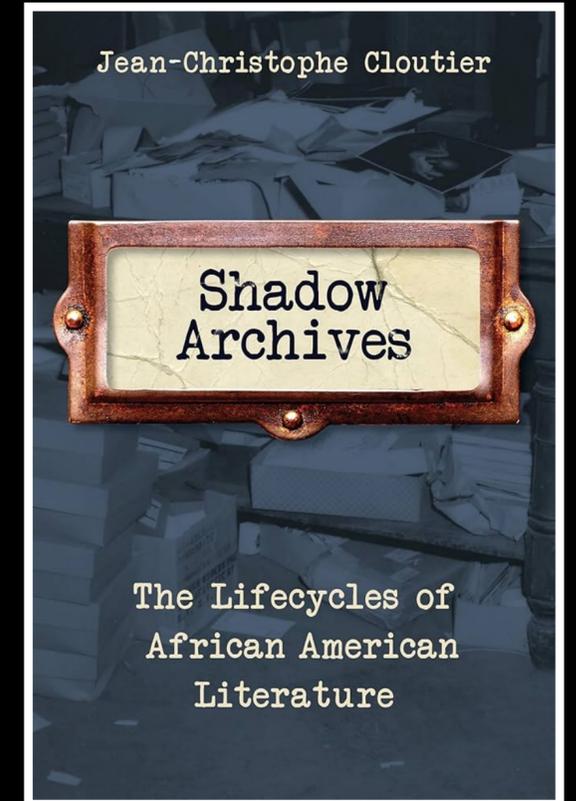


BOOKS!!



ECL 596: Professor Jessica Pressman
Fall 2025

Day 16: Shadow Archives and Archival
Theory

ADMIN

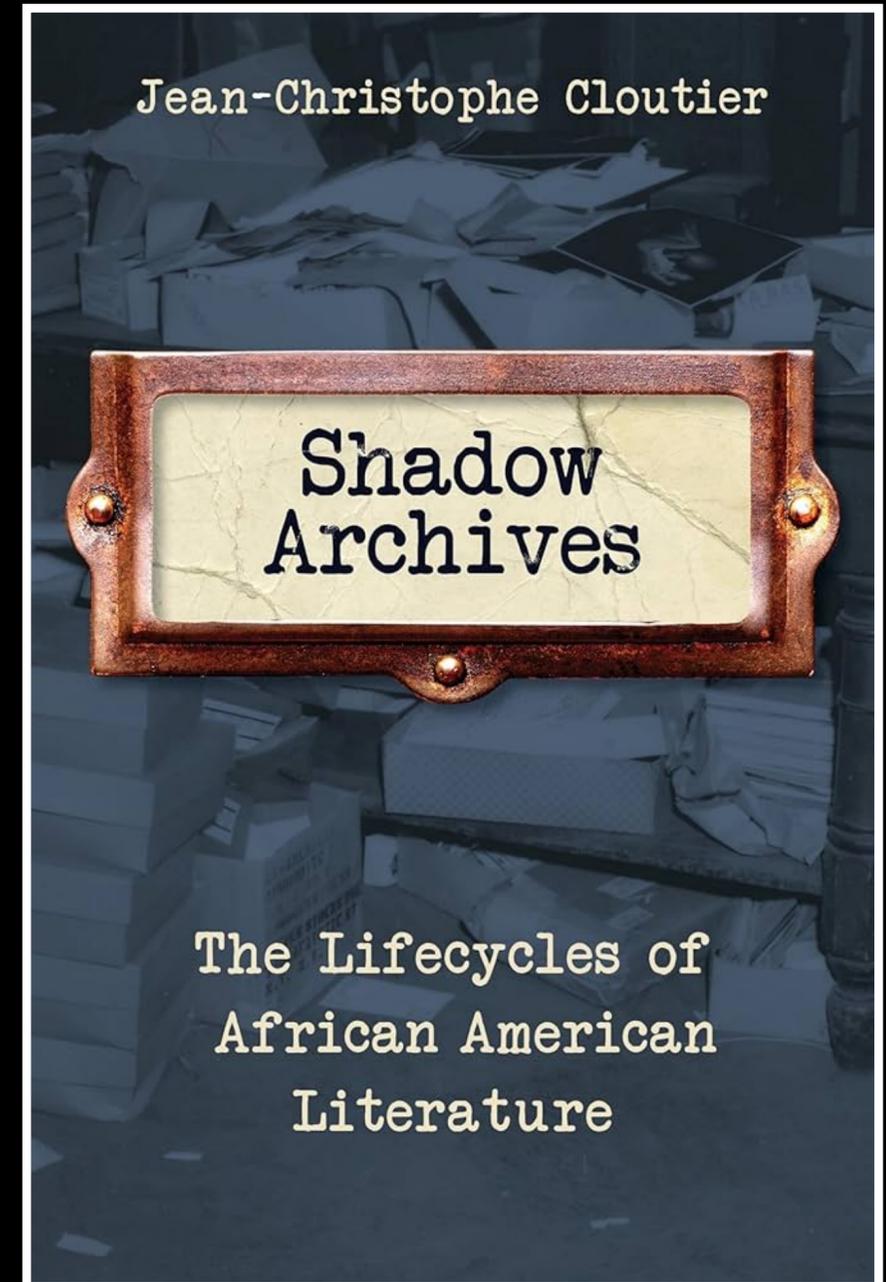
- Deadline for midterm revisions: 11/16
- Final project proposals also due on 11/16?? **Or do you want more time?
11/23**
- Change of meetings: Workshopping in DH on 12/2

Final Project proposal brainstorming

- What is your topic/idea/research question?
- What object(s) do you want to examine/explore?
- What kind of format do you want your presentation to take?

Discussion

- Thoughts about this text AND archives



From your blogs- reading archives as historical “texts”

- DAKOTA: This circles back to the power of an archivist and collector. They are able to pick and choose what they want and exert power over what they deem worthy to be collected. Shadow books fight against this and prove that awareness is always shifting... Studying all aspects of the archive can reveal a lot about the archivist, society, and the content.
- MICAELA: His metaphor of the archive as a “boomerang” suggests that texts may disappear from view but can return to relevance when cultural interests shift or when scholars retrieve and reinterpret neglected materials”
- JANESA: By looking through different archives over time, it can tell us about the political climate and how people were seen at the time depending on how and who curated it.

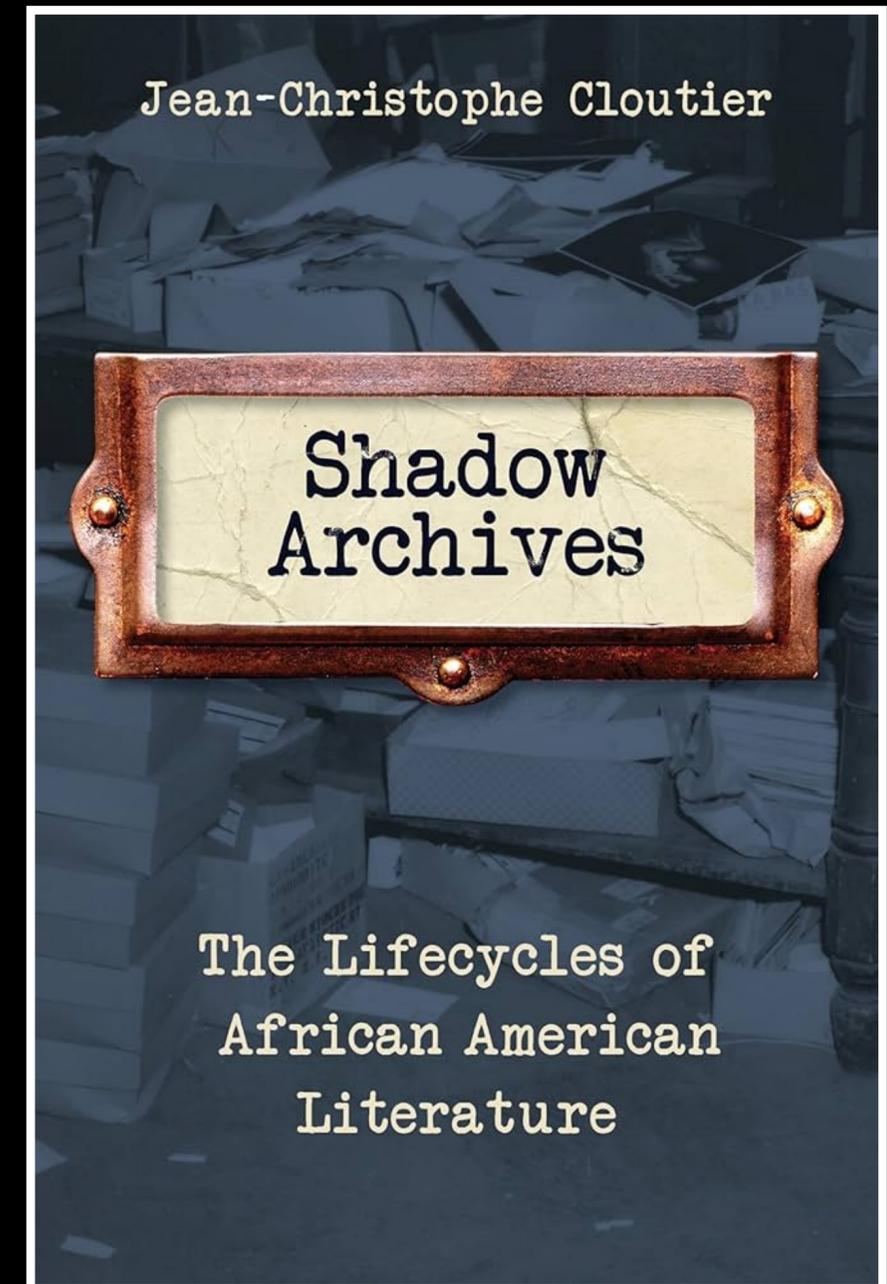
-

African American Archival Theory

“African American letters are suffused with a spectral poetics of anticipation that gestates in and through archivism” (17)

“Shadow archivism is an Afrofuturist pledge” (17)

Jean-Christophe Cloutier, *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* (Columbia UP, 2019).



African American Archival Theory

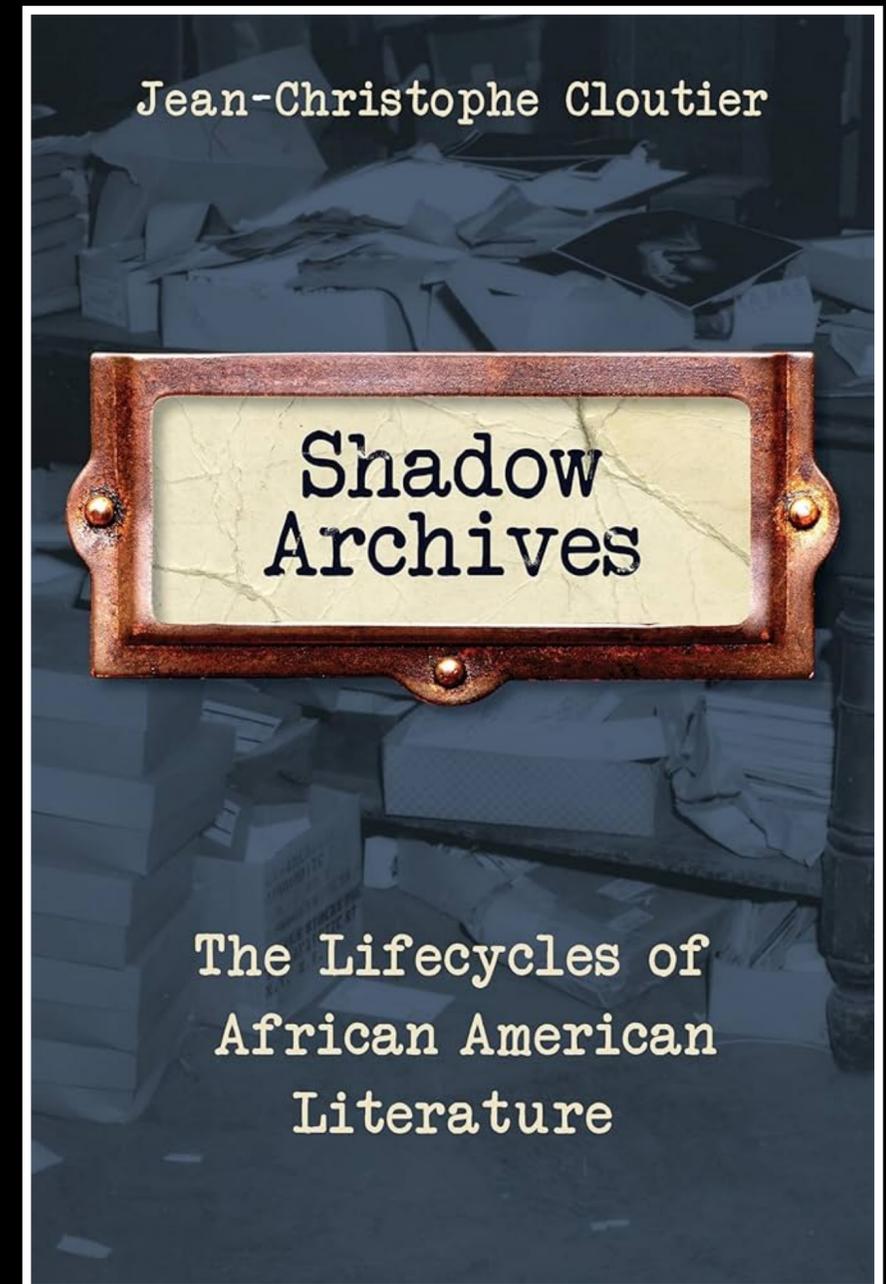
“The paradox here—namely, that future presence is born out of past absence, that anything saved serves only to remind us of all that was lost—forms the archivescape of African American literature” (2)

“The book argues that such an archival impulse is the invisible hallmark of twentieth-century African American literary practice” (2)

“The archive is never an end in itself—otherwise we might as well call it a dumpster—but rather a speculative means to possible futures, including unknowable theologies guided by unborn hands” (3)

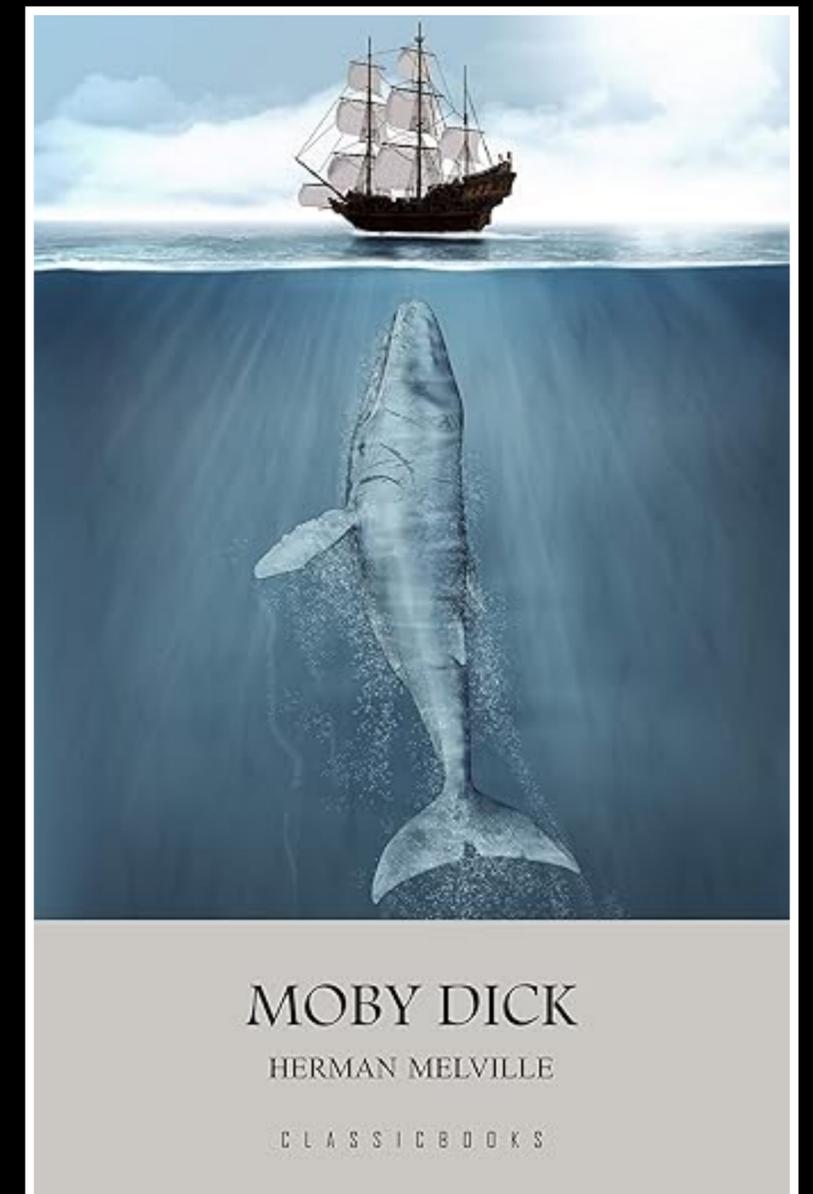
“African American criticism fuse archival theory and practice in thinking together afterlives, resilience, tradition, materiality, loss, translation, absences, recuperation, and civic engagement” (9)

Jean-Christophe Cloutier, *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* (Columbia UP, 2019).



From your blogs — literature as archive

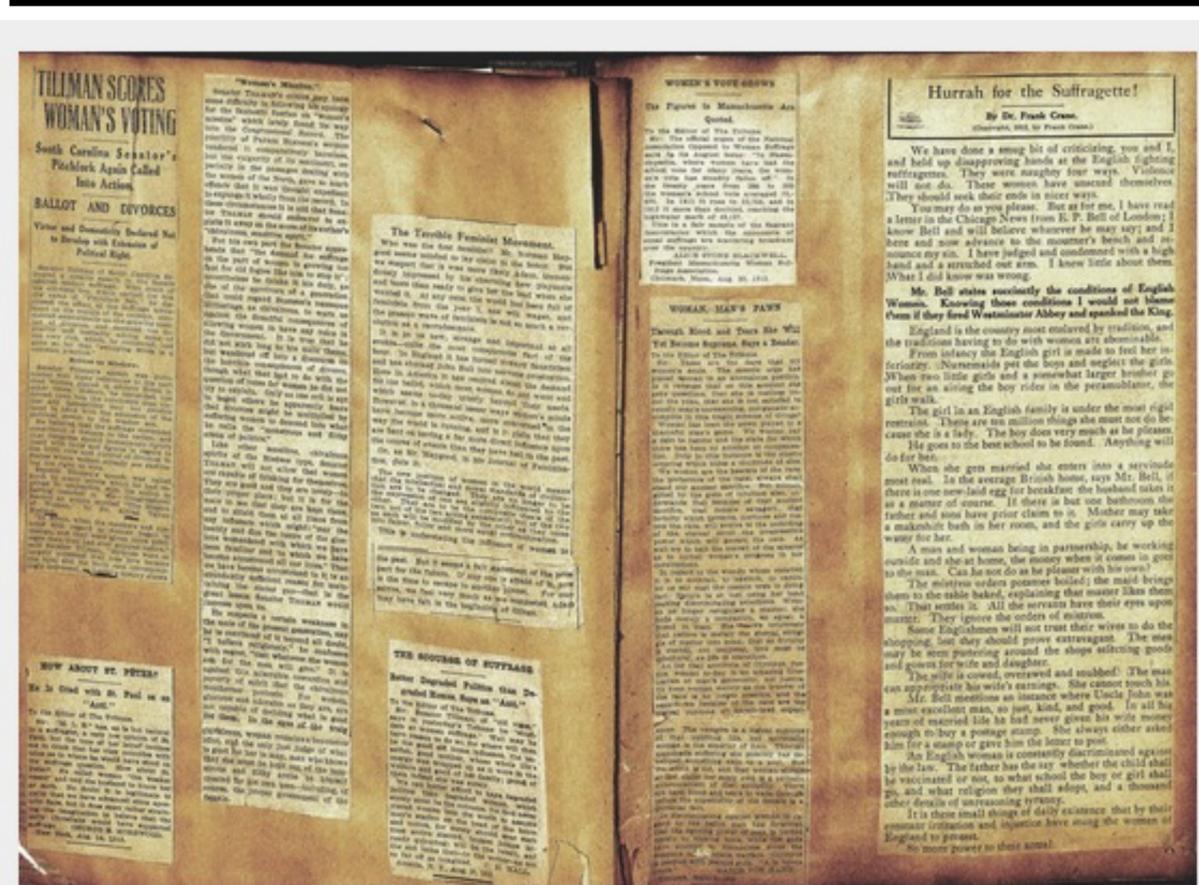
- VIDE: Fiction and other forms of creative writing like poetry and creative nonfiction offer individuals the chance to distill their personal histories and libraries into portable, sharable mini-archives. This is valuable work.



From your blogs — archives AGAINST the Power

- TANYA: What I found most moving was how this “archival sensibility” wasn’t just political but also deeply creative. These writers weren’t only keeping records to survive, they were turning that survival into art. The act of saving letters, manuscripts, or photographs became something beautiful a way of saying we were here, and our stories matter.

Scrapbooking



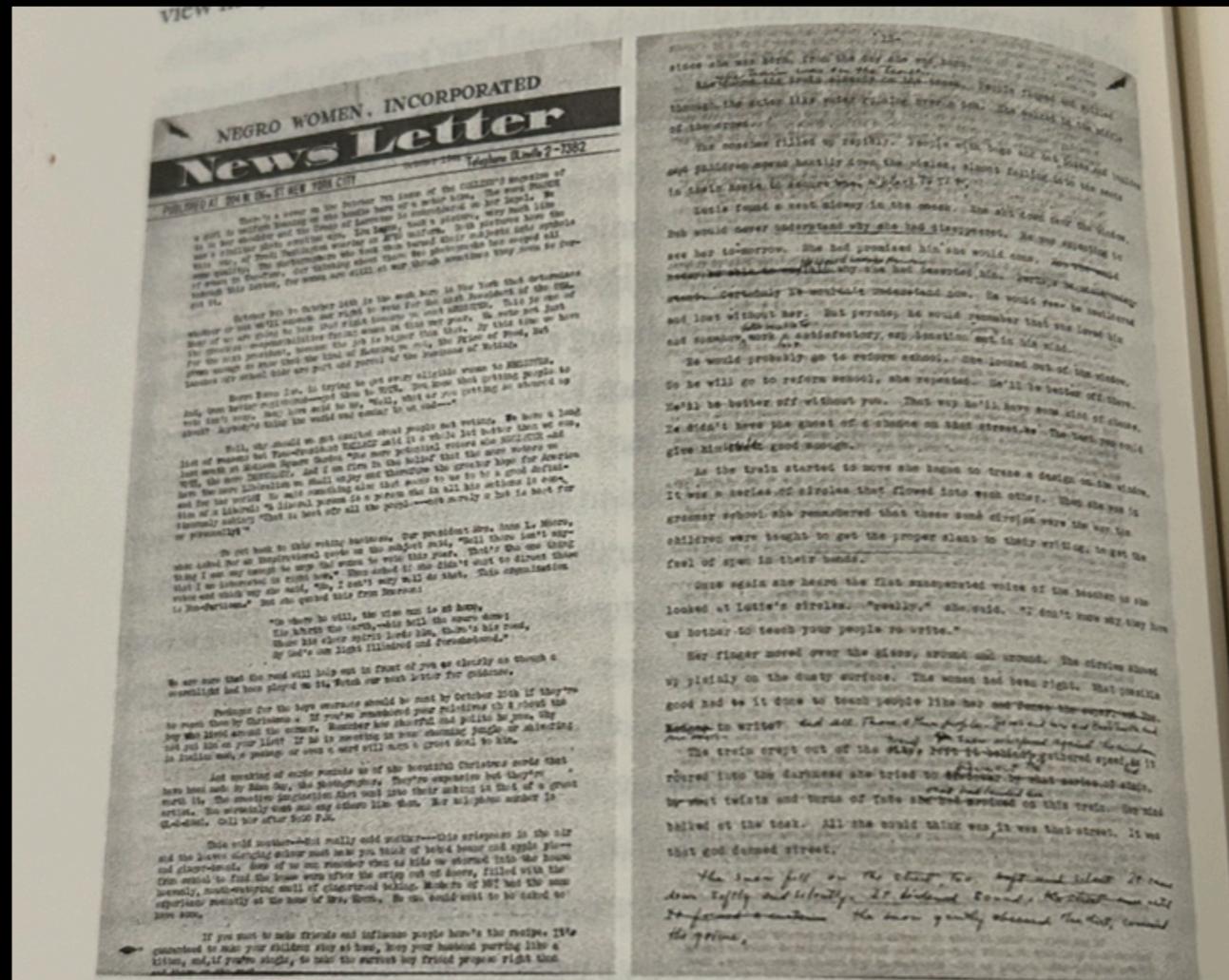
— Scrapbook regarding World War I and Women's Suffrage, 1913-1918. Emily Wayland Dinwiddie compiled this scrapbook, which includes history-making headlines from newspapers during the beginning of women's suffrage to World War I. The headlines of this page are what are most important. They show many different views of how people (editors specifically) felt about women having the right to vote. Some headlines are exciting like "Hurrah for the Suffragette!" while others blame women's suffrage on issues such as divorce or laziness. (MSS 3194-c. Image by Petrina Jackson)

Material Studies

Ann Petry often typed her novels on the backs of fliers and newsletters of the activist organization in which she was a leading member (214)

“In other words, Petry’s literary work is literally inscribed upon her activism, a relation that a the materiality of her manuscripts renders inescapable as each typescript page forms two sides of the same coin or, rather than same sheet of paper” (214)

Jean-Christophe Cloutier, *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* (Columbia UP, 2019),



FIGURES 4.1 AND 4.2. Recto and verso sides of a page from the original typescript of Ann Petry’s novel *The Street*, typed on pages of *Negro Women, Incorporated, Newsletter*, October 1944.

Source: Box 1, folder 1, uncataloged James Weldon Johnson MSS Petry Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale.

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* (1992)

“It has occurred to me that the very manner by which American literature distinguishes itself as a coherent entity exists because of this unsettled and unsettling population” (5-6)

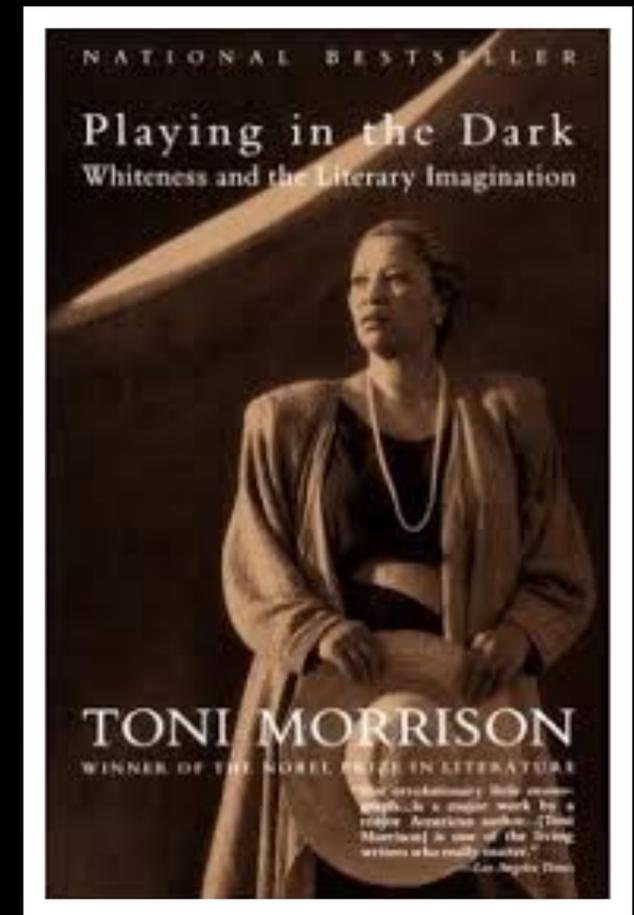
“How does literary utterance arrange itself when it tries to imagine an Africanist other? What are the signs, the codes, the literary strategies designed to accommodate this encounter” (16)

“Africans and their descendants were not, in any sense that matters, *there*” (16)

“It requires hard work *not* to see this” (17)

“Explicit or implicit, the Africanist presence informs in compelling and inescapable ways the texture of American literature.” (46)

“Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself *as not enslaved*, but free; not repulsive, but desirable” (52)



Saidiya Hartman on the Black archive

-“the stories that exist are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses” (2)
“The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of prosperity” (2)

-“Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise” (12)

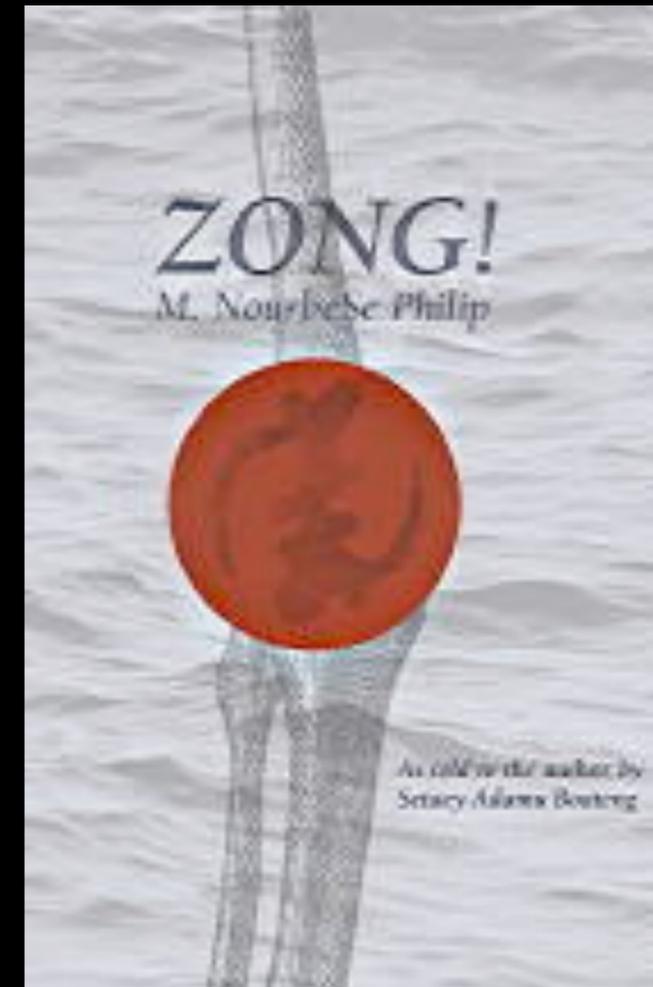
“It is a history of an unrecoverable past... it is a history written with and against the archive

—“Venus in Two Acts” *Small Axe*, no. 26, vol 12, no. 2, June 2008, 1-14

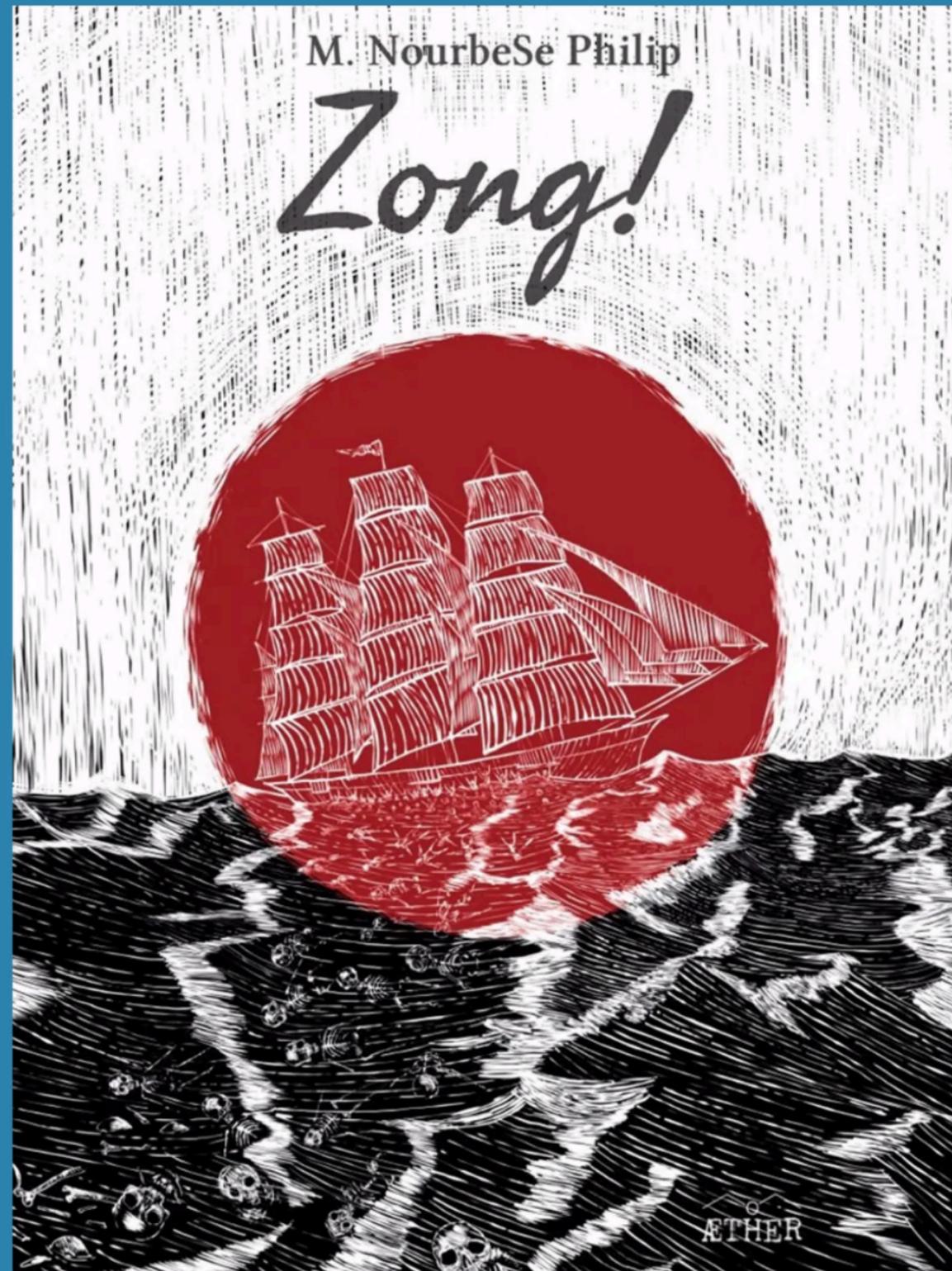
Zong & Zong!

On November, 1781, the captain of the slave ship *Zong* ordered that some 150 Africans be murdered by drowning so that the ship's owners could collect insurance monies

“The case report *Gregson vs. Gilbert*, recounts the massacre by drowning of some 130 enslaved Africans over the course of ten days beginning on November 29th, 1781. The captain of the eponymous slave ship, *Zong*, having made many navigational errors resulting in extending the length of the voyage from West Africa to Jamaica ordered the Africans be thrown overboard so as to allow the owners of the ship, the Gregsons, to claim indemnity from their insurers, the Gilberts. When the insurers refused to honour the contract of insurance, the ship’s owners initiated legal action against them, which proved to be successful. Upon appeal, however, the insurers, the Gilberts were granted a new trial. The report of that hearing, *Gregson vs Gilbert* constitutes the only extant, public document related to the massacre. Through fugal and counterpointed strategies, *Zong!* explodes the coded, documented silence of the historical text to become an anti-narrative lament that tells the story of this haunting and tragic massacre: it cannot be told yet must be told; it can only be told by not telling.”



M. NourbeSe Philip, Setaey Adamu Boateng
2008

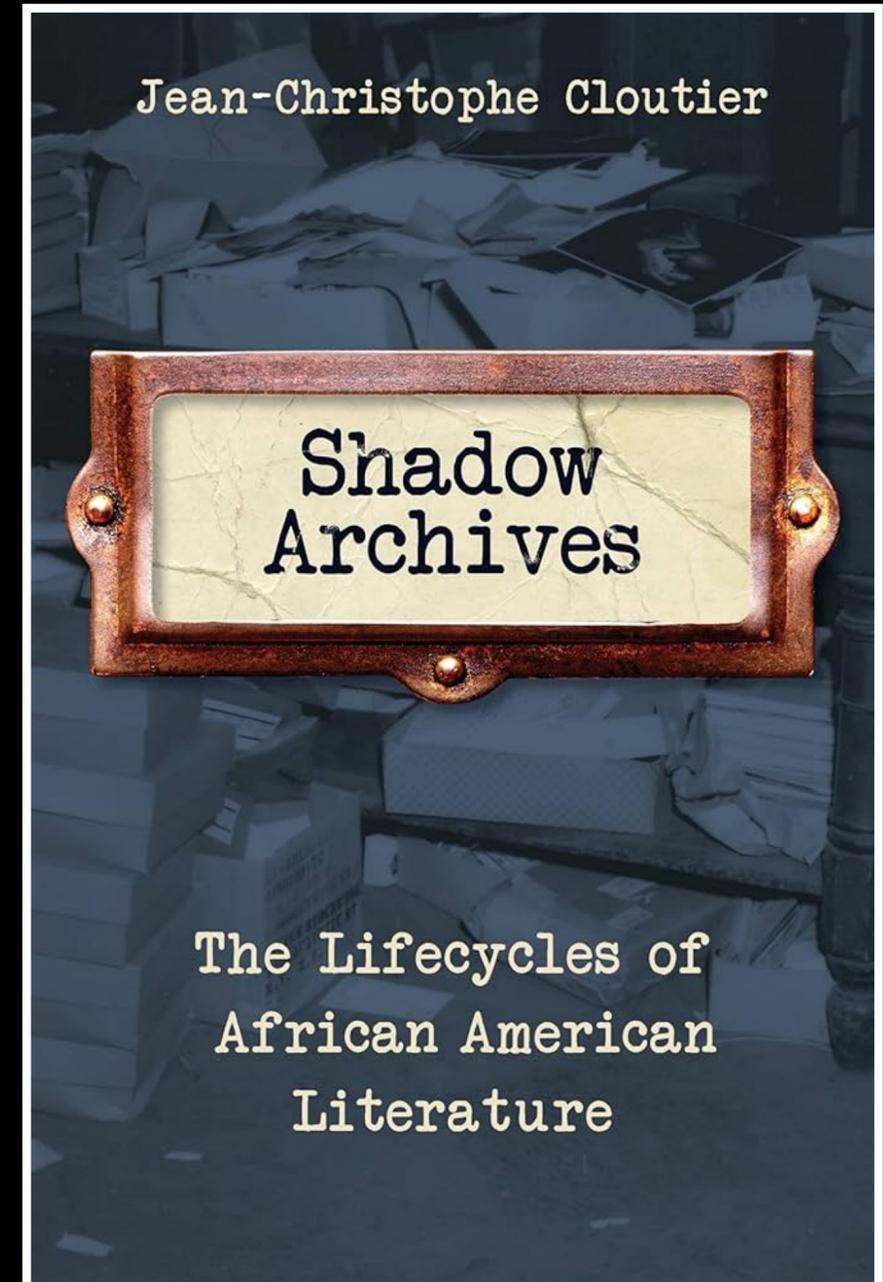


“What is the word for bringing bodies back from the water? From a ‘liquid grave’? Months later I do an Internet search for a word or phrase for bring someone back from underwater that has as precise a meaning as the unearthing contained within the word exhume. I find words like resurrect and subaquatic but not ‘exaqua.’ Does this mean that unlike being interred, once you’re underwater there is no retrieval – that you can never be ‘exhumed’ from water?”

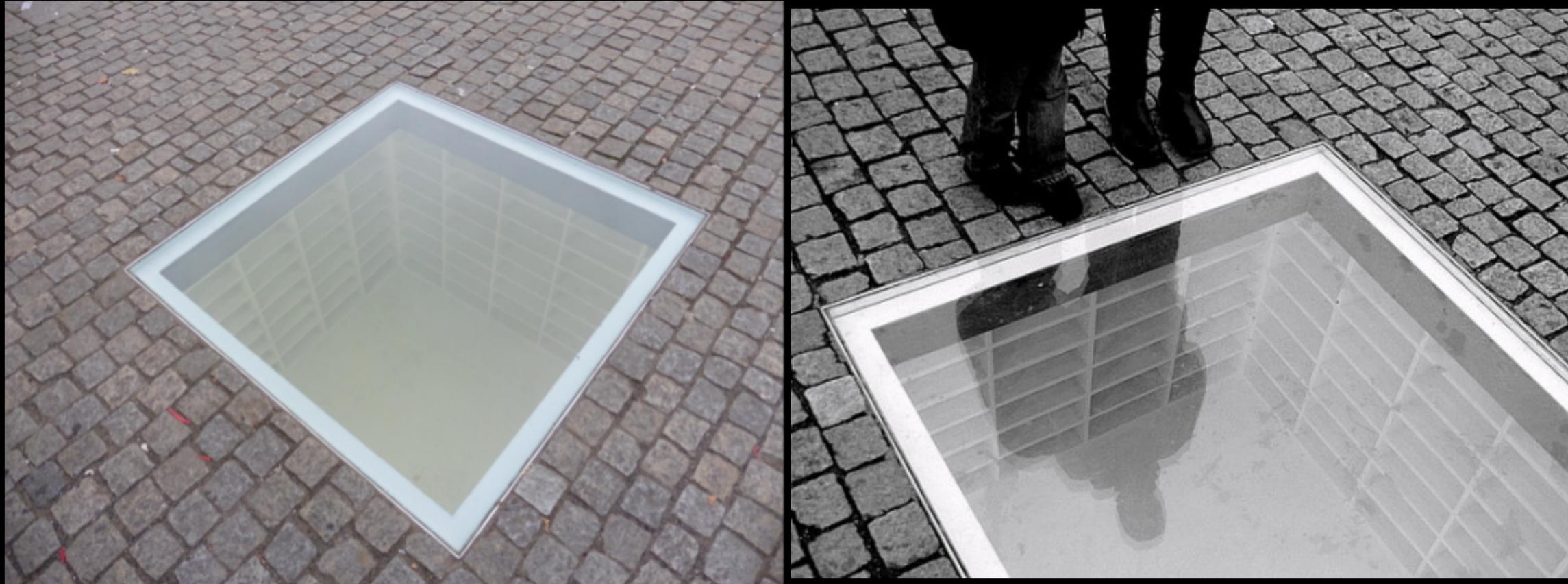
- M . NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*

Discussion

- With this understanding of archives, what might you do— as critic or creative writer?



Shadow Archives



Micha Ullman's "Library" (1995), a memorial to books burned in the Holocaust, located in Berlin's Bebelplatz, the site of public burning of tens of thousands of books on May 10, 1933.

(1978)

The Sea Is History

Derek Walcott 1930 – 2017

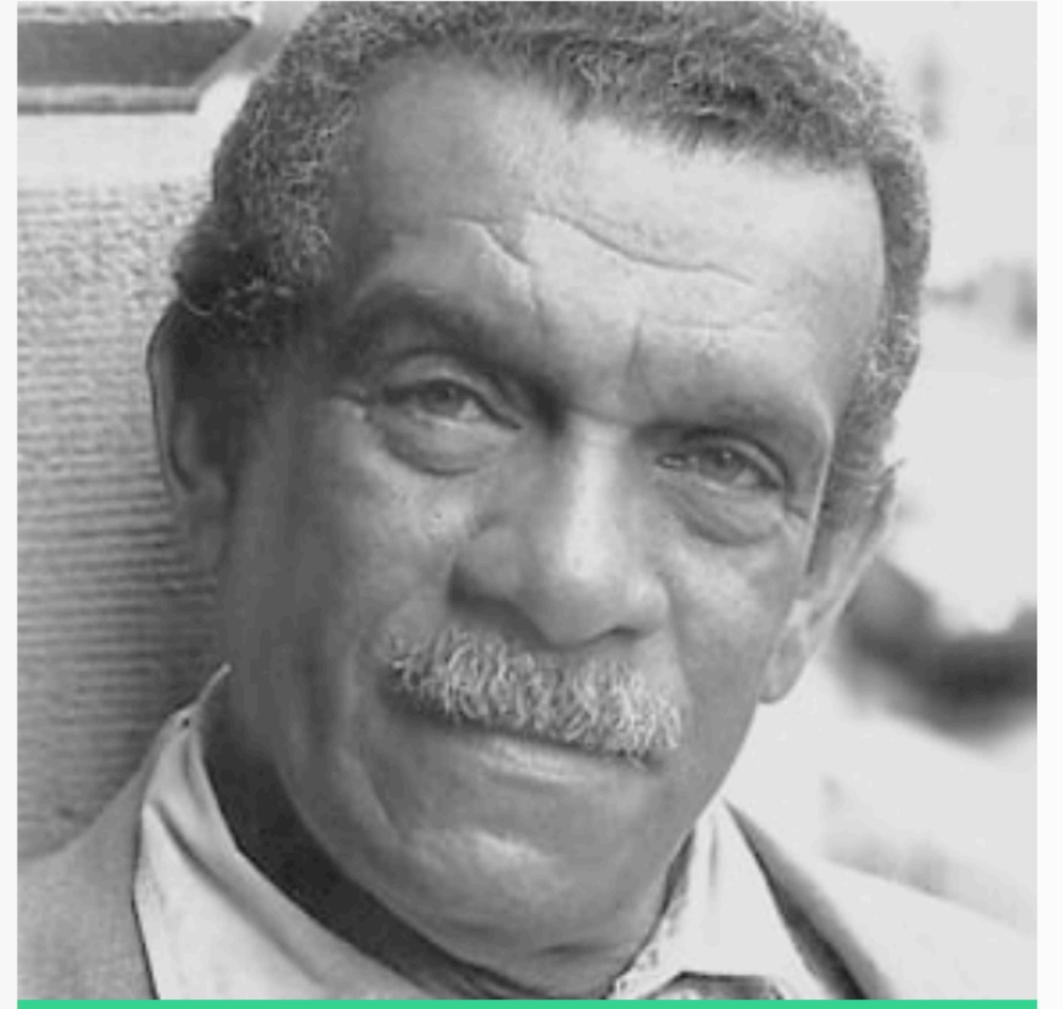
Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History.

First, there was the heaving oil,
heavy as chaos;
then, like a light at the end of a tunnel,

the lantern of a caravel,
and that was Genesis.

Then there were the packed cries,
the shit, the moaning:

Exodus.



Born in 1930, in the West Indies, Derek Walcott received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992.

[About Derek Walcott](#)>

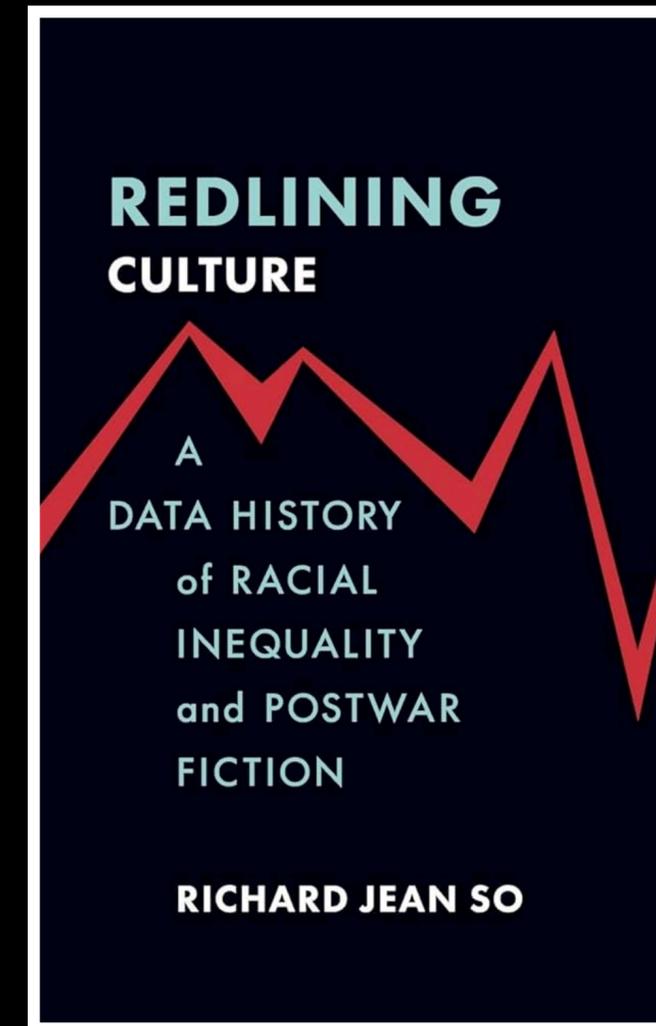
Themes

redlining in literary culture

“One main thesis of this book is that racial inequality in literature is hard to change in part because it’s hard to see. And it’s been hard to see because it partly exists at a scale that eludes traditional modes of readerly understanding and detection—what one can read on the page, and an archive.” (185)

“The value of a computational approach to literary history is that it reveals persistent patterns of language and form. But perhaps just as importantly, it draws our attention to the individual works and authors who interrupt the pattern. Close reading allows us to discover moments of curious and revealing noise amid all of the signal. Such noise enables us to understand how the pattern can and often is subverted.” (65)

-Richard Jean So, *Redlining Culture: A Data History of Racial Inequality and Postwar Fiction* (Columbia UP, 2021)

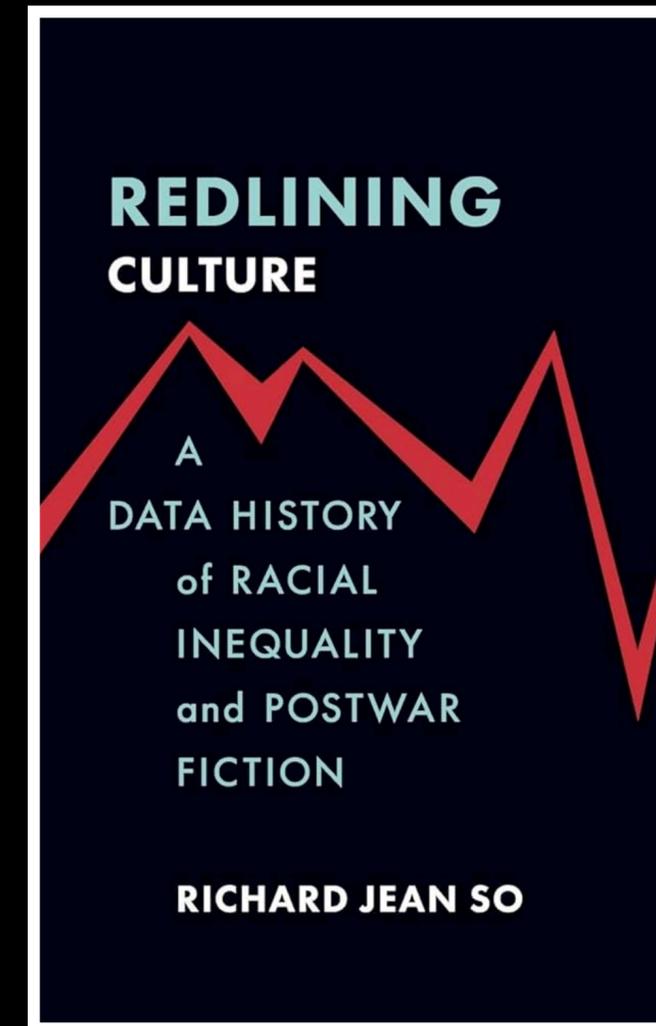


redlining in literary culture

-“literary scholars have missed the story of cultural redlining because our available methods, such as close reading and historicism, are not well equipped to discern such patterns. Cultural redlining, much like economic redlining, does not happen at the level of the individual writer, page, or text.” (6)

Book prizes: “The central, organizing logic of postwar American literary distinction is a denial of blackness” (110)

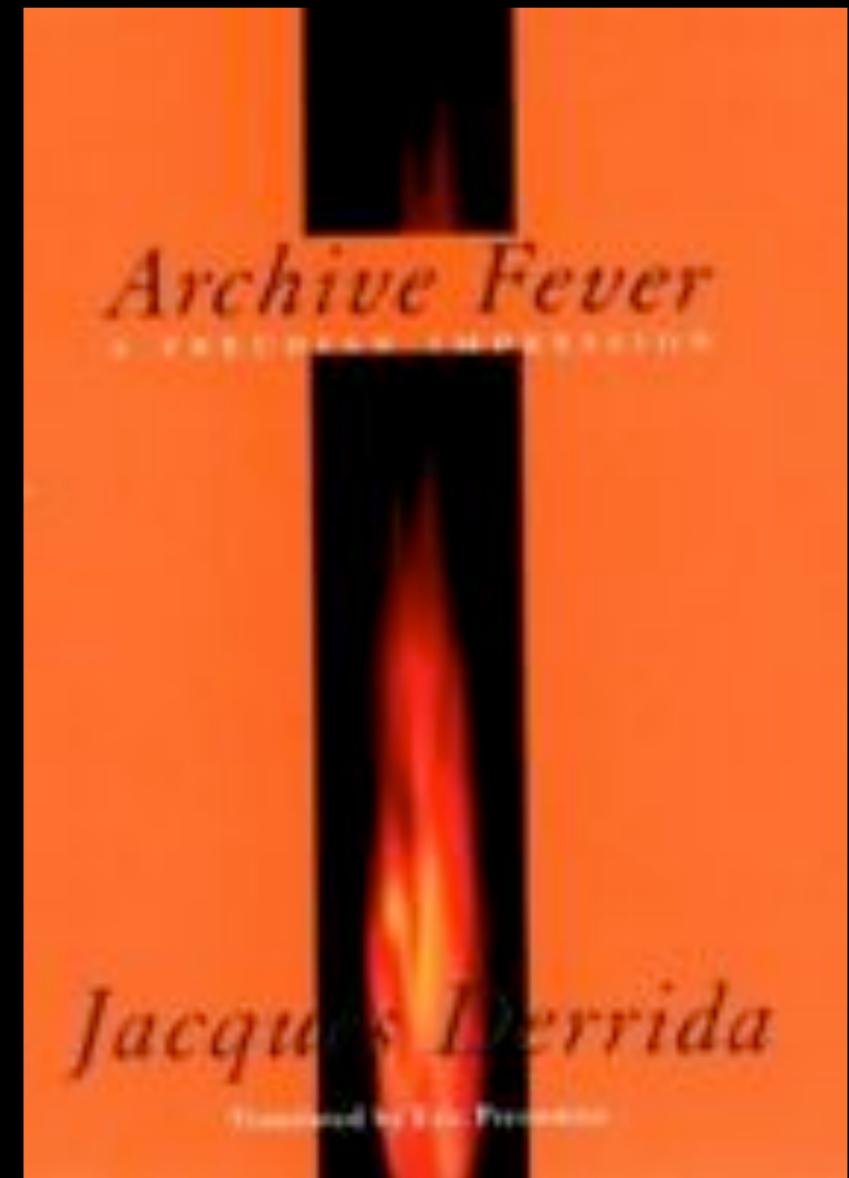
-Richard Jean So, *Redlining Culture: A Data History of Racial Inequality and Postwar Fiction* (Columbia UP, 2021)



Jacques Derrida on The Archive/Library as Power

- “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (4)
- “Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives” (18)
- “The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future”

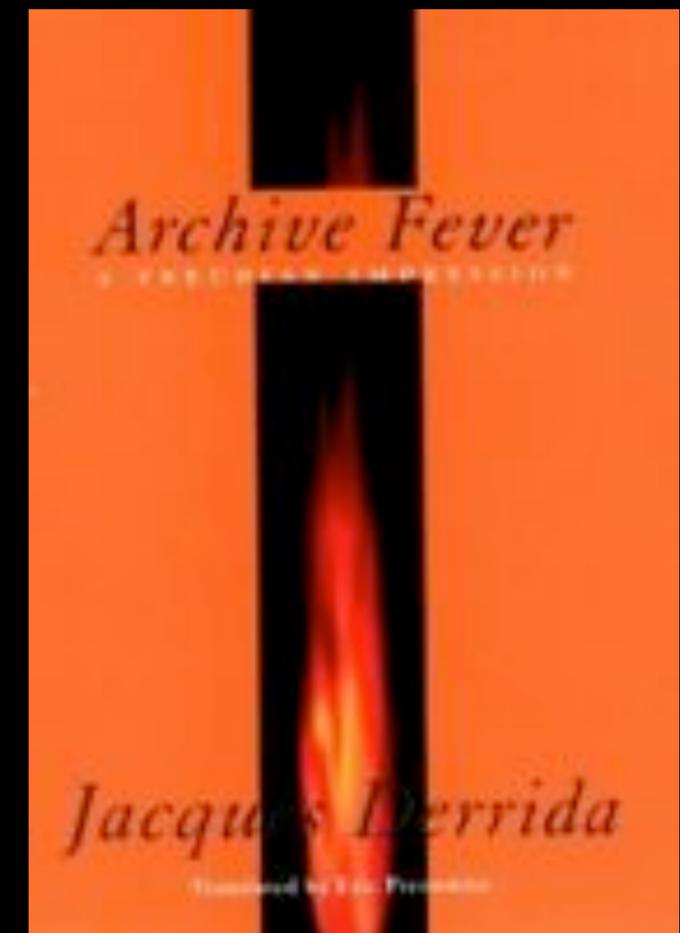
Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (1998)



Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

“A science of the archive must include the theory of the institutionalization, that is to say, the theory both of the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right which authorizes it” (4)

“The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future” (68)



Take-aways/Questions?

- Thoughts?