the boy’s now-dead body away, saying “what needs to be done, I’ll do.”

Minutes later Hamlin is clubbed unconscious and comes-to in a clearing, interrogated politely but directly by the same man, who introduces himself as “King Dick.” All white strangers, King Dick explains, are suspected of spying for the French who are attempting to reconquer “Haiti.”²¹⁵ Hamlin insists his sole mission is to get the stranger Miss Lydia Bailey’s signature on a will that leaves her father’s fortune to the needy young U.S. government, thus emphasizing his own country’s post-Revolutionary similarity to Haiti’s own situation. King Dick wittily replies, however, “leave this place

²¹⁴ It also left out the first fifth of the book, set in Alien and Sedition Law-era U.S. courts and political arenas, which sets up Roberts’s swingeing critique of U.S. policy, politicians and the polity.

²¹⁵ The colony was not so renamed until about a year after this scene, in 1804.

on your own and in twenty-four hours I'll find Haitian flesh-eating ants will be gorging themselves on your eyes. Which reminds me, I'm quite hungry. Come, let us eat. Then I will decide what to do with you."

King Dick's elegant home is full of sumptuous furnishings. After listening to the drums, he offers to guide Hamlin to the country "chateau" of Lydia's employer and fiancé, Colonel d'Autrement. D'Autrement is a leader of the French counter-revolutionary plot, so King Dick, as one of Toussaint's generals, seizes the opportunity to spy on d'Autrement by posing as Hamlin's servant. He introduces Hamlin to his eight wives, including one he introduces, smirking significantly, as a "very talented girl." The rest he describes variously as "the best cook in the world," "all of her children are sons," "very intellectual," etcetera. One is an exotic looking "Vodoun priestess," although he hastens to tell Hamlin "I don't believe in it at all." Finally there's "old Cloryphène, [who's] not the prettiest, but I have no secrets from her." This Dick is more discretely chauvinistic than the one in the novel, as one of the book-wives was "a Nangola, and Nangolas got a pretty strong smell, even for me."²¹⁶

Movie King Dick has been transformed from Roberts's version of Hamlin's Sancho Panza, into a literally independent force; from guide to host. No longer a Sudanese outsider who has somewhat Haitianized (and "thinks like an American"), he's now a native Haitian who is Americanized by education, privilege and character. He quotes Plato. He distances himself from Vodou even as he represents it, by offering Hamlin a "very powerful wanga" to "keep him from harm" because "if the Gods exist, I shall be in heaven. If not, what have I got to lose?" As they ride through the countryside, disguised as ragged Negro fieldhands, he tells Hamlin to "Call me Dick. It's true my

²¹⁶ LB 101

ancestors were kings in Africa, but it's more important these days that one remembers he was once a slave." This history establishes movie-Dick's bona fides for the United States audience: from the U.S.-American binary perspective, King Dick is Negro, even if a light-colored educated, prosperous planter. How "ex-slave" Dick was educated is not explained. His perfect diction reverts to the novel's post-Uncle Remus dialect only when he acts the addled servant for d'Autrement's benefit. Movie Dick's position within Haiti's more complex class-color structure, as a mulatto, will be dealt with below.

At d'Autrement's plantation, a Voodoo celebrant signals Dick to kill one of the Frenchman's allies, a traitorous black general."²¹⁷ After Dick does so, d'Autrement sends his dogs and hangers-on after him; Hamlin joins the pursuit and helps Dick escape. The French have landed and Colonel d'Autrement rides off to join them. Dick and Hamlin gaze down on the burning village where Dick was born as civil war spreads through the land. They separate, with Dick going to help L'Ouverture wage scorched earth war, and Hamlin returning to rescue Lydia from marauding maroons. They are reunited after Toussaint's troops bring Hamlin to the Haitian camp, wounded and unconscious after diving into a gorge to escape d'Autrement's dragoons.

King Dick and Hamlin try to convince Toussaint not to appear at negotiations with the "treacherous and cynical" French, in a scene which fictionalizes the United States's ambivalence about French intervention in the hemisphere. Toussaint rebukes King Dick for saying "the tongues of these white men are black with lies!" by saying

²¹⁷The ceremony is ludicrously over-staged and over-choreographed, but the use made of it does fit the theses of Yale sociologist James G. Leyburn, that "Vodun" (his spelling) had only emerged in the 1730-1790 period, to be "Test[ed] in the fires of revolt... 1790-1800," *The Haitian People*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 150, and Ramsey, "as Geggus puts it, 'during the Revolution magico-religious beliefs served to mobilize resistance and foster a revolutionary mentality,' and in Pluchon's words, 'provided networks of information and action.'" *The Spirits and the Law*, 44.

“White? Black? ... have you forgotten that we have black enemies, and white friends?” Hamlin the U.S. American now identifies with Toussaint and his people, saying “I know now what you’re fighting for and I realize it’s no different from what men in my country fought for.” Albion puts himself in L’Ouverture’s place as negotiator, and is arrested by the French. The Haitians set fire to Cap Français, as d’Autrement’s soldiers escort Hamlin to a U.S. ship in the harbor.

King Dick strolls to the rescue. Challenged by a French sentry for the password, he replies “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité!” When the sentry protests “That’s not the password,” Dick replies “I know, my friend, but it ought to be” and knocks him out. He knocks Hamlin’s guards into the harbor by throwing barrels at them, then swims across it with Hamlin. The movie ends with King Dick standing on the flaming waterfront as Hamlin and Lydia row out to their refuge:

Hamlin: I feel like I’m running away....When it’s all over come and see us. I may need your advice [on marriage].

Dick: You’ll come back to us. We won’t have much, but we’ll have our freedom.
(They shake hands.)

Lydia *(looking into King Dick’s eyes)*: Thank you.

Dick: Goodbye, Mademoiselle.

(They go off standing in the open boat, as King Dick waves his giant club in farewell as the music swells, then heads back into the burning city.)

Gone with the Barbary section of the book is King Dick’s African identity. King Dick has become a Haitian Nathan Hale to L’Ouverture’s tragic black George Washington (as Hamlin calls the latter), ready to give his life for his country. The equation implied by Roberts in the novel—Revolution equals mere national independence—is made explicit in the movie.

The movie is an escapist re-telling of “America’s” struggle for independence, a fairy-tale revisioning of “revolution” in which the enormous price of national liberation is

paid, luckily, by alien Blacks. National liberation and emancipation are conflated. King Dick has become the Great Man Toussaint's most important, and most 'Americanized' advisor, while Hamlin is little more than adventurer and witness. Although he's called general, Dick operates like a civilian consultant in his white planters' suit, not a uniformed fighter or tactician. He embodies Clemenceau's dictum that war is too important to be left to the generals: instead of advising Haiti's leaders to fight, as in the novel, Dick and Hamlin urge Toussaint to save himself for his people's sake. Dick represents the voice of national mythology, not strategy or even policy.

The movie's plot is less convoluted, more romantic cliché than the novel's. The story's viewpoint shifts from Roberts's 1940s patriarchal attitude of superiority to Blacks and contempt for the masses, to a 1952 liberal-paternalistic respect for the patience and suffering of both. This rewriting fits Hollywood formulae and movie clichés, but in the process the story has been transformed; Dick has gone from "slave of the lamp" to noble master and patriot. In the novel, Dick is a magically-talented opportunist; the cinema reconstructs him as a pure patrician patriot. His capitalist activity as a genius who "knows how to make money" has been reduced to the static position of a rich, masterful man who willingly throws it away for the cause of liberty. To some extent this is an effect of condensing 200 pages of novel to 90 minutes of screen time, but the rewrite goes beyond emphasizing certain features over others. It doesn't just silence Dick's rich back-story, but rather rewrites it. Movie Dick is a rich citizen of Haiti, rather than an enterprising citizen of the world. For Roberts, King Dick incarnates a super-naturalized reduction of the struggle for economic survival, but Hollywood, as so often is the case, silences that struggle. Under Roberts's post-colonial Gaze, King Dick was constructed as a clown-

genius, a supernaturally-talented subaltern Other who applies the ways of the American exceptionalist socio-economic mission as if by magic. Under the unself-conscious imperial gaze naturalized by Hollywood's dream factory, he *becomes* an American aristocrat, above the blood, sweat and toil of making a living. Instead of embodying stereotyped Negro characteristics, he transcends "racial" markings. He is replete with social as well as economic capital.²¹⁸

"Promoting" King Dick

The film completes King Dick's transformation from working-class hero to Hollywood's version of an aristocratic American in brownface. He emerges as a sort of parody Southern-planter, perfected in his marriage to eight beautiful black women and loving paterfamilias to dozens of children. His sexuality fulfills '50s-era "Father Knows Best" chauvinism, replete with fantasies of male potency and protection, while avoiding white miscegenation taboos. He wears his white suit throughout except when disguised as a field-hand. He is graying at the temples. He hardly ever condescends to use his fists as in the novel, preferring his cocomacaque (bamboo club). He is also less of a "character" in the 19th Century sense of being rooted in work, duty, and action—but also as an outlandish human type—and more of a 20th Century "personality" participating in consumer culture.²¹⁹

No trace remains of Roberts's pop-eyed clown, nor even Dartmoor's seven-foot bearskin-hatted despot: even his famous stature all but disappears next to the six-foot

²¹⁸ E. Anne Kaplan comments: "The imperial gaze reflects the assumption that the white western subject is central much as the male gaze assumes the centrality of the male subject," *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); quoted in Patricia Waugh, *Literary Theory and Criticism, An Oxford Guide*, (Oxford NY, Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 514

²¹⁹ see Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 19-20, 203-4 for character versus personality.

something actor (Dale Robertson) playing Hamlin. Marshall's medium-brown color identifies him, significantly, with elite Haitian *milats* or mulattoes. His Caucasoid facial features would, in Haiti, be called "clair" or socially good, as opposed to Roberts's "soft sooty black" skin and "mouth stretched all the way across his face" or the Dartmoor sources' "Ethiopian" aspect or Crichton's "round wooley head."²²⁰ Haiti's revolutionary *milats* often aspired to inherit their French fathers' privileges and position. Instead of grappling with their elitist pretensions, however, Hollywood implies that Dick is a U.S.-style democrat, waiting for his countrymen to catch up. His statement that his "ancestors were kings in Africa," juxtaposed with his aspiration to be a citizen-patriarch, flatters U.S.-democratic and Haitian elite fantasies alike: who would not prefer having his natural superiority recognized, over the unearned status of hereditary aristocrat? Perhaps the studio also saw this imagined heritage as a way of kowtowing to potential African audiences' post-colonial cultural claims. Dick's change in social status is surely overdetermined, by Hollywood story-telling practices, Walter White's desires, and perhaps even audience segment-considerations.²²¹ The customers who could afford to see the film when it opened in Port-au-Prince would be the elite *milats* and privileged "*clairs*," not the impoverished masses.

The Hollywood that made *Lydia Bailey* still couldn't conceive of a self-defined powerful black man. Despite the lip-service to African origins, all the Haitian characters are crammed into U.S. models: Toussaint is a combination of George Washington and

²²⁰ See Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation*, 109-138, and Nicholls, David, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race Colour & National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 105-126 and *passim*.

²²¹ Walter White would have been seen as Black by choice: "I am a Negro. My skin is white, my eyes are blue, my hair is blond." Walter White, *A Man Called White*, (NY: Viking Press, 1948), 3. My late grandfather once had him and Algernon Black, founder of the Society for Ethical Culture, as dinner-guests; my mother remarked of the occasion that that "Mr. White was Black; Mr. Black {whose skin color was deeper} was White." But I digress.

Jesus; King Dick is Nathan Hale and gentleman Booker Washington, with the added *droit du seigneur*'s privilege to sleep with any (black) woman in sight. Put in more contemporaneous early 1950s terms, Dick had become a kind of black Douglas MacArthur, defending his America against corrupting foreigner invaders bent on enslaving a nation which was congratulating itself on slavery's abolition. He's a liberal fantasy, transformed again: from the northern racist Roberts's beard or alibi for racism, to not-very effective Hollywood liberal skill for Haitian tourism.²²²

As a cultured, sophisticated gentleman, movie-Dick would have been a much easier sell to black audiences foreign and domestic than the comic-magic-working-class grotesque produced by Roberts's and other writers' white gaze. That this rewriting was a direct response to post-war Black activism seems unlikely; more probably, it reproduces the mid-20th Century spectrum of non-"racist/bigot"-ed U.S. responses to the race problem, from curmudgeonly conservative to Hollywood liberal. The movie constructs its audience as patriots and racial "liberals," again willing to befriend a black man—or at least accept help and hospitality in his homeland—as long as he's "got too many brains" to sleep with one's sister, as Hamlin explained in the novel, or any other white woman for that matter.

Roberts had written the novel during World War II. By the time the movie was scripted, the Cold War had replaced the hot one; the nation was preoccupied with Communist subversion and encroachment. Screenwriters Michael Blankfort and Philip Dunne had strong Cold War liberal credentials: the former served as front for a

²²² "beard" is defined as "a slang term describing a person who is used, knowingly or unknowingly, ...to conceal infidelity or to conceal one's sexual orientation. The American slang term originally referred to anyone who acted on behalf of another, in any transaction, to conceal a person's true identity" [or character—AL]. Wikipedia contributors. "Beard (companion)." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 26 Oct. 2012. Web. 13 Nov. 2012.

blacklisted screenwriter, the latter cofounded the Screen Writers Guild and was a strong anti-Communist pro-civil liberties opponent of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Director Jean Negulesco had left his native Rumania at age 27, approximately twenty years before the Soviet take-over.²²³ In addition to these studio representatives, Walter F. White and the Washington establishment alike were bent on preventing race issues from weakening the United States internally. White and the NAACP were determined to use the international crisis to advance Civil Rights; the government wanted to strengthen the nation's Caribbean allies against Red Revolution. All these would have thought it important to counter Soviet propaganda by improving the United States' racial image.²²⁴ So in reconfiguring the movie's Haiti as an endangered fellow newly-independent nation, the United States' turn-of-the-last-century sister-in-arms against European invasion, Hollywood could respond to White's entreaties, U.S. culture's then-dominant narrative, and the government's strategic preoccupations, all at once.

Audience-marketing might have been an even greater factor in remaking the story and King Dick in particular. The movie was released in at least 12 nations. Dick is prominent in the movie's posters, as the only identifiable black character. He's placed in the margin, looking towards flaming scenes of battle and bizarre "Voodoo" celebration. His image is always understandably inferior in position and size to the embracing lovers, but several posters, apparently designed to attract the novel's fans, include the legends

²²³ "Jean Negulesco" at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0624535/bio>; "Philip Dunne" at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0242897/bio>; "Michael Blankfort" at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0087581/bio>, all consulted 3/7/13 1-2:00PM, and "Movies July 03, 1991". Los Angeles Times. http://articles.latimes.com/1991-07-03/entertainment/ca-1469_1_writers-guild, Retrieved 2013-03-24.

²²⁴ Lipke, Alan *American as Apple Pie: How Terrorism Lost*, (Public Radio International 2003, and PRX.org); see also Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2011), 3-17, 249-254.

“King Dick sounds the battlecry...!” and “KING DICK ... Son of African Kings... whose mighty arm altered history!”²²⁵

It is tempting to over-interrogate and over-estimate Mr. and Mrs. White’s influence in Hollywood. To Hollywood producers and screenwriters, Mr. and Mrs. White’s input, as sophisticated public-relations-types, would have appeared more professional, less “self-interested,” than that of a notoriously bad-tempered and bombastic novelist.²²⁶ The race they claimed to represent might have been disdained, but it was still a desirable market-segment. No doubt they would have pointed out that Blacks stateside, in the Caribbean, and perhaps even in Africa might pay to see a dignified black hero, but would not be interested in another demeaning clown-character, however central to the story.

King Dick Sells *Lydia*

One area where Mr. and Mrs. White seem to have been effective was in pushing for the premiere of *Lydia Bailey* to take place in Haiti.²²⁷ The movie received its gala opening in Port-au-Prince on May 4, 1952. It brought much desired attention, and dozens of journalists to a “reception and grand ball ... at the National Palace,” flattering the *noiriste* President Magloire. At the same time, actor William Marshall’s color and facial features would have gratified Magloire’s *milat* social and political rivals. Marshall “rode [with female lead Anne Francis] in front car [*sic*, of the motorcade] like Presidential candidates” and “kibitized” her “try[ing] out the voodoo drum of Haiti’s leading

²²⁵ *20th Century-Fox Exhibitor Campaign Book*.

²²⁶ The records of Poppy Cannon White’s employer, the Peter Hilton Advertising Agency, cannot now be traced, and representatives of the PR industry say no good comprehensive history thereof exists.

²²⁷ According to historian Matthew J. Smith, “The realization of this [Port-au-Prince premiere] owed much to the ardor of the NAACP and Walter White in particular.” *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press 2009), 164 and note 55.

drummer” —all actions suggesting a proximity to the blonde budding star which might have displeased white Southern U.S. taste-makers.²²⁸ The multi-day fête was described in local newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* as “the first time the grand premiere of an American film has taken place abroad.”²²⁹

Southern U.S. Whites might have been averse to seeing a black character and the Haitian revolution portrayed in a sympathetic light, especially with Blacks now actively demanding economic, political, and social equality. And so the studio reconstructed King Dick, one of the most unique characters in U.S. historical literature, into another Archetype: the post-*Gone with the Wind* humane Southern planter, only this time, an alien of color. Perhaps Fox hoped Dick would be read as affirming the separatist/segregationist rationale that Blacks are fine *in their* [foreign] *place*.²³⁰ Perhaps they hoped to steer between competing audience prejudices; or to teach a lesson in tolerance enough Whites might swallow. What is clear, however, is that they failed to find a lasting answer: *Lydia Bailey* the movie, for all its ‘fifties-cliché familiarity and Technicolor thrills, is now almost impossible to obtain. It has never been broadcast on national network TV. It “was slated for TV presentation on NBC's *Saturday Night at the Movies* in 1963, but was pulled from the schedule because of a subplot involving

²²⁸ W. Z., “Movie Junket Back in Full Glory: Reporter Goes to Haiti for Lavish Premiere—and Returns Alive” *The New York Herald Tribune* 5/11/52, n. pag., Roberts letter book.

²²⁹ “la première fois que la grande premiere d’un film américain a lieu à l’étranger,” *Le Nouvelliste* 4/24/52 p.1, courtesy of the Digital Library of the Caribbean. This was no mean accomplishment, requiring release of the French-dubbed version of the film before its U.S. premiere.

²³⁰ This conjecture is based on the perhaps *a posteriori* distinction made by some, including former Arkansas Supreme Court Justice James D. Johnson, between *white supremacists* and *separatists*. Oral history, 1991, quoted in Lipke, Alan, *How the South—or White Supremacy—Won the War*, (Public Radio International and PRX.org, 2000).

miscegenation.”²³¹ No such “subplot” exists, except as embodied in the visibly-mulatto persona of King Dick.

Mr. and Mrs. White were delighted with the movie. Roberts hated it.²³² Critics were mixed, one calling it “a Technicolor blend of Haitian history and Hollywood horse-opera... redolent of a studio backlot jungle.... moviegoers may get the feeling that the camera, by moving a frame to the right or the left, might catch sight of a Southern California orange-juice stand.”²³³ Adventure-oriented reviewers liked it; many singled out William Marshall’s performance as King Dick. As “the dominant figure in the cast.... he has the rich eloquence and resonance characteristic of the better actors of his race. A carefully controlled but always dominant swagger give him an air of majesty and power.... here is a man we would like to have revisit the screen again and again” wrote reviewer Alton Cook.²³⁴ “An imposing and indestructible patriot whose voice is as commanding as his figure” noted A.W. in the *New York Times*; “King Dick... the most colorful character in the drama ... is given great humor, vitality and dignity....”²³⁵ The character is described as a “cross between leader, servant and guardian angel” and Marshall’s work as “by far the best acting performance.”²³⁶ King Dick’s special power seemed to shine through, however reframed and reconstructed. Even one hundred twenty years after his death and massively reconstructed several times over, he was able to turn

²³¹ According to <http://allmovie.com/work/lydia-bailey-100734>, consulted 4/10/2011.

²³² Numerous letters, marginal comments and diary entries in the Library of Congress Doubleday and Rauner Roberts collections.

²³³ *Time* 59 (16 June 1952) pp. 98, 100.

²³⁴ Cook, Alton, “Adventure Roars in a Menacing Haiti,” *NY World Telegram*, n.d. n.pag.

²³⁵ A.W., “‘Lydia Bailey,’ Fox Movie Based on Kenneth Roberts Noval [sic], Opens at Roxy Theatre,” *New York Times*, 5/31/52 and Guernsey, Otis L. Jr., “On the Screen: Lydia Bailey” *New York Herald Tribune*, 5/31/52 respectively.

²³⁶ W. Ward Marsh, “Sound, Fury, Color and Strong Cast Make Hipp[odrome]’s ‘Lydia Bailey’ Exciting” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, p12, and a small unidentified clipping titled “Cinema.” All reviews of Marshall’s performance are from Roberts’s letter books, Rauner archives; the attribution ellipses are his, unfortunately.

racism into nationalism and brotherhood for Hollywood. The studio remade him as someone we would like to be, not merely a man with talents we'd like to have (as in Roberts's novel), an alien angel of our better natures (Hazel/Jones), or a Black phenomenon in a British lockaway (Dartmoor Memoirs).

King Dick is Dead; Long Live the King

The *Lydia Bailey* complex of novel, movie and promotion was the last of Dick's reincarnations for almost sixty years—unless, as Professor Robert C. Doyle implied in his 2000 Harmon Memorial Lecture at the U.S. Air Force Academy, King Dick's alleged financial shenanigans at Dartmoor inspired James Clavell's 1962 *King Rat*.²³⁷ Doyle does not suggest a direct connection—he only points out the similarity—between our hero and the latter novelist's white wheeler-dealer in a Japanese prison camp. But Clavell would have been of an age to read and find value in Roberts. Then for a while Big Dick, King of the Darkies, lived on only in the commentaries of his diverse academic admirers, although he'd earned a place in The African American National Biography.

Then came renaissance. As this thesis was being written, Dick reappeared in Paul Wheeler's 2012 adventure fiction *The Legend of Gentle Morgan* as Richard Crafus of Dartmoor, "a massively built black slave ... who has been bribed by the prison governor to report anyone planning to riot or escape." The hero and Crafus escape together but "they return to America and Crafus is convicted as a runaway slave and arrested to return

²³⁷ Doyle, "Making Experience Count," 9

to the plantation.”²³⁸ Dick enslaved is subject to indignities never before seen by him. But more important, the struggle over his representation has been reopened.

Dick has, for the first time, been reclaimed by his own. Black playwright Carlyle Brown’s *Dartmoor Prison* received a staged-reading at Chicago’s Goodman Theatre in December 2009, and a workshop production since then. It draws on Bolster’s sensitive investigation of Dick’s imprisonment.²³⁹ King Dick is the central character of the ensemble cast; he exercises his power to create a space for protest against racism and involuntary servitude. Dick is portrayed as a semi-articulate man with a strong sense of right and wrong and an awareness of racialized injustice. He is a creature of physical self-expression rather than introspection, so the protest is voiced most effectively by an Afro-Caribbean character called the “Governor.” One of the play’s greatest strengths is this believable sense of King Dick’s personality, perhaps the first time someone has reconstructed his character with an eye and ear for psychological verisimilitude rather than a societal agenda. Dick struggles to assert equality of authority and bring justice between the separated Black and White P.O.W. communities. His morals bespeak a rough, maritime practicality: without directly expressing moral judgment or distaste, he uses the homosexuality of two of his white antagonists against them. Although the character experiences little dramatic growth, just the fact of his presence in *Dartmoor Prison* represents the reclamation of his identity by African American community, if so crude and simplistic a social grouping may still be asserted.

²³⁸ Wheeler sources “Crafus” in *Gentle Morgan* to Horsman; the novel is available in digital and hardcopy editions from CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, June 7, 2012. Summary details are from <http://www.amazon.com/Legend-Gentle-Morgan-Paul-Wheeler/dp/147501077X>, consulted 3/25/13 1:20PM.

²³⁹ Telephone conversation with Carlyle Brown, 3/10/13, who also kindly provided a copy of the script.

Coda: King Dick's Centuries

Suppose we were to treat “King Dick” imaginatively, as a single being in all his incarnations and constructions. We would have to follow the chronology of his lifetime, disregarding distinctions between established “facts” and “fictions.” We would use best scholarly practices to judge contradictory elements in favor of the best-documented versions. The result would be a tragedy: a Dick who was born into or descended from African royalty, enslaved, then rose to millionaire *general de place* Haitian patriot at the turn of the century.²⁴⁰ After a time as North African leader, he went to sea as a common sailor, and became a powerful prison trustee in the War of 1812. After that he was Boston's ceremonial “King of the Darkies”, pioneer of boxing in the United States, bouncer, auxiliary cop, “labourer,” and finally victim of grave-robbing Boston physicians.²⁴¹ On the dimension of “character” or personality, his alleged sense of humor increases until the final pathos of his imaginary friend Fourpe's death. Metaphorically-speaking, his life-circumstances sank as his literary prominence grew, from assorted often obscure memoirs and a couple of cheaply-printed pulp-novels, to a blockbuster novel and Technicolor film, then back to the only detailed version of his death in the Hazel-Jones sequel.

A more restrictive, “factual” interpretation finds he begins in unknown origins and proceeds to sea service in a privateer. The apex of his fame and power comes somewhere between Dartmoor, where he exercised authority in prison, and his Boston “boxing resort” which subjected him to the malign neglect of white chroniclers. Then he was almost lost again, as a strong Black U.S. American before the time of liberation. But

²⁴⁰ *Lydia Bailey*: born—Roberts's novel; descended from, movie.

²⁴¹ North Africa: Roberts; Boston—numerous primary documents; “labourer”—Boston Directories; victim of grave-robbers—“Harry Hazel”, *Fourpe Tap*.

we should not ask which is “the real” King Dick; rather we should try to understand how his transformations met the demands of marketplace and ideology.

Walter Johnson has called for an appreciation of slaves’ lives that goes beyond pro-forma credit for their “agency,” their ability to act on independent choices.²⁴² We know King Dick was a prisoner for a while, but do not know whether he was ever a slave; certainly creating himself as King of Dartmoor Number Four established his facility for self-motivated action. Any expansion beyond agency must, surely, include the humanity, the emotions and expressions, of the subject; and here we are most dependent on imaginative writing. We may certainly credit William Cooper Nell’s statement that “When a boy living in West Boston, I was familiar with the person of Big Dick.” Justin Jones was of the same age, and while he and George Hugh Crichton (who was five when “Seavers” died) do not explicitly claim to have met Dick, it cannot be doubted that they mined a rich vein of anecdote from those who did. It is to them, the former writing as Harry Hazel, that we owe most of what we claim to know about his “person.”

Dick’s working-class credentials seem fully established by his professions of arms: maritime privateering, pugilism, policing whether as some sort of provisionally-recognized patrolman or mere “bullying” as Police Chief Savage would have it. We have none of King Dick’s public pronouncements preserved; he was not an abolitionist or preacher; apparently he only professed what he practiced. Physically. During his lifetime. Hazel/Jones certainly embellished his account, and Crichton confused his and cannot be treated as a fully independent source. Between them, however, they’ve provided meat for important academic speculation. Whether we follow Lloyd in accepting Hazel/Jones’

²⁴² Johnson, Walter. “On Agency” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37, 1, Special Issue (Autumn 2003), 113-124.

fanciful account of the Nigger Hill Riot as evidentiary or not, it's probable that King Dick's activities on behalf of Boston Blacks helped "co-fabricate," as Patrick Rael puts it, the discourse of respectability that middle-class Blacks sought to share with Whites in the Antebellum North.²⁴³ It was King Dick's policing and protecting of disrespectable Bostonians that made middle class respectability possible, especially among Boston's Blacks.

The tragedy of King Dick is the way he's been made to stand in for millions of U.S. African Americans, disdaining and trivializing his demonstrated authority and leadership in his own time; silencing his real accomplishments since; and most recently, whitewashing America's racism and Hollywood's paternalism by externalizing "the race problem."

According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the problem of historical inauthenticity is its dishonest representation of the real state of current social relations.²⁴⁴ Encapsulating history as romance allows the reader and writer to escape the discomforts of race and international problems implicated by racism, much as King Dick enables Lydia Bailey and her husband to escape the Haitian "monster" Dessalines' clutches. In each of his times, constructions of King Dick have been appropriated to serve the dominant discourses of privileged Whites: in 1803 as seen by Roberts and Hollywood, in 1814-15 Dartmoor, in 1820s Boston, in Hazel/Jones's 1845, in Roberts's and his readers' 1931 and 1947, and in Hollywood's 1952 version of Haiti and Blackness. Nineteenth century African Americans Nell and Greener tried to break through the white media to find significance in Dick's "patriot[ism]" and pugilism. In their writings and finally Carlyle,

²⁴³ Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Social Protest*, 3-6 and *passim*.

²⁴⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, pp.141ff.

the palimpsest has returned to his repersonalized role as champion. Dick has become a force-field in which to contest the representation of race in U.S. and American history. Only recently have we been able to look into the lessons of *The Strange Life and Stranger Afterlife of King Dick*.

Epilogue: What is to be Done?

The most grounded, most probably fixed point in Dick's life is the Dartmoor intake records. They record Dick's point of origin as Vienna on Maryland's Eastern Shore, under the name of Richard *Crafus*.²⁴⁵ The affidavit about the Dartmoor massacre, Savage, Crichton and an 1828 newspaper give the name Richard *Cephas*. W. Jeffrey Bolster points out that in that time seamen used several names. There is a well-established black Cephas family around Vienna, Maryland; further investigation there might establish some plausible "facts" about Our Hero's origins.

Any survivals from the 19th Century oral tradition in Boston would be extremely intriguing. If there is any trace of him still to be found in the Black community, it would seem to be among folk-artifacts. But as a Northerner and a lawman, Dick has not attracted the folk-music status of a Southern lawbreaker like Stagolee, or the lost ballad of Robert Charles of New Orleans.²⁴⁶ Short of a massive targeted oral-history inquiry, we can only hope an appeal to New England scholars might turn up some traces.

As for King Dick's movie-transformation, nothing has been published about Poppy Cannon's employer, the Peter Hilton Advertising agency. The Public Relations Society of America's archives are at the University of Wisconsin, but inquiries addressed to there, the PRSA, and several other PR organizations have not produced any leads.

²⁴⁵ The Ira Dye Collection on Early Seafaring is held at the *USS Constitution* Museum in Boston, including microfilm copies of the relevant Dartmoor Prison intake Records. Thanks to archivist Matt Brenkle for establishing at the last minute that Crafus is the only one of Dick's names that appears therein.

²⁴⁶ Lipke, Alan, *The Ballad of Robert Charles*, Public Radio Exchange www.PRX.org, 2005, quoting LaMothe, Ferdinand Joseph, interviewed by Alan Lomax, 1938, *Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings By Alan Lomax*, Rounder 2005.

Methodical investigation of these, Walter White and NAACP archives, and (most tenuously), any surviving records of Haitian President Dumarsais Estimé (served 1946-50) might flesh out Mr. and Mrs. White's "work ...with William Webb and Frank McCarthy in Haiti in 1949 on the picture." The papers of the 20th Century Fox functionaries William Webb and Frank McCarthy, screenwriters Michael Blankfort and Philip Dunne, and studio head Darryl F. Zanuck might provide useful insights into the reconstruction of King Dick in the *Lydia Bailey* movie, and of the movie itself. This would be most valuable as part of a proposed study of the overall "*Lydia Bailey*" *Complex*, as it affected U.S. images of Haiti and represents *A Cultural Genealogy Of The Construction of Race, Class, Gender, Religion and Nationality: Pop Fiction, Pulped History and the Celluloid Politics of Cultural Neo-imperialism*. A starting point would be the Margaret Herrick Library at the Motion Picture Academy in Los Angeles.

Any such research program is daunting, but it should be pointed out that this study was only made possible by the increasing of availability of sources on the internet, and networking among scholarly specialists. So from the publication of this thesis, let the word go forth to appeal for any other information or insights into the Haiti of Kenneth Roberts's *Lydia Bailey*, and especially *The Strange Life and Stranger Afterlife of King Dick*.

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About the Author

Alan Lipke is too old for this sort of thing. He has a Masters Degree already, in Broadcast Journalism, so what does he need this one for? He is the Executive Director and principal of Listening Between the Lines, Inc., a not-for-profit producer of audio and multi-media documentaries. The core series, *Between Civil War and Rights*, has won numerous awards. The premier episode, *Rosewood Reborn*, was originally distributed and broadcast on Pacifica Radio; most of the series' programs were originally distributed by Public Radio International, and several were adapted to National Public Radio. Most episodes are available on PRX.org, the public radio exchange, and all can be obtained through www.ListeningBetweentheLines.org and/or www.racewithhistory.org. Both sites will be considerably rebuilt in the very near future.