Hello 20th/21st Century Cultures Workshop:

This paper fits into a larger potential revision on the theorization of modernism and postmodernism as they have been read in African-American letters. As David Scott sums it up, African-American modernism is understood in terms of the production of African-American cultural and artistic forms that have recovered and repurposed those initially practiced on the continent and/or as those produced among African-American populations solely in the context of the New World. Regardless of whichever proves more convincing, I’d like to think of postmodernism in African-American letters as a shift whereby Black American writers in the back half of the twentieth century grow skeptical of the mandate once conferred on seminal African-American modernist forms (e.g. the African-American church, the Historically Black College/University, and the African-American soldier). My MA thesis dealt almost entirely with how Black American writers’ treatment of African-American Protestantism grows increasingly confrontational after 1950, and from this paper I’d like to grow a theory of how soldier and nation are produced as African-American modernist forms that come under critique by African-American writers at the start of the second world war.

I use the term “nation” quite extensively, and my aim in doing so is to highlight what appears to be a global unfolding of nationalist critique that contextualized the publication of *Black Reconstruction*. I’m also interested in how nation implies collective representation and in how the term “the Negro soldier” seems to carry that collectivity along with it in DuBois’ text. My point in looking at how a nationalist orientation sullies the otherwise “pure” critique that several of my archives think themselves to be undertaking is not that we have a classic case of nationalism on our hands with DuBois; my aim is instead to reckon with some of the problems that arise from the very forms assumed by global *counter-*literatures themselves. Apart from making these clearer, my biggest concerns in this paper are how to use nation; where, whether, and how I need to use a different category (e.g. nation-state); and how to more adequately move across archival temporalities in tracking the development of the nation as an epistemic form.

All the best,

Joel