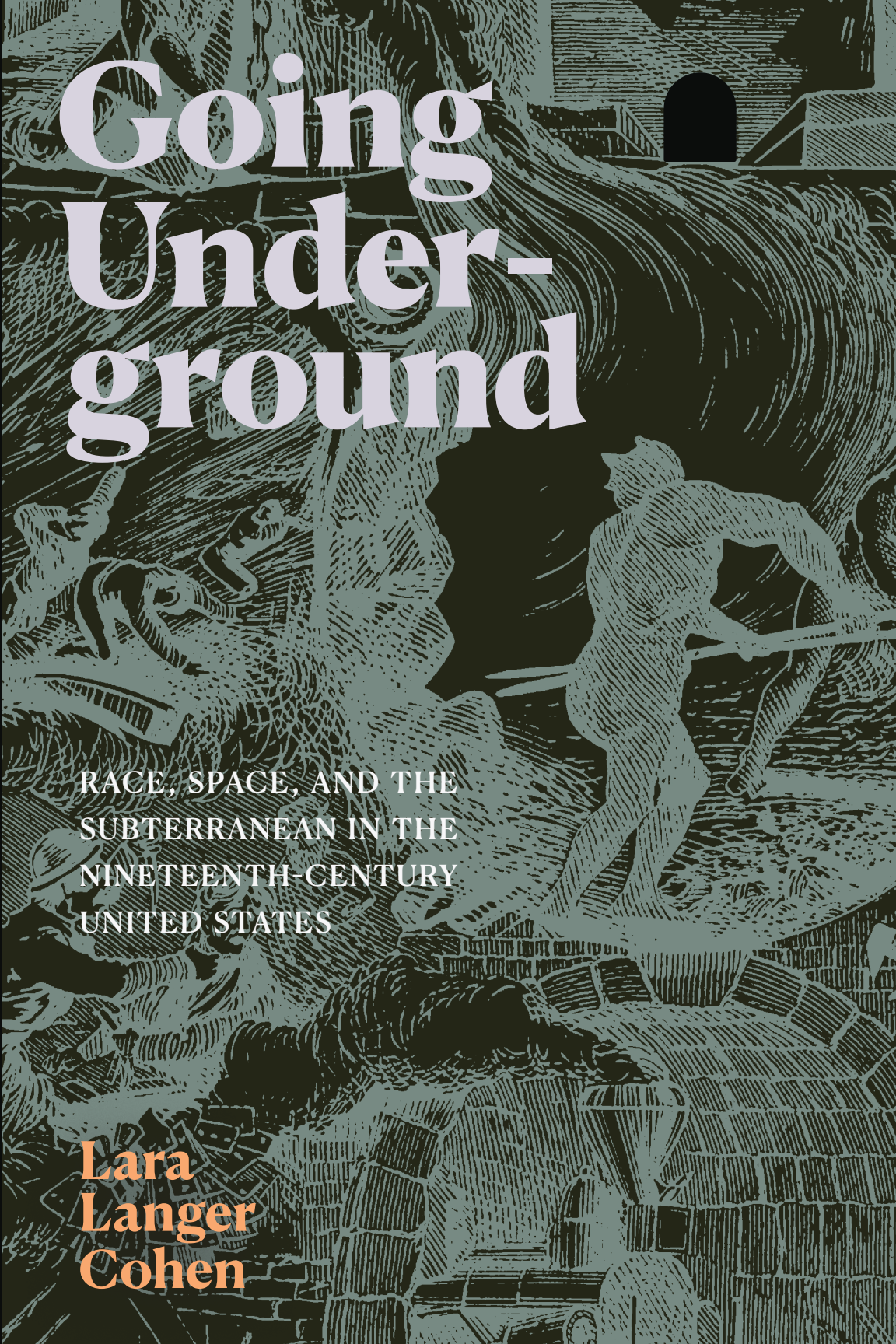




Going Underground

RACE, SPACE, AND THE
SUBTERRANEAN IN THE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
UNITED STATES

Lara
Langer
Cohen

Going Underground

BUY

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LARA LANGER COHEN

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UNITED STATES

DUKE

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Introduction

A BASEMENT SHUT OFF AND FORGOTTEN
DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

I wish I was a mole in the ground,
Yes, I wish I was a mole in the ground,
If I was a mole in the ground, I'd root that mountain down,
And I wish I was a mole in the ground.

"I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground," first recorded by Fred Moody, 1921

At the end of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the unnamed narrator, running from three drunken white men, falls into an open coal chute. After "whirling on in the blackness" for a time that "might have been days, weeks," he famously decides to "take up residence underground." Making his home below "a building rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century," he adopts a way of life that is also figuratively underground: he fights a "battle" against the resonantly named Monopolated Light & Power by stealing electricity and learns to speak in a subterranean register he calls "the lower frequencies."¹ *Going Underground* takes his descent as a provocation to ask what other undergrounds were "shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century" and what possibilities they may yet hold.

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Practices of collective subversion, resistance, refusal, and insurrection have existed as long as practices of domination. But the idea of the underground as a site of clandestine, unruly activity is an invention of the nineteenth century. First popularized as a metaphor by newspaper coverage of the Underground Railroad in the 1840s, the underground gave people new language and imagery to envision possibilities for living otherwise. In order to discern these visions, *Going Underground* excavates a vibrant world of nineteenth-century subterranean literature, including Black radical manifestos, anarchist periodicals, exposés of the urban underworld, manuals for sex magic, and the initiation rites of secret societies. I also seek out the underground obsessions of more familiar literature from the period—one whose emblematic text, *Moby-Dick*, after all, begins with the voice of the “Sub-Sub Librarian,” a “painstaking burrower and grub-worm.”² This study of early undergrounds is not simply antiquarian; it also has designs on the present. By mining past ideas of the underground, what forgotten modes of political imagination might we reanimate for today?

Before Subculture

To address this question, it is useful to distinguish *underground* from what is now often seen as its synonym, *subculture*. But *subculture* is a later invention, first defined over one hundred years after *underground*, and the two terms name historically specific, conceptually distinct formations.³ In some ways nineteenth-century undergrounds—and, for that matter, various earlier unorthodox forms of social activity—prefigure what would crystallize into twentieth-century subculture, but in many other ways they elude its definition. These divergences, opacities, and losses are what occupy me most in this book. Although I am interested in the long history of subculture, I am even more interested in seeking out versions of the underground that were never incorporated into it. Let me highlight some key differences between these early versions of the underground and the concept of subculture that would supersede them.

One, the concept of subculture enters culture top-down, as a subject of scholarly inquiry, beginning with the Chicago school of sociology’s urban ethnographies in the 1930s and continuing, in different veins, through the research on youth cultures at the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s and work on punk, hip-hop, techno, heavy metal, and other music scenes; drag cultures; tattoo enthusiasts; manga; early internet communities; and more in the decades

that followed.⁴ But the idea of the underground emerges bottom-up. It takes shape in the pages of popular print culture—"popular" in the sense of vernacular, if not always widely read—including the newspapers, pamphlets, cheap fiction, songbooks, and so on that form the archive of this book. Accordingly, while *subculture* constitutes an attempt to define social life, *underground* addresses itself to no such task. As an idea, it comes into being by gradually accreting and constellating meanings rather than by methodically assigning them.

In fact, for much of the nineteenth century, *underground* names something indefinite and even undefinable—a "mystery," to borrow a word often associated with undergrounds. This presents a second difference from subculture. It would be impossible to construct a typology of nineteenth-century undergrounds, as Dick Hebdige famously did for postwar British youth subcultures in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Such indefinability is partly a function of the idea's newness. But even once the figurative meaning of *underground* became a familiar description of subversive organizations—a shift I chart over the course of this book—these groups remained more recessive than "spectacular," as Hebdige describes subcultures, less concerned with recognition than with the affordances of opacity.⁵ This aversion to visibility endures in the use of *underground* today as a synonym for *secret*, as in underground movements, underground newspapers, or underground venues. But the undergrounds I explore theorize a more capacious, less instrumentalized understanding of opacity than *secrecy* conveys. Scandalous as they were, the occultist movement built by clairvoyant/sex magician/political activist/Freedmen's Bureau teacher Paschal Beverly Randolph (chapter 5) and the Chicago anarchist movement in the 1880s (chapter 6) were undergrounds not just out of necessity—that is, not just to do things that otherwise could not be done—but also because they understood the underground as a good in itself, which would be not only hidden from the world above but fundamentally out of keeping with it.

Three, the underground exceeds subculture's oppositional relation to dominant culture. Nineteenth-century undergrounds often have an autonomy from, or simply non-adhesion to, the world above ground that subculture's reactive model cannot encompass. While they are built below the surface, they are not bound to it, either through determination or rejection. At times going underground is an effect of subjugation, but at other times it is an act of refusal. Some undergrounds are sites to carve out other worlds, like the cave studio of the fugitive artist Bernice in William J. Wilson's newspaper serial "Afric-American Picture Gallery"

(chapter 2), and some are sites to prepare the destruction of this world, like Detroit's militant antislavery secret society the African-American Mysteries (chapter 3). Undergrounds may oppose what lies above, but they may also ignore, reject, or nullify this bifurcation and forge different configurations. Because they are not locked into a countervailing relation with dominant culture, undergrounds can take us beyond a familiar political analysis that restricts minoritized cultural production to a secondary, reactive role. Chapter 1's discussion of literature about Mammoth Cave offers one example: I argue that the racialization of the cave as Black was not organically created by white visitors and unilaterally imposed upon the cave and the enslaved guides; rather, it was a response to the Black intellectual and imaginative work already taking place there.

A fourth conceptual difference between *subculture* and *underground* may be indexed by a semantic difference: *underground*, used in this sense, is a metaphor. Since it signifies what it does not explicitly name, it can enfold an array of meanings; it can even reference disparate meanings simultaneously. The clearest and most consequential example of the underground's early multiplicity is the long entanglement of its figurative meaning with its literal meaning, which I will discuss further shortly. Its expression as a metaphor allowed the concept of the underground to move promiscuously in the nineteenth century. It did not designate a single meaning so much as it summoned a repertoire of them, each of which imparted something of itself to the concepts of difference, noncompliance, and subversion the underground was coming to express. In short, the underground meant *more* in the nineteenth century than it does now. One way to understand the development of the concept of subculture in the twentieth century, then, might be as the regulation of these earlier ideas of the underground.

Two Genealogies of the Underground: Space and Race

As the concept of the underground emerged in the nineteenth century, I argue that it was mediated by two other formations: actual underground spaces and ideas about race. Ellison calls back to this triangulation in *Invisible Man's* combined literal and figurative underground, rediscovered by a Black man who accesses it through a coal chute and then "whirl[s] on in the blackness." But the roles of space and race in the making of the underground have mostly slipped out of view, part of the "basement that

was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century.” One aim of this book is to recover their influence.

Whether in traditional nation-based literary criticism or in revisionary transnational frameworks, the spatial imaginaries of literary study have tended toward the planar. But before the word *pioneer* referred to settler colonists, Peter Stallybrass has shown, it meant “digger,” as Karl Marx well knew when, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), he quoted *Hamlet* to picture revolution as an “old mole,” that “worthy pioneer.”⁶ Turning to these subterranean “pioneers” allows us to access a spatial imaginary that runs athwart the familiar frontiers of literary history. We might see the New Madrid earthquakes—which rocked the middle Mississippi Valley from December 1811 to February 1812, causing shakes, strange sounds and smells, and weird bodily sensations from Georgia to Connecticut—as announcing the unprecedented role of the underground in the nineteenth-century United States.⁷ Cities grew down as well as up and out, as rapid urbanization led to the construction of subterranean infrastructures to convey water and sewage.⁸ Mining for coal, gold, copper, lead, and other minerals exploded, and in 1859 the drilling of the first commercial oil well in Pennsylvania established petroleum as a major industry. These ventures below the earth’s surface markedly reorganized life above it. Underground, Americans found a record of the earth’s ceaseless activity and the vastness of its history, which dwarfed humans’ almost infinitesimally brief tenure on it. Yet Dana Luciano argues that the dizzying abyss of “deep time,” which “offered space for a radical rethinking of the place of the human in the order of nature,” tended instead to elicit compensatory modes of thought that worked “to shore up extant human institutions and to extend human agency.”⁹ Specifically, as Kathryn Yusoff shows, geology—a science that arose in tandem with mining in the Americas that initiated the Atlantic slave trade—enabled a logic of white humanity through a logic of Black inhumanity created by “the traffic between *the inhuman as matter* and *the inhuman as race*.”¹⁰ For this reason, Yusoff urges us to understand geology as “a category and praxis of dispossession” and the objectification of Blackness, in turn, as “a geologic proposition.”¹¹ Only through knowledge of this “grammar of geology,” she contends, is it possible to forge an “insurgent geology” that “embraces its intimacies with the inhuman” as “a relation, no longer an appendage of fungibility.”¹²

Like geology, the development of archaeology made the underground an object of growing intellectual inquiry, which circulated through a broad

exhibition and print culture picturing the wonders that lay below readers' feet. The rise of archaeology, whose focus on excavation departed from earlier modes of antiquarianism, was propelled by discoveries like the "Kentucky Mummy" (supposedly found in Mammoth Cave, actually in nearby Short Cave) in 1815 and the excavation of massive ancient earthworks in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, built by Native Americans but often attributed to a lost non-Native civilization preceding them. Archaeology's underground revelations, like those of geology, were both ideologically charged and contradictory. On the one hand, the project of finding traces of Indigenous life underground facilitated settlers' possession of the land above by relegating Indigenous people to the buried past. On the other hand, the image of the earth as Indigenous beneath the surface sometimes rebounded in the prospect of an Indigenous underground engulfing settlers or bursting forth in their midst. An exploration of Indigenous ideas about the subterranean awaits another study by a more knowledgeable writer, but a few examples suggest that nineteenth-century Native Americans mobilized the subterranean in resistance to colonialism in ways that may have amplified settlers' misgivings about the relation between Indigeneity and the underground. Consider Nick Estes's observation that "during his campaign against US military invasion, to protect himself Crazy Horse collected fresh dirt from mole mounds"; consider, too, the visions of Crazy Horse's fellow Lakota Short Bull, who saw the ground swallowing US soldiers, and Kicking Bear, who saw all white people buried in a thick new layer of soil blanketing the earth.¹³

Literal undergrounds like those I discuss above were important to the emergent figurative meaning of the underground not just because *underground* was used in both these senses, as it is today, but also because for many years people understood these senses to be connected. A thick, lavishly illustrated 1873 volume by journalist Thomas Wallace Knox, titled *Underground, or Life Below the Surface: Incidents and Accidents Beyond the Light of Day; Startling Adventures in All Parts of the World; Mines and the Mode of Working Them; Under-Currents of Society; Gambling and Its Horrors; Caverns and Their Mysteries; The Dark Ways of Wickedness; Prisons and Their Secrets; Down in the Depths of the Sea; Strange Stories of the Detection of Crime*, illustrates the correlation (figure I.1). At almost a thousand pages, the book testifies to contemporaneous readers' interest in subterranean life. At the same time, the very range of *Underground* suggests how inchoate the idea of an underground was. As the impressive subtitle indicates, the book interweaves undergrounds of all kinds,



I.1 Frontispiece, Thomas Wallace Knox, *Underground, or Life Below the Surface* (1873). Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

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framing them all in lurid diction that Knox borrows from city mysteries and urban exposés, literary genres dedicated to representing the underground (and the subject of chapter 4). He explains in the preface that the book aims to “describe the life, not only of the miner, but of all who work under ground—whether literally or metaphorically.”¹⁴ He is unconcerned about what today we might take to be the irrelevance of these two modes of underground life to one another. Instead, he blithely jumbles chapters on “Explosions in Mines,” “The Underground Railroad,” “Vesuvius and Its Eruptions,” “Underground in the Metropolis,” “Animals Underground,” “The Mammoth Cave,” “Underground in Politics,” “Guano and the Coolie Trade,” and more into what one admiring reviewer called a veritable “encyclopedia of subterranean wonders.”¹⁵

To observe the long and fitful disembedding of figurative from literal undergrounds is not to claim that every sewer or mine was synonymous with subversion in the nineteenth century. (Though as Marx reminded readers in 1844, the word *radical*—in German as in English—comes from “root”: “To be radical is to grasp matters at the root.”¹⁶) But it can help us discern versions of subversion that do not readily appear to us today. I am especially interested in how the residual spatiality of the underground *emplaces* subversion. What are the political affordances of visualizing insubordination as a space where one could dwell? To address this question, I examine figurations of cultural or political undergrounds that retain an oddly spatial dimension, such as the art studio in a cave that also turns out to be the site of vigilante antislavery praxis in Wilson’s “Afric-American Picture Gallery” (chapter 1), the recurrent representations of the Underground Railroad as an actual subterranean train in the 1840s and 1850s (chapter 3), and the depictions of subversive elements gathering in tunnels, caverns, and tombs in city mysteries (chapter 4).

While literal undergrounds have some relation to figurative undergrounds, however extraneous that connection may appear from our perspective, racial thought has no obvious connection to the underground. Yet the chapters that follow will make the case that nineteenth-century ideas of the underground were often racialized, and most often, they were racialized as Black. This racialization of the underground proceeded from images of literal undergrounds and from there became a key vector for the emergence of the underground’s figurative meaning. Moreover, because race is not a fixed biological category but a shifting cluster of concepts for producing hierarchies among humans (specifically, as Sylvia Wynter teaches us, by sorting their claims to humanity), this process also worked in reverse.¹⁷ Even as

ideas of racialized Blackness shaped ideas of the underground, ideas of the underground shaped ideas of racialized Blackness, so that the racialization of the underground takes place alongside what we might describe as the subterraneanization of Blackness. This intertwined genealogy elucidates how racialization takes place on ground that was never solid.

Associations between the underground and racialized Blackness took disparate forms and served disparate ends. Because categories of Blackness and Indigeneity have often been co-constitutive, as scholars including Frank Wilderson, Shona Jackson, Tiya Miles, and Tiffany Lethabo King have shown, associations between the underground and racialized Blackness emerged alongside and sometimes in explicit relation to associations between the underground and Indigeneity; chapters 1 and 2 offer examples of how different writers understood this relation. Some associations between the underground and racialized Blackness, especially from white writers, drew on predictable comparisons between subterranean darkness and the darkness of skin, like the analogies that white visitors to Kentucky's Mammoth Cave made between the Black guides and the cave itself. Some hinged, as Yusoff argues, on the intertwined histories of slavery and mining, and on the conflation of enslaved people with the inhuman, extractable matter they mined—an association perhaps haunted by the growing geological knowledge that rocks do move, sometimes with catastrophic results for those above. In other instances, associations between the underground and racialized Blackness render topographically the subjugation of African Americans in a white supremacist society. In still other instances, they emphasize how that society rests upon such subjugation. The most infamous example of this racialized subterranean imaginary may be South Carolina senator James Henry Hammond's "mudsill theory," a reference to the framing timbers of a building that are embedded underground, supporting what lies above. In an 1858 speech before the Senate, Hammond argued that all societies require a class that "constitutes the very mud-sill of society and of political government" and that the South has "found a race adapted to that purpose to her hand."¹⁸ Hammond uses the metaphor of the mudsill to justify slavery, while indicting the North for using the white working class as *its* mudsill, which he considers "a degradation" rather than a natural disposition.

What became known as "mudsill theory" speaks to a contradictory logic underlying the racialization of the underground: on the one hand, the exclusion of Black life from the terrain of the world; on the other hand, the reliance upon Black life for that anti-Black world's coherence. By this second point

I mean both modern capitalism's dependency on Black labor, which Hammond acknowledges, and a deeper point, which he does not acknowledge but that lies at the heart of Cedric Robinson's concept of racial capitalism: modern capitalism's dependency on racism for its development. For Robinson, capitalism emerged as an "opportunistic strata" on a racialized social order, "willfully adaptive to the new conditions and possibilities offered by the times."¹⁹ As capitalism developed, it continued (contrary to Marx's predictions) "not to homogenize but to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into 'racial' ones."²⁰ Yet it is precisely by doing so that capitalism presents itself as what Robinson terms "an objective system"—a distinct order unto itself rather than an expansion of a racial order.²¹ Hammond's mudsill metaphor is more telling than he realized. It not only images the construction of capitalism on a racialized hierarchy; its subterranean character also illustrates how racialized Blackness nonetheless *cannot be recognized* as foundational, the basis for capitalism's "opportunistic strata," to return to Robinson's words. As a constitutive element of capitalism, racialized Blackness must be submersed, like a mudsill, beneath the surface.

But if the underground figures racist hierarchies, it also conjures the specter of such hierarchies' upheaval. For when writers represent the underground, it is almost never as a static space but as one of unseen growth, movement, concealment, and other activity. Consider the widespread nineteenth-century trope of slavery as a "slumbering volcano" that might erupt on an enslaving nation at any moment. Once a fairly common expression for instability, starting in the early part of the century "slumbering volcano" became used more specifically as a metaphor for the inevitability of enslaved people's uprising. This usage seems to have derived from the Count of Mirabeau's warning in the early days of the Haitian Revolution that the colonists in Saint-Domingue "slept on the edge of Vesuvius," a phrase English-speaking writers from James McCune Smith to Harriet Martineau quoted in their accounts of the revolution.²² But antislavery activists extended the metaphor to evoke the unacknowledged energies of enslaved people in the United States. In his 1827 prospectus for the short-lived magazine the *African Observer*, Quaker abolitionist Enoch Lewis envisioned every enslaved person "sunk and degraded below the proper level of humanity" as a volcano unto themselves, full of "dormant passions" roiling unseen, "for the slumbering volcano retains its fires, and those who occupy its smoking verge themselves become the victims of the devouring element."²³ The same year, the first Black newspaper in the United States,

Freedom's Journal, envisioned these subterranean fires on a far wider scale. Urging readers, "Remember Egypt—remember St. Domingo," the paper warned, "The elements of combustion are gathering in frightful masses—the earth beneath us already trembles with the labours of the heaving volcano—we are on the very verge of its opening chasm—and without great exertions, a tremendous eruption will soon convince us that it will be impossible to escape the vortex of inevitable destruction."²⁴ Over the next several decades, writers continued to call on the image of the slumbering volcano until the Civil War opened its own "vortex of inevitable destruction."

In chapter 2, I discuss Frederick Douglass's remarkable riff on this trope in his speech "Slavery, the Slumbering Volcano" (1849), as well as Martin Delany's staging of it in his serialized novel *Blake; or, the Huts of America* (1859, 1861–62). For now, I just note several features of its general use. First, the slumbering volcano pictures the gathering forces of rebellion as a physical underground, in the conjunction of literal and figurative that I have proposed characterizes early ideas of the underground. Second, because the slumbering volcano belongs to what Marlene Daut calls the transatlantic "tropics of Haiti"—"symbols of the epistemological uncertainty" produced by the Haitian Revolution—its image of subterranean fires that might burst forth at any moment also summons the image of Haiti's revolutionary energies exploding *north* at any moment.²⁵ It maps the topography of the underground onto the geography of the hemisphere. Third, this image of the underground not only figures the latent dangers of race-based slavery but also is itself often racialized, so that Lewis describes enslaved people themselves as "sunk and degraded below the proper level of humanity" but fomenting revolution nonetheless. Fourth, it is precisely the subterranean depths of the slumbering volcano that make it active. "Sunken" is here not a synonym for abjection but for proximity to unseen fires, a promise of inevitable eruption. Fifth, the slumbering volcano exemplifies a very different narrative of subterranean activity than subculture's reactive model. Where subculture is a secondary phenomenon that results from or responds to a dominant culture, the underground forces figured by the slumbering volcano are undetermined by what lies above.

Going Underground explores various examples of the racialization of the underground, but it foregrounds Black authors who used the underground to imagine Black life within unfreedom. Some use the underground as a means to consider the ongoing negation of Black life in a society that

nevertheless rests on its existence. They examine subjection by comparison to submersion, enslavement by comparison to entombment. Others use the underground to envision scenes of escape, covert organization, insurgency, and proximity to another world. Often, authors do some combination of this work. We find their theorizing in diverse and sometimes unexpected places: in the maps and tours of Stephen Bishop, an enslaved guide in Mammoth Cave (chapter 1); in Douglass's extension of the "slumbering volcano" metaphor (chapter 2); in the Underground Railroad ballads of songwriter Joshua McCarter Simpson (chapter 3); in Paschal Beverly Randolph's visions of the underground as the threshold of the cosmos; and in Pauline Hopkins's novel *Of One Blood*, in which an occultist medical student seemingly based on Randolph learns that he is king of a hidden Ethiopian city accessible only through underground passages (chapter 5). I posit that their work established an enduring intellectual tradition that later Black writers and artists would mine and renew (and that also prefigured crucial frameworks in Black studies, as I describe in chapter 2). This introduction began with perhaps the most famous example, Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). A very partial list would also include W. E. B. Du Bois's short story "The Comet" (1920), which centers on a bank messenger who survives the destruction of New York City when his boss sends him on a menial errand to "the lower vaults," "down into the blackness and silence beneath that lowest cavern . . . in the bowels of the earth, under the world"; Richard Wright's novel-turned-short story "The Man Who Lived Underground" (1942), which prefigures *Invisible Man* in its portrayal of a protagonist who "triumphed over the aboveground"; Curtis Mayfield's song "Underground" (1971), which envisions a refuge from earthly destruction that will also become a place of sensory transformation, cultivating "long-range sight for an eternal night" even as "there will be no light so there can be no sight"; Martin Puryear's sculpture *Old Mole* (1985), which materializes Marx's citation of *Hamlet* in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as a beaked shape woven of strips of wood, suggesting a continuity between the subterranean and the aerial; Toni Morrison's novel *Be-loved* (1987), which recounts how forty-six men, imprisoned in cells built into ditches, escape together by diving down through the mud during a storm; Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play* (1995), which revolves around a gravedigger who turns his skills to creating a replica of an amusement park called the Great Hole of History; and Evie Shockley's poem "ode to my blackness" (2012), which analogizes Blackness to "the tunnel john henry died / to carve":

i dig down deep and there you are	at the root of my blues
you're all thick and dark, enveloping	the root of my blues
seems like it's so hard to let you go	when i got nothing to lose ²⁶

The list goes on: it also includes Kiese Laymon's novel *Long Division* (2013), whose characters drop beneath the red clay of Mississippi to travel through time; Jordan Peele's film *Get Out* (2017), which envisions a realm of Black abjection called the Sunken Place; and its follow-up, *Us* (2019), which centers on subterranean doppelgangers plotting an uprising against their counterparts on the surface; and Alexis Pauline Gumbs's poetry collection *M Archive* (2018), which depicts a postapocalyptic future when Black people have abandoned the surface of the earth to build a life underground, in "the archive of our failure."²⁷ Readers can certainly add more instances. The variation among these examples, whose undergrounds range from horrifying to liberatory, reflects not only the creativity of the writers and artists but also the underground's unsettled character, contested history, and expansive possibilities.

Subterranean Method

Not surprisingly, the undergrounds of the nineteenth century can be hard to find. This is partly an archival predicament familiar to anyone who works with marginalized or subversive materials. Underground movements tend to leave few written traces, and those they do leave are less likely to be preserved. For example, aside from a few cryptic references in personal correspondence, the only written traces left by the militant Detroit antislavery secret society the African-American Mysteries, which I discuss in chapter 3, are two newspaper interviews the organizers gave decades after the group had disbanded. Some underground texts are deliberately suppressed because of their perceived danger: copies of David Walker's 1829 manifesto *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, for instance, which I examine in chapter 2, were confiscated throughout the US South, and those suspected of distributing it were arrested, sentenced to hard labor, or sold.²⁸ At other times the problem is less archival scarcity than distortion: mainstream texts represent undergrounds in wildly exaggerated form, like the paranoid reports of the Underground Railroad that filled newspapers in the 1840s (chapter 3) or city mysteries' suggestions that all manner of undergrounds teemed beneath most major cities and many small ones (chapter 4).

Yet if finding nineteenth-century undergrounds presents one challenge, a still greater one is recognizing the presence of the underground when we find it. Because nineteenth-century ideas of the underground do not necessarily resemble the later shapes into which the idea settled, their early manifestations are difficult to discern in retrospect. Moreover, even in the nineteenth century, the idea of the underground was not fully fledged: its meanings were diverse and fluid, and they did not necessarily travel under the word *underground*. The indeterminacy of early undergrounds does not diminish their theoretical power, interest, or relevance; to the contrary, one premise of this book is that it increases them. But that indeterminacy does make it harder to locate the object of study. How do we devise ways of reading for an idea that has not yet been expressed as such and whose features we may no longer know even when we see them? How do we attempt the historiographical work Michel Foucault called “archaeology” on the underground itself, if the underground presents no “regularity of a discursive practice” to “uncover”?²⁹

Such is the challenge of studying an emergent idea, to use Raymond Williams’s endlessly useful term. Williams defines the emergent as the “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships, and kinds of relationship” that develop as “substantially alternative or oppositional” to “dominant culture.”³⁰ Earlier I questioned how well the underground fits the model of opposition to dominant culture. But one advantage of Williams’s analysis is that it conceives of cultural dominance not as “a system or a structure” but as a “process” of hegemony that “has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified,” while it is “continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.”³¹ Of these pressures, emergent elements of a culture are particularly hard to identify. They are subject to incorporation, especially when they are perceived as threatening, which makes for an analytical paradox: to understand emergent cultural elements clearly, we need to see them before they become clear. “What we have to observe is in effect a *pre-emergence*, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named,” Williams explains.³² Thus, while I take the introduction of the figurative sense of *underground* as a kind of bellwether for this project, I follow Williams in supposing that the idea of the underground actually begins to take shape before such naming. The earliest texts I discuss precede the figurative use of the word, some texts never mention it at all, and even the naming of the underground does not fully fix the idea in place. As a result, the preemergent and emergent

ideas of the underground in the nineteenth century are various, sometimes even incommensurate. The resonance between the terms *preemergent* and *underground*, which both name something that has not surfaced, indicates one of the more disorienting (but I hope also interesting) features of this project: it seeks an underground that is *itself* underground, historically and conceptually.

To write this book then, I have had to go underground, too. Often I undertake a kind of archival burrowing that leads me toward texts that seem slight, eccentric, or ephemeral. Moreover, the underground rarely comes into focus as a main subject (and when it does, as we will see, a narrative often crumbles or comes to a sudden halt), so I tend to burrow *in* texts, seeking out undergrounds in backgrounds, tropes, and allusions. I also burrow between seemingly incongruous versions of the underground, seeking out connections that may not be visible from the surface or “fully articulated,” in Williams’s words. In chapter 2, for example, I begin my reading of Walker’s *Appeal* from the observation that Walker laces his call for Black people to rise up against their subjugation by white people with a motif of Black people forced to labor as miners “three or four hundred feet under ground.”³³ From there, I notice how these visions of a gathering Black revolutionary force and this motif of Black miners unfold over pages marked by Walker’s increasingly energetic use of footnotes, where he often places his most militant statements. Over the course of the *Appeal*, the footnotes multiply and lengthen, threatening to overtake the page from below. Even if Walker never describes his goal as mustering a Black radical underground (although we might), I argue that by associating his call for Black revolutionary organizing with the image of Black people working underground, Walker helps build a nascent figurative sense of the underground while staging subterranean power compositionally. Striking combinations like these register the emergence of the underground as an idea. More than that, they demonstrate some of the affordances of the underground as an emergent idea, whose apparent incoherence was also a source of amplitude and power.

As an interpretive method, burrowing does not presume a singular object, a locatable object, or an object that can be brought to light. Rather, it is an action of tunneling patiently, of submersion without a known destination, of study that honors its subject’s elusiveness. But the search for (pre-)emergent ideas of the underground also creates an unresolved tension in *Going Underground*, as it oscillates between an impulse toward recuperation and recognition that this task is impossible. More than

being impossible, the task of recuperation may even be unfaithful to the underground, invested as it is in remaining below the surface. If one of the challenges of this book is to devise methods for understanding early undergrounds, then another is to devise methods for *not* understanding early undergrounds, at least not fully. This, too, is an act of burrowing, of immersing myself in undergrounds without exactly trying to bring them to light. Instead I try to find a way to linger critically with their indeterminacy, to study them while honoring their elusiveness.

In doing so, I take guidance from the work of scholars in Black studies who have confronted archival erasures and distortions and elaborated powerful alternative methods for thinking historically. Carla Peterson's account of Black feminist "acts of speculation" and Saidiya Hartman's concept of "critical fabulation," a practice that seeks "both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling," have been especially formative in this body of thought.³⁴ More recently, Peterson's and Hartman's work has been fruitfully extended in books like Tina Camp's *Listening to Images* (2017); Ada Ferrer's *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (2014); Marisa Fuentes's *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016); David Kazanjian's *The Brink of Freedom: Improvising Life in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2016); Britt Rusert's *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (2017); and Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016). All model how a commitment to marginalized historical subjects can lead us away from belief in or desire for archival recovery toward more open-ended modes of inquiry. As Sara E. Johnson explains, such "informed speculation" may employ "a certain interpretive and writerly mode" that "allows for possibilities," or make a "recurring gesture toward what might have been," or create a mood of "yearning" in order "to productively move beyond the impasse of that which we cannot know or understand with certainty."³⁵ While scholars working in this speculative mode demonstrate how one may exceed available epistemologies, I am also indebted to Scott Herring's determination, in *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (2007), to thwart them: to "spoil" the expectations of revelation that scholars, like other disciplinarians, have brought to bear on "underworld sexual knowledge."³⁶ Herring's call for a mode of reading that respects the hiddenness of queer underworlds resonates with the undergrounds that were arguably their predecessors and that were not only hidden but indeterminate.

In addition to being inspired by these recent scholarly interventions, I have returned repeatedly to an older term for the value of non-empirical thinking: *mystery*. *Mystery* appears frequently in the archives of the underground, from Martin R. Delany's short-lived newspaper the *Mystery* to the African-American Mysteries secret society to the midcentury literary genre known as city mysteries. We tend now to define a mystery as a puzzle to solve, but in the nineteenth century the term still carried more of its earlier theological meaning of an idea beyond comprehension—*mystery* as in the mystery cults of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome or in the medieval Christian sense as synonymous with *miracle*. This sense of mystery, as we will see, pervades representations of the underground. For all the time I spent researching nineteenth-century undergrounds, I often felt that I did not get any closer to understanding them. But I have tried to learn something from the idea of mystery these undergrounds thematize about the value of study that cannot arrive at a solution. The participle of the book's title attempts to capture something of this approach. The underground is not a place one gets to: one is always *going* there, one is sometimes there before one knows it, and there are always further depths to go.

Chapter Overview

This book tracks how various nineteenth-century thinkers used the concept of the underground to imagine how to break open an unjust world and live anew within it. The chapters are roughly chronological, since to a certain extent they tell a story about change over time. But the underground, as I will argue, does not mark just a distinct kind of space but also a distinct kind of time, and its temporality is not quite linear. Subterranean time stretches and stills, offers passage from the present to the past and future; and one of the aims of this book is to explore these temporalities. They also shape the book's own itinerary: some chapters jump forward in time or backward; some texts loop in and out.

The first four chapters show a burst of interest in the underground in the 1840s and 1850s, when the term's figurative usage first gained currency. But while the idea of an underground fascinated readers and writers, it had not achieved definitional stability. Rather, the texts I examine proliferate different versions of the underground that clustered in proximity to one another, a loose assemblage of disparate subterraneities. The book begins with the most famous underground in the early nineteenth-century United States: Kentucky's Mammoth Cave, the longest cave in

the world, which generated a host of newspaper reports, travel narratives, fiction, and poetry after it opened to the public as a tourist attraction in the late 1830s. Chapter 1, “The ‘Blackness of Darkness’ in Mammoth Cave,” shows that the cave’s fame derived in part from the fact that its guides were all enslaved men, who guided visitors through miles of tunnels by lamp-light. The white-authored literature of Mammoth Cave often describes visitors’ disordered senses of themselves and their surroundings in terms unconnected to the actual hazards of their journeys; instead, I argue, they fearfully conflate the power of the cave and its guides. In doing so, they reinvent the guides’ knowledge of the cave as affinity with it, identifying subterranean darkness with racialized Blackness. Including Mammoth Cave in the history of the underground may seem willfully literal-minded. But it illuminates how the racialization of the underground becomes a vector for the emergence of its figurative meaning, as the literature of Mammoth Cave repeatedly conjures strange realms of Black sovereignty. At the same time, I ask what we can glean from the literature of Mammoth Cave about the body of Black thought it sought to disavow: the alternative relations between race and the underground that the guides theorized through their own subterranean explorations.

Chapter 2, “Early Black Radical Undergrounds,” turns to four texts that develop the radical political potential of images of the Black underground: David Walker’s fiery pamphlet *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829), Frederick Douglass’s anticolonizationist speech “Slavery, the Slumbering Volcano” (1849), Martin R. Delany’s novel of hemispheric Black revolution, *Blake; or, the Huts of America* (1859, 1861–62), and William J. Wilson’s imaginary museum tour/adventure story “Afric-American Picture Gallery” (1859). I analyze these texts’ fascination with subterranean spaces, like mines, volcanoes, and caves, as well as spaces that are not actually subterranean but subterraneanized, like footnotes on a page, a ship’s hold, and the positions of Haiti and Cuba latitudinally “underneath” the United States. These works, I argue, use the underground both to theorize the negation of Black life in a society that nevertheless rests on its existence and to imagine modes of Black life impossible aboveground. They anticipate important twentieth- and twenty-first-century intellectual frameworks in Black studies, like Édouard Glissant’s “abyss,” Sylvia Wynter’s “underlife,” Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s “undercommons,” or Frantz Fanon’s “zone of nonbeing,” a “descent into a real hell” that is also “where authentic upheaval can be born.” But they also hold theoretical possibilities of their own. By following the metaphorization of the underground, I demonstrate

how nineteenth-century Black writers wrest resources for world-building from analyses of anti-Blackness and place this transformation among what Cedric Robinson felicitously calls the “roots” of the Black radical tradition.

At the beginning of the introduction, I noted that the metaphorical use of “underground” in the United States was popularized by the lively media coverage of the Underground Railroad in the 1840s. Today, the Underground Railroad has been institutionalized in celebratory narratives of national history, but chapter 3, “The Underground Railroad’s Undergrounds,” argues that contemporaneous representations envisioned undergrounds far in excess of these stories. One of the most vivid fantasies was that of the Underground Railroad as an actual subterranean train. The first part of the chapter examines this fantasy through antebellum newspaper reports, engravings, poetry, and song, showing how it evinced desires less for escape north than for a space beyond the world’s planar coordinates. The chapter hypothesizes that the extravagant discourse of the Underground Railroad in turn inspired antislavery undergrounds beyond its arrangements. Piecing together the faint evidence of letters and memoirs, I excavate the subterranean strategies—rhetorical and paramilitary—of clandestine organizations including Detroit’s African-American Mysteries, Boston’s Anti-Man-Hunting League, and John Brown and his comrades, whose raid on Harpers Ferry was preceded by an unrealized plan to invade the South called the Subterranean Pass Way. Finally, in the last part of the chapter, I jump forward in time to postbellum writer Pauline Hopkins’s play *Peculiar Sam; or, the Underground Railroad* (1879) and her novella *Winona* (1902), a fictionalized account of John Brown’s Kansas campaign. In these works, I show, Hopkins seeks out possibilities for freedom that antebellum undergrounds might continue to harbor after legal—but never actual—emancipation.

Chapter 4, “The Depths of Astonishment: City Mysteries and Subterranean Unknowability,” studies a midcentury literary genre dedicated to the secretive collectivities and insurgent activities Americans were beginning to refer to as undergrounds. Wildly popular, city mysteries were cheap, sensational novels chronicling the underbelly of urban life. The undergrounds they depict consistently have one feature in common: they are located physically underground. This chapter pursues the convergence of literal and figurative undergrounds in the city mysteries toward two readings in tension with one another. On the one hand, I argue that the “mystery” these authors find underground becomes the basis for powerful critiques of capitalism and visions of its upheaval. Here, the underground educates

the reader in the pleasures of and possibilities of unknown worlds. On the other hand, I demonstrate that the white authors of city mysteries derive the unfathomable mystery of the underground from the association with racialized Blackness that I traced in the previous three chapters. In the nineteenth century and arguably beyond, the underground is never not a racialized trope. The chapter's conclusion reflects on the city mysteries' topographical obsessions as a useful vantage point for understanding demystification as a critical practice. Analyzing Marx and Engels's account of city mysteries in *The Holy Family* (1844) and Marx's famous image of the "old mole" in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), I outline a version of demystification that does not attempt to dispel mystery but preserves a dialectical relation to it.

Where the first four chapters of *Going Underground* focus on the production of the underground as a concept in the early to mid-nineteenth-century United States, in the final two chapters I turn to the late nineteenth century and to writing *from* the underground—that is, writing by people who understood themselves to be participating in insurgent movements. Chapters 5 and 6 consider two very different examples of such movements, although I will show that they have more in common than we might expect: occultism and anarchism. Chapter 5, "'To Drop beneath the Floors of the Outer World': Paschal Beverly Randolph's Occult Undergrounds," departs from the juxtapositional approaches of the previous chapters to focus on a single author: the occultist/sex magician/political activist/educator Paschal Beverly Randolph. The child of a Black mother and a white father, Randolph struggled against racism his whole life. But he contended that his experience of alienation cultivated spiritual sensitivities that allowed him to access an unseen universe, while his "mixed identity" gave him the power to channel other souls in addition to his own. In the first half of the chapter, I examine Randolph's creation of what Jonathan Eburne, in his book, *Outsider Theory: Intellectual Histories of Unorthodox Ideas*, calls "a theory of outsider theory."³⁷ In handbooks, pamphlets, novels, newspaper articles, manifestos, historiography, and a memoir, as well as printed "private letters" and handwritten manuscripts he circulated covertly, Randolph sought to mobilize an occult underground that would use sex, drugs, and study to connect with extraterrestrial spirits. The second half of the chapter draws out the political dimensions of Randolph's thought by focusing on the writing he produced while a teacher and advocate for the Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana. Highlighting the oddly topical digressions that often disrupt his occult instruction, I show how, as Randolph grew

increasingly despondent over the prospects of Reconstruction, he came to envision the underground as a portal to the cosmos, whose forces might be brought to transform the order of things on earth. Finally, I return to Pauline Hopkins, whose final novel, *Of One Blood* (1902–3), centers on a character I hypothesize is based on Randolph, who finds himself transported via subterranean tunnels to a mystical, ancient Ethiopian civilization. In *Of One Blood*, Hopkins both extends her earlier explorations of the underground through Randolph's occult thought and ultimately confronts the idea that it may offer no way back to the world above.

Chapter 6, “Subterranean Fire: Anarchist Visions of the Underground,” takes up a more obviously political underground movement: the anarchist International Working People's Association. The IWPA flourished briefly in the 1880s before the Haymarket bombing in 1886 and the notoriously unjust trial of eight members, at which defendant August Spies, upon receiving his death sentence, described the movement as a “subterranean fire” that could not be extinguished or even grasped. This chapter explores the ramifications of the IWPA's underground imaginary. While chapter 5 read for the politics of Paschal Beverly Randolph's occult thought, here I draw out the supernatural qualities of the IWPA's political thought. Analyzing reporting, poetry, and short fiction in the IWPA's Chicago-based English-language newspaper, the *Alarm*, I show how contributors built an anarchist underground through visions of the dead as buried but not stilled. I trace the dispersion of this vision into several other striking motifs that theorize the buried dead's galvanizing influence: of dynamite as an image of latent force, of tramps as the living dead, and of anarchism as the revival of abolition's unfinished work. The chapter's conclusion considers the influence of Haymarket on Herman Melville's novella about suspected conspiracy and the injustice of law: *Billy Budd, Sailor*, which Melville drafted during the trial and its aftermath. The relation between Haymarket and *Billy Budd* has gone almost unnoticed by critics, but it flashes into view when we notice how Melville borrows August Spies's famous words to describe the master-at-arms Claggart's tumultuous feelings for Billy Budd as a “subterranean fire.” I argue that Melville's relocation of anarchism's underground to Claggart's heart indexes the beginning of the underground's transformation into “an inside narrative,” in the words of *Billy Budd's* subtitle—a figure for interiority that would reach its fullest expression in emerging theories of the unconscious.

Finally, a brief epilogue, “Staying Underground,” considers the fate of nineteenth-century ideas of the underground by examining a recent burst

of literature and visual art about the Underground Railroad. Rather than recapitulate the stories familiar from textbooks and historical sites, these works cultivate a deep strangeness much closer to mid-nineteenth-century representations of the Underground Railroad. I focus on Colson Whitehead's critically acclaimed, best-selling 2016 novel *The Underground Railroad*, which takes as its premise the literalization of the Underground Railroad that so enthralled antebellum readers. Like the Chicago anarchists' invocations of radical abolitionism, Whitehead's vision of the Underground Railroad suggests the continuing pull of the subterranean in and on the present. The novel ultimately leaves the underground behind for the West. But Whitehead's account of going underground raises the indelible question of what it would mean to find a way to stay there.

Nineteenth-Century Undergrounds Now

To some extent, this book's story of the emergence of the underground pieces together the strange history of a now-familiar idea. I hope it will interest readers drawn to the odd, restive, or little-known corners of nineteenth-century American literature: to unruly thinkers, obscure texts, idiosyncratic theories, and all the other elements that make the period at once fascinating and unfathomable for us today. I especially hope the project will interest readers who come to it from their own immersion in undergrounds of one kind or another—that it will illuminate how this formation came to be and why it continues to beckon to us. But if the underground's past has something to offer its present, I think it lies less in the path to the idea as we know it than in a glimpse of what got left behind along the way, which might yet be recovered and reimagined. Today the concept of a cultural or political underground has become so familiar that we no longer refer it to hollow earth theories, the habits of a mole, the space of a cave, or the world of the dead—all key images of the underground I discuss in the chapters that follow. But what resources for living otherwise might we find if we did?

In her luminous recent book *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds*, Jayna Brown recalls José Esteban Muñoz's statement in *Cruising Utopia* that "queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present." Brown responds to Muñoz by suggesting that we direct our utopian thinking not only toward the future but toward the "synchronic layering" of the here and now. "I think that the present is actually dimensional and the

place of great improvisations,” Brown writes. “I suggest that we descend into the quagmire, for it holds great depth.”³⁸ Brown’s phrasing recuperates the metaphor of the quagmire, which for Muñoz signifies the predicament of being fatally stuck, as an unseen space of possibility and movement. *Going Underground* explores the long history of similar lines of thought, which look underground to find new dimensions to the present. Following Brown, I hypothesize that to think about nineteenth-century undergrounds now is to crack open what we mean by *now*.

The hope that drives this project is that the history of the underground could help us multiply the possibilities for being in but not of a rotten world. In particular, I hope that through the nineteenth-century underground’s unfamiliar forms, we might expand our models of political agitation outside the customary oppositional frameworks of dissent and resistance. Of course, I am not (as it were) against dissent and resistance. But there are so many kinds of imaginative and lived activity that their rational, reactive, circumscribed nature doesn’t quite describe. *Going Underground* seeks to join recent work exploring modes of recalcitrance outside their frame, including Kevin Quashie’s *quiet*, Audra Simpson’s and Tina Campt’s versions of *refusal*, Ashon Crawley’s *otherwise*, Avery Gordon’s *in-difference*, and the extensive scholarship on *fugitivity*.³⁹ The nineteenth-century undergrounds I explore suggest some new—which is to say old—modes of world-making and world-breaking for a time when this world feels untenable. In doing so, I seek both to follow Ellison’s narrator in reopening the “shut off and forgotten” undergrounds of the nineteenth century and to ask how we too might use them to build spaces for ourselves and to dream, as he does, of descending even further into their depths, to a “lower level” and a “still lower level.”⁴⁰

Notes

Introduction. A Basement Shut Off and Forgotten during the Nineteenth Century

A version of the introduction appeared as “Going Underground: Race, Space, and the Subterranean,” *American Literary History* 33 (Fall 2021): 510–26, in a special issue on second book projects.

1. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 568, 571, 6, 581.
2. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, xvii.
3. Sociologist Milton M. Gordon first defined the term *subculture* in “The Concept of the Sub-Culture and Its Application,” although the *Oxford English Dictionary* records earlier nonce uses of the word.
4. For a helpful sampling and overview of this work, see Gelder, *Subcultures Reader*.
5. Hebdige, *Subculture*, 18.
6. Stallybrass, “‘Well Grubbed, Old Mole,’” 13; Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 121.
7. See Valencius, *Lost History of the New Madrid Earthquakes*.
8. On the scientific and infrastructural significance of the underground, see Williams, *Notes on the Underground*, chaps. 2 and 3.
9. Luciano, “Sacred Theories of Earth,” 716. John McPhee coins the phrase “deep time” in *Basin and Range*, 142.
10. Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, 5. I read Yusoff’s book as I was finishing this one, and I wish I could have had it from the beginning. Denise Ferreira

da Silva points out that to the extent that “blackness refers to matter” —and that *matter* was once defined as “that without form” —“it functions as a nullification of the whole signifying order that sustains value in both its economic and ethical scenes” (“1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ – ∞ or ∞/∞”).

11. Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, 67, 6.

12. Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, 107, 108.

13. Estes, *Our History Is the Future*, 19; “Short Bull’s Speech, October 31, 1890,” 313; “Kicking Bear’s Speech, October 9, 1890,” 310.

14. Knox, *Underground, or Life Below the Surface*, 5.

15. “New Publications,” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, June 6, 1873, 5.

16. Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” 64.

17. Wynter elaborates this idea through much of her writing, but see especially “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom.”

18. Hammond, “Speech on the Admission of Kansas, under the Lecompton Constitution,” 318. My thinking about the mudsill and the slumbering volcano has benefited from conversations with Geo Maher, who also writes about both in his book *Anticolonial Eruptions: Racial Hubris and the Cunning of Resistance*.

19. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 19.

20. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 26.

21. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 9.

22. Mirabeau quoted in James, *Black Jacobins*, 55; Smith, *Lecture on the Haytian Revolutions*, 15; Martineau, *Hour and the Man*, 1:18.

23. Enoch Lewis, “Proposals for Publishing a New Periodical Work, to Be Entitled *The African Observer*,” *Berks and Schuylkill Journal*, April 7, 1827, 1.

24. “African Colonization,” *Freedom’s Journal*, December 21, 1827, 2.

25. Daut, *Tropics of Haiti*, 5.

26. Du Bois, “Comet,” 253, 254; Wright, “Man Who Lived Underground,” 54; Mayfield, “Underground”; Shockley, “ode to my blackness,” 30. The underground promise of Puryear’s “Old Mole” stands in contrast to his “Ladder for Booker T. Washington” (1996), a long wooden ladder that narrows so dramatically toward the top that it appears to recede indefinitely, a wry joke on the unattainability of Washingtonian uplift.

27. Gumbs, *M Archive*, 139. *M Archive* expands on Gumbs’s 2015 short story “Evidence.”

28. On the circulation of Walker’s *Appeal*, see Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 116–72.

29. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 144–45.

30. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 123.
31. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 112.
32. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 126.
33. Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, 68.
34. Peterson, "Subject to Speculation," 111; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11. Hartman further develops critical fabulation as a method in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, xiii–xv.
35. Johnson, "'He Was a Lion, and He Would Destroy Much,'" 196, 197, 202, 207. Johnson's essay is part of a discussion of Ada Ferrer's *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*.
36. Herring, *Queering the Underworld*, 21, 209.
37. Eburne, *Outsider Theory*, 352. Eburne uses this term to describe the writings and music of Sun Ra, who drew on the writings of Helena Blavatsky, who in turn seems to have been strongly influenced by Randolph (see Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, chaps. 12–13).
38. Brown, *Black Utopias*, 17, 18, 17.
39. Quashie, *Sovereignty of Quiet*; Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Campt, *Listening to Images*, chap. 2; Crawley, *Black Pentecostal Breath*; Gordon, *Hawthorn Archive*. The work on fugitivity grows every day, but for influential statements see Best, *Fugitive's Properties*; Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, chap. 12, and *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*; Mackey, "Other" and "Cante Moro"; Moten, *In the Break*; and Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*. Rinaldo Walcott, however, cautions that *fugitivity* is a "limited frame . . . for thinking Black freedom" because it "only makes sense in the space of unfreedom and thus cannot be constituted as freedom." Rather, fugitivity "mark[s] the interstices of Black desires for freedom" (*Long Emancipation*, 106).
40. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 9.

Chapter 1. The "Blackness of Darkness" in Mammoth Cave

A version of chapter 1 appeared as "The Blackness of Darkness: Mammoth Cave and the Racialization of the Underground," *History of the Present* 11 (Spring 2021): 2–22.

1. Bird, *Peter Pilgrim*, 2, 65. "Monarch of caves" became something of a stock phrase in Mammoth Cave literature.
2. Earlier in the 1830s, before the cave became a full-scale tourist attraction, two white guides had led small numbers of visitors through parts of it, and later in the century, new Black and white guides joined the descendants of the antebellum