
Racial Villainy: Cape Verdean Characters in White-Authored US Literature

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Abstract:

Cape Verdeans are largely invisible to mainstream America, in part because they have virtually no presence in white-authored US literature. The half-million Cape Verdeans currently living in the US represent the largest diaspora of voluntary immigrants from Africa. Arriving as early as 1778, they have established supportive communities and joined US society while maintaining their own unique traditions. This essay addresses the rare white-authored literary works between 1850 and 1950 that feature Cape Verdean characters. Most authors, like HP Lovecraft and Frank Shay, reinforced society's racist prejudices against the so-called "Portuguese niggers," portraying them as bestial villains and inhuman local color. Herman Melville, on the other hand, satirized society's racist attitudes toward the "Gees." However, criticizing ugly depictions is not the same as celebrating Cape Verdean culture, especially when a text expresses the attitude that the oppressed minority is inferior and helpless without the aid of white paternalism.

Cape Verdeans, like other minority groups in the United States, strive to promulgate an accurate cultural narrative and a positive depiction of their personhood. However, Cape Verdean-American historian Marcel Gomes Balla has called them "the most neglected minority group in America" (9). Hyperbole perhaps, but certainly a representative opinion of his community. Few non-Cape Verdeans know this community exists, let alone that it represents hundreds of thousands who, "as early as 1778" (Duignan and Gann 364), emigrated from a small archipelago just off the coast of West Africa. Few know that these bi-racial people hold the distinction of being "the only group of African Americans to come to the United States as voluntary immigrants rather than as enslaved persons" (Fluehr-Lobban 98). Few know they have been attacked verbally and physically "for being what others perceived as black" (Sanchez) when, in fact, generations of Cape Verdean immigrants have actively resisted being conflated with either African Americans or mainland Africans, asserting their own unique "diasporic identity" (Gibau 119). Early in the twentieth century, the largest Cape Verdean communities, in New England, formed local organizations to help new immigrants adapt to American life without losing their cultural identity (Lopes 198). Today, advocacy groups like CVC UNIDO, which represents "over 60,000 Cape Verdeans in the Greater Boston area," embrace "a mission to promote the power and the potential of the Cape Verdean community" ("Organizational History").

These organizations work against a willful ignorance that has confined many dark-skinned Cape Verdeans to the hatred, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices of the black and white binary in the US. Immigrants and their descendants have faced bitter racism including derogatory epithets like "Gees," "Portygees," and "Portuguese niggers" (Pap 113). Cape Verdean-American Danielle Porter Sanchez recounts how her father, raised in Boston during the 1960s and 1970s, "had bricks thrown at him and was called a nigger more times than he can count." Her brother also faced daily taunts and violence several decades later in Texas. Thus, achieving greater tolerance and understanding for Cape Verdeans and their

culture requires a decolonization of the mind that, according to Makarand Paranjape, must be “more centered on the Self than on the Other. By decolonizing myself, I mean developing myself and my society fully, realizing our potential, enlarging our capacities—rather than displacing, overthrowing or defeating the Other” (Judge). To achieve this, historian Marcel Balla demands Cape Verdeans embrace their *caboverdianidade* and Anglo-Americans “re-evaluate their treatment of US Cape Verdeans” (11), recognizing the group’s humanity and cultural individuality.

Cape Verdean-American artists, musicians, and writers have done their part to decolonize the American mind. In just the last two decades, numerous authors have used their creative talents to communicate personal experiences and cultural traditions, including Jarita Davis’s *Return Flights* (2016), Vasco Pires’s *Soul & Spirit* (2010), Joaquim Manuel Andrade’s *Korda Mininu, Korda! A Cape Verdean-American Play* (2004), Lena Britto’s *Yankee mericana! my Cape Verdean odyssey* (2002), Louis Joseph Babbitt’s *Visions of Wisdom* (2002), and Nuno Martins *Abandoned by Wolves Raised by Flowers* (1998). These published poems, memoirs, and plays give Cape Verdeans a more positive public presence, as have national and local events like the annual Cape Verdean Heritage Day in Brockton, MA, the 2014 Cape Verdean American Film Festival in Washington D.C., and “The Cape Verdean Connection,” centerpiece for the Smithsonian Institution’s Festival of American Folklife in 1995 (Hurley-Glowa 146).

Nonetheless, mainstream society remains ignorant of this group, in part, because most depictions of Cape Verdeans in white-authored fiction during the last two centuries have been unflattering, reductive, and inaccurate. Balla explains that “Cape Verdeans are usually at the lower end of the social strata in America and lost in a world where they are virtually non-existent in the view of official US policy” (93). Their public persona has been restricted to racial stereotypes, such as simpleminded lackeys and evil criminals (Pires 80), hence other than Herman Melville, who satirized these stereotypes, the few white authors who created Cape Verdean characters made them bestial villains, helpless victims, and non-human “local color” for naturalistic novels set in New England. Since demonizing the dark-skinned Other has been central to the construction of whiteness in the US and embedded in the Eurocentric literary tradition (McLaren *et al.*), Cape Verdean-Americans have faced a quandary that has long plagued African Americans. One difference is that as a smaller minority they are unable to duplicate the wealth of scholarship focused on African American history, culture, and literature.

Another difference is the transnational identity of those who remain connected to family and culture on the Cape Verde islands. For Cape Verdeans who fully disconnect from their homeland and identify as African American, the Négritude movement may provide “solidarity in their common ideal of affirming pride in their shared black identity and African heritage, and reclaiming African self-determination, self-reliance, and self-respect” (Sani 404). However, many seek to reclaim a different type of African heritage, one centered more on ethnicity than race consciousness, resulting in “a fractured diaspora” (Gibau 262). They offer an alternative approach to self-identification: “actively reshaping the boundaries of racial categories by creating a space for cultural differentiation” (Gibau 405). Early immigrants began creating their own space by rejecting US Immigration Service labels like “black Portuguese” or “African Portuguese” (Halter

35), and ever since, "Cape Verdeans in America have been struggling to be recognized as a distinct ethnic group with a specific cultural heritage" (Firth 221). This heritage is maintained through acts like telling traditional stories, cooking familiar foods, and speaking "Kriolu, the mother tongue and the language of intimacy" (Meintel 31). Contesting the way race is constructed in the US, these Cape Verdean-Americans "negotiate their identities as multiple and transgressive" (Gibau 265), a perspective that has garnered the attention of sociologists but not literary critics.

Despite the important strides of the multiculturalism movement, a mere handful of essays on Melville represent the entire scholarly analysis of Cape Verdean characters in white-authored US literature. Certainly there needs to be more scholarly attention on literary works written by Cape Verdean-Americans themselves, but I propose that an analysis of their portrayal in white popular fiction engages the brutal attitudes they have faced and exposes how difficult it has been to establish a favorable public presence and a strong literary voice. Although this essay does not present anything new about racial prejudice itself, it does discuss the important reality of the black diaspora being subsumed into a monolithic view of "blackness" in US literature, and by extension US society. Not only is it important to read the Cape Verdeans' actual stories, but it is important to analyze why mainstream America has conflated this group with African Americans, who have a vastly different ethnic background and cultural identity. It is troubling that white-authored US literature lacks positive, or even accurate, portraits of Cape Verdean-Americans, and perhaps just as troubling that recent literary scholars have not investigated this oversight.

The negative images in literary texts ignore barriers Cape Verdean immigrants have overcome in terms of language, labor rights, and citizenship, in addition to their struggle against xenophobia and racism to gain civil rights and self-respect. It also diminishes the rich cultural and artistic traditions they have shared with many New England communities and the challenges faced by subsequent generations born in the US. By reducing dark-skinned Cape Verdeans to a racial stereotype, white-authored US literature erases the unique and complex aspects of a whole culture. Decolonizing the American mind requires a deeper examination of the texts that established the erroneous perspective in the first place. Thus, this essay discusses how the portrayal of Cape Verdeans as racial inferiors by white authors, with the exception of Melville, from the final decades of slavery through early-twentieth-century fiction fails to present their culture as distinct, complex, and equal.

While Cape Verdeans have been discounted in literature, the real-life immigrants have been studied by several historical scholars. Marilyn Halter describes the Cape Verde archipelago as a group of "twenty-one islands and islets in a crescent shape stretching from 283 to 448 miles off the west coast of Africa" (1). Previously deserted, the islands were officially discovered by Portuguese explorers in 1460. Two years later, Halter explains, Portugal's Prince Henry began sending colonists, authorizing the establishment of sugar cane and cotton plantations and the importation of enslaved Africans as laborers. However, the islands' desert-like climate was not conducive to agriculture of any kind, so the colony became a strategic weigh station for explorers, whalers, and slave traders. Famous travelers visited, including Vasco

da Gama in 1497, Christopher Columbus in 1498, and Charles Darwin in 1832. The US Navy's African Squadron used Cape Verde as a base from 1843 to 1861, patrolling Africa's western coast to stop slave trading by American ships. Despite centuries of color prejudice, the islands developed a strong creole culture and an almost entirely interracial population. In 1975, after decades of struggle, the colony won its independence and became the Republic of Cabo Verde.

The early appearances of Cape Verdeans in US literature occurred when slavery was central to both American and Cape Verdean societies. According to Stephen Kantrowitz, black Americans at that time sought not just equal rights, but social acceptance and love. Yet, many Anglo-Americans in the 1840s and 1850s believed that dark-skinned people were inferior and unworthy of legal or emotional support. Those who opposed slavery were not exempt from this view, as "an aversion to slavery was by no means synonymous with racial liberalism" (Dippel 146). While Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 anti-slavery bombshell *Uncle Tom's Cabin* insists slaves and former slaves be protected from violence, the African American characters are not deemed equal to their white benefactors. Richard Yarborough posits that Stowe's "commitment to challenging the claim of black inferiority was frequently undermined by her own endorsement of racial stereotypes" (47). Jane Gardiner equates Stowe with her character Miss Ophelia in her desire to help the slave Topsy without actually wanting to touch or smell her. Thomas Graham explains that Stowe was not alone among anti-slavery activists in not wanting African Americans in their communities, preferring a policy of sending former slaves to Africa.

Similarly, white Cape Verdean author José Evaristo D'Almeida, in his 1856 romance *O Escravo* (*The Slave*), both challenged and reinforced traditional racial stereotypes on the islands. Like Stowe, D'Almeida advocated the abolition of slavery, legal in Cape Verde until 1873. While the novel "allows the Other to cease to be an Object in order to transform itself into a Subject" (Portugal 58), the black subjects still remain inferior to the white subjects. The novel only allows its cross-race lovers to be together in death, and the dark-skinned characters who remain alive only find happiness when they "return" to the African mainland. According to Isanilda Soares, Stowe and D'Almeida "construct their black characters as stereotypical others, but they depict the light-skin characters as superior both culturally and physically. The bi-racial characters are portrayed as the ones who possess beauty and intelligence as an inheritance from their European ancestry, while blacks are relegated to the margins" (iv). For Stowe and D'Almeida, justice and brotherhood were abstract social goals, a means of recognizing a group's rights without accepting individuals from the group as social equals.

American explorer and author Benjamin Morrell also conveyed abstract outrage at the conditions of slaves on the Cape Verde islands. His popular 1832 book *A Narrative of Four Voyages* professes sympathy for the "wretched negroes" on plantations, calling the slave owners "unfeeling oppressors" (260). However, Morrell's disgust with the institution did not lead him to see the slaves as individual human beings. He did not interact with them, nor was he interested in learning about their culture. Morrell shared the paternalistic attitude many anti-slavery whites felt toward African Americans (Trodd 340), deeming Cape Verdeans a cause to be championed, but not intelligent, gentle, industrious humans who could look after

their own affairs. Because he considered political and social power the exclusive purview of white men, Morrell expected dark-skinned Cape Verdeans to accept socio-political subordination as long as it was humane.

Nonetheless, many slaves refused to be helpless and passive. Scores of them escaped the islands and joined European and American whaling crews during the 1780s (Howard 11). Morrell notes that the plantation owners vigorously discouraged the flight of their “property” (259) by denying them the use of boats, even though fishing was essential for survival. John DeWitt estimates that approximately half of the sailors aboard Nantucket whaling ships between 1800-1830 were Cape Verdean (66), many of whom eventually started new lives in America. Frequent droughts and famines caused even more Cape Verdean to immigrate to the US, particularly New England, throughout the nineteenth century.

Rarely did the dark-skinned immigrants from Cape Verde gain the equality or the opportunities they hoped for in America. Those who could not pass as white faced bitter racial and ethnic prejudice (Saucier). Such discrimination was untenable to Herman Melville, who warned that it contradicted America’s deepest social and political ideals. Unlike the whites that approached racial inequality from a theoretical distance, Melville expressed respect for the humanity and wisdom of dark-skinned individuals, and a number of his stories included realistic portrayals of “Portuguese Negro” sailors. Although Cape Verdean characters play minor roles in his novels *Omoo* (1847) and *White-Jacket* (1850), these characters are distinct and honorable individuals, not objectified or dehumanized. In *Omoo*, when a Cape Verdean crewman becomes ill and dies, he is beautifully memorialized by Antone, “a Portuguese, from the Cape-de-Verd Islands” (67). Sidney Kaplan notes that “Melville does not refer to him as a ‘Gee or in any way derogate him” (32). The act of naming this minor character and demonstrating his human compassion exemplified Melville’s respect for members of all races and ethnicities.

In *Moby Dick* (1851), there is at least one Cape Verdean character, the “St. Jago’s Sailor.” In addition, the harpooner Ahasuerus Daggoo, a “gigantic, coal-black negro-savage” from Africa, was likely inspired by 6’6” Cape Verdean-American Joseph Broadrick, a whaler living in Boston at the time (Burt *et al.* 59). Daggoo faces the same discrimination as Cape Verdeans living in America at the time. Melville’s ship-world problematizes this racism, challenging stereotypes and modelling equality, mutual respect, and brotherhood. Daggoo has moral strength and pride for his heritage, speaking and fighting against the insults of white men without degrading himself. Daggoo is multi-layered and believable as a human being; he is sharp-witted with a distinct personality, a good sense of humor, and a practical intelligence. He surely proves to be a nobler figure than Mr. Flask, the ship’s racist third mate.

In addition to being minor characters in Melville’s sea novels, Cape Verdean-Americans were the subject of his unsigned story “The ‘Gees,” published in *Harper’s* in 1856. In it, Melville challenged readers to notice that there was a sizable Cape Verdean population in several New England coastal towns. Moreover, he satirized the racist attitude of mainstream America, which only recognized the negative physical, mental, and moral characteristics of Cape Verdeans and, therefore, mistook the majority of them “for naturalized citizens badly sunburnt” (348).

The term “Gee” was used as an epithet for Portuguese-Africans, who the narrator denigrates as a mix of European criminality and “an aboriginal race of negroes, ranking pretty high in incivility, but rather low in stature and morals” (343). From this statement it is easy to see why some critics have claimed the story merely perpetuated pre-existing racial stereotypes. Kaplan, for example, argued that both “The ‘Gees” and “Benito Cereno” are racist stories, which directly contrast the more progressive racial attitudes in Melville’s earlier works: “a plummet-like drop from the unconditionally democratic peaks of *White Jacket* and *Moby Dick*—an ‘artistic sublimation’ not . . . of anti-slaveryism, but rather of black primitivism dear to the hearts of slavery’s apologists” (26). The narrator in “The ‘Gees” seeks credibility by alluding to the racist theories of Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon. These contemporary ethnologists argued in their 1854 works *Types of Mankind* and “Is Man One or Many?” for the scientific and biblical “truths” that prove Caucasians superior to all other races and ethnicities. Their theory and its biological “facts” were hailed by many as legitimization of racial and ethnic stereotypes, allowing slavery apologists to assert that it was the white man’s duty and destiny to dominate. Melville’s racist readers would have laughed with, rather than at, the narrator’s mainstream attitude that the Cape Verdean sailor was a primitive “monkey” (347).

However, the fact that the narrator’s grotesquely racist attitude contrasts sharply with the attitude of tolerance, understanding, and brotherhood in other works by Melville suggests that the prejudices in “The ‘Gees” should be read as the narrator’s, not Melville’s. Several literary scholars have asserted that the story is meant as a satire of America’s racist attitudes and indicts the nation’s slavocracy. Conscientious readers are supposed to reconsider the attitudes of slavery apologists, including the ethnologists who viewed African Americans’ physical, moral, and intellectual characteristics through the lens of racism. Melville, according to Karcher, “aims to subvert, rather than openly attack, the prejudices of his public” (421). Newman states that Melville “uses wordplay, parody, and burlesque to expose the crude racial bigotry and proslavery propaganda masquerading as scientific truth” (219). Thus, “The ‘Gees” implicitly argues that people from Africa are human beings and not what many Americans assume them to be: docile, ignoble, immoral, soulless beasts that deserve degradation and enslavement.

The poor treatment of the “Gees” mirrored the injustice and immorality of America’s slavocracy. Karcher posits that Melville’s Cape Verdean-American “constitutes an almost exact counterpart of the American Negro” (161). This connection was exemplified by the Colored Seamen Laws of South Carolina and Georgia. These laws compelled the local police to imprison Cape Verdean sailors when ships docked at southern ports, and if the ships’ captains refused to pay the jail fees, the prisoners were sold into slavery. The dehumanizing, unjust, ugly attitudes behind these racist policies cause the narrator in “The ‘Gees” to call Cape Verdeans “barbarous” and categorize them as sea-birds, zebras, and unruly dogs. He suggests sea captains consult an “authority,” like a plantation owner would before purchasing a new slave. Indeed, he advises a captain to acquire sailors from a “Gee jockey” rather than select them himself:

Of course the ‘Gee has his private nature as well as his public coat. To know ‘Gees—to be a sound judge of ‘Gees—one must study them, just as to know and be a judge of horses one must study horses. Simple as for the most part are both horse and ‘Gee, in

neither case can knowledge of the creature come by intuition. . . . Many a young captain has been thrown and badly hurt by a 'Gee of his own choosing. For notwithstanding the general docility of the 'Gee when green, it may be otherwise with him when ripe. (346)

The narrator's comparison of the "Gees" to fruit and horses highlights the stereotype that Cape Verdeans, like all Africans, are inhuman and should be bred for enslavement and exploitation.

The narrator further emphasizes the Cape Verdeans' blackness in the most offensive ways. For example, the captain, like a slave trader, must examine the anatomy of the "Gees" as one would examine livestock. The narrator describes how one evaluates their hair, skin, mouth, teeth, neck, legs, knees, and feet, including praise for those whose "flesh is firm but lean" like "venison" (344). After commodifying them, the narrator warns that Cape Verdeans are lazy and rebellious if not trained properly after capture. Part of the dehumanizing training is the removal of any personal dignity or identity. The narrator suggests calling them "Gee" rather than "Man" or their actual name, and that "only when extraordinary stimulus is needed, only when an extra strain is to be got out of them, are these hapless 'Gees ennobled with the human name" (347).

The "Gees" often worked for food and a bed onboard ship instead of money, which was not only unjust but represented complaints of Southern whites against the use of slave labor and Northern whites against runaway and freed slaves entering the workforce (Dippel 2; Wilson 198-9). The narrator claims that Cape Verdeans can eat but cannot think because they lack intelligence and imagination, which mirrors Morrell's beliefs and the common assumptions about American slaves. Furthermore, the narrator praises captains who captured "Gees" from their homeland. Treated as slaves, Cape Verdeans sailors had to absorb insults and work under the worst conditions without complaint or face harsh punishment.

If taken as satire, the story indicates that Americans invite disaster by perpetuating these absurd racial stereotypes. The implication of "The 'Gees," *Omoo*, and *Moby Dick* is that dark-skinned people are neither abstractions to be studied nor beasts to be owned. Instead, they are intelligent, sensitive, functioning members of US society. "The 'Gees" ends with one final, biting reproach. The narrator worries that Cape Verdean-Americans living in New England do not appear "savage"; in fact, they attend universities and pass as gentlemen and ladies. He warns:

these 'Gees are not the 'Gees of Fogo. That is, they are no longer green 'Gees. They are sophisticated 'Gees, and hence liable to be taken for naturalized citizens badly sunburnt. Many a Chinaman, in new coat and pantaloons . . . has promenaded Broadway, and been taken merely for an eccentric Georgia planter. The same with 'Gees; a stranger need have a sharp eye to know a 'Gee, even if he see him. (348)

Here, Melville is criticizing racist attitudes as an attempt to find signs of inferiority that aren't there, attitudes that limit one's understanding of and respect for the Other as a human being.

Unfortunately, neither Melville's writing nor the abolition of slavery significantly reduced racism in

America. Freed slaves and Cape Verdean immigrants still faced institutional segregation, economic discrimination, and violent intimidation. This attitude was even more evident in early-twentieth-century literature. Many New England authors at the time would have known about the existence of Cape Verdeans, yet almost none appeared in their works. Those that did were either mocked, degraded, or vilified. For instance, Henry James's 1903 novel *The Ambassadors* disparages a "Portuguese" (122) woman as inherently inferior to European women.

Mainstream society believed that people of African heritage were too primitive to succeed in American society, which caused Cape Verdean-Americans to feel unwanted. George Washington Cable expressed the mainstream desire to push the "Negro" out of the white consciousness and the "white" country in his 1880 novel *The Grandissimes*: "When I say the 'whole community,' I mean the whole white portion...What else could I mean? Could you suppose, sir, the expression which you may have heard me use—'my down-trodden country' includes blacks and mulattoes?" (59). Dismissed as part of the landscape, many Cape Verdean immigrants were reduced to menial, slave-like labor in the textile mills and cranberry bogs. The atmosphere was plantation-like and the bosses were frequently called slave drivers (Halter 74). According to Halter, former cranberry pickers "explained that the negative feeling about cranberries among Cape Verdeans stemmed from the work being too much like picking cotton in the deep South" (72).

Cape Verdean immigrants were under attack in a different way than African Americans, especially during the restrictive immigration laws of the 1920s. Feri Felix Weiss expressed the common attitude in his 1921 book *The Sieve or the Revelations of the Man Mill: Being the Truth about American Immigration*. Although Weiss praised Cape Verdeans as "skillful boatmen, good sailors, quick, intelligent, peaceful, honest and trustworthy" (287), he believed that "these neglected children of civilization" should not be allowed into the US (292). Weiss, an immigrant himself, argued that America had "already a most serious colored problem on our hands," which he believed was only being made worse by the acceptance of more "Brava" immigrants (292). The name of a Cape Verde island, Brava was used as a derogatory term. Weiss considered Cape Verdeans a threat both to white culture and to the virtue of white womanhood. He played on this fear by suggesting their ancestors "may have been African kings and Portuguese dames." He claimed an "over-population" of Cape Verdeans in America as a significant "danger" (294), remarking that in one New England town they outnumbered the "native whites, with the result that they proposed a 'Jim Crow' school." Weiss warned that these "savage" (289) people could not be the "admirable American citizen[s]" (292) the nation desires. Danielle Sanchez relates the difficulties faced by these immigrants from the islands: "my great grandfather's dream of finding prosperity and stability in the United States was drastically different from the harsh reality he faced as an immigrant in early twentieth-century America."

Hatred for the group did not preclude the possibility of respect for the "exceptional" Cape Verdean. In Joseph Crosby Lincoln's *The Portygee, a novel* (1920), protagonist Captain Snow, whose name indicates the value he places upon his own racial purity, despises all non-Anglo Saxons and says that all other races and ethnicities "don't count" (37). Snow criticizes his daughter's choice of a Cape Verdean-American husband, saying, "those foreigners breed like flies" (37). Then, when his grandson Albert Miguel Carlos

Speranza comes to live with him, he scornfully calls the young man “Portygee” and “half-breed” (21). Grandson Al is respectful, intelligent, industrious, and independent—qualities that eventually force Captain Snow to accept him. However, this acceptance comes with strings. Snow coaxes Al to say he agrees with the attitude that the dark-skinned immigrant may only be considered an American if he rejects his own culture and fully assimilates into “white” mainstream society. In addition, Snow’s tolerance is limited to accepting the “exceptional” Cape Verdean into his circle. Rather than change his view of the Other, Snow considers his grandson an exception to the stereotypes because he shows deference to the white power structure and seeks to adopt his grandfather’s values. The basic stereotypes remain in place, which has harmful implications for Al. As Jerry Watts explains, “The status of the ‘exceptional’ black is a status rooted in the most explicit desire for white acceptance and hatred of one’s own affinities with other blacks” (58). Thus, Al may hate himself and his community to be accepted by his grandfather and white society.

More often all “black Portuguese” were seen as the same, an inferior people on whom Anglo-American could vent their frustrations in order to reassert their own sense of superiority. Cape Verdeans had little social, political, or economic power, evident in Captain Joe Antone’s complaint that during the Depression the Cape Verdean-Americans were “always the last to be hired and the first to be fired” (Coombs 170). Christine Bold explains, “Antone’s stories speak entirely to power and exclusion: instances of racism on and off shore” (124). Society’s stereotypes were incorporated into popular white-authored novels during this period, resulting in the Cape Verdean-American being portrayed as the comic “Sambo,” the exotic primitive, or the savage villain.

This villainization often included Cape Verdeans’ “mysterious” and “evil” culture. In H.P. Lovecraft’s famous 1926 story “The Call of Cthulhu,” scientists find a cultish sculpture in Providence, Rhode Island, that is “infinitely more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles” (58-59). The members of the cult are “men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of Negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands” (63). The cult practices ritual murders in the swamps of Louisiana, a region much like what Americans envision Africa to be: “one of traditionally evil repute, substantially unknown and untraversed by white men” (61). The cult members in this “black morass” beat tom-toms and shriek demonically with “animal fury and orgiastic license.” When the police seek out the cult, they are horrified to find “in a natural glade of the swamp. . . . a more indescribable horde of human abnormality than any but a Sime or an Angarola could paint. Void of clothing, this hybrid spawn were braying, bellowing, and writhing about a monstrous ring-shaped bonfire” (62). The police kill or arrest the “[d]egraded and ignorant” (63) cult members, who claim a membership of thousands in America and around the world. The horror is that they merely await “the call” of their high priest to conquer and rule the earth, representing the white man’s fear of the demonic and malevolent dark-skinned Other.

Lovecraft’s 1927 story “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” links Cape Verdean-Americans to vampirism. The plot: a young white man living in Pawtuxet, Rhode Island, begins to make some mysterious experiments and hires “a villainous-looking Portuguese half-caste from the South Main St. waterfront who

acted as a servant" (275). The arrival of the "evil Portuguese mulatto" (280) gives the house a noticeably dark and morbid quality, creating a strong binaries of light/dark and good/evil. Lovecraft's narrator reports that from his interaction with the "good" residents of the rooming house, "it was soon plain that the Brava Portuguese was loathed" (284). As in "The Call of Cthulhu," this story plays on existing racial fears and cultural stereotypes to create tension, revealing the darkness of the human soul and the danger of the Faustian bargain.

In addition, traditional American detective fiction of the first half of the twentieth century reinforced conservative values and racist institutions (Berger). Rarely did black Americans appear in these stories, and if they did they were villains or abstract, racialized figures that authenticated the setting. For example, Raymond Chandler begins *Farewell, My Lovely* (1942) with ghostly and notorious-looking "Negroes," who "chanted and chattered" (5) in the dark corners of a seedy bar. Their role is to alert the white detective and reader about the "wrong" part of town, followed a few paragraphs later by someone sneaking up behind the detective and knocking him unconscious.

Cape Verdean-Americans serve as both local color and bestial villains in Frank Shay's 1931 detective novel *Murder on Cape Cod*. The novel is set in a segregated fishing town on Cape Cod, and its "West End" includes many dark-eyed girls, shops with colorful and tawdry fineries, and young men from the fishing fleet who strum guitars and sing traditional Cape Verdean *morna* ballads. The narrator reports seeing dirty children running wild and "speaking a jargon that is peppered with alien phrases" (Shay 8). Throughout the novel, Cape Verdean-Americans lurk in the background and chatter in their "alien" dialect like birds or monkeys. As in Chandler's novel, the setting and unnamed characters create a *noir* mood of seediness and danger. Readers are affected because they fear the Other, just as they fear their own primal urges, both of which lurk at the margins of "nice" society.

One of the town's most prominent citizens, Elkanah Snow, has just accepted into his home a Cape Verdean wife and a wild, homeless dog. Snow, as his name indicates, is pure, honest, kindhearted, and white. His friends grumble that they consider the wife a member of a primitive race who only wants to improve her social condition, something that her father later confirms when he tells the detective that marrying an Anglo-American is like going to heaven. The mongrel dog is meant to mirror the wife—both are predatory, primitive animals accused of causing the town's misfortunes. Both the Cape Verdean-American and the dog are unwanted intruders into the peaceful, established, so-called civilized society, and the town fathers would like to remove them from the community. Snow, portrayed as altruistic and misguided, intervenes on behalf of both, but when he is murdered the police immediately suspect his wife.

Cape Verdean sailor Goncalo Soiza, eventually revealed as the murderer, represents several racist stereotypes and fears white society has of the dark-skinned foreigners. Soiza is a likely suspect from the start because he is a rum-runner and the leader of a hijacking gang. As a tough criminal, he flouts white authority, becoming "a kind of a hero among the Portuguese" (119). At first, Soiza's stereotypical laziness and cowardice causes the white detective to doubt his guilt. In fact, when asked who killed Snow, one white man asserts: "these Portuguese talk big but they don't kill" (120). Later, however, another white man

emphasizes their “natural” villainy: “[the killer is] probably one of those savages down at the West End” (198).

The white detective, admired for being intelligent, articulate, trustworthy, and perceptive, sharply contrasts Soiza, who is “built on the general plan of a gorilla, his arms swinging low and his hands twitching” (230). Although the detective only has circumstantial evidence, he declares Soiza guilty by the way he looks, prompting Soiza to state, “‘Wot chanct I got? . . . Wot chanct any dam’ blac’ Portygee got in dees town? I wan’ a lawyer. I show you any dam’ blac’ Portygee jus’ as good as any one else’” (232). After merely guessing that Soiza is the murderer, the detective claims to confirm his suspicions by stating, “I smelled killer all over him as soon as I saw him” (234). The same response is made by Snow’s dog, which, unlike the wife, has transformed into a symbol of loyalty, honesty, and justice by the end of the novel. The dog wants to attack Soiza, so the detective uses it to force a confession out of Soiza. In the eyes of the town’s fathers, Soiza’s seeming guilt and “natural” bestiality make him inferior to this mongrel dog. The evidence against Soiza is thin and the judge grants him bail, but upon his release the dog kills him, which draws praise from both the detective and the author.

Cape Verdean-American savagery and villainy is also central to Edward Garside’s 1938 naturalistic novel *Cranberry Red*. Though Garside was a little more ambivalent than Shay about violence against the Other, his Cape Verdean-Americans characters are all ugly, dirty, bestial, and ignorant. The story vilifies the younger generation for not knowing their place in the racial hierarchy: those who question a white man’s authority, fight for equal wages, and demand respect are portrayed as evil brutes and communists. The novel’s white bigots sometimes verge on the absurd, yet this depression-era novel ultimately supports the complaint that “these Portygee want too much. They ought to be glad they’re alive and got a job, without complaining. . . . [The authorities] ought to ship them to hell out. A white man can’t get a job” (383).

In the novel, the Cape Cod town’s prominent white citizens assume the Cape Verdeans are naturally criminals, so they supplement the police chief’s wages to keep the “undesirables” in the slums and force them to treat all whites with extreme deference. The town fathers sympathize with the police chief because they believe “it’s a dirty job. He’s got to keep his eye on all them Portygees” (41). However, since the police are not always available, brutal vigilantism is not uncommon. For instance, when a young Cape Verdean-American boy accidentally runs over a white man’s dog, the owner beats and kicks the boy nearly to death, bragging later that “a harder [head] than that Portygee’s I never encountered. Solid ivory. But it finally cracked” (38). Cape Verdean-Americans had no legal standing, so the dog owner is not arrested; instead, the authorities state that they hope the boy “learned his lesson.”

In addition to violence, *Cranberry Red* condones cruel attitudes. The most prominent stereotypes are animalistic physical features and behavior, including a lack of intelligence and a hypersexuality. One “Portygee” is said to look “like a mad dog” (41), while another is called a “stinking . . . black little boogey” (58) and compared to a gorilla. Men at a cannery consider their co-worker, Joe Gonsalves, the lowest form of life, giving him the worst, most dangerous jobs. One of the white men complains about being treated badly himself by the cannery’s owner, saying, “he treats a [white] man as if he were that flea hound of his .

. . . or like Gonsalves here” (62). When a poorly maintained floor at the cannery causes Joe’s death, one laborer says the cannery owner “practically murdered the guy. Of course, he was only a Portygee” (137). This comment is reminiscent of a similar exchange in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but without the satirical overtones. In Twain’s 1884 novel, Huck mentions a riverboat accident, causing Aunt Sally to ask if anyone was hurt. Huck responds: “No’m. Killed a nigger,” to which Aunt Sally says: “Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt” (230). This similarity further shows Anglo-Americans’ willful misunderstanding of the black diaspora. As white authors did with African American characters, Garside strips Joe of his cultural complexity and his very humanity, having the factory owner dismiss him and his distraught brother as a “crazy animal” and a “stricken bull” (142). This flattening of the black diaspora into a single set of stereotypes gives readers permission to attack or dismiss a whole community and its culture.

Garside’s narrator, seemingly trustworthy and moral, indicates that Cape Verdeans deserve to be brutalized. For example, he explains the reason several laborers collapse during a hot day working in the cranberry bogs is that the “chattering little monkeys” follow outdated Cape Verdean customs and do not eat enough (269). He pardons the white townsfolk for accusing the wrong man of murder because it is acceptable to assume a “Portygee” guilty. The narrator describes Joe Gonsalves as “unrefined by the Portuguese blood simmering in his veins. Like a small, stooped monkey he poked around, trying hard, but not getting much done. His heavy jaw hung forward, drawing down the hollow cheeks” (56). Garside portrays Joe’s home as a primordial swamp, especially once he starts speaking crudely about his sexual needs. One evening, Joe invites Keith Bain, the novel’s white protagonist, into his home, where he encourages Bain to join him in drinking alcohol and urinating on the living room floor. In the dark of Joe’s pitiful home, “Bain could feel, but not see, his gaping, simian smile” (64). Bain is aghast as Joe’s “simple words conjured a vision of an implacable phallus, a streaming phallus on which the world revolved as on an oiled axis” (65).

White society often used the myth of the black man’s sexual appetite to justify exploitation of and violence against him. In *Cranberry Red*, Garside portrays Cape Verdean-Americans as subhuman beings who only enjoy the most primitive and licentious activities, including sexual perversion, urination, brawling, and wild singing and dancing. A group of white men joke that like all “Portygees” sailor Manuel Gonsalves contracted a venereal disease when he visited friends on the Cape Verde islands. The narrator states that these seamen only visit the islands to have sex, as “they bred as nonchalantly as fruit flies” (270). Bain’s friend Johnny is shocked by Leon Lopes’s eleven children, and when he witnesses Leon’s daughter breast-feeding her child, Johnny “was much disturbed by this primitive exhibition” (220). Later, the police chief breaks up one of the Cape Verdean-Americans’ orgiastic dance parties and is horrified when he finds that the “Africans” have hired a white prostitute. The chief angrily asserts that the Cape Verdean-American men “would pay anything for a white lass” (307). For no other reason, he beats and arrests several “black bastards,” declaring, “They outa ship the whole lot of you guys back to the old country” (303).

Another of Garside’s Cape Verdean characters, Smoky Joe, plays the role of compliant black servant. His hard work, obedience, and silence fool his boss into believing he is happy and loyal. Smoky

Joe also performs the role of exotic primitive and animalistic brute. The narrator considers this giant man an ape-like beast with “woolly hair and sooty flesh” who is out of place in “a naked, frosty Yankee gravel pit” (253). The narrator implies that he should be running wild through an African jungle, and that America would be better off if that’s where he was. Smoky Joe is often described by his anatomy, for the reader is to see him as arms and legs rather than a human. In addition, his Portuguese-creole is an inhuman “musical moaning” and “a strange animal cry, a deep menacing growl” (267). Thus, Smoky Joe seems to embody the message of the novel—Garside’s implication that the people of African descent are dumb brutes who do not belong in America unless they have been trained to be loyal, honest, and hard working.

Bain, the hero of the novel, develops an ambivalent relationship with the Cape Verdean-American community. After arriving, he takes a job at the local cranberry cannery and befriends several “Portygees.” At odds with his racist, greedy, self-serving boss, Bain sympathizes with his working class peers, both Anglo and Cape Verdean. Early in the novel, Bain is portrayed as a benevolent explorer of the Cape Verdean wilderness, and much to his white friends’ chagrin, he eats and jokes with “them,” attempts to speak their language, visits their homes, and participates in one of their dances. Bain defends Joe Gonsalves’s son when he is unjustly arrested for murder, and he pays Smoky Joe’s fine when he is wrongfully imprisoned. As a result, the whole “Brava” community respects Bain and pledges their undying gratitude.

Bain cringes when they are abused or insulted, and he sometimes dislikes the racism, greed, selfishness, and brutal violence of the other white characters. However, Bain, like Stowe’s anti-slavery characters, always maintains a sense of racial superiority over the Cape Verdean-Americans. Even he calls them “monkeys” and complains about “that fusty nigger smell” (173). From the start, his positive feelings for Joe are based on his “comforting animal presence” (96), and it isn’t until Joe dies that Bain realizes he had human feelings and dreams (173). At the dance, Bain complains that “everybody sweated freely and the air was thick with the strong rancid musk of negro flesh” (338); furthermore, when he visits Smoky Joe in prison, he calls the unjustly accused man a sick animal. Despite Bain’s friendliness and sympathy, he ultimately cannot accept the Cape Verdeans as equals. Even for Bain, they never rise above bestial status, evident in his surprise at seeing a clean “Brava” home (334) and his reaction to being seduced by a “Portygee” girl: “Bain went outside, completely upset and ashamed, and vomited” (339). Soon afterward, he leaves the town because, among other things, he had had enough of the “shuffling, hissing, moaning Portygees” (413). In the end, Garside’s novel reconfirms the worst stereotypes.

Even white authors who resisted these stereotypes did not necessarily provide an accurate perspective of Cape Verdeans or their culture. Mary Heaton Vorse’s 1942 non-fiction work *Time and the Town* applauds the multicultural atmosphere of Provincetown, MA, without fully understanding the Cape Verdeans’ experiences there. First, the book laments that previous generations of Cape Verdeans felt like they were living in the segregated South, conflating their unique experience with that of African Americans. Second, the description of bicultural cooperation highlights the Cape Verdeans’ European roots and downplays their African heritage. Third, although Vorse declared an end to the Ku Klux Klan activity, yet it appears that some Cape Verdean-Americans still did not feel as safe and accepted as Vorse claims, evident

in her comments that many Anglicized their names and that “there are several families who are Bravas but do not admit it. They have ‘passed’” (199).

Vorse’s text may be more progressive than Shay’s or Garside’s, but she did not seem at ease with the “dark-skinned children” and “dark faces on the streets.” Also, she emphasized the exotic differences of the Cape Verdean culture without acknowledging its similarities with Anglo-American culture. While the Cape Verdeans are praised as a group, she does not interview any, nor does she provide any details about their cultural practices or history. Some of Vorse’s complements seem strained and some even have a slightly derogatory undertone. For example, she commented that the Cape Verdean-Americans speak “with the soft, guttural, honeyed syllables of Portuguese dripping from their tongues. The Bravas form a town as alien as anything you might find in the mysterious islands to which the Clarendon Belle was bound” (142). Whether it is the Cape Verdeans or the European-Americans who feel alienated is not clear. Although her book romanticizes the Cape Verdeans as an exotic Other, it also attempts to raise awareness of this ignored, typically vilified segment of her Cape Cod town.

Despite Vorse’s hopeful portrayal, white society continued to reject Cape Verdeans as equals and, in many cases, as humans. Scott Corbett’s 1953 novel *We Chose Cape Cod* reduces the “Portygees” to nothing more than exotic local color. They merely chatter “gibberish” and are obviously not “true” Cape Codders (229). The commodified Cape Verdean-Americans, who must work back-breaking, underpaid jobs in the cranberry fields, are portrayed as cheerful and grateful ghosts. The grinning, dusky-faced laborers are nameless, interchangeable, and inarticulate figures who disappear into the setting: “The polished red of the berries and the russet-tinged green of the vines delighted the eye; the steady roll of the barriers in the scoops and the soft voices of the Portygees pleased the ear” (234). According to Marcel Balla, this attitude was still rampant in 1990: “due to ignorance of Cape Verdean culture, the Cape Verdean people have been used to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of America and the fantasies that Americans have about minorities and ‘other peoples’” (106).

In conclusion, Cape Verdean characters in white-authored US literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reinforced racist social norms and cultural prejudices. The few white authors who even mentioned their existence often denigrated the “Portygees” by portraying them as ruthless villains, bestial laborers, or voiceless, inhuman pieces of scenery. Even the exception, Melville, focused more on critiquing white racism than presenting complex Cape Verdean characters or detailing their actual history and culture. The depiction of the dark-skinned Other in these literary works reflects the attitude of American society throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, as Desmond Fonseca states in a 2016 blog: “When a police officer sees me on the street none of this history or this culture matters. I’m a black body with black skin, black lips, and black twisted hair. My being Cape Verdean won’t save me.”

Nevertheless, many Cape Verdean-Americans have worked to establish their own sense of identity and write it into existence. Part of this effort is legitimizing their cultural heritage, and part of it is exposing the truth about America’s suffocating stereotypes in order to gain equality and respect. Blogging about her family and cultural history, Danielle Sanchez acknowledges the daily racism faced by her elders and

struggles to “take ownership for my heritage.” She encourages Cape Verdean-Americans to resist the self-image presented by white society: “Ultimately, I want to raise my son to know that he is (partially) Cape Verdean and to never be ashamed of that fact.” Greater awareness and tolerance may help the US realize Balla’s dream that Cape Verdean-Americans will be treated as people and not commodities, that their history and culture will be acknowledged and honored, and that white America “will get a better understanding of all people of this world and try to find a way to bridge the gap between different peoples before it destroys a great nation” (11).

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