"'In the Wake' of the 'Quake: Mary Ellen Pleasant's Diasporic Hauntings"

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"She was a friend of John Brown." San Francisco businesswoman Mary Ellen Pleasant's requested tombstone epitaph constitutes a challenge to American historical memory, staking her claim that she played a significant role in combatting chattel slavery. Pleasant thereby constructs her Napa Valley grave as a both site of memory through which she renegotiated the story of her past and what Toni Morrison names a "remain," or residual evidence, for future generations to interpret.[1] Her declarative act anticipates her marginalization in the annals of the American West. Most accounts concur that Pleasant was a successful black woman who resided in San Francisco from the mid-nineteenth century until her death in 1904 and that she was a servant in Nantucket, Massachusetts, during her childhood.[2] Conflicting histories attest that Pleasant was either born enslaved on a plantation in Georgia, Virginia, or Louisiana and raised in part on a plantation, or free in Philadelphia prior to her indenture in Nantucket. She was reputed to be the daughter of a slaveholder and a "Haitian voodoo queen," and self-reported as the daughter of a "native Kanaka [Hawaiian] and . . . a full-blooded Louisiana negress." Although the record bears that she married twice and inherited wealth estimated anywhere from $15,000 to $50,000 upon her first husband's death, even these men's identities prove ripe for contest.[3] Pleasant's story exemplifies the ways in which "African American women's history is riddled with silences," a paradigm that she manipulated to her benefit—making and remaking herself as she left an imprint upon the American West.[4] Lynn Hudson notes, "Pleasant . . . was extremely savvy about history, the press, and self-presentation."[5] Pleasant's occlusions of her racial identity and

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origins, in tandem with deeply ingrained prejudices and shifting public sentiments, obscure her from broad historical view. Noted historian Quintard Taylor suggests that Pleasant "generated a contradictory persona that contributed to the confusion surrounding her life," while Susheel Bibbs contends that she "tailored different memoirs . . . to counteract the gossip and criticism leveled against her in the press."[6]

Infamously named a "voodoo queen," a madam, a witch, and a mammy, Pleasant occupies a contested space in frontier mythology. At once known through her association with wealthy pioneers and various scandals and a figure shrouded in mystery, Pleasant symbolizes black women's success, as well as the vicissitudes of fortune seeking while black and female in the urban West. Complex modes of remembrance and disremembrance shape Pleasant's historical legacy in the twenty-first century, pointing us toward the West anew in order to glimpse her hidden in plain sight. While many people have never heard of her, beneath the surface of the purely academic one finds a wealth of cultural productions featuring Pleasant from the 1920s forward.[7] From Helen Holdredge's *Mammy Pleasant* series to Karen Fowler's *Sister Noon* (2002), some works rehash rumors about Pleasant and wealthy San Franciscans, while others foreground her accomplishments and her life's complexity.[8] From Bibbs's rich body of work on Pleasant to Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise* (1993), Denise Nicholas's *Buses* (1988), to Comedy Central's *Drunk History* 2013 feature, nuanced reconsiderations of Pleasant's life abound.[9] Just as during her lifetime, Pleasant remains seemingly ubiquitous while resisting a place within any single category. Known and unknown, she remains, in effect, a haunting.

Pleasant's location and dislocation within San Francisco's landscape proves a site of cartographical struggle—one in which she was discursively mapped through the tropes of "mammydom" and voodoo. Simultaneously, Pleasant, in Katherine McKittrick's terms, "create[d] more humanly workable" geographies for blacks in the burgeoning frontier city through her civil rights and antislavery activism, public transit lawsuits, and creating employment opportunities for black workers.[10] Pleasant's story provides a unique opportunity to, in Taylor's words, "pursue the challenge of linking cities and Negroes in determining the region's character," as well as "remind us that 'multiple' Wests existed side by side."[11] While known primarily as an urban frontier figure, Pleasant was reputed to have genealogical, cultural and residential links to Southern Louisiana, and thereby, "Voodoo," a version of an African diasporic religion most commonly practiced in Haiti, where it is known as Vodou. Wittingly or unwittingly, however, Pleasant came to be marked by—and to manipulate—nostalgia-driven fantasies of antebellum plantation relations anchored by the figure of the "mammy." Thus, even as she left her imprint as a shrewd businesswoman—numbering among "black women" who, as William Katz notes, "hitched their dreams to the wagons rolling West . . . toward the frontier's promise of opportunity"—Pleasant's place in public memory leaves more questions than answers in its wake.[12] Douglass Flamming contends, "One of the more influential African Americans

in the antebellum West was also one of the most mysterious.”[13] Pleasant’s story presents “gaps in historical knowledge” that testify to how American histories anchor themselves in the ellipses that signify silenced black womanhood.[14] Her posthumous status as the mother of Californian civil rights and successful black female capitalist are consistently obscured by various musings about her character. Attributions of servile maternity, alleged sexual degradation, and spiritual “impurity” comprise acts of historiographical comeuppance that reframe her presence in San Francisco from within the “libidinal economy” of the Southern plantation.[15] Accordingly, we must understand San Francisco as a site wherein Pleasant in her business practices and self-presentation manipulated and contested plantation-based perceptions of black womanhood.

This essay traces Pleasant as a mythic diasporic figure to assess how her location and dislocation in the American West results from her sociohistorical mapping from within the imagined geographies of the plantation. As Smith and Cohen note in *Look Away!*, “The plantation . . . ties the South . . . to the rest of the United States.”[16] While no clear records exist of Pleasant living and working upon cotton, indigo, tobacco, sugar, or rice plantations in the American South, Bennett notes that there are many secondary accounts of Pleasant spending her childhood on a plantation, though the issue of in which state has not been settled. Important to this study is the way that Pleasant becomes socially legible only insofar as she imaginatively inhabits a black woman’s place as circumscribed by slavery and the plantation. Hence, she frequently presented herself “as a simple cook and laundress” in order to “exploit assumptions about Black women’s domestic skills . . . obscuring . . . aspects of her businesses . . . outside the realm of domestic work” to amass holdings such as the three laundries she owned by 1855, as well as her mining investments.[17] The 1870 census reports that Pleasant had $15,000 in real estate and another $15,000 in personal holdings, no mean feat for one seen primarily as a domestic worker.[18] When one encounters Pleasant in the annals of the West, she will likely be called *mammy*—a moniker with which she had a fraught relationship.[19] The term *mammy* confirms the American West was beholden to the South, which was in turn shaped by the forced creation of the African diaspora through the transatlantic slave trade. Late newspaper depictions of Pleasant as the mammy of Southern plantation fantasy assimilate her within American structures of racial dominance and render her a dangerous diasporic interloper that menaced California.[20] Reorienting attention to Pleasant’s location and dislocation, we understand the American West as another site of diasporic unbelonging constituted in the wake of black feminine presence—a locus of black geographical settling and unsettling mediated through Pleasant’s denied place in Western American historical memory.[21]

Accordingly, I look to Pleasant’s haunting legacy in San Francisco’s history and folklore, citing her representations in Cliff’s *Free Enterprise,* Nicholas’s play *Buses,* and Tim Powers’s *Earthquake Weather* (1997) as examples of her fictional–historical afterlives. Cliff and Powers cartographically inscribe Pleasant within San Francisco’s geographies as a diasporic figure, while Nicholas sit-

uates Pleasant in the terrains of dreams to underscore her lack of historical recognition. *Free Enterprise* and *Earthquake Weather* call attention to Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial Park in San Francisco as a site of black feminine haunting that operates "outside the space–time orientation" of Western linear historiography in a fashion similar to *Buses*'s dreamscape, though the park is refused as an appropriate memorial in the play.[22] Each text's engagement, or lack thereof, with the park hinges upon its concurrent handling of Pleasant as a historical figure, revealing distinct ethical relationships to Pleasant's memory. Tracing Pleasant's diasporic identity in *Free Enterprise* and her inhabitation of dreamscapes in *Buses,* I assert that these works present her as a mythic figure deserving historical remembrance. Reading *Earthquake Weather* through the lens of Pleasant's haunting, I interrogate Power's insistence upon mapping her onto contemporary San Francisco and Napa Valley geographies as an African diasporic figure to argue that Powers's historical–fictional construction of Pleasant as mammy and voodoo practitioner unwittingly attests to Pleasant's centrality in shaping California's cultural landscape. *Earthquake Weather,* I contend, positions Pleasant as an intermediary figure in a manner that ultimately suggests that black women function as diasporic passages through which the American West came into being.

Mythic Dreams of Diaspora: Speculation, Rumor, and Remembrance in *Free Enterprise* and *Buses*

Cliff's text *Free Enterprise* and Nicholas's play *Buses* magnify and complicate Pleasant as an historical figure. As with much of Cliff's work, *Free Enterprise* performs literary archaeology in order to amplify the subsumed voices of those marginalized and silenced within official historical records. In "History as Fiction, Fiction as History" (1994), Cliff herself places *Free Enterprise* in conversation with "Maryse Conde's *Tituba* and Morrison's *Beloved,*" textual "attempts to rescue an African American woman from the myth of American history."[23] Interweaving myth, fact, and fiction to craft a story that recognizes Pleasant and scores of others typically silenced within traditional historiography, Cliff constructs Pleasant not as a figure of the Western frontier but as a markedly African diasporic figure who traverses the continental United States and whose epistemological orientations are rooted in diasporic history, mythography, and practices. In other words, while Cliff attends to Pleasant's role in shaping San Francisco and by extension the modern West, she is more interested in representing Pleasant as a mobile diasporic woman in order to reclaim her marvelous (Western) American history as part of the history of the African diaspora. She does so partly by claiming and affirming the diasporic heritage previously used both to marginalize Pleasant and to eject her from narratives of Western expansion and San Francisco history. Cliff's textual practices align with Christina Sharpe's construct "black annotation," because they consist of "reading and seeing something in excess of what is caught in the frame" of the

historical record in order to offer a different view of Pleasant's life.[24] Cliff's valuation and revaluation of Pleasant's contested diasporic lineage comprises an annotative practice that amends external attributions of otherness to forward positive representations of African-derived cultural practices, including those that fall under the heading of voodoo, akin to Bibbs's reclaiming work in *Heritage of Power.*

Pleasant, in Cliff's text, insists that the mythography of the diaspora proves equally tenable to Western mythography and historiography that marginalizes, erases, and oppresses people of color. Pressing her young comrade Regina to take the moniker "Annie Christmas" as her *nom de guerre,* Pleasant questions the migrant diasporan's inability to believe either in the mythical Annie, "a messianic sister with the physical power of John Henry," or in Nanny, "the great Maroon chieftaness": "Why can't you allow yourself to believe in her?"[25] Pleasant insists that Annie give as much credence to the fantastic as others give to scripture: "If so many can believe in that other twelve and their divine center, water into wine, rolling back the stone, rising up, take-thy-bed-and-walk, Lazarus, why can't you believe in her?"[26]

Relegating nearly all of history to myth or fantasy, Pleasant insists that history stands as no more than the narratives that people believe. Annie's refusal to believe in either Annie Christmas or Nanny echoes future historical disbelief in, and erasure of, Pleasant's complexity as a black female frontier figure. Pleasant's place in the historiography of the American West continues to rest largely within myth and rumor—a tendency that Cliff exploits within the pages of *Free Enterprise* to orient attention toward the ways in which Pleasant's blackness and womanhood limit the conceptual registers through which she may be historically perceived. She annotates these limited and limiting registers of black womanhood such that "more ethical viewing and reading practices" can be put into service to preserve and honor Pleasant's legacy.[27] Cliff exposes the limited registers for apprehending black female life and presence available to Pleasant both during her lifetime and posthumously within a rhythmic, polyvocal passage (the passage is worth quoting at length):

> "Mary Ellen Pleasant?"
> "Wasn't she a voodoo queen?"
> "A madam?"
> "A mammy?"
> "Didn't she run a boardinghouse for white businessmen in San Francisco?"
> "Wasn't she Mammy Pleasant?"
> "Didn't she work voodoo on that white woman and send her off her head?"
> "*Wasn't she Haitian?"*
> "Didn't she have a witch mark on her forehead?"
> "A cast eye?"

> "One blue and one brown eye?"
> "Wasn't she ebony?"
> "Yellow?"
> "Wasn't she so pale you'd never know?"
> "*Didn't she come back as a zombie?*"
> "Didn't she have a penis?"
> "Couldn't she work roots?"
> "Didn't she make a senator's balls fall off?"
> "Didn't she set fire to her own house?"
> "Never heard of her."[28]

In this fictive exchange, Cliff sounds the intersecting sites of confusion surrounding Pleasant's identity while clearing space for the reader to imagine this woman "otherwise . . . in excess of" the limiting strictures upon black women in traditional historiography.[29]

The repeated interrogatives "wasn't she" and "didn't she" highlight uncertainty while performing the textual work of creating resonant echoes that continue to call up Pleasant as a specter of (Western) American historiography. These statement–queries enact a disciplining and containment of Pleasant's black female personhood that define her place and displacement in Western American history. Cliff notes, "Whenever I mention . . . —the entrepreneur and radical Mary Ellen Pleasant—to scholars of this period, they say they have never heard of her, or they ask me, in a non-questioning way, 'Didn't she run whorehouses in San Francisco?'"[30] These pseudo-interrogative statements foreclose a comprehensive understanding of Pleasant as a historical figure, because they revert to stereotypical notions of black womanhood, effectively confining Pleasant's role in San Francisco within familiar racist–sexist frameworks. The echoed queries concerning "voodoo" in the passage also reflect an inheritance from the nineteenth century, wherein "public Voodoo narratives . . . demonstrated the persistent threat of black and female rebellion." The persistent belief that Pleasant gained her fortune solely as a madam and a mammy reveals a long-standing social investment in using black women's bodies as "axiomatic public objects" designed to produce and reproduce New World wealth.[31] "Wasn't she pale" and "didn't she have one brown eye and one blue eye" obliquely gesture toward Pleasant's double life, wherein she was purportedly known as black among black San Franciscans and received as white among white San Franciscans. Pleasant's ability to keep an eye and hand in both communities allowed her unprecedented access to information that allowed her to grow her substantial wealth.[32] However, Pleasant's historical remembrance and disremembrance, Cliff suggests, suppress this aspect of her life in favor of foregrounding her blackness, as evidence of inferiority and as grounds for her historical dismissal.

The seven references to Pleasant's body in the passage illuminate the emphasis on black feminine physicality as the locus through which Pleasant's legacy remains apprehended and misapprehended, as well as understood and

misunderstood. The offhand attention to “the place in between” Pleasant’s legs—“Didn’t she have a penis?”—recalls slavery’s discursive excesses that engendered “the social construction of ‘the space between [black women’s] legs’ . . . and the racial–patriarchal uses” of these women’s bodies as “profitable sexual and reproductive technologies.”[33] The terse sentences also textually enact the ways in which Pleasant has been historically bound and confined within speculation and rumor. In this passage, Cliff opens a literary path toward the historical space between the words that makes possible apprehending Pleasant otherwise. Within the spaces of the interrogatives, Pleasant embodies and occupies an array of black identities such that she functions as a microcosm of the African diaspora. Cliff uses the construct of diaspora to both mythicize Pleasant and displace the plantation construct that overwrites her place in Western historical memory.

Haunting acts in tandem with Cliff’s acts of historical remembering in the text, revealing their mutual imbrication. Rather than understand Cliff’s novel as recovering Pleasant the woman, we must consider it as an act of African diasporic mythmaking. Just as *Free Enterprise* troubles the lines between history, myth, and fiction, the novel blurs distinctions between presence and haunting to insist “everything is here, and now”—an assertion that the past is not past, nor is the future to come, but that each exists as material presence in the present.[34] From the appearance of Malcolm X in the nineteenth century as a “hologrammatical man” to the multi-century–spanning stories of dispossession told by the inmates at a leper colony, *Free Enterprise* collapses historical time in favor of an unending present, a tactic also employed within Nicholas’s reimagining of Pleasant in *Buses*.[35] Within the novel, multiple characters and hauntings traverse the geographical and social landscapes of white supremacy, colonialism, and “the trade” in unending battles for survival and self-definition. For this reason, the interrogative “didn’t she come back as a zombie” becomes important. The word *zombie* recontextualizes haunting via a figure steeped in Haitian history and cultural practices that evokes both horrors of the brutal plantation system in the former Saint Domingue and blacks’ violent wresting of bodily and political freedom through armed resistance. The figure of the zombie has also enjoyed sustained popularity within the United States as a racialized horror trope that serves in its contemporary form as a vehicle for white fantasy and projection.[36] However, Cliff’s invocation of Haiti prior to the term *zombie* resituates its mythological origins within Haitian folklore to emphasize that the zombie, as Sarah Juliet Lauro cogently theorizes, “represents revolutions that have not been completed . . . [and] thereby incorporates a people’s history of both enslavement and political resistance.”[37] Cliff thus enfolds Pleasant’s Western American historical haunting into a larger diasporic framework by placing her (and Harpers Ferry) in the context of an unending violent struggle for freedom undertaken by subjects of the African diaspora, marking her diasporic location and dislocation to undermine the manner in which the plantation and the moniker *mammy* came to overwrite her legacy.[38] Powers’s text, as noted later,

also returns to the Haitian rendering of the zombie myth in its presentation of Pleasant as one raised from the dead to render her services but in a manner that binds her spiritual labors within her interminable role in the Western imaginary as mammy.

To return to Cliff, the author ultimately refuses the rumor of Pleasant's return as a zombie, instead reinforcing another popular myth near the novel's close that the Great Earthquake of 1906 was Pleasant's posthumous act of revenge upon the city of San Francisco. After sifting through a box containing remnants from Annie Christmas's (nee Regina's) life, Annie and her friend Rachel raise a toast to "the beloved memory of Mary Ellen Pleasant."[39] Annie describes Pleasant in this overt act of memorialization thusly:

> "Dedicated fighter in the Cause, Mother of Freedom, Warrior and Entrepreneur, who some believe came back from the dead in nineteen and six to avenge her good name, and the loss of property she suffered at the hands of the fathers of San Francisco, who finally brought her down, charging she was a witch, casting spells with her one blue eye and her one black eye, poisoning the city water supply, wreaking havoc at the stock exchange, souring the milk of nursing mothers."[40]

Rachel and Annie's toast to Pleasant opens by affirming her role in combatting the institution of chattel slavery. The toast also reconfigures her maternal status such that she is the "mother of freedom." Having refuted the ascriptions of black female inferiority that cling to Pleasant's legacy, the women go on to celebrate her as a "warrior," canonizing her within the text's pantheon of diasporic warrior women participating in insurrectionary violence to actualize blacks' freedom. Next, they claim her rightful profession as entrepreneur to highlight her intellectual and financial prowess, as a testament to her rightful place among the founders, here "*fathers* of San Francisco." Just as the women celebrate Pleasant's achievements in shaping the economic and social geographies of the city of San Francisco to map her within Western history, they also attest to her destructive powers to unmake the city that scorned her, perhaps affirming her status as a witch. Pleasant's supernatural revenge manifests as an earthquake that does not simply destroy but also frees. In Cliff's description of the catastrophic weather event, the earth opens itself to unleash destructive power upon the city's and nation's institutions while simultaneously opening fugitive pathways toward freedom for the dispossessed. Cliff writes:

> First came the huge roar. An enormous sound. Not from above, but. . . . A thundering from under the earth. At the tail end of the thunder came the movement. The pavements rolled. Streets Cracked. Split.

It was 5:00 a.m. on the 18th of April, 1906. The shaking lasted one full minute, maybe more. *Time which was elastic.*

The U.S. Mint split apart and spit thousands of coins down its marble staircases, out its doors, and into the streets. Then the streets of San Francisco, at least a few, were paved with gold.

The water mains broke. Water poured down the hills, gathered in flats, flooding the Mission District, running into the China Basin and the bay.

At the Pacific Steamship Company, on the docks, the holding pen for immigrant Chinese, the movement cracked the walls and the place opened, and men who had been considering suicide ran through the streets.

A slave woman, kept in a crib since her arrival on Gold Mountain six years before, gazed more in wonder than fright as the wooden pen came apart. “This is the first time I see San Francisco.”

A well-born woman cursed her lily feet as she tried to flee the collapse of Chinatown.

A herd of buffalo breached the fences in Golden Gate Park, and thundered through Pacific Heights. Coming up against the bay, they turned looking for a way home.

On Alcatraz, Pelican Island, men in ghost shirts for whom Wounded Knee was yesterday, ghost-danced out of cells and stole a boat to carry them away.

Then the fires began, and they were much worse than the shaking.

The business district was razed, every scrap of folding money, every stock certificate, or gold bond was incinerated.

Then suddenly, the fires stopped.

At the doors of the Mission Dolores, some will tell you, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Madre de las America, says no more.

On the street where I once lived, *I say.*[41]

The imaginative consecration of Pleasant as the Great Earthquake of 1906 constitutes her act of climatic violence as a befitting capstone to her lifetime of insurrectionary activity, confirming whispered rumors and vaulting her to a mythic status. The rumbling earth—“An enormous sound . . . from *beneath*”—affirms the revolutionary potential of underground resistance and agitation. The destruction of San Francisco’s centers of capital occurs in tandem with the breaking open of prisons, holding pens, and cages to free a multiethnic group of people confined in various states of unfreedom. Pleasant’s climatic dissolution of the West’s center of capital also breaks its confines for those who languish in

revamped modes of enslavement. Pleasant again offers a diasporic route toward a precarious freedom.

In the wake of Pleasant's visitation as earthquake, the geographies of San Francisco are torn asunder and the city repopulated amid, and because of, its destruction. In this way, we can understand Pleasant as forging her mark upon the city by shaping and reshaping its geographical and demographical terrains, albeit in a fashion that remains untraceable and thereby not attributable to her. The sudden cessation of the fires "at the doors of the Mission Dolores" at the behest of "Our Lady of Guadalupe, Madre de las Americas" (as "some will tell you") reorients attention to Pleasant's contested and often unrecognized legacy in the city of San Francisco and the state of California. However, Pleasant rebuffs this assessment from beyond the grave, voicing the thought, "On the street where I once lived, *I say.*"

After the earthquake, on the street where Pleasant once lived, a different kind of testament to her place in San Francisco's history also lives. From 1501 to 1699, six eucalyptus trees stood on Octavia Street in San Francisco, towering and casting their broad shadows over a mixed-use development. These trees and the small spaces between them, now surrounded by concrete and cars, as well as a plaque placed by the San Francisco African American History and Cultural Society, constitute the entirety of the park named in her honor. As the "smallest park in the city of San Francisco," the spatial allocation of the narrow strip seems to affirm Pleasant's status within the historical memory of the city and, by extension, the frontier.[42] These trees mark only a fraction of the property Pleasant once held at Octavia and Bush Streets, where she built a mansion alleged to be valued at $100,000 in 1877.[43] While the spatial organization of the park contains the publicly recognized impact of Pleasant upon San Francisco's racial and social topographies, it also attests to her legacy in a manner that defies its own spatial limitations. The long shadows these trees cast over the commercial properties on Octavia and Bush Streets provide visual confirmation of Pleasant's economic reach within the city. This shadowing also recalls the hidden aspects of Pleasant's story, those elements of her life that necessarily remained shrouded in darkness and mystery. Alternately, these shadows evoke in a Melvillian sense the specter of revolutionary violence allied to the Haitian Revolution and other instances of black armed revolt—looming terrifically—unthinkable on the now-peaceful and prosperous streets.[44]

Most importantly, perhaps, Cliff's representation of what later becomes Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial Park in *Free Enterprise* allows a reassessment of the narrative's investment in Pleasant as a creator of diasporic routes toward freedom. The text insists that we recognize the durability of her African diasporic roots in the city of San Francisco as a testament to the legacy her hands wrought. Cliff writes, "'How else would you explain that after the fires, which raged for days, after the fires were finally put out, the only things left standing on Octavia street were the eucalyptus trees she planted herself?'"[45] The trees, as the only things left standing following the fires that purged the city, were

also rumored to bear “her initials . . . burned into the trunk[s] . . . M.E.P., the *M* formed like a *W*.”[46] Each of the six unmoved eucalyptus trees bears her mark as a “remain” for future generations to decipher in tandem with her tombstone epitaph—remembrances that are also commandments.[47] Together with Cliff’s imperative to recuperate and uncover Pleasant’s legacy as a guerilla fighter for black freedom, the significance of the trees becomes more expansive. The magnificent trees’ prominent physical presence aboveground, and the long shadows they cast topographically, map Pleasant onto the cityscape, whereas the underground network of their spreading roots continues, unseen, to disrupt, make and unmake, and shape and reshape the (plantation’s) landscape from below. These trees wage an unending struggle beneath the surface to break and to form “demonic grounds” of possibility for remembrance and resistance.

Similarly, Nicholas’s *Buses* uses various strategies to foreground not only Pleasant’s life and accomplishments but also ways in which her black womanhood shaped the stories that characterize her legacy. As does Cliff’s text, Nicholas’s artistic production unapologetically reclaims Pleasant’s contradictions to insist upon an understanding of her life as nuanced, complex, and in some ways revolutionary. *Buses,* a speculative play set within a dreamscape, imagines an encounter between Pleasant and Rosa Parks, another recognized black woman civil rights pioneer. Parks awaits a bus for the Montgomery City Line on Rosa Parks Boulevard as Pleasant is unceremoniously ejected from yet another car on the Omnibus Trolley Line as she hurls insults at the driver, shouting “GIT YO’ HANDS OFFA ME! YOU OL’ BEAT DOWN CONFEDERATE FOOL!!”[48] By refusing a clear sense of when and where these women are in time and space, Nicholas implies a permanence to these women’s historical positions, as well as the ubiquitous nature of racial prejudices and plantation mentalities nurtured in the Confederate South. The stage settings acknowledge Parks’s cemented place in public memory through the prominent display of the boulevard named in her honor, also drawing attention (by refusing to anchor Pleasant’s side of the stage in the park named for her) to the ways in which Pleasant’s legacy is largely forgotten. Neither the six eucalyptus trees at Octavia and Bush that comprise Pleasant’s park nor the streets upon which her mansion stood bear naming in Nicholas’s play, a seeming testament to San Francisco’s refusal to remember her. While Pleasant laments that she has not been appropriately memorialized, Parks suffers from the limiting aspects of her historical remembrance. Parks notes, “Unless I talked about that day on the bus, nobody cared what was on my mind. Nobody asked me what came before that bus or what came after.”[49] Conversely, Pleasant complains, “I spend my whole life making history and you just spent one day. Half the world knows you and I’m not even a memory!”[50]

Parks’s and Pleasant’s conflicting responses to the ways in which they are remembered and disremembered call attention to the limited modes of apprehending black womanhood tied to the “libidinal economies of the plantation.” Kalisha Buckhanon notes that *Buses*’s significance stems from the following:

> It dramatizes the extent to which historical codes by which black women have been read must be dissolved before these women can be fully realized by modern and postmodern audiences as filled subjects worthy of continued remembrance, and how speculative and mythical literary forms seek to compensate for the historical gaps produced by that past's dissipation.[51]

These historical codes often converge within the register of a respectability discourse that at once frames and contains Parks within the bounds of virtuous black womanhood, as well as refuses Pleasant entry into historical remembrance due to her association with voodoo and sex work. Injurious to both women, these codes of remembrance remain steeped within both the sexual–moral logics of slavery and the plantation as the conceptual space from which black women come to be understood. To draw attention to the manner in which perceptions of black womanhood continue to be circumscribed within the logics of slavery—underwriting the importation of a plantation schema within the American West, Nicholas stages Pleasant's recollection of her 1852 arrival in San Francisco as akin to a slave auction.[52] Although Pleasant proclaims early in the play that she "come to San Francisco 'cause it was wide open. Free!" as a reminder of the opportunities the West presented to her and other "pioneer urbanites" seeking the same, her later recollection of her arrival reveals how Western opportunity converges philosophically with the slaveholding South at the site of a black woman's body.[53] Nicholas writes:

> MARY ELLEN: (*to Rosa*) Soon as my feet hit the docks, a bunch a men begun bidding for my services as a cook! Mind you, they never asked my WHAT my business was. They seen a colored woman and BLAM, just like that, I had to be a cook!
> (*Mary Ellen re-enacts the auction for her services as a cook. It becomes too much like a slave auction.*)
> (*All bidding voices are male.*)
> VOICE: $100 a month plus a room!
> VOICE: $150 with light housework!
> VOICE: $200 over here! No work outside the kitchen!
> VOICE: You want to hire her or marry her!!
> VOICE: I wouldn't marry a coon? Not me!!
> VOICE: Take her but never marry her! I'll be her master, alright![54]

The men continue to banter and bid, laughing together as the price for Pleasant's services continues to rise. Eventually, one of the male voices says, "Good teeth! Now turn around and show the rest!" before one of the bidders

enters a final bid of $500, the amount Pleasant was reputed to have secured for services as a cook upon her arrival in San Francisco. At this final number, all the men cry “SOLD” in unison, finalizing, it seems, her position in the frontier city. In Nicholas’s imaginings of Pleasant’s arrival, the playwright chooses to foreground Pleasant’s blackness and thereby the ways in which the conceptual space of the plantation intervenes within the geographies of San Francisco to affix Pleasant in her appropriate place. In so doing, Nicholas refuses engagement with another strand of Pleasant’s mythic biography—the fact that the entrepreneur was reputed to pass as white during her early years in San Francisco under the name Mrs. Ellen Smith.[55] Rather than depict Pleasant as a woman passing to guard her safety and self-interest, Nicholas highlights how the “Western ideal” of limitless opportunity and freedom was, for black women, persistently undercut by the haunting specter of slavery.

Though Nicholas’s play illuminates the ways in which Pleasant has been slighted, and her story has been largely left in the hands of those who “want to name [her] in their own words for the rest of eternity” and who have “been plucking at [her] remains for years,” she refuses to sanitize Pleasant’s story.[56] Throughout the dialogue in *Buses,* salacious aspects of Pleasant’s business and personal dealings come to the fore as Parks questions her repeatedly: “What about ‘Mr.’ Bell?,” “Here Lies Mary Ellen Pleasant . . . friend of John Brown who laid down with ‘Mr.’ Bell,” and “Now, what kind of pleasures had to be so secret?”[57] Pleasant confesses, “Wine and song. Women and men,” to which Parks responds “It was a glorified cat house!!”[58] As the two women continue to wrestle with their historical legacies, Pleasant produces newspaper clippings about her political intrigues and her possible involvement in Thomas Bell’s death, whereby Parks discovers that she was known as “Mammy Pleasant.” Pleasant contends that after Bell died, the notable men of San Francisco “wanted to erase . . . bury . . . and mark [her] for all time in some throw away name like ‘Mammy,’” affirming the disciplinary function the moniker enacts to thwart historical remembrance by re-placing her within the sphere of the plantation.[59] Nicholas’s play offers no easy remedies to Pleasant’s historical dilemma, only a closing scene wherein Parks “packs [Pleasant’s belongings] with love and care” before deciding to no longer wait for her bus, declaring instead, “I can walk.”[60] Nicholas thereby suggests that black women escape the plantation’s libidinal economies only by testifying to and affirming one another—that historical remembrance invariably snares them within respectability traps that require them to behave as “flawless wonders,” as in the case of Parks, or evacuates them from memory using the disciplinary logics of the plantation, as with Pleasant.[61]

Taken together, Nicholas’s and Cliff’s imaginative representations of Pleasant trouble the tensions between myth and history, examining the ways that these tensions cathect, unresolved, within the black female body. While Cliff mines the mythic aspects of Pleasant’s life to insist her exploits were equal to the highly mythicized and historically remembered men of her time, Nicholas mines the quotidian and seemingly unsavory aspects of Pleasant’s life in

tandem with her great achievements to contest the limiting registers through which black women's lives are remembered. Both writers suggest, however, that moving Pleasant's story from the mythical to the historical realm remains a distinctly black woman-centered imperative, indicated in Cliff's text by Annie's role as the keeper of Pleasant's memory and in Nicholas's by Parks's packing Pleasant's belongings "with love and care" and walking away from her circumscribed legacy. In this way, even while advocating for Pleasant's rightful place in American history, each author casts doubt about the possibility of equitable historical remembrance for black women, save for in the works of other black women, whose attention and care may excavate and amplify these figures even as they strain against the disciplinary logics of the plantation that renders them the discursive excesses of American historical memory.

Pleasant in and as *Earthquake Weather*: The Spectral Mammy Serves the White Fisher King

Powers's novel *Earthquake Weather* integrates multiple religious, cultural, and psychological mythographies to craft a tale of a region overrun by unmoored spirits set loose by earthquakes in contemporary California. The novel's primary concern is not Pleasant, yet the ways in which her haunting spirit remains both active and serviceable within the geographical and spiritual terrains of California allow a reading of the text centered upon her. Powers calls up Pleasant's mystical presence and then leverages the mammy stereotype in tandem with the spiritual devaluation of voodoo in order to contain and dismiss her power. The novel's lead character Plumtree, a woman susceptible to possession by drifting spirits, attempts to resurrect the "Fisher King" of the West, whom she murdered while under the influence of a possessing spirit. Powers engages with the historical memory of Pleasant, referred to as "Mammy Pleasant" throughout, as a powerful "voodoo queen" who reappears as an intercessory spirit meant to aid the novel's protagonists. Powers's novel traverses the geographies of the San Francisco Bay area and the Napa Valley region to solve the otherworldly mysteries at the heart of the story. The painstaking manner in which *Earthquake Weather* charts Californian landscape from San Francisco to the Napa Valley, places Pleasant resided, as well as the multiple transformations of this landscape actualized by earthquake weather events that unleash haunting spirits, reveals an investment in the mystical aspects of physical place. In a novel so concerned with geographical locations and their relationships to the spirit world, how each character maps into the text is of great importance. In *Earthquake Weather,* the West is a deeply mystical space imbued with the spirits of all those who have inhabited it. True to the legacy of her historical place and displacement, Pleasant's first depiction in the text marks her as disruptive—"a *negro*" that breaks in upon an improvised spiritual telephone to displace a looping image of "silent-movie star" Mary Pickford.[62] At this point in the novel, an unnamed specter, Pleasant—uncalled—breaks in upon the scene much in

the same way she “breaks in upon the [American] imagination” in a radical displacement of white femininity.[63] Read another way, this moment signals the ways in which Pleasant, as many believe, first performed white femininity as a perceptive frontier entrepreneur, anticipating and paving the way for the pioneering movie star and businesswoman.

A shadowed figure, unbidden, haunting a haunting, Pleasant redirects the characters toward San Francisco as the site in which their search must take place. The “cable car bell in the background” in tandem with the “open window with a row of eucalyptus trees” provide sonic and visual clues that help the seekers determine that their journey inevitably leads to San Francisco. These sounds and sights acoustically and visually map the cityscape, obliquely referencing Pleasant’s role in shaping its social and geographical terrains. The cable car bell recalls Pleasant’s aforementioned suits against the streetcar companies while the trees reference the opulent mansion that once stood at the corner of Octavia and Bush Streets. The “faint, crackling susurration” of Pleasant brushing her hair, “insistent knocking of the raised window shade bar against the window frame, and a clanging bell from outside,” in contradistinction to the silence of Pickford’s twin action of brushing her hair, present Pleasant as an acoustically dominant presence.[64] Here noise, allied with blackness and both femininity and nonfemininity, aids in racially marking Pleasant. The sounds associated with her allude to her familiarity with the spirit realm and attest to her voodoo powers. Plumtree, a character inhabited by multiple personalities, notes, “the knocking, and the bell, those are to confuse ghosts,” suggesting that the onscreen figure understands the necessity of “masking” one’s spectral presence from intrusive spirits.[65] Moreover, Angelica, a trained *bruja,* fails in her attempts to literally tune out Pleasant and banish her from the communication device: “Angelica was shaking the jar harder, as if trying to drive the image off the TV screen, and she seemed irritated that the pennies weren’t doing it, were instead just jangling in rhythmic counterpoint to the bell.”[66] Angelica’s inability to banish Pleasant at once suggests the elder spirit’s greater powers and provides a rich moment for considering Pleasant’s legacy in our exploration of the relationship among black womanhood in the American West, the plantation, and the African diaspora. If we understand brujeria as a distinctly Americas indigenous practice that influenced religious and cultural practices in Central, South, and North America, particularly the American West in its nascence, then we may also understand Angelica’s act of shaking the pennies as an extension of this onto-cosmological framework and its power in the contemporary moment of the text. Angelica’s practices suggest a distinct spatiotemporal ground that encompasses the American West as the current and former domain of Mexican-identified and indigenous peoples and their cultural practices and knowledge that have been coopted and devalued in the United States.

Pleasant’s cacophonic disruption reorients the group’s attention to black womanhood in the West, overlaying the spiritual cartography of California as one intertwined with diasporic being, knowledge, and feminine power. Though

likely not Powers's intention, his characterization of the yet-mute Pleasant as a spectral figure engulfed in noise activates a politics of hearing blackness in the American West while suggesting that Pleasant's voodoo powers are able to withstand Angelica's brujeria. We understand voodoo as an African diasporic practice geographically allied largely with the Caribbean and the American South, so we must interrogate the place and presence of Pleasant's alleged voodoo practices in the making of the American West. In so doing, we also examine "the complex relationship between conjure and the political and libidinal economies of the . . . plantation [that enable] self-determination [while also] complicit in the sexual subjugation of black women."[67] Put another way, attending to the possibility of Pleasant's voodoo practices, we might understand voodoo (as does Bibbs) as a source of political and individual agency used in the service of self and community, even as these practices socially mark Pleasant as outside the frame of acceptable womanhood. By allowing Pleasant a posthumous spiritual potency that overwhelms Angelica's efforts, Powers affirms the (shadowed) powers of black femininity in the making of the American West. His presentation of Pleasant reifies long-held negative associations between the self-proclaimed capitalist and "the dark arts," even as he obliquely insists that one cannot understand California's spiritual cartographies without her. This revelation that her spiritual potency is aligned with voodoo affirms Bibbs's claim that Pleasant was a practitioner of voodoo who employed her "heritage of power" to garner influence among San Francisco elites in order to effect social change.[68] Thus, while Pleasant as a character remains shadowed, she proves central to the novel—echoing in many ways the circumstances of her life in the Bay Area. However, it cannot be ignored that she is called upon to function as a passage—an intercessor through which white being (in this case, literal reanimation and resurrection) can be actualized. Extrapolated to consider the sociospatial logics of the American West, we might also say that the African diaspora—as represented by Pleasant—functions as an intermediary space through which the (whitened) West has been actualized. The collapsing of diaspora via the plantation within black feminine form allows her body to signify a passage carrying the West into modernity, necessitating both acknowledgement of her power and discursive management of this power.

Pleasant's disempowerment in Powers's novel echoes the mechanisms of her historical marginalization—the spiritual devaluation of voodoo and persistent use of the appellation of mammy as measures of containing her black feminine power and autonomy. Unnamed for several pages after her appearance, and referred to simply as "negro" and "old black woman," Pleasant offers guidance to the other characters, insisting that they "eat the seeds of [her] trees," to enable her spirit to enter a member of their party to further aid them.[69] They initially rebuff her, even while in desperate need of her intercession, because they suspect "*she just wants a body again.*"[70] This initial refusal exposes a desire to keep Pleasant firmly in place—permanently ejected from the realm of the living to serve as a border against which to define the others' humanity. We see fur-

ther attempts to discursively contain Pleasant within the text when her identity is revealed as an “old voodoo-queen ghost . . . Mammy Pleasant, whose been screwing with TV receptions . . . ever since there’s been TV to screw with.”[71] The term *mammy* renders Pleasant legible as a subservient maternal resource available for white exploitation, while *voodoo queen* invokes her possible diasporic origins. However, Pleasant also traverses the spiritual and meteorological atmospheres of the Bay Area in Powers’s text as a powerfully disruptive force that persists over time, obliquely attesting to her enduring mark upon the region. Her role as “intercessor” for the ragged band of spiritual warriors centers her African diasporic knowledge, even while the text persistently devalues this knowledge in relation to Greco-Roman mythological traditions.[72]

As the novel progresses, Angelica’s adopted son Kootie runs away to an area in Chinatown that presents a spiritual passageway to Pleasant Boarding House, a “*magic*” place where “a fugitive” finds welcome—hinting at Pleasant’s reputed involvement with the Underground Railroad. Pleasant’s cosmic authority within the house, however, remains subordinated to an unseen white “master,” recalling plantation logics in the space of the West.[73] When she introduces herself to Kootie, Pleasant says: “You may as well call me Mammy Pleasant, like everybody else.”[74] Powers imagines the fearsome woman who vociferously contested her reduction to a mammy in life inviting a fourteen-year-old child to continue her posthumous debasement. As she converses with the boy, she confirms rumors about her enslaved origins and her training in “Caribbean voodoo systems,” but in a turn that demotes African diasporic cosmologies, she shuns her mother’s training to give “her allegiance to an older god,” whom we later learn is Dionysus.[75] In Powers’s imagination, Pleasant justifies her reduction to an intermediary, or servant within white-centered spiritual cosmographies through the demotion of voodoo, echoing her inalterable subordinate position as mammy in the American historical imaginary. The novel constructs Pleasant as an unfaithful servant of Dionysus who, upon her return to “the bloody practice of real voodoo,” lost her earthly goods and had her spirit bound to Earth as punishment.[76]

Kootie guides his group back to the site where he entered Pleasant’s home, finding instead of the phantasmagoric mansion, only the “six huge, shaggy eucalyptus trees” before looking down toward the placard that proclaims them Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial Park.[77] The trees’ seeds and bark prove necessary to their mission. The park as a site of Pleasant’s commemoration at once suggests, as does Angelica, that they “should have . . . more respect for her ghost” or legacy, as well as marks a site of eternal punishment that proves ripe for their exploitation.[78] The trees’ rootedness allow them to gather Pleasant’s spirit to use as their route toward reconciliation with Dionysus and the eventual resurrection of the Fisher King. Pleasant’s diasporic roots enable the use of her spectral body as the route that reproduces white male dominion. This paradigm attests to the ways in which black women make and remake landscapes into “more human geographies” while affirming and reaffirming the structures of

dominance against which they strain. One might easily understand Pleasant, and the other black women who ventured into the Western frontier, as performing these functions. Invariably bound to and created within and against "larger geographies," Pleasant's park still maps a space of the otherwise—a black feminine geographical site of annotation that recognizes blackness as generative. The relationship between Pleasant's black cartographies and maternal fecundity clashes within the imposed moniker *mammy* that socially constructs black femininity in subservience to whiteness.

While Pleasant's park provides a geographical site of spiritual knowledge and she enables the other characters' reconciliation, Pleasant is marked as perpetually inferior, her diasporic knowledge subordinated within a framework that prioritizes Greco-Roman conceptions of "gods" over her voodoo practices. Powers reduces her to an undead mammy, requiring the black woman's service even in death. This recalls the original Haitian folk meaning of the zombie while attempting to bind Pleasant's spirit within U.S. plantation logics in perpetuity. Despite (or perhaps due to) Powers's reliance on the denigrating impulses that mark her legacy in Western American history, *Earthquake Weather,* glanced at sideways, allows us to glimpse Pleasant as a black feminine presence so powerful and so enduring as to forever mark San Francisco's geographies, as well as guide lost souls across uncharted spiritual terrains. At the novel's end, the recoronated Fisher King banishes Pleasant from Earth, ordering her aboard an "insubstantial boat" to meet her eternal fate with the sea god.[79] The last vision of Pleasant is of a specter diminishing in strength, fading quickly as she returns to the oceanic realm, swallowed into its oblivion. Succeeding Pleasant's banishment, the natural order of things reasserts itself, evidenced by the king's assertion "this is a happy day . . . all of us obedient to our proper places," insinuating that her proper place remains outside the frontier city she helped to shape.[80]

Endings without End: Diasporic Passages

And yet, the oceanic comprises another diasporic geography shaped over space and time by black presence—a site of "submarine unity" littered "in the darkness, in the silence at the bottom," with evidence of Africans' transatlantic location and dislocation—their "bones comminuted into sand…. Bone into sand, into coral," regenerating, generative black being absorbed into Earth, transmuted into weather.[81] Even today, in Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial Park, within tight, constricting concrete barriers, six eucalyptus trees stand tall. The trees' roots tear through the earth, remaking the space they inhabit, unseen and unremarked—a testament to Pleasant's and scores of other black women's cartographical struggles to shed the confines of the plantation in order to map themselves onto the urban geographies of the wide-open West.

Notes

1. Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir,* ed. William Zinsser (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 83. Morrison delineates her literary practice of taking the remains or residual evidence of a person’s existence and imagining an interior life that has gone unrecorded. I am suggesting Pleasant’s postmortem invocation imagines her future remembrance inclusive of her lived experiences unrecorded in or as “history.”

2. See Jessie Carney Smith, “Notable Black American Women” (New York: Gale Research, 1996); Mary Ellen Snodgrass, “Pleasant, Mary Ellen,” in *The Underground Railroad: An Encyclopedia of People, Places, and Operations* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Lerone Bennett Jr., “An Historical Detective Story: The Mystery of Mary Ellen Pleasant,” *Ebony* (April and May 1979): 90-96, 71-86; and Lynn M. Hudson, *The Making of “Mammy Pleasant”: A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

3. See Bennett “An Historical Detective Story” and Hudson, *The Making of Mammy Pleasant*. W.E.B. Du Bois, in *The Gift of Black Folk* (1924), estimates Pleasant’s inherited fortune at $50,000, while Bennett, in keeping with Pleasant’s testimony in the *San Francisco Examiner* (October 13, 1895), says in “An Historical Detective Story” that she brought $15,000. Pleasant’s first husband, John Smith, was an abolitionist and purported plantation owner of unverifiable origin. Her second husband, John James Pleasant, also spelled his surname Pleasance and Plaisance, prompting Susheel Bibbs to suggest in *Heritage of Power* that Plaisance was of Haitian extraction and that he was perhaps a descendant of Jean Jacques Dessalines; Susheel Bibbs, *Heritage of Power: Marie LaVeaux to Mary Ellen Pleasant* (Sacramento: M.E.P. Publications, 2012).

4. Hudson, *Making of “Mammy Pleasant,”* 9-12. Bibbs notes in an 2018 interview for KQED, “How a Heroine Became a ‘Demon’ in Victorian San Francisco,” (October 26, 2018, https://www.kqed.org/news/11701126/how-a-heroine-became-a-demon-in-victorian-san-francisco. Accessed November 15, 2017), “Her life is so enshrouded in mystery because she was her own spin doctor.”

5. Hudson, *Making of “Mammy Pleasant,”* 2.

6. Quintard Taylor, “Mary Ellen Pleasant: Entrepreneur and Civil Rights Activist in the Far West,” in *By Grit and Grace: Eleven Women Who Shaped the American West* (1997), 115–34, 116; Bibbs, *Heritage of Power,* 10.

7. Hudson, *Making of “Mammy Pleasant,”* 1.

8. Holdredge’s series includes *Mammy Pleasant* ((New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1953), *Mammy Pleasant’s Partner* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1954), *The House of the Strange Woman* (San Carlos, CA: Nourse Publishing, 1961), and *Mammy Pleasant’s Cookbook* (San Francisco: 101 Productions, 1970).

9. Bibbs’s work on Pleasant includes *Heritage of Power* (Sacramento: MEP Productions,1998), *Meet Mary Pleasant* (Sacramento: MEP Productions, 2008), public performances, and a dedicated webpage to Pleasant’s life (www.mepleasant.com).

10. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xviii. Pleasant was active in the fight for racial equality in San Francisco (and by extension, the nation). In 1858, Pleasant financed attorneys for Archy Lee’s (a black man arrested and detained under the federal Fugitive Slave Act) court cases in pursuit of his freedom. In 1866, Pleasant initiated antidiscrimination lawsuits against the North Beach and Mission Railroad and against the Omnibus Railroad Company.

11. Quintard Taylor, “Facing the Urban Frontier: African American History in the Reshaping of the Twentieth-Century American West,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 (2012): 6.

12. William L. Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States* (New York: Touchstone, 1996). See also Douglass Flamming’s *African Americans in the West* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2009), 11, for a discussion of African Americans’ investment in the “Western Ideal—the notion that the West offered the best chance for racial equality in the United States.”

13. Ibid., 43.

14. Hudson, *Making of “Mammy Pleasant,*” 10. Bibbs asserts in *Heritage of Power* that Pleasant lived in New Orleans in the 1850’s and trained in Vodou with famed mambo Marie LaVeaux. It was during this time, Bibbs contends, that LaVeaux aided Pleasant in getting work as a plantation cook in order to hide her from authorities seeking to arrest her. According to this version of Pleasant’s story, she sailed to California from New Orleans as “Mme. Christophe” (Heritage of Power, 115-116)

15. Jarvis McInnis, “‘Behold the Land’: W.E.B. Du Bois, Cotton Futures, and the Afterlife of the Plantation in the U.S. South,” *The Global South* 10, no. 2 (2016): 74.

16. John Smith and Deborah Cohen, “Uncanny Hybridities,” in *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 6.

17. Jill Jepson, “Disruption and Disguise in Black Feminine Entrepreneurial Identity: Mary Ellen Pleasant, Elizabeth Keckley, & Eliza Potter,” in *Women’s Concerns: Twelve Women Entrepreneurs of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 157, 156, 120. See

also Bennett, "Historical Detective Story"; Hudson, *Making of "Mammy Pleasant";* and Taylor, "Mary Ellen Pleasant."

18. Lynn M. Hudson, "Mining a Mythic Past: The History of Mary Ellen Pleasant," in *African American Women Confront the West, 1600–2000,* ed. Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

19. W.E.B. Du Bois profiles Pleasant in *The Gift of Black Folk,* wherein he retains the problematic moniker "Mammy Pleasants" in his otherwise laudatory profile, going so far as to suggest that the three initials "M.E.P. . . . stood for Mammy Pleasants," reflecting his inability to imagine Pleasant outside the framework of mammydom (272). Famously, in a 1901 interview with Isabel Fraser, Pleasant reported, "I don't like to be called mammy by everyone. Put that down. I'm not mammy to everybody in California." See Isabel Fraser, "Mammy Pleasant: The Woman." *San Francisco Call,* July 9, 1901.

20. The *Sharon v. Sharon* (1884) and *Sharon v. Hill* lawsuits in the 1880s most prominently cemented Pleasant as mammy in the public imagination, as well as trafficking in rumors about her "voodoo powers" and her role as a madam. Newspaper accounts of these trials, such as the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s March 19, 1884, story "Sharon's Dirty Duds, Sarah Althea's 'Hoodoo': Socks and Shirts to Rekindle Love's Flame in Sharon's Bosom," paint Pleasant as a duplicitous mammy–madam figure who trained her charges to "charm" their lovers. Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2007), 5. McElya argues that the mammy trope was constructed such that "the relationship of the master to the slave was removed from . . . economic exigency and . . . [was] based on . . . mutual obligations . . . as well as affection."

21. Here, I draw upon McKittrick's seminal work *Demonic Grounds* (2006), wherein McKittrick delineates the ways in which "geography and black women have always functioned together" in order to call attention to "this interrelated process [as] a new way to 'enter' into space (conceptually and materially), one that uncovers a geographic story predicated on an ongoing struggle (to assert humanness and more humanly workable geographies)" (xxiv).

22. Ibid., xxv.

23. Michelle Cliff, "Fiction as History, History as Fiction," *Ploughshares* 20, no. 2 (1994): 199.

24. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 117.

25. Michelle Cliff, *Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1993), 25, 27.

26. Cliff, *Free Enterprise,* 27.

27. Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 117.

28. Cliff, *Free Enterprise,* 18.

29. Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 117.

30. Cliff, "Fiction as History," 197.

31. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* 46.

32. Bibbs, *Heritage of Power.*

33. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* 46.

34. Cliff, *Free Enterprise,* 154.

35. Ibid., 75. Michelle Y. Gordon, "'Midnight Scenes and Public Orgies': Public Narratives of Voodoo in New Orleans and Nineteenth-Century Discourses of White Supremacy": American Quarterly 64.4 (2012): 769.

36. Sarah Juliet Lauro's *Transatlantic Zombie: Slavery, Rebellion, and Living Death* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015) helpfully "traces the zombie myth, whereby a popular metaphor about slavery became transposed in cinema, pulp fiction, and US popular culture" (3). Zombies as cultural figures are believed to have emerged from Haitian folktales "deeply associated with the nation's history as a colony and the people's past as plantation slaves" (3). While Lauro points out that "after hundreds of years of transmission, transformation, and translation, the zombie can't be called anything other than a myth," the mythological status of the zombie, and its varied permutations as a symbol of living death cannot help but remain "uniquely in synch with its form, which originally represented a slave raised from the dead to labor, who revolts against his masters" (4).

37. Ibid., 7.

38. Cliff's text later influences Hudson's historical study, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant."* Hudson epigraphically inserts the previously quoted text from *Free Enterprise,* opening her historical biography of Pleasant with its provocative interrogations as a means of exposing the highly contested and largely misunderstood impact of Pleasant's presence in the American West.

39. Cliff, *Free Enterprise,* 203.

40. Ibid., 203.

41. Ibid., 204–5, my emphasis.

42. Brock Keeling, "Exploring Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial Park, the Smallest Public Park in San Francisco," *Curbed San Francisco,* September 22, 2016, https://sf.curbed.com/2016/9/22/13017182/san-francisco-mary-pleasant-small-park, accessed November 25, 2017.

43. Bennett, “Historical Detective Story.”
44. Here I allude to the most famous passage in Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno,* “‘You are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?’ ‘The Negro’” (Bedford, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, [1855] 2006, 107), to suggest that we can read the shadows of Pleasant’s eucalyptus trees as an environmental reminder of the shadows of revolt—a reference to the unfinished business of black liberation in diaspora, as well as to the shadowing of blacks within the making of American or New World capital.
45. Cliff, *Free Enterprise,* 203.
46. Ibid., 204.
47. Sharpe writes of “Black annotation and Black redaction as . . . examples of wake work” (*In the Wake,* 113). Redaction is understood as working across its multiple meanings: “putting into a definite form,” “an act of editorial revision,” and “resistance” such that we can understand Pleasant’s tombstone epitaph and the trees in her park as acts of black redaction that allow Cliff to apprehend her otherwise than mammy, witch, or prostitute. Pleasant’s redactions anticipate and engender Cliff’s black annotations.
48. Denise Nicholas, “Buses” in *The National Black Drama Anthology: Eleven Plays from America’s Leading African American Theaters,* ed. Woodie King (New York: Applause Theater Books, 1995), 304.
49. Nicholas, *Buses,* 324.
50. Nicholas, 325. See also Douglass Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).
51. Kalisha Buckhanon, “Pleasant Imagining: Speculation, Trials, and Postmodern Historical Heroism of Mary Ellen Pleasant,” *Medium,* March 2, 2015, https://medium.com/@Kalisha/pleasant-imagining-speculation-trials-postmodern-black-historical-heroism-in-mary-ellen-pleasant-4776ec55bcb9, accessed December 17, 2017.
52. While Nicholas has Pleasant voice that she arrived in San Francisco in April 1852 in *Buses,* even the date of her arrival proves ripe for contest. Some scholars mark her arrival as early as 1848, as does Pleasant in her autobiography.
53. Nicholas, *Buses,* 308.
54. Ibid., 317.
55. Several sources note that Pleasant initially passed as white upon her arrival in San Francisco, though beliefs about her motives vary widely from the prospect of economic gain to her need for self-protection in a territory recently at the center of contest about the expansion of slavery in the United States that culminated both in the Compromise of 1850 and the federal Fugitive Slave Act, as well as California’s own Fugitive Slave Law in 1852, the purported year of Pleasant’s arrival.
56. Nicholas, *Buses,* 307, 327.
57. Ibid., 313, 314.
58. Ibid., 314.
59. Ibid., 331.
60. Ibid., 331.
61. Ibid., 312.
62. Tim Powers, *Earthquake Weather* (New York: TOR Tom Doherty Associates, 1997), 108.
63. Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 80. Spillers writes that “the [black] female . . . breaks in upon the imagination with a forcefulness that marks both a denial and an ‘illegitimacy’” that renders black female presence as disruptive.
64. Powers, *Earthquake Weather,* 108.
65. Ibid., 108.
66. Ibid., 108.
67. McInnis, “Behold the Land,” 79.
68. Bibbs, *Heritage of Power,* 108–9.
69. Powers, *Earthquake Weather,* 188.
70. Ibid., 189.
71. Ibid., 205.
72. Ibid., 205.
73. Ibid., 254–55.
74. Ibid., 255.
75. Ibid., 274.
76. Ibid., 275.
77. Ibid., 287.
78. Ibid., 288.
79. Ibid., 431.
80. Ibid., 437.
81. Cliff, *Free Enterprise,* 210.