Deborah A. Thomas

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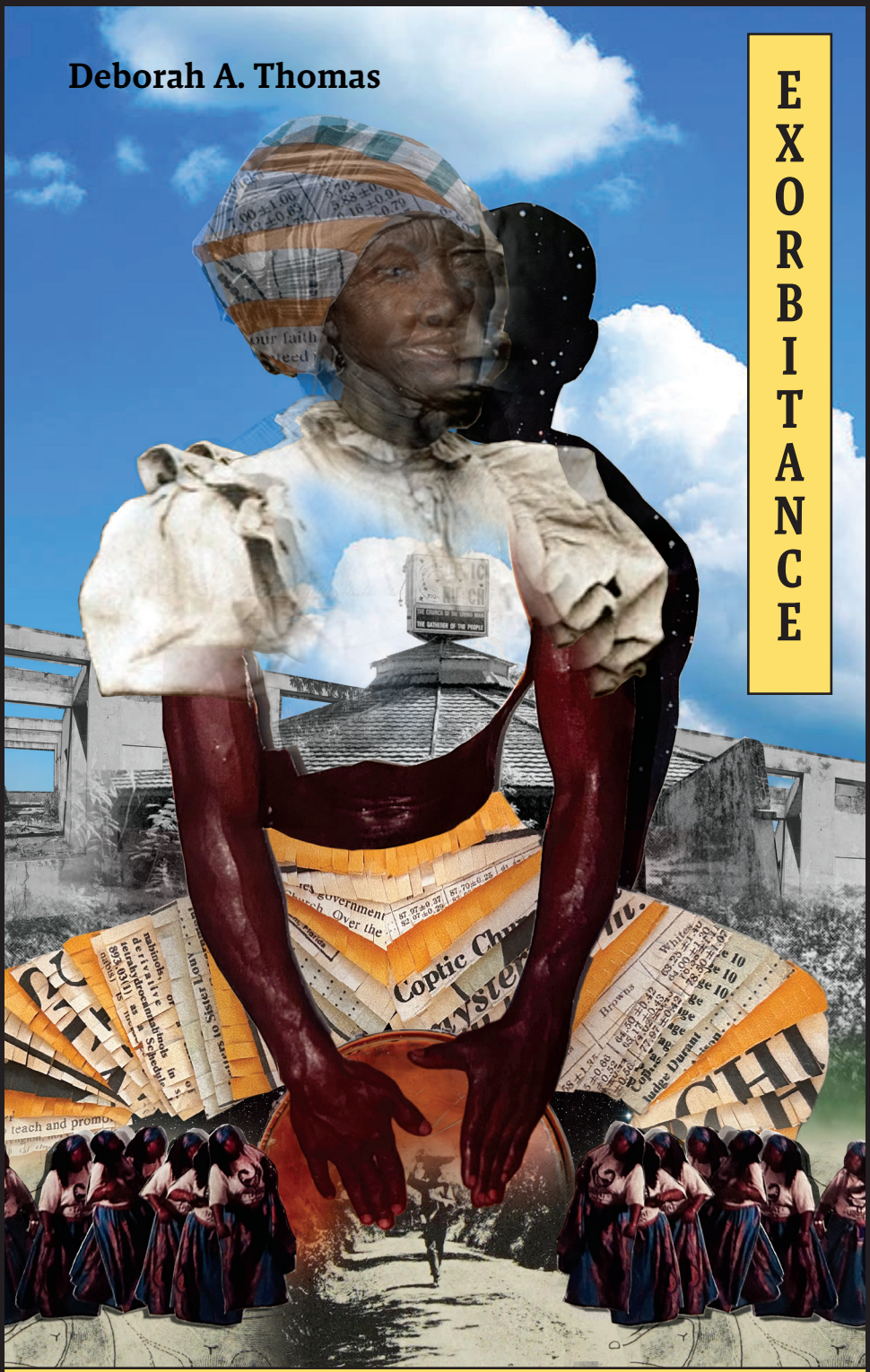

A SPECULATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF INHERITANCE

Exorbitance

THE LEWIS HENRY MORGAN LECTURES

Kathryn Mariner and Llerena Searle, Co-Directors

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Deborah A. Thomas

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For the ancestors, dead and living

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Foreword

Deborah A. Thomas delivered her Lewis Henry Morgan Lecture in October 2023. The public talk, "Bodies, Knowledge, and Modes of Repair," was followed by a workshop in which invited scholars and faculty at the University of Rochester provided feedback on the manuscript for this book. Formal discussants included Faith Smith (Brandeis University), Maya J. Berry (UNC–Chapel Hill), and Kristin Doughty (University of Rochester).

Thomas's lecture continued the tradition of the oldest and longest-running anthropology lecture series in North America. The Lewis Henry Morgan lectures were conceived in 1961 by Bernard Cohen, Chair of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Rochester, and supported by gifts from the families of Joseph C. and Joseph R. Wilson. Meyer Fortes gave the first lecture in 1963. The lectures have been organized and edited over the years by Alfred Harris, Anthony T. Carter, Thomas Gibson, Robert Foster, and Daniel R. Reichman. The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures include pathbreaking contributions to the discipline, constituting an archive of ethnographic and theoretical innovation. Thomas's lecture—and this book—contribute to this legacy, providing an inheritance for future scholars.

Exorbitance is a speculative ethnography—risky, invested, innovative—that seeks forms of sovereignty that exceed the state and its juridical power. Thomas retools terms and practices freighted with racist, colonial legacies—sovereignty and possession, for example—looking to Caribbean, African, and indigenous antecedents to theorize sovereignty not premised on control over violence and possession not understood as territorial dominion. In centering relational, embodied performances—for example the myal possession of Jamaican *kumina* dancers or the spiritual testimonies of Coptic brethren—she finds alternate inheritances, in forms of evidence, archives, and modes of thought that elude frames of reference tethered to Western modernity.

The Morgan Lectures are themselves freighted with the kinds of inheritances with which Thomas grapples. The lectures honor the complex legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan, the attorney, businessman, and ethnologist who collaborated with Caroline Parker and Ely S. Parker, members of the Tonawanda Seneca Nation, to write one of the earliest examples of systematic ethnography, *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois*, published in 1851. Even as he worked closely with the Parkers, Morgan favored Native assimilation into white society and saw the role of anthropologists as documenting vanishing ways of life. His subsequent writings have been foundational to kinship studies, anthropology, and Marxist thought. In *Ancient Society* (1877), Morgan links technology to intellectual and social development, creating a model of cultural evolution with direct links to the race science that Thomas critiques in chapter 1. Rather than ignore or disavow this legacy, Thomas engages it, analyzing the 1929 study *Race Crossing in Jamaica* to excavate alternative forms of embodiment and autonomy that were illegible to its authors' anthropometric methods.

The rituals, practices, and exclusions of academia are also an inheritance with which we, as editors of the Morgan Lectures, and Thomas, in *Exorbitance*, wrestle. Thomas argues that "particular bodies in particular moments in particular contexts are exorbitant to European philosophical categories of Being and action"—and, we would add, to European ideologies about who *can* philosophize. The very embodiment Thomas seeks to recuperate has been seen as inimical to thought and used as an alibi for excluding women and people of color from the Academy and ignoring their contributions. We see this in the history of the Morgan Lecture itself: The first eleven lectures were delivered by men. Two women were honored in the 1970s and four in the 1980s before the lectures achieved a rough gender balance in the 1990s. As a record of anthropology as a discipline, the lectures thus chart slow changes in scholarly institutions. Deborah Thomas—whose scholarship, filmmaking, teaching, and institutional leadership have done so much to bring Black anthropology to the center of the discipline—has helped anthropologists and this lecture series to recognize and celebrate other inheritances.

Fieldwork, lectures, books, and academic workshops are some of the inherited practices of academic anthropology. In her lecture and workshop, however, Thomas performed the exorbitance of Black feminist praxis she describes in the book, creating new legacies within and beyond the old forms. With the poise of a dancer, Thomas performed her talk rather than reading it. She transformed the dull lecture hall with music and carefully framed video clips from Tambufest, the

kumina dance festival she co-organized in Jamaica, that suggested her care for and with her interlocutors. She refused the impulse to analyze Tambufest in expected ways—to catalog and frame it. Rather, she described a process of contributing to events that would "cooperatively active the conditions for the relational space of *myal*," modeling collaboration, possession, bodily engagement, and surrender as a modes of anthropological praxis. The talk was like a beacon: "I didn't understand everything, but I got this overwhelming inspiring feeling that's what anthropology could be," one of my students told me afterward. It was, in the best way possible, speculative: a risky and optimistic investment in the future of our discipline.

Similarly, Thomas and her invited discussants transformed the lecture's workshop into a generous unfolding. By evoking evidentiary modes that included personal experiences and memories, the discussants' comments helped to build a mode of relationality with Thomas that exceeded their formal roles as discussants and author. Thomas was humble, vulnerable, curious. The tenor of the discussion was collaborative and open-ended: What could the manuscript be/become/do? Now, as a book, *Exorbitance* alerts us to forms of embodied knowledge in relation with others that enable *sovereign-ing*: creating new possibilities within old and harmful structures.

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INTRODUCTION

SOVEREIGN-ING
The Body as Method

For as long as I can remember, I have had what would now be called an embodied practice. I was seven when we moved to the United States from Jamaica, and because one starts school earlier in the British system than in America, I was often at least a year younger than the other students. This meant that I was also less physically developed, and my lack of coordination plagued me in gym class, where I was regularly brutalized in dodgeball. After several tearful outbursts, my parents enrolled me in a gymnastics class. I took to it immediately and soon was flipping in circles around my classmates. I competed for various club teams as we moved from place to place, and then for my high school team (we won the state championships twice!), and then for Brown University. After my freshman year in college, I tired of turning tricks four feet in the air on a four-inch-wide piece of wood, and I started to wonder what other people did in the afternoons, evenings, and on weekends. So I quit.

To stay in shape, I tagged along with a roommate one day to a jazz dance class, and I fell in love instantly. I invited the teacher to lunch—that was Joe Bowie, then a junior at Brown, who would go on to dance professionally with Paul Taylor and Mark Morris—and I asked him to tell me everything: What other

classes could I take? Who were his favorite teachers? How could I catch up, given I was starting so late? What did I need to know to change my gymnast body into a dancer body? He told me, and I followed his lead. I took three classes a day (ballet, modern, jazz, African, improv—whatever was on offer), I read incessantly, I learned dance history, and I started performing, first with student groups and then with a company in Providence. I moved to New York to do the Alvin Ailey Scholarship program, but I ended up working in theater. After a year in Bahia, Brazil—performing with contemporary dance companies that were incorporating the rhythms and dances of candomblé into their movement vocabularies—I came back to New York, and through a series of serendipitous surprises, I became a member of the Urban Bush Women (UBW), a company founded in 1984 by Jawole Zollar to use performance as a means of addressing issues of social justice and encouraging civic engagement, and to bring the untold stories of disenfranchised people to light through dance from a woman-centered perspective and as members of the African Diaspora community.

At the time, the company was touring about thirty-five weeks out of the year, and seeing the world through dance, in my twenties, was a huge gift. So was being salaried, but that is another story. Although it would later become common for companies to integrate dancers' vocalization and percussion with choreography, this practice was something that Jawole innovated (and something that likely emerged in part because of her training with Dianne McIntyre's Sounds in Motion). Jawole's process of making work through research, through improvisation, and through collaboration with musicians, artists, and writers generated moments of brilliance and laughter, struggle and tears, joy and recognition. Touring meant that we connected with audiences across the country (and around the world) and that we listened to new stories and encountered new motivations for the work she continually developed, work that broadened the space to hear, acknowledge, and value Black women. Dancing with the company thus became a kind of ongoing and processual conversation, between Jawole and us, among ourselves, and between the company as a whole and our audiences and interlocutors. The work of UBW drew from my body language, from the dance repertoires with which I was familiar or in which I had trained; indeed, it drew from the languages of all who passed through the company to develop something unique, something powerful, something that was always growing, something that valorized our stories, and something that nurtured these stories into spaces where we could live and laugh together.

Certain movement sequences from the company's repertoire—the "lanes" in "Shelter," the clump in "Bitter Tongue"—are forever lodged in my body because they required a particular kind of attention to our one-ness. Even now, having not rehearsed them in decades, I know that if I heard the drum break or the verbal cue, my body would automatically fall in line. On stage or in the rehearsal studio, when we were particularly attuned to the music and to one another, those sequences could feel transcendent, and in that state, we were one organism, one breathing body, one relational chorus. We would dance it and, afterward, not remember exactly how or when we got offstage. Those sequences are part of my corporeal and affective memory, and they inform how I walk in the world.

While I was in the company, we began a program of work that we then called Community Engagement Projects, which has since developed into the UBW Summer Institute and the other aspects of collaborative engagement in which the company is involved. Over the course of a year, we began learning from popular education leaders, from experts on embodied work with grassroots groups, and from community leaders in order to develop longer-term residencies through which we would collaboratively build skills and consciousness through movement and music. Our first residency was in New Orleans over twelve weeks in 1992; there, we worked with a community bookstore, a teen pregnancy prevention center, a welfare rights organization, a basketball team that needed math tutoring, and others. I was stationed with two other company members at a puppet theater organization in the Ninth Ward whose project was to host a block party to which they would invite a rival neighborhood group with the intention of enjoying an afternoon together without incident. Over six weeks, we worked with them on improvisation, on relaxation techniques, on expression and de-escalation, and the party went off without a hitch. Jawole and I also met regularly with a group of young women to talk about Black women's health and wellness issues, and after we left, this group went on to become a chapter of the National Black Women's Health Project. These community engagement projects transformed the company, individually and collectively. For me, this transformation ultimately meant leaving the company for graduate school to learn more about how artists have been involved in political and social change movements elsewhere in the diaspora, but this mode of working also grew and developed into an incubator for broader interventions that would reach far beyond what individual company members themselves were doing.

Why am I telling you all of this? In part, I am telling you because for years I have avoided writing about dance except insofar as it has been a portal into

broader political questions. Although I read it, I was not interested in *writing* what was then called dance ethnography. I saw people like Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, and Yvonne Daniel as fellow travelers, as models of what it could mean to be a Black woman who was both performer and scholar and who was committed to and embedded in the communities with which they were conducting research. But as a graduate student, I was also inspired by those mid-twentieth-century anthropologists in the Manchester school who provided examples for thinking political life through performative, embodied rituals. I wanted to learn about the infrastructures that dancers were trying to create, the changes they were catalyzing, the impact they were having as they tried to transform the world. The *feeling* of dance I would leave to memory, or to Saturday nights in the club. But in fall 2022, after two decades out of the dance studio, I went back to dance class. Because of the ways I have been thinking about what sovereignty feels like, I needed to remember—and try to consciously experience—what it means to know through the body. I needed to make explicit what I had learned to take for granted, to exteriorize what had always felt normative to me. It took a few weeks, but after the muscle soreness subsided, and after I reacclimated to anticipating where the teacher's movement vocabulary would lead us in a sequence, I remembered how it *felt* to be in relation with the music and with others.

After presenting an early iteration of these thoughts at the University of Texas at Austin, one of my former graduate students, who now teaches there, squealed with delight: "It took you three books but finally you're getting back to dance!" This is true, in a way. But it is also true that dance has never really left me. It has always, perhaps subconsciously, informed my approach to problem-solving, to entering space, to editing films. And it certainly has informed my understanding of what a kind of exorbitant sovereignty could feel like. This book seeks to explore this exorbitance and, with it, the interplay between the feeling of bodily freedom and the intensities of political sovereignty. It asks what sovereignty might look like, and feel like, if we approached it not exclusively in terms of its foundational violences (conquest, imperialism, settler colonialism, capitalist extraction, and so on) but through the embodied forms of autonomy and relation we create in the realm of everyday life.

It was this interplay that Allen Feldman (1991) interrogated long ago in his ethnographic and oral historical account of political conflict in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1981, an interrogation he called a "genetic history" of violence, "a genealogical analysis of the symbolic forms, material practices, and narrative strategies through which certain types of political agency are constructed" (1).

His interest, in that project, was to destabilize European philosophical equivalencies between the formation of the body and the formation of the political subject, instead showing how the body is a site of material and symbolic discourse through which history is culturally constructed over time. The body, Feldman argued, "accumulates political biographies, a multiplicity of subject positions, as it passes in and out of various political technologies of commensuration" (9). It is, as such, a potent site for political engagement, one that, he argued, intensifies in agency as the space for political action in the public sphere shrinks. Although the language of agency reflects the theoretical constellation of the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is Feldman's probing of the relationship between the body and political subjectivity (and subjugation) that I find useful. On one hand, it raises the question of who properly possesses a body and, therefore, the potential for meaningful political action. On another, it asks us to think about the ways particular bodies in particular moments in particular contexts are exorbitant to European philosophical categories of Being and action. And finally, it encourages us to explore the dynamic ways we express and engage our inheritances.

Like many others, I have long been interested in the proliferating and palimpsestic histories of dispossession and in the assertions of humanness that have emerged alongside, against, and across these histories. Within the Caribbean, the range of instantiations of self-determination that are legible in relation to classic iterations of political life include *marronage*, revolution, and anticolonial struggle. In and through each of these, however, we can also read their obverse—the continued incursion of the entities and projects to which they are opposed. In this book, I am interested in the ways thinking through the frame of *inheritance* might discombobulate this recursive feedback loop. If we read sovereignty through a phenomenological notion of inheritance—one that is not strictly concerned with genealogy or cause and effect but is instead experiential and indeterminate though historically embedded—we understand it not as a state of being grounded in instrumental rationality but as a mode, and a mode of being with, that I want to read not through Heidegger but through Édouard Glissant and his notion of *donner avec*, or "giving-on-and-with" (1997), a refusal of Hegelian recognition, an engagement with difference that seeks neither domination nor assimilation but respects autonomy, a reciprocity grounded not in knowing (transparency, extraction, exploitation) but in relational opacity. This reorientation would attune us to the modes of autonomy and interdependence that either circulate through or refuse these classic sovereign statements, and thus to the relations and forms

of exorbitance that can produce a sovereignty beyond utility.[1] It would propel us toward practice-based and durational articulations of self-determination that are processual, performative, and grounded in the everyday intimacies of living together, and it would allow us to attune ourselves toward questions about how what we inherit can evidence modes of world-building that exceed classic political frames.

Exorbitance thus builds on my earlier interrogations of sovereignty to propose a different lexicon through which we might envision a political present and future rooted in relational and speculative Black feminist praxis. This lexicon, for me, is grounded in the body and thus will require a certain amount of what Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (2022) has called corpoliteracy, "an effort to contextualise the body as a platform, stage, site and medium of learning, a structure or organ that acquires, stores and disseminates knowledge" (14). My argument is that, first, we are heir not only to colonial logics but also to the means to refuse or retool them, and that both of these inheritances are inscribed in and on the body.[2] Second, I assert that our understanding of the relation between inheritance and embodiment directs our attention to particular forms of evidence over others. By foregrounding embodied methods and embodied insights, I am also seeking to embrace quieter experiments with what a more radically humanist anthropology could look like, one that eschews Western Enlightenment modes of recognizing, categorizing, and collecting difference, one that moves beyond binary conceptualizations of the relationship between body and mind, self and other, and one that refuses linear teleologies, themselves the inheritances of liberal constructions of the transparent, knowable, and governable subject, constructions possible only through the violent policing of the category of the human. My interrogations are thus as much about the process and practice of anthropology as they are about the ins and outs of any specific interrogation of political life in Jamaica. By the end of this book, I hope I will have convinced you that to be in the world exorbitantly—however ephemerally and in whatever dimension—is to sovereign.

THE PROBLEM WITH SOVEREIGNTY

Within both critical Black and Indigenous studies, sovereignty has been a vexed topic. This is because having been defined as universal reason and absolute perspectivity, sovereignty constitutes the interior humanity of the rational European self against which all Others are compared and measured (and found wanting). Because violence is the constitutive force of conquest, colonialism, and slavery,

and because in classic formulations of political philosophy, control over violence defines and legitimizes the sovereign, sovereignty is grounded in historical-ideological and onto-epistemological phenomena that benefit its architects and their progeny, producing whiteness, maleness, and Europeanness as the apex of humanity, the epitome of transparency, universality, determination, and causality (Ferreira da Silva 2007; Wynter 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Kauanui 2008; Sturm 2002). Sovereignty operates by solidifying boundaries, controlling movement, demanding a singularity of life out of a vast multiplicity, creating and then naturalizing hierarchies that function through dehumanization, dispossession, and exclusion. These processes proceed through the ongoing and simultaneous recognition and elimination of Indigenous populations, through the constitution of Black people as dispossessed and therefore depoliticized subjects, and through the standardization of dominant settler reckonings of time and relationship to place.[3] How, then, can one engage sovereignty as self-making when new forms of dispossession are continuously rewritten over earlier removals and displacements, what Shanya Cordis (2019, 20) would call the "settler ascription of sovereign in/capacity"? How can sovereignty be a language through which to call attention to alternative ontologies, modes of governance, accountability, community, and ceremony when the logic of recognition has been a way to reiterate colonial rule through the perpetuation of the tropes of Black and Indigenous cultural and temporal difference (Coulthard 2014; Alfred 1999; Moreton-Robinson 2017; A. Simpson 2014)? Find another word, my friends have begged me. While this book in part represents an attempt to "find another word," we should also remember that all of our words for freedom, liberation, and self-determination—not merely *sovereignty*—are corrupted by and seemingly trapped within juridical etymological and geopolitical lineages that render Blackness external to life and being human. My endeavor here is not to recuperate sovereignty as a claim to or for the power of the state (and therefore subjectivity) but to explore why it remains such an important term for many around the world and how it might be conceptualized and experienced as exorbitant to these lineages.

There are, of course, other words. "Autonomy" is an obvious candidate, in part because it has already been resignified by both Marxists and feminists. Whereas for Kant, autonomy was the foundation of a moral philosophy in which being autonomous meant having the capacity to be self-determined, to govern oneself through impartial and rational awareness unconstrained by either internal or external forces, John Stuart Mill mobilized it in the service of a political liberalism

concerned with individual freedoms and rights. Both were grounded in an understanding of moral or political rights as universal, untainted by specific cultural commitments or racial regimes, or any other particularities of Being or history or experience. It is this universalism that feminists have rejected, advocating on one hand for an analysis of capitalism that extended the Marxist concept of labor through the whole society, thereby advancing women's unwaged housework as falling within the capitalist wage-labor relation (Federici 1975; S. James [1974] 2012, 2021; Weeks 2011), and, on the other, for an understanding of self-determination rooted not in independence and noninterference but in relation and nondomination (Pettit 1997). This kind of self-determination is what Iris Marion Young (2001), drawing from Indigenous refusals of the grounding of liberal sovereignty in private property, called "relational autonomy" (34). Young's argument is that the presumption of noninterference does not fully capture the ways people are constituted through relationships, making the notion of ontological freedom a fallacy. Relational autonomy, on the other hand, "entails recognizing that agents are related in many ways they have not chosen, by virtue of kinship, history, proximity, or the unintended consequences of action. In these relationships, agents are able either to thwart or to support one another" (34). In this framing, autonomy becomes a capacity for "regulating and negotiating relationships so that all persons are able to be secure in the knowledge that their interests, opinions, and desires for action are taken into account" (Young 2001, 35; see also Boggs 2012). This approach helps to contextualize the observations of someone like the feminist anthropologist Eleanor "Happy" Leacock (1978), who found that women in Montagnais-Naskapi communities seemed interested not in equality but in the ability to make independent decisions about their own lives, individually and collectively, even in the face of a leadership that was predominantly male.[4] It also helps us to understand, as Jessica Cattelino (2008) has argued, that settler states like the US exist in a relation of interdependency with Indigenous peoples.

Feminisms across Latin America and the Caribbean have also been central to conceptual reformulations of autonomy, as they have understood theory and knowledge as being made and remade through activism and the celebration of different forms of sociality, and because they have conjoined antiracism, anticapitalism, and anti-imperialism with decolonial struggles toward Indigenous thriving.[5] For these feminists, a relational framing of autonomy is particularly necessary in contexts where the patriarchal cultures of organized party politics has marginalized women's interests and erased their participation in revolutionary

struggles throughout the region, and where significant power inequalities among women have also obtained.[6] Autonomy, in these contexts, is perhaps most usefully understood as a *method* of working against these power disparities, encapsulated by the question the Red Thread Organization in Guyana has posed as a mode of reflection and organization: "How are we related to each other and what have I not understood about my situation when I didn't understand hers?" (Trotz 2007, 74; see also S. James [1974] 2012, 2021). In this way, relational autonomy disrupts the Enlightenment imagination of legitimacy through rationally chosen and unconstrained authority, in the sense of juridical authorship.

Another critical approach to autonomy has addressed its discursive roots in settledness. Charles Carnegie (2002), for example, has asked us to consider an ethos of *marronage* as a counterpoint to a version of autonomy that is grounded in the state or in the capacity for self-determination or self-governance. For Carnegie, *marronage* extends far beyond "settled communities of runaways" (119) into a wider dynamic of transfrontier mobility and fugitivity. In his trenchant critique of sovereignty, *Postnationalism Prefigured*, we are confronted with Black sailors and interisland traders who exploit the various vulnerabilities of planters, colonial officials, and nationalist policymakers who are constantly trying to constrict the mobility of those on whose movement they nonetheless depend. We come to apprehend the modernity of control and containment as continually one or two steps behind the countermodernity—a kind of fugitive autonomy—of subalterns. For Carnegie, these subalterns create a "loosely articulated infrastructure," an "institutional complex" as much urban as rural and grounded in actual and potential relationships, a complex "whose recognition significantly alters present-day political perspectives tied to fixed notions of race and territory" (136). He shows us, in other words, that the plot constantly exceeds the space and time of the plantation, and that autonomy is rooted not in the race-nation-territory triad but in the everyday movements within and across it. Like others, he sees *marronage* as orienting us away from a view of sovereignty in which control of the state is the site of aspiration and potential social change, and toward one that is grounded instead in accountability, spiritual practice, and nonlinear and nonteleological relations with others, including nonhuman others (Bonilla 2015; N. Roberts 2015; Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton 2023; Lewis 2023).

The term *possession* is another plausible substitute for *sovereignty*, and this too is a term that both aligns with and disrupts imperialist and nationalist commitments. Like *sovereignty*, *possession* has a juridical and legal etymology that emerged

in intimate relationship with modern processes of conquest and imperialism, processes for which the English are *arrivants*, coming on the scene in the early seventeenth century, centuries after the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) divided the lands of non-Christians between Spain (Castile) and Portugal. In a context in which the right to absolute and independent rule (imperium) was based on the right to possess and rule territory (dominium), the British had to promulgate new understandings of land ownership grounded in both Roman law and post-Reformation understandings of Genesis and Psalms that placed a premium on the actual, physical occupation and improvement of territory (terra incognita or terra nullius) (MacMillan 2006). Territorial possession of lands thought to be "unimproved" thus paved the way not only to the evisceration of Indigenous claims to land but also to the recognition of English claims to sovereignty supranationally. These maneuvers were supported by emergent theories of property and ownership (by political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke) and by cartographic practices (by geographers such as John Dee). In this conceptual tracking, possession shares with sovereignty the violences of modern juridical orders and the institutions of the state, as well as the post-Enlightenment view of the rational, agential, accountable, and self-determined individual as the proper subject of liberal governance.[7]

There is a second sense of *possession*, however, that emerges from the realm of spiritual practice, and this sense allows us some inroads into the modalities through which juridical dominium could be unsettled. In tracking this parallel etymology, anthropologist Brent Crosson (2019a) has demonstrated that by the early modern period, possession not only applied to territorial dominion but also "to the inhabitation of humans by spirits or demons" (546). Given that attention to this kind of possession emerged at the same moment when post-Enlightenment political philosophy began to position the rational, "self-possessed" individual as the proper subject of liberal governance, Crosson argues that spirit possession was foundational to Western modernity insofar as it became a kind of "constitutive other" for Western personhood (see also Johnson 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2019). Unsurprisingly, possession thus also came to be a key focus of study for anthropologists and other ethnographers who were interested in non-Western (and particularly African and African diasporic) spiritual practices.

If dispossession (of land, of oneself, of one's "body-lands," to quote Ana-Maurine Lara) constitutes nonpersonhood, then possession requires "spiritual and bodily reclamation and healing" (Cordis 2019, 12; Alexander 2005; Lara 2020). In

this sense, possession is embodied practice, process, and dialogue; it is ephemeral, performative, affective. It indexes that altered ordering of consciousness, time, and space caused by the inhabitation of humans by gods, spirits, and ancestors (both eventfully and in the everyday), the moments in which one is claimed by and in dialogue with a network of spirits and co-presences (Beliso-De Jesús 2015; Berry 2021). It is an embodied phenomenon that can both produce and transform power through cultural memory and everyday performance,[8] and by *performance* here I mean to invoke Diana Taylor's (2003) notion of repertoire as set of embodied practices that also constitutes a system of knowledge production and transmission (26). Possession thus marks the nonlinear and unexpected ways something that feels like relation circulates and is transmitted from one to another, today, yesterday, and maybe tomorrow. It constitutes knowing without determination (Ferreira da Silva 2017a, 2022) and reaches toward a reorientation of colonial recognition (see, for example, Lamming, interviewed in Scott 2002; Matory 2018).

If possession (by spirits or ancestors) undoes the certainties of coloniality and liberal possessive individualism, it does so only if we surrender to it. While *surrender*, like *sovereignty* and *possession*, has etymological roots in law, militarism, and territorial expansion, it also indexes a yielding, a giving up of something to the power of another. This "giving up" not only refers to property or, in the case of war, territorial authority but also to giving "oneself over to something," which potentially makes surrender into something less juridical than relational (Glissant's "giving-on-and-with"), something that requires embodied attunement to what the body knows and how it knows, and how we come to appreciate the evidence it generates. In her examination of moments of military surrender, sociologist Robin Wagner-Pacifici (2005) tells us that surrender is "an event on the threshold" (24–25). Coming from the Old French *sur rendre* (to give back) and the Latin *rendere* (to repeat, to recite), the term suggests not only a prior claim but also repetition and some form of translation.

But *surrender* as a term is itself indeterminate, and that is perhaps best seen when we attempt to translate it. In Spanish, for example, to surrender could be translated as *rendirse, entregar, renunciar, capitular, abandoner, cesar,* or *dar*. Or in modern French, it could also mean *se librer*. Each of these words carries different affective resonances and thus has different implications for thinking about self-determination and agency. In some cases, we read intentional action, as in *renunciar* or *abandoner*; in others, we infer that a struggle has led to an involuntary surrender, as with *capitular*.[9] But we also know that capitulation in one moment can

be turned into something that feels like freedom in another, which means that in all cases we are being asked to think through the broader contingencies and contexts—historical, spatial, and affective—in which the action of surrender is occurring. For Wagner-Pacifici (2005), it is the French reflexive verb *se rendre* that most clearly suggests in surrender "an implicit return of the self to its true sovereign . . . a sense of a recovery of an original state that either is true in its essence or is made true by the work of witnesses" (19). The presence of an audience suggests that surrender, like possession, generates archives that are in one way or another public, archives that might allow insights into what surrender means for those experiencing or bearing witness to it.

Other scholars have worked from locally relevant terms to describe something that looks and feels like sovereign-ing. I'm thinking here about how Thomas Cousins (2023) uses the isiZulu term *amandla* in his ethnography of repair in South Africa. For the timber plantation workers among whom Cousins conducted research, the elaboration of disalienation in contexts of extreme exploitation was not generated through a refusal to work but through the "ordinary scenes around the plantations," through "mutual incompleteness, becoming with others, and a relational effort to absorb, without effacing, the wounding effects of colonial displacement" (4). Timber workers enacted these efforts by, for example, engaging in forms of marriage play or by distributing traditional medical remedies. Cousins sees these daily practices as the work of repair, the development of capacity and strength, which he identifies as *amandla*, a term that resonates historically as "power" but that here indexes ethical life in a post-Apartheid labor regime.

I'm also thinking about Khaled Furani's (2022) offering of *khalifah*—"an ideal through which the Muslim tradition formulates the human telos as inherently transient" (483)—as a way to disturb secular understandings of sovereignty grounded in its purported indivisibility. Furani argues that within Abrahamic religious traditions, indivisibility is the province of God alone, and its transmutation to secular governance creates individuals who are, under the governing sovereign, conscripted in "enslavement projects that masquerade as freedom" (483). For Furani, a conception of sovereignty as finite and incomplete (rather than universal and indivisible)—and here he is drawing from Hobbes's framing of the state as a mortal god—opens the door to a valorization of transience and fragility. The gap created between the body of the king and the body politic, or the "God otherwise" who refuses "her own utterance" (McAllister and Napolitano 2020, 4) produces a vulnerability to the appearance and endurance of other

ontologies of sovereignty (see also Rutherford 2012, 2018). Furani's (2022) claim is that Qur'anic *khalifah* is not coterminous with rule but instead evokes replacement, transmission, succession, and inheritance, all terms that evoke an ethos of trusteeship (of each other, of land) rather than of the ownership so central to liberal conceptions of citizenship.[10] "To uphold a khalifal ideal for an ethically oriented life, then, is to handle finitude with care," he writes, "to treat as a trust (*amānah*) the earth that we receive upon entry and leave upon departure" (500).

Just as there are other words that strive toward enactments of sovereignty through this kind of ethical accountability, there are other genealogies of and referents for the term itself. Building on her classic articulation of refusal in *Mohawk Interruptus* (2014), Audra Simpson (2020), for example, has attempted to distinguish sovereignty as a Western form of exceptionalism and dominance from "sovereignty as Indigenous belonging, dignity, and justice" (686). In the latter context, the language of sovereignty has been central to Indigenous claims for self-governance, whether these claims are being presented to other Indigenous nations, to other governments (such as the US or Canadian), or to international tribunals. Sovereignty matters, therefore, because it is a way to talk about an ontology that makes land and water central to personhood, safety, and integrity; indeed, possession in this context dissolves the border between body and land.[11] This connection also holds within the Australian context, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2007b, 2) has argued: "Our sovereignty is embodied, it is ontological (our being) and epistemological (our way of knowing), and it is grounded within complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans and land. In this sense, *our sovereignty is carried by the body* and differs from Western constructions of sovereignty, which are predicated on the social contract model, the idea of a unified supreme authority, territorial integrity and individual rights" (emphasis mine). In these ontological recalibrations, where easy spatial and temporal binaries and Western hierarchies of being are refused, sovereignty becomes a mode of relationality rather than an instrument of exclusion and violence.

Similarly, Nishnaabeg scholar and writer Leanne Simpson (2017) discusses Indigenous governing structures as processual and emergent, systems of leadership that reflect the local landscape. The idea of nationhood that emerges from this relationality of context, land, and people reflects what she calls an "ecology of intimacy" (8), one grounded in connection, relationship, reciprocity, respect, and self-determination (see also Maynard and Simpson 2022). For Simpson, as for others, sovereignty cannot be rooted in recognition by the political form of

the nation-state because it is inherent and unceded. Instead, Indigenous scholars note, sovereignty emerges from the kind of "grounded normativity" that Glen Coulthard (2014) has argued grows through resurgent political and cultural practices. These are what Laura Harjo (2019) identifies as "practices of futurity" (13)—everyday community-based practices through which people recognize their own power to act and to self-determine—practices that bring a "radical sovereignty" into being. Conscious efforts to revitalize languages are among the ways to elaborate this kind of sovereignty, one that can also redound to new forms of economic autonomy (Cattelino 2008; Davis 2018). So are documentations of oral tradition, such as *The Mohawk Warrior Society: A Handbook on Sovereignty and Survival* (Hall 2023) and the more eventful moments of protest and the enactment of self-rule, such as NoDAPL (the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline), moments David Myer Temin calls "earthmaking" (2023, 15), practices of care and responsibility toward human and other-than-human beings. In these contexts, sovereignty resonates as decoloniality, a world-making project that defies the state's claim to unilateral and indivisible power, instead privileging care, accountability, relation, and interdependence.[12]

The Caribbean context too—where, as Michelle Stephens (2013) has argued, the very concept of *island-ness* fits the Caribbean region into the "geopolitical imagination of early modern Europe" (14)—offers genealogies of political philosophy that privilege relation and interdependence rather than linearity, teleology, and hierarchy. Europeans' understandings of islands as "early visual tropes of the utopic, insular features of the sovereign state," Stephens argues, tamed what she defines as the region's "archipelagic relationality" (14, 12), a relationality rooted not in the landmasses that dot the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean but in these bodies of water themselves. This relationality is what would have grounded Kamau Brathwaite's (1975) famous assertion that "the unity" of the Caribbean region "is submarine" (1),[13] as well as his rejection of the dialectic and his proposal of the "tidalectic" (Brathwaite 1999) as a way to read political theory through quotidian Caribbean life. The old woman sweeping sand from her yard every morning, her constant reiteration of a seemingly futile ritual, stands for Brathwaite as a constant reference to the Middle Passage, which brought her from Africa to Jamaica, and to travel that might in the future take her to another land mass, maybe a continent, maybe an island, "perhaps creative chaos" (Brathwaite 1999, 34). The "tidalectic" is a back-and-forth rather than a repetition (which is, on the other hand, what he calls "the Sisyphean statement"); it is a nonlinear phenomenon

of cyclical, rhythmic fluctuation with unpredictable and complex results. This rejection of fixity and embrace of a rhizomatic relation with others is also what constitutes Glissant's (1997) poetics of relation, already discussed briefly. In relation, truths are neither grasped nor proselytized, and identity is not rooted in a past or in a territory but is emergent, indeterminate, and interdependent. This earlier generation of Caribbean scholars embraced particle physics and chaos theory because they already knew that the contradictions facing people around the world would not be transcended by aspiring to control of the state.[14] Their iterations of sovereign-ing were thus grounded in nonteleological and fractal phenomena that also regularly appear as elements of Caribbean landscapes.[15]

More recent Caribbeanist scholarship has asked us to reconsider *marronage*, to think anew about Afro-Indigenous relations in the region, and to consider the forms of solidarity and relation that are forged through spiritual practice. Take, for example, Ronald Cummings's (2018) positioning of *marronage* as an assemblage, not merely a bid for freedom through flight from the plantation but also "a remaking of structures and possibilities of community and a renegotiation of relationships to space, land, and territoriality in response to ongoing structures of colonial violence and the forging of a range of practices for making Maroon life" (49). Such a positioning reflects a processual understanding of sovereignty as something that repeats, not just spatially throughout "Plantation America"—the term developed in 1957 by anthropologist Charles Wagley—but also temporally (see, for example, R. Price 1972, 2011; Besson 2016; Bilby 2006; Freitas 1978). It brings into view the struggles over the boundaries of sovereign maroon territory and how those struggles have continued beyond the abolition of slavery (the immediate context of their establishment, in Jamaica, through the 1739 treaty between the British government and both Leeward and Windward branches of maroons)[16] to the contemporary moment, when negotiations regarding land and access (to clean water, clean air) involve the independent Jamaican nation-state and the Chinese companies now involved in bauxite mining in the Cockpit Country. While the Maroon Wars in Jamaica may have eventfully occurred during the decade before the signing of the treaty, their articulation of terms of struggle and their conflicting visions of sovereignty continue to wash ashore, "in terms of recurring arcs and experiences of vulnerability and insecurity" (Cummings 2018, 49), at different levels of scale and through different modalities of articulation.

This approach to *marronage* also requires a more nuanced understanding of the ways maroons have come to embody "resistance" within the nationalist

(and "post"-nationalist) imagination. Indeed, scholars and commentators have for years demanded a public reconsideration of the historical role of maroons in quelling rebellions, given that their own juridical sovereignty depended on the return of those who had escaped from plantations or who otherwise threatened the viability of the plantation system. Consider the following story. In spring 2022, Jamaica's governor-general announced that April 8 would be known as National Chief Takyi (Tacky) Day. Chief Takyi led the longest insurrection of enslaved people in Jamaica, from 1760 to 1761. While the insurrection was inspired by the First Maroon War (1728–40), it was maroons who ultimately captured and beheaded Tacky, thereby ending the revolt. Intrinsic to attention to actually existing *marronage*, then, is also a reconsideration of the presumed solidarities on which our notions of collectivity are built.

It should not be seen as incidental that Afro-Indigenous relations, as Sylvia Wynter (n.d.) surmised in her epic work "Black Metamorphosis," may also have been grounded in sixteenth-century solidarities generated by *marronage*, solidarities that have largely been erased in the Caribbeanist canon (Newton 2013). Melanie Newton (2022) has argued that European imperial ethnocartography both created and reproduced this erasure through Janus-faced legal instruments distinguishing between an Indigenous continent and non-Indigenous islands. These distinctions persisted even as the Lesser Antilles resembled the continent demographically well into the eighteenth century, even as Afro-Indigenous populations consistently stymied British administrators' attempts to reinforce boundaries, and even as resistance to British colonial rule persisted and was militarily effective. The effect of this erasure is the reproduction of a dominant colonial narrative of Indigenous absence in the face of the ur-modernity of plantation-based monocultural, protocapitalist sugar production for export.

Engaging these relations has been the project of recent scholarship across critical Indigenous and critical Africana studies (see, for example, S. Jackson 2012; Cordis 2019; Byrd 2011; Maynard and Simpson 2022; King 2019). Ana-Maurine Lara's (2020) work with criollo traditionalists and feminist and LGBT activists in the Dominican Republic, for example, led her to argue for the elaboration of a "zambo consciousness," one that shifts analytic frames from *mestizaje* and "toward Afro-Indigenous solidarities manifest through the erotic, desires, sex, faith, friendships, and through embodied and spiritual struggles for queer freedom : Black sovereignty" (21). This is a freedom, needless to say, that exists beyond the state and instead emerges from knowledges, experiences, and spiritual practices that

Lara calls "criollo traditions," traditions that rupture the expectations and certainties of Christian colonial sovereignty: "Criollo traditions could reorient our beings toward other possibilities: the figure of the sovereign disappears and, in its place, emerge the *misterios*, the ancestors and the spirits that preside over the shifting relationships expressed through community; body-lands are not the object of conquest, the reflection of authority or power, but rather the material through which life forces are enabled" (125). Attending to the realm of the spiritual also requires an engagement with other inheritances and with the generations of transnational Black feminists who have long argued that freedom is realized as an everyday practice that conjoins the political, the spiritual, and the erotic.[17] This engagement necessarily alters not only our conceptualizations of the space-time of sovereign claims making but also our sense of the modalities through which something that might feel like sovereign-ing appears, flows, and recedes. If imperialism and slavery have afterlives in the context of the still-colonial present, then the modes and embodiments generated by refusals of the constrictions and constraints posed by these structures continue to circulate in unpredictable, though contingent, ways.

Our surrender to these modes and embodiments is necessarily guided by spirit, and this surrender requires not only an acknowledgment of the multiplicity and ongoing-ness of processes of dispossession, of the ways "violently dislocating transregional processes (conquest, colonialism, migraiton, war, wage labor) are rendered internal, are (literally) incorporated into people and their social and cultural practice" (Shaw 2002, 5). Surrender also requires faith, what Ajay Skaria (2022), in a brilliant essay on the figure of the "minor" in the work of Qadri Ismail and other contemporary subaltern studies scholars, defines as the "equality of vulnerability" (290). In tracing the difference between faith and belief (drawing from Ambedkar and Gandhi), Skaria argues that "at work in faith is a reverential equality with the sacred itself." He writes: "Precisely because we are acutely aware here that faith is groundless, we cannot subordinate ourselves to the sacred. Cannot: even as we surrender to the sacred, we are thrown back into ourselves in our freedom and equality to what we surrender to. As such, faith always intimates (even if it does not usually accomplish) a surrender without subordination, a vulnerable freedom with the sacred" (290). In the Jamaican context, we might think of this as the Rastafari I-and-I, a shared common essence with the divine, and indeed this is how Sylvia Wynter (1977) (following Hans Jonas) explores the implications of the Gnostic heresies. Understanding one's oneness with the divine produces a worldly transformation, a rejection of dominant

systems and a reconstitution of the self in relation to others. Faith, as outlined here, is a practice of knowing that is oriented toward a "messianic impossibility," a "striving to realize the impossible in the here and now" (Skaria 2022, 293), a cultivation of authority through a practice of unbounded love rather than violence.

What I am arguing is that we must be open to articulations of sovereignty that are not tethered to the state or the parameters of its institutions but are instead offered as practices, performances, and processes that refuse law and dominion and draw attention to alternative inheritances of governance, community, and ceremony. I do not stand alone in this approach; other Caribbeanists have made similar claims in their own attempts to understand the affective and performative ways leaders articulate sovereignty and generate authority, ways that engage with but sometimes stand in tense relation to more normative forms of legitimacy (Kivland 2020; Jaffe 2024). The genealogies of scholarship I have rendered here show us that we can, and must, attribute to gestures toward sovereign-ing the quotidian enactment of process rather than sweeping project, safety rather than security, affect and performance rather than law and dominion, by reading it through a phenomenological notion of inheritance, and the forms of "implicancy"—what Denise Ferreira da Silva (2017b) has understood as quantum-level entanglements that exceed the limits of space and time—that redound from this. Further, I am entreating us to appreciate these gestures—moments of what Kevin Quashie (2021) has called "aliveness"—while also resisting the impulse to "scale up," as it were, refusing to turn local (and sometimes ephemeral) practices of sovereign-ing into modalities for reforming liberal structures of governance, which is impossible in any case. If sovereignty is historically contingent, if it is neither unitary nor universal but is instead messy, interdependent, nested, and entangled,[18] then it can be, and often is, unhinged (Thomas and Masco 2023). If we can imagine surrender without subordination, as Skaria (2022) has articulated, then perhaps we can also imagine autonomy without authority, and sovereignty without stability. My argument is that we can do this if we reflect and invite vulnerability and intimacy, theoretically and methodologically—modes of experience that demand attunement to the corporeal.

Bodies matter here because they are integral not only to the elaboration and management of liberal promises of inclusion and citizenship but also to the refusal of dehumanizing ascriptions—as property, as non- or not-quite-human, as traffic-able, or as socially and politically dead (Patterson 1982; Wynter 2003). The Caribbean, unsurprisingly, was central to the development of imperial and

colonial knowledge about the body, not only during the early modern period of Spanish empire but also throughout the height of mercantilist colonialism throughout the British and French West Indies (Gómez 2017; Hogarth 2017, 2021). At the same time, transplanted Africans also developed a science of the body within New World plantation contexts, a science that was often advanced through such relational and embodied technologies as divination and possession (Palmié 2002; Gómez 2017). Stephan Palmié (2002) understands these technologies as providing a "record of the reflections of people on the moral texture of the world in which they conduct their daily business of being humans in the face of danger" (76), a co-constituted body of knowledge that emerged from and within the violent elaboration of modernity and one that was accessible analytically only through embodied attunement. The Black body is thus what Vanessa Agard-Jones (2013) has called a "scalar intertext" (184); it both indexes and reproduces local, regional, and global forms of power,[19] and it has the capacity to unsettle these both perceptibly and intangibly (Ferreira da Silva 2021).

Just as there are multiple genealogies of sovereignty, there are also multiple conceptualizations of the body and, therefore, of heritability and what it means to be a person.[20] I am interested in how we encounter and read those genealogies, and in what they might tell us about the modes of collective world-building that exist outside of but in relation to the juridical structures of sovereignty that govern modern Western political and social life. We know that Western political theory has been "profoundly somatophobic" (Threadcraft 2015, 208), an effect of Kantian critiques in which reason, interiority, and universality are located in the rational mind. For Cartesians, the mind-soul was trapped in (and therefore inseparable from) the body, whose subordination to the mind-soul also organized other subordinations—of non-Europeans to Europeans, of women to men, of colonized to colonizers (Covington-Ward and Jouili 2021). Moreover, the body was to be transparently apprehended (and controlled) through reason as an object among all other objects. In its purest elaboration, this process of apprehension led, analytically, to the forms of scientific racism and eugenics I discuss in chapter 1. During the period of conquest and throughout the transatlantic slave trade, however, what this process meant pragmatically was that Europeans were afforded interiority and subjectivity. Their closed bodies were not subject to violations by others, and also were not breached by spirits, and this condition is what purportedly allowed for the flourishing of mind. Black and Indigenous bodies, on the other hand, could never attain such interiority; their fleshiness—the conditions of possibility for

European interiority—was too penetrable.[21] Porous Black bodies thus became fungible flesh, whereas dispossessed Indigenous bodies became carnal, both lacking the interiority that would have made them legible as persons to imperialist adventurers.[22] While Cartesian dualisms have persisted across various philosophical lineages and developmentalist pragmatics, the emergence of phenomenology allowed us inroads that would move us beyond these Eurocentric binaries.[23]

The phenomenological lineage regarding embodiment in which I am most interested here is the one that moves from Husserl and Heidegger toward an understanding of the relationships between the body and conceptualizations of experience, both individually and communally, and this is a lineage that (within anthropology) begins with Marcel Mauss. Mauss's (1935) interventions regarding embodied habitus—that the ways we move are neither physiologically nor individually determined—provided inroads to thinking about bodily capacity, and therefore bodily perspectivity, as historical and social. If Mauss taught us that the body is not natural and universal, then Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) taught us that it is perceptual, where perception is indeterminate and preobjective (though not precultural). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not an object to be known by the mind but is instead the grounds for knowing, where the mind becomes instead the site of objectification.[24] As Thomas Csordas (1994) has put it, "Embodiment is the existential condition of possibility for culture and self" (12), and gleaning insights into the latter requires what he has called "somatic modes of attention," "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" (Csordas 1993, 138). These phenomenologists have seen the body as both a physiological and a social relation among bodies (T. Turner 1994)[25] and as a site of "perceptual processes that *end* in objectification" (Csordas 1994, 7); it is thus medium and mode of intersubjectivity (G. Weiss 1999). Within this formulation, the body is not an isolated object but is actively engaged in world-making. As the essential condition of being in the world (Heidegger's Da-sein), the entangled and emplaced relational body brings "History" and "Society" in dialogue with the day-to-day embodied practices of individuals and communities.

While this lineage is compelling, it has also produced certain analytic problems. A body that is perceptual and that is part of making a world must be a body that properly exists for itself, not as "flesh" (Spillers 1987), not as property, not as the grounds for modernity, but as self-possessed interiority. Rizvana Bradley (2023) has argued that the limit of phenomenology is constituted through its

refusal to "engage blackness as a serious theoretical problematic for 'moving beyond' the proper body" (82). "Black people," Bradley observes, "do not properly have bodies, insofar as such 'having' is in fact a linguistic concealment of a terrible claim: both to the presumptive ontic status of normative personhood and to the regimes of property and propriety to which the metaphysics of individuation are inextricably bound . . . flesh constitutes the body's very condition of (im)possibility" (87). The body is, for Bradley, a "racial apparatus" (83) that renders Black bodily sovereignty impossible; it is an entity that only indexes the ongoing violences of racial modernity, the conditions of possibility for Euro-American interiority. Bradley goes on to argue that "flesh is before the body in that it is everywhere subject to the body as racial machinery, violently placed at the disposal of those who would claim the body as property" (86). As a result, she states, "Phenomenology cannot furnish the conceptual tools for apprehending either the 'lived experience of the black' or the experiments in form which emerge from that experience, because black people have never had (which is to say, had the capacity to lay claim to) bodies in the sense presumed by phenomenology" (89). In a way, this is an important claim that serves the purpose of unsettling what she sees as overly celebratory anthropological investigations of corporeality that position bodies as "porous, affectable, malleable, or experimental" (82). However, for me, it is also a claim that presupposes a kind of historical boundedness that allows for no antecedent to the moment when racial terminology becomes tethered to civilizational hierarchies and notions of being human, the moment when we are conscripted within modernity (Scott 2004).

It is important to be attuned to alternative concepts of "bodiliness" (T. Turner 1994), to alternative modes of being and becoming such as the "pluriverse" (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Escobar 2020; Stengers 2010) or the kind of "anachoreography" that Fahima Ife has proposed as a "recursive practice of refusal" (2021, ix),[26] and to the coexistences and copresences that accompany bodies (Beliso-De Jesús 2015; de la Cadena 2015) not in order to descend into the realm of ethnographic particularity but to more properly understand how various challenges to the temporal teleologies of imperial philosophy and politics and their associated representational violences are articulated through the body. Moreover, this attunement allows us to pay attention to ways the body is not only "a means of passing on memory and history, it is also a means of *challenging, creating, and redefining* memory and history" (Covington-Ward 2016, 16). Inheritances, like bodies, are not stable.

My own feeling is that reading sovereignty through a phenomenological notion of inheritance helps us transit between flesh and body, moves us in and out of the world of totalizing ascription and toward potentiality and indeterminacy, toward the possibility of an interiority that honors other inheritances in which we are not engulfed by Enlightenment philosophical conceptualizations of space and time, form, and matter(ing) (see Ferreira da Silva 2017a, 2017b). Analytically, this releases us from the totalizing realms of colonial, poststructuralist, and Afropessimist discourse and toward an appreciation of performance and improvisation[27]—modes of practice, we will remember, that have also been central to Caribbean formulations of "giving-on-and-with." Everyday forms of bodily reverberation, for Brathwaite and Glissant as well as for us today, are modes through which to glean insights into sovereign-ing that are exorbitant, that in not being legible to liberal Enlightenment conceptions of value, or of space and time, or of transparency, also evade capture by its juridical norms. The Black body, then, is an archive not only of modernity's violences but also of its antecedents and its iterations yet to come.[28]

Finally, we return to the question of the body as an index of political community. Within ancient legal and philosophical formulations, this is the *corpus politicum*—echoing Plato's early formulation of human society as a collective body—itself derived from *corpus mysticum*, the Christian doctrine of the church as the mystical body of Christ. Hobbes's notion of the fictive body of the state had its roots in ancient Greek and Roman formulations of the sovereign as the head of the body and therefore its mind-soul, and in imperial Roman legal concepts of the corporation (*universitas*). It was Baldus de Ubaldis, however, who connected the theory of corporation to the ancient political and biological concept of the body politic, in which the whole body of a people forms a *populus* ruled by government, just as an individual is ruled by its soul. The soul, thus, persists as the mind-force of governance whose (consensual) authority over the individual was absolute. This would have been the position advanced by Hobbes; as Shatema Threadcraft (2015) has argued, "The state is but an artificial body for Hobbes; sovereignty, its vaunted soul" (208). Yet, if bodies don't everywhere conform to Cartesian notions of the mind-soul–body divide, if the soul can exist and act independently of the body, and if we perceive (ourselves, others, broader social collectivities and capacities) through our bodies, then paying attention to collective practices of embodiment can offer us insights into inheritances that locate the sovereign impulse outside of, but in relation to, European juridical norms.

If there is an argument for the need to find another word to identify the sovereign impulse, it emerges from this proposition, and if I had to choose one, it would be myal, which is, as I elaborate in chapter 3, a state in which the body is released—if only ephemerally and vibrationally—from the juridical realm altogether. What I hope to convince you of here, however, is that it is the *doing* and not the *naming* of sovereignty that is key to separating Western juridical notions of sovereignty from iterations of sovereign-ing grounded in exorbitant embodiment, in spiritual practice, in quotidian life, and in relation.

Let me suggest that our attempts to chart these terrains of sovereign-ing (and the modes through which we chart them) are perhaps best understood as forms of speculation, "the forming of a theory or conjecture without firm evidence" (Oxford English Dictionary), or the "investment in stocks, property, or other ventures in the hope of gain but with the risk of loss." The questions that are raised here have to do with evidence (What exactly is firm evidence?), and risk (How risky is too risky?). Speculation, therefore, invites questions of faith, but it is also the driver of conspiracy, itself an attempt to relationally read bodies of circumstantial evidence in order to draw conclusions about things we "know" happened but have no firm proof of. Evidence itself resonates multiply, and it is often not self-evident despite the word's etymological roots in notions of visibility and legibility. If we imagine evidence as something that can establish a truth claim, then we are privileging a positivist and juridical vision for ethnographic inquiry, one with roots in liberal, Enlightenment ideas encouraging reasonable deduction on the basis of evidence over "'slavish' and hidebound" obedience to authority (Kuipers 2013, 400). Evidence here becomes a question of science and law, institutional spaces in which a body could move "seamlessly from being viewed as person to property to evidence" (Crossland 2009, 71).[29]

But if we understand evidence to pertain not just to facts—objects and events that are somehow seen to exist outside a research relation—but also to affects and experiences, which inevitably include the ethnographer,[30] then we must understand evidence, as Kirsten Hastrup (2004, 461) has argued, as "enfolded within the relational nature of anthropological knowledge that—epistemologically—precludes the use of evidence as an independent measure of validity" (see also Strathern 2008). When we ask epistemological questions about what evidence is, how it is recognized, for whom it is legible or sensible, and how it is valued, we are thinking about evidence as a problem of the possibility of representation and narration. We are questioning the limits of legibility, and bringing into being the

grounds for nonteleological relation on post-but-still-colonial terrain. We are attuning ourselves to how people make sense of their experiences in the world and how, in doing so, they potentially refute the inscriptions, categorical or temporal, that shape others' assessments of their being in the world. And we are enacting what Ana-Maurine Lara (2020) has called speculative anthropology, "an anthropology that eschews positivism's imperatives and instead attends to the poetics of being" (24).

Each chapter of *Exorbitance* takes as a point of departure an evidentiary mode, asking what these modes tell us (or what they are designed to tell us) about bodily inheritance and knowing, and speculating about the forms of sovereign-ing this knowing generates. In the first chapter, I explore the concept of trace evidence through an analysis of an early eugenics study conducted in Jamaica. The second chapter mobilizes testimonial evidence in its exploration of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, and the third considers embodied evidence in relation to the performed ritual of *kumina*, a Congolese-based ancestral practice in eastern Jamaica. While the common assumptions undergirding the eugenics study in chapter 1 are that Black people in the New World were unable to inherit the gifts of the West, and while chapter 3 shows scholars and practitioners alike making claims to a history of Being that is not tethered to New World inheritances, chapter 2 limns a bimodal attempt to create practices and ontologies that extend beyond the state but also take advantage of the state system. This is an issue that has resurfaced now as the Jamaican government has opened an avenue for the legal cultivation of ganja for sale on medicinal markets. As I have already stated, my aim is to read the embodiments and articulations of sovereignty as emergent, ephemeral, processual, and—ultimately—relational. But I am also charting a story about the pasts and presents (and maybe the futures) of anthropology, one that moves from an obsession with measuring and collecting to cooperative praxis, in order to explore what it could mean to put our bodies on the line and to acknowledge that our bodies are always—unequally—on the line (Berry et al. 2017).

The mode of investigation that undergirds this book is critical now as we grapple with how to organize political life in a global context in which the violence that (re)produces racial inequalities and insecurity globally have only deepened. Today, the neoliberal dynamics that prioritize American, and recently Chinese, political and economic interests have further entrenched a condition in which the commonly cited benefits of citizenship are not being provided by the state but instead must be sought in and through other forms of community (includ-

ing those that are transnational and diasporic). Attending to these forms releases us from the grip of the nation-state and attunes us to what has been disavowed, misrecognized, and destroyed through the global historical transformations glossed as "modernity"—specifically, the Black and Indigenous knowledges, experiences, and spiritual practices that undermine spatiotemporal teleologies and boundaries between self and other, human and nonhuman.

Throughout *Exorbitance*, I hope to demonstrate that the Caribbean region, foundational to the initial violent elaboration of Western modernity, can now teach us something about its unsettling. It can teach us that moving beyond liberal commitments to self-determination to embrace the forms of world-making that have always existed alongside and in relation to modern dispossessions might generate the conditions for sovereign-ing, a sovereign-ing that is rooted—at least in part—in collective, nonteleological, and boundless embodied practice toward a relational, iterative mode of being, however ephemeral. I also hope to enact an analytic process that responds to the questions confronting contemporary anthropologists: What would twenty-first-century anthropological scholarship look like if it invited vulnerability, if it surrendered to a praxis of cooperation, an openness to new archives, and a sweeping interrogation of the relationships between discipline and method? And, finally, I hope to give one account of what dance can do for the world,[31] of what is produced when we are attuned to, and engaging, each other's kinespheres.

Notes

INTRODUCTION. SOVEREIGN-ING: THE BODY AS METHOD

1. Here, I am referencing Georges Bataille (2017), who argued that sovereignty should be grounded in immediacy rather than future-thinking, consumption rather than production, and the desire for nothingness rather than attachment. To refuse conventionally iterated sovereignty for Bataille's sovereignty "*in the storm*" (342) is to seek a life "*beyond utility*" (198) and beyond the engulfment of recognition. What he called the "*human quality*" should not be sought in the language of either democratic rights and responsibilities or socialist collectivity, but in the one "who refuses *the given*" (343). This iteration of sovereignty also refuses the world of "projects" and eschews the expectation embedded in the temporality of the future anterior or the notion of progress or the politics of recognition.
2. Heritability has, in fact, been a key term in thinking about notions of class, race, and behavior in Jamaica (J. Alexander 1977; Austin-Broos 1994). While this is not the immediate referent for my thinking about inheritance in this book, it does inform my understanding of how these notions circulate, and how they are attached to particular bodies in particular moments.
3. On recognition and elimination, see Wolfe 2006 and Morgensen 2011; on Black people as dispossessed and depoliticized, see Spillers 1987; on dominant settler reckonings of time and place, see Bruyneel 2007; Rifkin 2017; and Harris 1993.
4. For an extended discussion of the prehistories of nondomination and autonomy, see Graeber and Wengrow 2021.
5. See Curiel 2007, 2021; Espinosa Miñoso 2017; and Aguila-Way 2014. For overviews of Latin American autonomous feminisms, see also Laó-Montes 2016 and Martínez-Cairo and Buscemi 2021. For analyses of the Red Thread Organization in Guyana, see Trotz 2007, 2010, 2021; and Peake and Trotz 1999. For reflections on Sistren Women's Theatre Collective in Jamaica, see Ford-Smith 1999; and Ford-Smith with Sistren 1994. And for a literary analysis of Grenadian feminist reflections on the revolution, see Lambert 2020.
6. I'm thinking here with Irina Silber (2010, 2022) and Courtney Desiree Morris (2023).
7. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) has argued, "The possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty discursively disavow and dispossess the Indigenous subject

of an ontology that exists outside the logic of capital, by always demanding our inclusion within modernity on terms that it defines" (191).

8. See, especially, Stoller 1994, which argues against those scholars of collective memory who read possession as text rather than as bodily practice and sensory experience. See also Covington-Ward 2016 and Masquelier 2001.
9. I thank Ana-Maurine Lara for this insight, which she offered on reading an earlier draft of this discussion.
10. For a somewhat different perspective on what they identify as "theopolitics," see also McAllister and Napolitano 2020, 2021
11. I thank Danilyn Rutherford for this insight.
12. On sovereignty as interdependence, see Cattelino 2023. For an analysis that similarly positions Idle No More (2013–14) as a form of countersovereignty, grounded in deep relationality with other humans, water, and land, see Melamed 2015.
13. David Scott (2013) understands this intervention by Brathwaite as a humanist incursion into Caribbean studies, which had been, to that point, predominantly social scientific. This incursion was meant both to displace the centrality of structuralist and Marxist interpretations of plantation economies, and to reorient critical attention from top-down analyses of the problems of the postcolonial state to bottom-up engagements with popular action and worldviews.
14. This attunement to chaos also suffuses Antonio Benítez-Rojo's (1996) rendering of the relation between the plantation and the sea, and of the Caribbean region as a meta-archipelago in which processes of infinite differentiation and repetition correlate. The Caribbean, for Benítez-Rojo, is fractal, a "spiral galaxy tending outward—to the universe—that bends and folds over its own history, its own inwardness" (36). Here, again, we see the elaboration and embrace of what seems unpredictable but is nonetheless governed by dynamic regularities, an attunement to the different positions from which histories of contact, conquest, creolization, and *cimarronaje* emerge and are experienced. At the same time, the territorial proliferation of plantation-based sugar production for export allows us insights into the dynamics of a "changing same" throughout the region. The repetition of the sugar plantation, Benítez-Rojo shows us, is dynamically conditioned by its relation with other forms of social and economic organization, and by the generational temporalities of its establishment in different Caribbean territories. Like Glissant, Benítez-Rojo demands a move away from teleologies and toward (unresolvable) process, away from the certain identities of nationalism and toward chaos. "I start from the belief that Caribbeanness is a system full of noise and opacity," he writes; "[it is] a nonlinear system, an unpredictable system, in short a chaotic system beyond the total reach of any specific kind of knowledge or interpretation of the world" (295).
15. Waves are an obvious example here, but so are plantations (Benítez-Rojo 1996) and sand (Agard-Jones 2012).

16. The National Library of Jamaica notes that oral histories conducted with maroons demonstrate that the First Maroon War actually began in 1655, which is when England took imperial control of Jamaica from Spain. "The English," in "History Notes: Information on Jamaica's Culture and Heritage," National Library of Jamaica, accessed January 8, 2025, https://nlj.gov.jm/history-notes-jamaica/.
17. Here, I am of course thinking of Lorde 1984 and M. Alexander 2005. For more recent work, see J. Allen 2011; Gill 2018; Berry 2021, 2025; Castor 2017.
18. Here, I am drawing from Barker 2005; Sturm 2017; Rutherford 2018; Cattelino 2008, 2023; A. Simpson 2014; and Dennison 2012.
19. See also Farquhar and Lock 2007.
20. The New Melanesian Ethnography is perhaps the most iconic of this type of interrogation (Geertz 1975; Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988; Mosko 2015), but this topic has also been addressed by Africanists (Covington-Ward 2016; Comaroff 1985; Wariboko 2018; Oladipo 1992), Caribbeanists (E. James 2008; Jordan forthcoming), and scholars of Indigenous Australia (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Myers 1979). Indeed, many scholars have turned to African diasporic religions to show how an Afro-diasporic self is "removable, external, and multiple" (Strongman 2019, 10; see also Covington-Ward and Jouili 2021) and have argued that a distinction between the material and immaterial components of a person cannot be mapped onto Cartesian dualisms. This of course would be the legacy of continental beliefs among the Yoruba, for example, who hold that a person is made of the material body (which includes the feelings and psychic life that are governed by the internal organs); a life-giving element (which is immortal and intangible, and which can leave the body and assume tangible form, perform activities, and return to the body); and an individuality element (which is unique to the person) (Oladipo 1992). Indeed, across many African communities, personhood is understood as processual, communal, and relational, something that is recognized and conferred by others as a result of growing into responsibility and accountability within the community (Hoekema 2008; Mbiti 1970; Wariboko 2018).
21. Many Indigenous South Americans, for example, perceived the body as "populated by extra-human intentionalities endowed with their own perspectives" (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 472) and therefore as continuously and actively made through the sharing of bodily substances. Black bodies, too, were permeable not only to the whims of estate owners and managers but also to "the spiritual hosts that had animated [them] prior to [their] capture by the West and its philosophy" (Strongman 2019, 4).
22. On fungibility, see Spillers 1987; Hartman 1997; and Z. Jackson 2020; on carnality and corporeality, see Povinelli 2006. It is worth noting that Indigenous populations in South America, too, perceive of the body as "populated by extra-human intentionalities endowed with their own perspectives" (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 472), and therefore as continuously made. Kinship, Viveiros de Castro argued, was "a process of active assimilation of individuals through the sharing of bodily substances, sexual

and alimentary—and not as a passive inheritance of some substantial essence" (480–81).

23. For review articles, see Lock 1993; Farnell 1999; Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Van Wolputte 2004; and R. Morris 1995. See also Crossland 2009, 2012; and for a critique of poststructuralist approaches to the body, see T. Turner 1994, 1995. An entire literature on embodied cognition has emerged in philosophy, coming from ecological psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, linguistics, and robotics, which rejects the computational dynamics of cognitive science and emphasizes a study of the body's interactions with environment as the basis for cognition. These scholars argue that the body learns and produces knowledge, and their interest is in how our bodies shape our thoughts (see, for example, Lakoff and Johnson 1981). Thomas Csordas (2008) has argued against this position, arguing that embodied experience cannot be interpreted through cognitive and linguistic models—it is not "body language" nor "non-verbal communication."
24. This, of course, represents an argument against Saussurian structuralism as it was taken up by Lévi-Strauss, which locates deep cultural structures like myth, language, and cosmologies in the categories of mind.
25. Terence Turner (1994, 1995) would not have seen himself as a phenomenologist, and indeed his critique of poststructuralism revolved around a view of the body as passive and naked prior to its construction by discourse(s), a construction that then directed attention to the management and control of individual desires, rather than to the broader spheres of material, political, and pragmatic action in which people were engaged. However, I am citing him here to include his insights into bodily plurality and the "multifold ways [the body] is constituted by relations with other bodies" (1994, 28).
26. For more on refusal in anthropology, see Thomas 2024.
27. By "improvisation," I mean here to invoke the eschewal of universalisms, totalizations, and characterizations that push us to situate our perspectivity in relation to concrete temporal and material contexts (Drewal 1992; Covington-Ward 2016; and Farnell 1999).
28. Nigerian poet and theater scholar Esiaba Irobi (2006) has argued that phenomenology can, in any case, be fully expressed only "through a bodily participatory experience" (7), with participation here understood as a practice that exceeds linear and material conceptualizations of time and space. By claiming that thought in African continental communities is validated through symbolic action and transmitted through performed structures such as proverbs, myths, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals, Irobi argues that those Africans who were trafficked to the so-called New World were "mobile libraries of their culture's total intelligence" (5). The body, as he puts it, thus "functions as a somatogenic instrument as well as a site of multiple discourses which absorbs and replays, like music recorded on vinyl, epistemologies of faith and power grooved into it by history" (3).

29. Even within this juridical framework, however, evidence, or valorizations of different kinds of evidence, is not static. For more on this in relation to race, see, for example, Chinn 2000.
30. See, for example, several contributions to the volume *How Do We Know*? (Chua, High, and Lau 2008), most particularly Emma Varley's. See also Hastrup 2004.
31. "What can dance do for the world?" is a question choreographer Reggie Wilson, director of the Fist and Heel Performance Group, asks in every class, workshop, and gathering. Reggie and I cotaught a kinesthetic anthropology class together when he was a fellow with the Center for Experimental Ethnography, and we realized that we have been asking the same questions on parallel paths.

CHAPTER 1. TRACES

A version of this chapter will appear in Amade M'charek and Lisette Long, eds., forthcoming, *Evidence on Display* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press).

1. See Carby (2019) for an analysis of how every Jamaican family has a Black branch and a white branch.
2. For an analysis of German racial atlases, see Mak 2020; on Dutch racial science and anthropometry in colonial Indonesia, see Sysling 2016; and on various collections of images in South Africa, see Campt 2017. As Campt (2017) writes, these kinds of collections were "made to identify, classify, isolate and distinguish" through physical attributes (75).
3. Harvard was, at the time, the center of eugenics education, offering four separate courses.
4. In *Race Crossing*, Davenport and Steggerda acknowledge Mr. D. H. Hall, Second Assistant Colonial Secretary; Dr. B. M. Wilson, Superintending Medical Officer; Mr. P. J. O'Leary Bradbury, Director of Education; Mr. Frank Cundall, Director of the Jamaica Institute (Institute of Jamaica); Dr. B. E. Washburn, Rockefeller Foundation, Director of the Jamaica Hookworm Commission; Dr. Crutchley, Director of the Gordon Town branch of the Jamaica Hookworm Commission; Mr. A. J. Newman, Principal of Mico College; Rev. J. F. Gartshore; Mr. Graham, the Chief of the Kingston Fire Department; Miss Ethel Henderson, Director of the City Crèche in Kingston; Mr. Harrell, Inspector General (Police); and Inspector Knolls, Sargeant-Major Higgins, and Corporal Ford (Police).
5. Sydney Rhoden is the only assistant named in the book. Steggerda stayed in touch with Rhoden, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Rhoden wrote Steggerda from time to time looking for work—first should Steggerda return to Jamaica and later because he had emigrated to New York City. Davenport and Steggerda had first hired as assistant Sydney Carby, but after Steggerda returned from the holidays in winter 1926, Carby had taken another job. Box 16, Folder 8, Steggerda Collection, Otis Historical Archives [OHA], National Museum of Health and Medicine (hereafter cited as Steggerda Collection).